

CHAPTER X

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAINFED AGRICULTURE - AN INTRODUCTION

Development of rainfed agriculture is gaining increasing interest in most developing countries and in a wide range of international agencies. It was repeatedly asserted by participants in a major seminar on development of rainfed patterns of agriculture that it could be one of the main means of alleviating food deficits in Jordan and other countries of the Middle East. In response to this conviction many of these countries have initiated ambitious programmes in this sector, assisted by technical and financial support of specialized institutions with considerable expertise and resources.

Unfortunately, most of the international aid institutions have refrained from extending any support to the West Bank, on the premise of not dealing with the occupied territories as long as they are under occupation. This policy has helped weaken the economic base of these territories, facilitating their economic exploitation by Israel, and making the establishment of a reasonably viable Palestinian state increasingly difficult. What has made things worse, is that local service institutions have fallen under direct Israel control and, as argued earlier, have tended to be run down over the past 14 years. Consequently there are no national infrastructure groups engaged in such conventional assignments as producing in-depth sectoral studies and formulating detailed strategies and blueprints which would help guide interested governments and international institutions. Whatever the Military Administration is doing along those lines appears orientated in the first place towards fulfilling Israeli interests, often at the expense of the occupied territories themselves.

As was stated earlier under Objectives, this study is meant to provide guidelines to those interested in developing one of the West Bank's most important sectors, namely, rainfed agriculture. It is not intended to be a substitute for detailed plans and feasibility studies for individual projects. Such an assignment has been well beyond the technical and financial resources available to the researcher in the present study.

What political scenario?

Unlike the situation in most other countries, development of the West Bank economy carries profound political implications which often over-ride conventional economic and social criteria. This is more true in the case of agriculture, because of its heavy bearing on fundamental issues underlying the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, such as land, water and population changes. So before articulating a developmental strategy for such a highly politically charged sector, one should first outline the political setting within which development is to take place. This was the crucial but somewhat speculative issue which overshadowed economic forecasts envisioned for the occupied territories by such economists as Vivian Bull (The West Bank-Is It Viable?), Brain van Arkadie (Benefits and Burdens), and Elias Tuma and H. Drabkin (The Economic Case For Palestine). Ever since June 1967, the question has remained the same: what is the political scenario to be assumed by the development economist?

Many economists were attracted to explore the economic viability and development potential following Israeli withdrawal and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. Such economic scenarios, however, proved of little practical value because of one fundamental impediment - continued occupation. Even now, 15 years after the onset of Israeli occupation, it remains unduly optimistic