



UNRWA

Case Study

Reports on the West Bank Barrier
February 2004

The Grass is Always Greener on the Other Side of the Fence: Livelihoods at Risk in Barta'a Enclave and Jayyous.

In the West Bank, shepherds are a common sight with flocks, large and small grazing on the rugged hills as they have done for millennia. In Barta'a enclave the population of sheep and goats rivals that of the people. In Jayyous, behind the barrier, flocks are often unable to reach their grazing lands in what the Israeli Government terms the 'seam zone'. Families in the Barta'a enclave, between the Green Line and the barrier, are unable to reach much of their grazing land as it now lies behind the barrier.



The following is an account of the situation as it has developed since the beginning of October 2003 and will demonstrate how Palestinian livelihoods are at risk owing to the hunger and poor condition of the sheep and goats in Barta'a and Jayyous.



'I can go hungry, but I cannot watch my sheep starve'. A shepherd from Khirbet Munthar, on the eastern side of Barta'a enclave, gazes at the herd as they cross confiscated land that once was his. His weather-beaten face betrays no emotion as he explains that a new settler road isolates him and his family. The road is being built on his grazing land and olive grove. 'The IDF came here and I was grazing my sheep as you see me do now. They told me that if they saw me again like this they would shoot me.'

A Barta'a elder explains that while sheep farming is a traditional activity, it is also a coping mechanism in times of economic hardship, 'The people rely on their sheep and goats to help them survive.' The prices of livestock fluctuate (US \$200 per head of sheep in November 2003) and making a profit is

unlikely, especially at the subsistence level. But animals such as these can increase food security providing milk, cheese and meat.

A local family who own 80 sheep and goats had a meeting with the IDF Civil Administration at Salem in the West Bank to explain their predicament. They said that their grazing land was now behind the barrier and that to prevent the animals from starving they needed to bring in fodder. The IDF officer refused permission for this request and would not give a reason for his decision. Security restrictions have been placed on the food for the sheep by the IDF. It is strictly forbidden for Palestinians to bring sheep fodder across the gate.

For anyone defying Israeli law to bring food for the animals, imprisonment is a distinct possibility. Higher prices and rising transportation costs reduce the profit margin and for some have led to the sale of their animals, depriving the children of essential nutrients contained in milk in a society where anaemia and other micro-nutrient deficiencies are of concern.



The hunger of the animals is all too obvious to Dr Khalil, the local veterinarian. He now practices alone. The only other vet working in Barta'a, Dr Maher was not issued a permit by the Israeli authorities because, although he worked in Barta'a, his residence is registered as being in Tulkarm. According to Dr Khalil, the Ministry of Agriculture officers in Jenin have been denied permits and therefore are not allowed to visit.

Dr Khalil himself has problems bringing in essential medicines for the animals through the gate because the soldiers refuse to allow it into the enclave. He is therefore unable to offer some treatments and preventative care because of shortages of simple drugs like antibiotics and vaccines. On average he can bring in 25 per cent of what is needed. He states: 'The condition of the animals is very poor. Most of them are unable to provide enough milk. The owners are often too poor to afford treatment and avoid coming, and for those whose animals who are very sick, the owner can often only pay a fraction of the bill and I cover the rest myself.' The situation is expected to worsen in the summer when the already serious shortage may become disastrous.

So, 'on the other side of the fence', is the situation any better? In Jayous, on the eastern side of the barrier, some 86 households own sheep or goats. When the barrier was erected Jayous lost most of its grazing land. This figure does not include land near the barrier that is not used because people fear a violent response from the IDF. One hundred per cent of the animal fodder is brought in at great expense from Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarm when the roads are open.

Although the gate opening times theoretically allow movement, the time is insufficient, and the timing unreliable and inconvenient for shepherds and other farmers. One shepherd, Abul Aziz, says that for many years he has grazed his animals in what the Israelis term the 'seam-zone'. Now, because the opening of the gate is unreliable 'depends on the soldiers' mood', he cannot risk his flock being unaccompanied, so his sons must stay on the 'Israeli side' of the barrier and their home, sleeping in rough shelters and coming back to Jayyous every few days. If they get caught, as has happened to other shepherds, 'on Israeli land' as they were told by the IDF, the soldiers will bring them back to the gate and confiscate their permits and Israeli identity cards. Abdul Aziz says, 'I worry about my boys, I don't feel that they are safe. If they get caught and sent to the gate we will lose everything.' Unattended for a maximum of three days, the herd of 190 animals would be lost.



Abdul Aziz points to the grazing land and greenhouses beyond the gate and the barrier.

When told of the IDF claim that the gates and barrier will not affect Palestinian lives he asks, 'In what way does it not affect our lives? I pray to God to end this situation.' As he draws deeply on his cigarette, Abdul Aziz says he owes NIS 20,000 to various people as he tries to provide food for his flock. 'When the situation is so bad, I'll pay in goats and sheep and it will be finished.'

The lack of permits for most farmers in this area has meant that the greenhouses whose vegetable waste once supplied high quality, nutritious food for the sheep has declined to an almost negligible level. Seven wells on this land supplied the sheep with plentiful clean water. Now, giving water to the sheep is problematic because the wells are situated behind the barrier. The area east of the barrier has no major grazing land to support the 2,000 animals. Residents with one or two animals in their gardens for milk and cheese now have to buy food for them, which few can afford. (Pellets cost NIS 1,500 per tonne, barley NIS 700 per tonne).

Cottage industries such as cheese-making, has also declined because some residents have had to sell their sheep, despite the difficulty in finding a market due to closures. The mayor says that 'The people already started losing their sheep, from death, from selling to survive--soon it will all be lost.'

Conclusion

Despite the existence of plentiful grazing lands, water reserves, local expertise in animal husbandry and the availability of qualified veterinary care, animals on the eastern and western sides of the barrier are hungry and sick. Water supplies and grazing land have been lost and the measures in place to mitigate the lack of access have failed. Israeli restrictions on the passage of

animal food and medicines, as well as the denial of access to the PA Ministry of Agriculture officials, have meant that the animals are also the victims of the conflict. They suffer while their shepherds look on, helpless in the face of the animal's hunger and the barrier that separates them from the lives and livelihoods they once knew.