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## Promoting Palestinian Self-Reliance

Promote Palestinian Self-Reliance Through Community Development  
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Jason Ben-Meir, Guest writer

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Checkpoint near Shechem  
Palestinian workers pass  
through inspection.  
Photo: Josh Shamsi



Waiting for work  
Palestinian workers wait in line  
to pass into Israel to their jobs.  
Photo: Jamar Aruri, amrc.org

Community-based development can be a critical tool for securing peace. Around the globe, projects that are designed at the community level have diversified income, provided food and health care, furthered education, preserved natural resources, and forged public-private partnerships. Above all, case studies from around the world, including in Kenya, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, show that community self-reliance is fostered when members work together to better their lives by establishing projects that are based on local capacities and know-how.

In the process of working together to realize their development goals, communities often establish local associations (core civil-society institutions) to manage projects and create new ones. New tiers of cooperation form as neighboring communities join together in implementing projects beneficial to the entire region. As a result, local development through inclusive dialogue can have positive, even ground breaking, economic and political consequences.

What if this community development approach were widely applied in the West Bank and Gaza? Is community development at the grassroots level an answer to the enormous socio-economic challenges the Palestinian people face?

The Palestinian economy is completely integrated with Israel's, whose enhanced security measures have wreaked economic havoc on the West Bank and Gaza. Perhaps more than ever before, the Palestinian people have been ravaged by poverty, declining health, and environmental devastation, dramatically underscoring their economic vulnerability. World Bank labor surveys put the current unemployment rate in the West Bank and Gaza at 25 percent. If not for the financial support of the international community, primarily the League of Arab States which during the Intifada provided roughly one-third of all **international aid** (and in 2004 about one-fourth), the Palestinian Authority could have fiscally collapsed.

Approximately 75 percent of all imports to the West Bank and Gaza are from Israel and 95 percent of all exports from the territories go to Israel. The West Bank and Gaza are highly dependent on imports, with these accounting for roughly eighty percent of their GDP. Thus, a good deal of economic activity is derived, not from local industry, but from imported goods, which could potentially be produced at home.

Community-based development is critical to achieving Palestinian self-reliance. The approach begins with facilitated meetings characterized by broad public participation, where local people first prioritize their development goals and then design projects to achieve them. Members of the community, local teachers, government liaisons, and NGO personnel, among others, can all be effective facilitators of meetings once they receive training in techniques of consensus building and organizing interactive dialogue. Identification of interested parties, enhanced communication, mutual understanding, and the transfer of skills, are some of the significant benefits that occur at this stage.

The international community ought to financially support this approach, without any input or restrictions, to help the Palestinians construct a more self-reliant economy, based on community empowerment. Israel and the West can generate tremendous goodwill by funding these community projects, and not simply covering expenditures or deficits of the Palestinian Authority. As local community resources improve, international assistance will become less necessary.

Community-wide participation in the design and management of development projects creates socio-economic progress through a pluralist democratic process. This development approach in the West Bank and Gaza will also help stabilize Israeli-Palestinian political relations and increase the prospects for peace.

*Jason Ben-Meir is pursuing a Doctorate in Sociology at the University of New Mexico. A former Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Morocco, he is currently President of the High Atlas Foundation, a nonprofit that assists community development in Morocco. He is also a fellow at the American Institute of Maghrib Studies.*

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