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Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs in Palestine

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SMALL BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS

In Palestine

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1. Introduction to Country

Palestine is located between the south- eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Because of the strategic location of Palestine and its being sacred to various religions, it has been a place of conflict throughout history. In 1918 Palestine which used to be an Arab home for a period of fourteen centuries, came under the British mandate when the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the World War I. Thereafter, and during the British occupation, hundreds of thousands of European Jews immigrated to Palestine. This massive Jewish immigration, which was against the well-being of original people, increased the percentage of the Jewish population. The Jews took the advantage of such immigration and established their state on two- thirds of Palestine home with significant help of the British mandate, which became the so-called Israel. Thus, the conflict continued, and up to now. Today, the majority of Palestinians are living in parts of the historical Palestine known as West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip and inside the green line of Palestine. The Palestinians are Arab; they are either Moslems or Christians. Today the Palestinian population is almost ten million, of total half of them are living in Palestine, while the other half is living in exile in neighbouring Arab states and abroad all over the world.

In spite of the political situation existence, the human development index in Palestine is a moderate as expressed by education, health and income per capita, due mainly to significance of workers' remittances who are working abroad mainly in Arab Gulf states and Northern American which formed about 16% of the GDP (AMF, 2006, and UNCTAD, 2004). Exporting labour is considered a positive aspect due to the substantial received cash inflow from abroad. For example, the human development index in Palestine is about 0.736 and rank at 100

out of 170 states, which is higher than the average of Arab states and higher than the medium human development index and it is about the average of the world human development index. The life expectancy at birth for the Palestinian is about 72.9 years, ranking of 64 among the 170 world states; Adult literacy rate of 92.4% of rank of 48 out of 170 states. The average size of the Palestinian family is about 5.8 persons, with a number of 3.3 rooms for the average Palestinian housing unit (UNDP, 2006, UNDP, 2008 and PCBS, 2008). In addition, the Palestinian women are relatively well educated in comparison to other developing countries and has a good status compared to most of Arab states as expressed by literacy rate, education, work opportunities as well as they have a significant share in advanced profession including dentists, Journalists, lawyers, chemists, and civil engineers, while their share in self-employed business, was about 17% of the total businesses in Palestine (PCBS, 2006).

The Palestinian economy is affiliated to the emerging economies but it has distinguished characteristics, which may be summarized as follows;

First: The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has no national currency; this situation resulted in using three currencies for different purposes such as exchange transactions, saving and wealth measurement. Having multi currency circulations reduces the efficiency of the Palestinian economy and denying the benefits which may be accomplished from the revenues associated with the use of national currencies such as the seigniorage process.

Second: The increasing role of public sector in the Palestinian economy. This is pointed out by the increasing share of public sector in total consumption, investments, GDP, in hiring employees and in channelling external cash inflows, which ranged between 22% to 65% compared to private sector (Sabri, 2003). The public services in Palestine offers by three major groups: including the Palestinian National Authority through central budget allocations, the UNRWA agency which offers free goods and services to the Palestinian refugees and the NGOs which have a significant role in offering social, health and educational subsidized services. The total government budget expenditures of PNA reached about \$ 2 Billion in 2007.

Third: The Palestinian economy is mainly a service economy; the contribution of service sector is more than 67% of the Palestinian GDP compared to 8% for agriculture and 13% for the industry sector (PCBS, 2008). The service sector includes government, hotels, restaurants, storages, financial, communication, transportation, education, health sectors and other sectors. The total contribution of the service sector reached about \$ 2749 million as presented in Table No. 1. The total gross domestic product of the Palestinian economy reached to \$ 4, 136 million, while the final consumption expenditures of the Palestinian economy reached about 5,376 million in 2007.

Table No. 1
Summary of the Palestinian Economy in 2007

Economic Activity	\$ Million	\$ Million
Agriculture and fishing	341	
Mining, manufacturing, Electricity -water	527	
Construction	104	
Wholesale and retail trade	415	
Transport	479	
Financial intermediation	192	
Services	915	
Public administration	599	
Other sectors	564	
Total Gross domestic products (GDP)		4,136
Gross national income (GNI)		4,499
Final consumption expenditure		5,376
Gross capital formation		1,127
Source; PCBS, 2008		

Fourth: The role of the financial sector in the Palestinian economy witnessed a significant development since the advent of the Palestinian National Authority. The financial sector includes about thirty two banks with 135 branches, nine insurance corporations, and 270 money change firms, a stock market of 25 listed Palestinian corporations and six brokerage corporations (Sabri, 2003 and Sabri and Jaber, 2006). The total deposits of the Palestinians residents increased by 11% during the year 2007, raising the deposits value in banks located in Palestine to about \$ 6645 million, (MAS, 2008 and IMF, 2008).

Fifth: moderate inflation rate: the inflation rate in the Palestinian economy is relatively low and ranged between 3% and 5% in the last five years (PCBS, 2008). However, it is expected to increase significantly during the year 2008 due to the international increase of the prices of the basic foods up to 11% (IMF, 2008).

Sixth: The Palestinian economy has relatively three types of taxes; including income taxes, VAT taxes, and local taxes. However, the income taxes rates are low compared to other countries, they ranged progressively between 5% to 15% according to specified brackets and the ratio of income taxes imposed on corporations is a flat rate of 15%, while the main tax is the VAT, which is a comprehensive tax imposed on all transactions related to goods or services including medical services and basic needs. The VAT tax is the main internal source of revenues for the Palestinian economy (Sabri, 2004). The VAT tax rate in June, 2008 was 14% of the total sales value of goods or services, the collection of the tax is the responsibility of the supplier of the goods or the services. Customs are imposed in all exported goods between 0% and 200% besides the vat taxes. Table No. 2 summarizes the tax status in Palestine as existed in June, 2008.

Table No.2
Summary of taxes prevailing in PALESTINE as in June, 2008

Taxes	Rates
Income Tax	
1. Self-employed income	5% to 15%
2. Payroll income	5% to 15%
3. Corporate income	15%
Indirect Tax	
4. VAT on all goods and services	14 %
5. Customs duties (based on goods and source)	0% -200%
6. Excise on some produced goods	30% in average of sale value
7. Fees in Petroleum products	20% to 60% plus 14%
8. Excise on tobacco, wine	Average rate 50% of value
9. Local taxes (property and Education tax)	17% and 7% of rent
Source: Compiled by the author	

2. Government Policy on Small & Medium Enterprises and Entrepreneurship

The issue of small scale firm against large scale firm is one of the most debatable issues in the world economic context, and the argument among the policy makers to compare between the advantages and disadvantages of both alternatives is continued. Both sizes of firms have advantages and disadvantages regarding job opportunities of skilled and unskilled labour varieties of locations, cost of production, economy of scale, ownership structured and the allocated invested capital. For the Palestinian economy, a survey study carried out to compare between the two alternatives, and to answer the question whether the Palestinian policy makers in the new emerged states should emphasize enhancing the SMEs over large scale firms or visa versa. The study (Sabri, 1998) indicated that there are some advantages in favour of small scale industry, such as small scale firms have higher labour productivity than large scale firms, and has higher

ratio of assets turnover as well as in inventory turnover than large scale industry, in spite of the large scale firms have better opportunity in getting external financing.

To understand the entrepreneurship initiation in the Palestinian economy, we find that the majority of the Palestinian entrepreneurship is initiated based on individual or family saving with little support from the official agencies. However, the major motivation for establishing new SMEs is different from one venture to another. In a study conducted to examine the background of initiations in the Palestinian economy found that 53% of ventures established by individual based on their saving and experiences to start a new venture. A quarter of the added ventures where established in the Palestinian economy by entrepreneurs without previous experience in the field. The motivation was just to invest the available savings in order to find a job as self employed. While other ventures were established and emerged from small project to more will developed projects, as a backward integration or promoted from small workshops to more advanced factories as shown in Table No. 3.

Table No. 3
Initiation of Entrepreneurship Forms in the Palestinian Industries

Initiation of the present manufacturing Ventures	Ratio
1. Investor "Entrepreneurs" invested money without previous experience	26%
2. Investors "Entrepreneur" invested money with experiences	28%
3. Working in trade and expanded to industry "Backward integration"	17%
4. Expansion of workshops to a factory	16%
5. Employee Entrepreneurship	09%
6. Other forms of ventures	04%
Total	100%
Sabri, 1999	

The role of the Palestinian government in enhancing the SMEs, is relatively limited, due to the fact that the official policy prefers large scale firms, in order to have more job opportunities and to use more advanced technology. There are many statements mentioned in the economic development plans issued by the Palestinian ministry of Planning between 2005 and 2008 about supporting of Palestinian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who have difficulties in financing their operations, and in all development plans considered enhancing SMEs as one of the Palestinian economic strategies (PNA- MOP, 2005, 2006 and 2007). However, in reality there is no favourite policies adopted by the Palestinian National Authority regarding to the SMEs regarding taxes exemptions or business regulations, nor there is any allocated funds to offer special financing programs for such sector. In addition, The Palestinian law of investment promotion Number 1 of 1998 (PNA, 1999) gives tax exemptions in three aspects; including the

exemption from customs and other taxes, the income tax exemptions of zero taxes for five years regarding new established firms, and exemption of furniture and electronic equipment from customs fees. However, such privileges are granted only to new established large firms of minimum capital of \$ 150,000 and not for small scale firms as stated in Article 22 and 23 and article 35; the other aspects of the promotion investment law also not direct to SMEs (PNA, 1999). On the other side, the SMEs received attention from groups other than the central government, which can be summarized as follows:

First: the Palestinian SMEs received a substantial support of the microfinance programmes run by the UNRWA agency. For example, the mission statement of UNRWA Micro- enterprise Programme aimed to improve small business and micro entrepreneurs, sustain jobs, decrease unemployment, empower women and provide income-generating opportunities to Palestine refugees (UNRWA, 2005). The UNRWA granted about 130,000 loans for SMEs since it operated this program of a value of \$ 120 million up to 2007. One third of the total granted microfinance loans were directed to small firms operated by women (UNRWA, 2008).

Second: The SMEs receive also financing services from specialized NGOs some of these organizations work with firms operated with women only, while others work with all small firms regardless of type of business and gender of ownership. Currently, The major NGOs institutions working as Micro finance institutions offering loans to SMEs and members in PNSMF are: Palestinian Businesswomen's Association, Palestine for Credit and Development – FATEN, Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committee – PARC, Arab Centre for Agricultural Development – ACAD, American Near East Refugees Aid – ANERA, Corporative Housing Foundation – CHF, Young Man Christian Association – YMCA, Caritas – Jerusalem (Associate member) Source; PNSMF (2008). The above NGOs include local and international firms offered about 26900 loans, with outstanding balance of about \$ 45 million (Khaled et al., 2006) up to 2005.

Third: there is one institute known as Palestine Development Fund which offers to SMEs microfinance services. It is considered as semi government institute and offer to both small as well as large scale firms' loans for new established firms. The fund offered about \$ 98 million to about 3000 Palestinian borrowers mainly medium scale firms (PBC, 2008). Table No. 4 summarized the micro financing loans offered by all groups to SMEs in Palestine during the last ten years.

Table No. 4
Summary of Microfinance in Palestine directed to SMEs

Indicators	Values
Number of active borrowers	26,900
Outstanding balance (Million US\$) in 2005	44.5
Average outstanding balance per loan (US\$) in 2005	2905
Number of loan officers for all firms	179
Number of offices for all firms	72
Number of firms- institutes including UNRWA and PBC in 2007	11
Accumulated value of loans awarded by UNRWA in Million US\$ up to end of 2007	129.8
Number of accumulated loans awarded by UNRWA in Palestine up to 2007	119,979
Number of accumulated loans awarded by PBC (1996-2006)	2976
Accumulated loans awarded by PBC (1996-2006) in Million US\$	98.1
Sources: a: Khaled et al., 2006 b: UNRWA in Figures, 2008 c: (PBC) Palestinian Banking Corporation, 2008	

3: The Environment for Entrepreneurship & the State of Small Business

First: The business environment in the Palestinian SMEs; the Arab business environment may has relatively adverse practices due to some practices in Arab culture and social habits, and may lead to complicating the Arab business advancements (Sabri, 1996). The Arab business firm is mainly a family business, thus we have to consider the issues facing family business in general to understand the major merits of Arab business environment. A family business firm as mentioned in the international literature may face various issues such as continuing under further generations, the less performance in managing family business firm, the need for training family managers who inherited their businesses from first or second generations and finally, the conflict in management between family members (Sabri, 2008a). Examples of management disputes and in succession issues as found in conducting family business firms in a recent study are presented in Table No. 5 (Sabri, 2008b). The dispute of small and medium business enterprises among management is to be found mainly in sole firms and partnerships firms compared to private and public corporations. However, almost all SMEs are organized manly as sole firm, partnership or private – corporation, and rarely are organized in public corporations which separate between management and ownership to avoid the issue of succession and dispute among management team.

Table No. 5
Examples of management disputes and succession issue in the Palestinian family

Business	Level of Generations	Main Dispute reason	The End
Clothes	First generation	Relationship to contractors	Partners left the business to one owner
A chocolate company	first and second generation	Marketing and management strategies	Sold to outsiders
A food company	Second generations	To rehabilitate the factory	Transfer the business to another country
A hotel	Second generation	Distribution of work among partners	Sold to other owners
A furniture company	Second generation	Marketing and management strategies	Sold to other owners
Wholesaling	Second generation	Over withdrawals of profits	Close the business
Sabri, 2008b			

Second: Easy of starting business: far from the political situation in Palestine, we may find that doing business in Palestine is relatively easy due to simple regulations stated by the related Palestinian agencies and municipalities. This conclusion is supported by the World Bank survey which assess the various aspects of doing businesses including starting a new business and getting credit. For example, in a last survey conducted by the World Bank Palestine was as 127 among 170 World states regarding the easiness of doing business, while it ranked 117 out of 170 regarding getting credit financing as shown in Table No. 6, which places it in the middle among the Arab states according to the World Bank assessment.

Table No. 6
Rank of doing business in Palestine in 2006 among the 170 world states

Economy	Ease of Doing Business	Starting a Business	Getting Credit
Saudi Arabia	38	156	65
UAE	77	155	117
Jordan	78	133	83
Algeria	116	120	117
Palestine	127	142	117
Iraq	145	136	159
Sudan	154	82	143
Djibouti	161	157	117
Egypt	165	125	159

Source: World Bank (2007b) Doing Business 2006, available online: www.doingbusiness.org

Third: A substantial part of the Palestinian SMEs is working as informal sector, run by individuals who have low education and are financed by family savings with low worker productivity (Malki et al., 2004).

Fourth: About 91% of The Palestinian economic units are considered as small firms (4 employees or less) which accounted for 88,489 units out of the total economic units for the whole Palestinian economy which are about 97,279 economic units. The majority (85%) of the small firms work sole firms and not organized in any of the four legal forms of companies existed in Palestine. Only a small share of SMEs is organized either in partnership company or a private corporation. The firms organized in private corporations are mainly working in manufacturing, real estate and wholesaling. While sole firms and partnerships firms are mainly working in retailing, repair, and restaurants, as expressed by number of labour and the allocated investments in capital as presented in Table No. 7. The number of firms classified as medium scale firms with employees between 5 and 19 counted for 8% of the total economic units working in both service and manufacturing sectors. The majority of employees in the SMEs working in manufacturing 91%, construction 94%, wholesaling and retailing 93% are male, while the majority of female working in education 54%, health firms 41% and in social firms 31%. The small scale firms working in retailing and wholesaling with less than four employees accomplished higher value added to the GDP compared to other sizes of business firms, while the large scale firms with 10 employees and higher working in Transportation- communications and storage businesses (PCBS, 2007, 2006 and 2005).

Table No. 7
Summary of the Palestinian Small scale firms

Economic sector	Number of units	5 or less labor	sole firms	Single-branch	Capital share
Agriculture	5539	94%	93%	98.8%	0.7%
Mining- Manufacturing	13177	77%	78%	92%	20.0%
Wholesale, Retailing, repair, restaurants, hotels	55048	97%	88%	94.9%	35.4%
Construction	704	59%	55%	87.6%	1.6%
Transportation-communications	873	63%	58%	82.5%	9.3%
Other services; education, health, finance, electricity, etc	21938				33.0%
Total of Economic units	97279	90.7%	85.0%	93.8%	100.0%
Sources: PCBS (2006) and PCBS (2005)					

Fifth: Employment status in SMEs in Palestine: To point out the employment status in Palestine operating in the private sector we find that about 27% of total employment in the Palestinian economy are working as self employed and distributed as professionals, operators, skilled and craft workers. The self employed group is organized mainly in small scale business firms .On the

other side about 58% of the total labour in the Palestinian economy are working as employees distributed to four economic sectors, but are mainly are working in SMEs service firms as shown in Table No. 8. In addition, there is about 11% of total Palestinian workers are working in family small firms as unpaid workers (PHDR, 2005), and mainly working in retailing, restaurants, repairs shops and in agricultural farms.

Table No. 8
Employment Status in Palestine

Major Merits of Palestinian employees	Percentage Partial	Total
1. Employers		4.1%
2. Self Employed ; distributed as		26.5%
a- Legislator, senior officials	3.8%	
b-Professionals	23.6%	
c-Services and market workers	18.2%	
d-Skilled agriculture and fishery workers	14.2%	
e-Craft workers	17.1%	
f-Machines operators	8.8%	
g-Elementary occupation	14.3%	
3. Wage employees ; distributed in		58.3%
a-Agriculture	16%	
b-Industry	13%	
c-Construction	12%	
d- Services	59%	
4. Unpaid family		11.1%
Source: PHDR 2004 (2005)		

Sixth: Major operational and financial features in the Palestinian SMEs: The major operational and financial features of the Palestinian SMEs may be summarized in Table No.9. It indicates that about 96% of the SMEs in Palestine are family business, a quarter of the firms facing conflict in management. The SMEs in Palestine have limited marketing polices and a high percentage of idle capacity such as the majority of business firms have no brand names for their products and sell from their locations with no special distributors . On the other side, the Palestinian SMEs have good profit ratio and rate of return as well as a high turnover ratio of assets. The higher idle capacity ratio for manufacturing firms belongs mainly to political situation and many barriers existed which hindered the movement of people and goods among different parts of Palestine. The majority of the Palestinian manufacturing firms work as subcontracted to large firms, and located in rented building. Finally, other Palestinian SMEs working in other sectors may have similar features in some aspects of the manufacturing and have differences in other aspects. Such as the idle capacity does not existed in construction, service sector or retailing sectors except in the hotel sector.

Table No. 9
Major operational and financial features in the Palestinian SMEs

Operational and financial features	Value -%
1. Family business (ownership- management)	96%
2. Conflict in management	23%
3. Subcontracted firms for other large scale firms	30%
4. Firms located in rented building	45%
5. Selling from the business location outlets	63%
6. Selling through exclusive agents	18%
7. Firms use own products' brand	26%
8. Idle capacity ratio (8 hours per day)	60%
9. Rate of return on investments	34%
10. Leverage ratio (debt to assets)	14%
11. Net profit margin	16%
12. Assets turnover ratio (times a year)	2.2
13. Inventory turnover ratio (times a year)	10.7
14. Labour productivity per % of \$ sales value	24550
15. A job creation by \$ value of capital	13750
Sources: Sabri, 1998 and Sabri, 1999	

4. Internationalization of Palestinian SMEs

The World Bank report (World Bank, 2007a) stated in a recent report that the Palestinian investment climate is good with relatively an efficient bureaucracy and well developed financial markets, but Palestinian enterprises have not invested enough to maintain their international competitiveness. In spite the fact that the Palestinian development plans considered promoting strategic partnerships between local and international as one of the government plan strategies (PNA- MOP, 2005-2008). But very few Palestinian SMEs found its way to international level. This is mainly due to the political situation since the PNA has no control on the borders of Palestine; thus the exporting process of Palestinian products is difficult, passes difficult processes and eventually very costly. However, some crafts business enterprises and tourism firms are qualified to work in the internationalization context if the issue of borders is avoided.

5: Conclusion

The Palestinian nation is considered as an emerging economy with moderate level in human development and relatively high advancement level in education including women. About 97% of the economic units in Palestine are organized in SMEs units working with 10 employees or less (2008). The small and medium scale firms operated in Palestine are mainly family business working in service sector and retailing businesses financed by individual and family savings. In

spite of the nominal support mentioned in the economic plans issued by the Palestinian National Authority, nothing has been materialized to support such sector. In addition, no single favorite regulations or tax or customs exemptions issued to enhance such sector were offered. However, the only support coming to this sector is that are related to the microfinance programs run by the UNRWA agency and about ten specialized NGOs, which offer reasonable support for such sector through mainly short term loans with simple collateral instruments.

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