

## **Cooperatives, a way out and a tool by Jihad.**

The economic situation in our country is not just difficult! In facts, it has become a suffocating daily reality that inflicts pressures upon almost every Palestinian household. The prolonged denial of our workers' access to employment inside the Green Line has brought about a sudden loss of livelihoods for tens of thousands of Palestinian workers at a time cost of living and financial obligations are increasing at an alarming pace. Those few workers who were lucky enough to get employed found themselves overwhelmed in less rewarding yet more demanding employment opportunities in the local labor market, a market controlled by few players amid deteriorating political conditions and severe restrictions on movement...

The question should not be about how to survive each by oneself; it should rather address how workers get unified and not watch anyone fall individually.

Economic and agricultural cooperatives could be an answer that paves our way towards long term sustainable rather than interim projects based on pertinent success stories elsewhere. Cooperatives can translate into a steadfastness technique and economic resistance in the face of siege and marginalization.

It goes without saying that when a group of people share land, effort, decision, and labor, they become more resilient and even stronger than the merchant and monopoly.

Economic and agricultural cooperatives can accommodate the worker whose job was cut off inside the Green Line as well as the farmer who was used to selling crops at a loss because he had to do so. In the cooperative, each and every member gains support as pricing becomes a collective decision rather than imposed by any whatever single entity. Cooperatives can expand our understanding of agriculture beyond mere farming and harvesting. Food processing, packaging, direct marketing to the consumer can all be addressed by cooperatives that can also economically channel such added values to the benefit of its members rather than market monopolies.

Furthermore, economic and agricultural cooperatives can also offer an opportunity to inject and circulate money among their members, coupled with offering employment opportunities that enable members to lead decent, consistent, and honorable lives in a way that preserve their dignity. But let's be honest! Economic and agricultural cooperatives can nevertheless backfire and fall apart if they turn into personal rather than common ventures and interests. Economic and agricultural cooperatives shall undoubtedly crumble if transparency and accountability are missing as well as when members cease to share common interests. On the other hand, economic and agricultural cooperatives are to flourish even if they start small only if founded upon clear vision and scope as well as when professionally managed by elected leadership. Openness, full transparency and keenness to support each other are also essential to set up a

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more realistic model in which all members deliver complementarily as a team. A local cooperative can involve five to ten members actively engaged in a project in a nearby market where money keeps circulating among them. In doing so, we won't be attempting to change the world. We will rather be consolidating collective efforts to protect ourselves, hold on to the land, create descent economic security, and prevent anyone from exploiting us. Economic and agricultural cooperatives are a courageous option to get us out of a major crisis at a time options are minimal and opportunities are almost non-existent.