

**Interview with ANERA field staff Mohammed Abu Rajab and Rabah Odeh  
Full Length Version**

**Thank you so much for being here. We feel so honored to have this opportunity to talk to you.**

**Odeh:** It's our pleasure.

**We first wanted to hear about both of your backgrounds and how you started to work with ANERA. Where are you from, and how have you progressed along in this organization?**

**Odeh:** I can start. Actually, I come from the city of Nablus in the Northern West Bank. I was educated in the States—I received both my BS degree and Master's degree in engineering management from Ohio University back in 1990/1992. I went back home afterwards, and I've worked for UNDP in Jerusalem and other organizations. I've been with ANERA for the past 15 years or so. I'm now holding the position of Deputy Chief of Party for a major USAID-funded project named PCID—that's an acronym for Palestinian Community Infrastructure Development Program. It's a \$100 million program implemented over the period of 5 years, where we're basically implementing infrastructure projects, i.e. water projects, water networks, water tanks, and water drainage projects in villages and small communities; we're constructing schools and kindergartens; we're constructing health clinics and several types of other projects throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

**Abu Rajab:** My background is in civil engineering, graduated from Manila, Philippines. I have my Master's degree in international development and cooperation from Pavia University through Bethlehem University. I started with ANERA in 2002—that's almost 15 years. During the second intifada, I was working with the PA Ministry of Local Government. I found it interesting to work with an NGO helping the Palestinian people when nobody was helping, and the PA was really doing nothing at the time. So, I'm working in the capacity of the Chief Engineer in the southern West Bank and the Director of the ANERA office in the southern West Bank. I'm working on the same program that my colleague mentioned. We are really happy to work with this organization as a neutral and nonpolitical organization, so I feel that we are helping our people in achieving their goals, doing what is really—maybe some people would call it development—but I would really call it human rights, because water is a human right, education is a human right, health is a human right. So we are happy to do that.

**You mentioned PCID (the Palestinian Community Infrastructure Development Program), an expansive project starting in 2013. Could you talk more about the implementation process at your sites, Nablus and in Hebron?**

**Odeh:** First of all, implementation for these projects is throughout the West Bank. Walking into this building, I saw the exhibit you have outside of photos in Bil'in. Bil'in is, for example, one of the villages where we were able to work and help the people. In Bil'in, we've constructed a new water network for the Old Village, and a water tank—reinforced concrete, elevated water tank—that supplies water to the whole community. We've also added one floor to the one and only girls' school in town, thereby providing enough new classrooms and other educational rooms like a laboratory, a computer lab, and a library. We believe this is a message that we're taking on our shoulders. We're just a vehicle. We have access to donors' money—in this particular case, USAID money. USAID trusts us. We follow USAID rules and regulations and implementation of such programs. And we are working throughout the West Bank; it's not only Bil'in or small villages. We're able to work all the way from Jenin down to Hebron and including the Gaza Strip. In Gaza, we're one of the few organizations who are really active and able to implement infrastructure projects, meaning water projects and networks, helping local organizations and small community-based organizations, and helping hospitals. We've just completed a project for the

Palestinian Red Crescent Society, PRCS, in Khan Younis in Gaza. We have a few other projects on our radar for the next year of implementation, both in Gaza and the West Bank.

Going back to where I come from, the city of Nablus—it's a city of 200,000 people. It's got three refugee camps, namely Balata, Askar, and Al-Ein. These are people who fled the 1948 War when Israel was created and have lived since then in the Nablus area, just like other refugee camps throughout the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Such people live in really harsh conditions. Basically, ANERA takes care of the daily needs of Palestinians living in refugee camps. It means ANERA provides healthcare, education, and other day-to-day services in such camps. They received their water and electricity from the local Palestinian municipalities in the area. The town of Nablus is one of the largest towns—probably Hebron is the largest, but then Ramallah and Nablus are the largest towns in the West Bank.

The day-to-day life we live is a bit hard. We need to commute on a daily basis to get to project sites and to our main office in Jerusalem, for meetings and for day-to-day business. And with Israeli checkpoints—having to cross Israeli checkpoints on a daily basis is a hassle. You could easily get shot and killed at a checkpoint just passing by. Soldiers at checkpoints are just standing there with their fingers on the triggers, and lots of lots of people have lost their lives recently just passing by. They were not attempting to stab an Israeli soldier, as the Israelis always claim; they were not attempting to run over an Israeli soldier in the area. They just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is one of the issues that we need to face on a daily basis. Moving around means delay at checkpoints, and a normal trip that usually should take half an hour could take two hours. You never know if and when you're going to get to your destination when you leave your office because any checkpoint can be closed at any minute without notice. The worst is that when you get to your destination and you try to come back home or to the office, you may not be able to do that because of Israeli closures. This is the day-to-day life that we live.

Despite that, we continue to do what we do best: we deliver projects. We do that on time, we do that with the best quality. We do that within budgets, within time-frames. Our donor is pleased, and this is what's most important because that is what guarantees that more money will come in to help people. That is our ultimate goal—to make the lives of people easier and better under such truly harsh conditions.

**Abu Rajab:** I came from Hebron. I'm responsible for the Southern West Bank, but Hebron has its special conditions. It's the largest town in the West Bank. You know the Oslo agreement classified territories in A, B, and C, but Hebron was classified A, B, C, and H1 and H2. H1 is the New Hebron; H2 is the old city of Hebron where it's still—as per the Hebron agreement between Rabin, King Hussein, and Arafat—is under the direct Israeli responsibility.

The problem in Hebron is that the occupation is still there. In some areas, it's direct and in some areas, it's indirect, but any time the Israeli military can come and make incursions.

I don't want to talk further in politics, but let's talk about projects. We are proud that we recently completed the construction of a reservoir and water network at area C where USAID played a major role in obtaining a permit that takes two years to get in an area where the people have never experienced municipal water—they were just getting water from the cistern and you don't know the quality. The other project that I can speak about is Al-Walajah Clinic. This is in a village located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. We were able to construct a clinic for this community. It's a small community, but Israel is now creating a gate for each and every city in the West Bank—if not a gate, at least a checkpoint that sometimes prevents people from getting access to healthcare. So, this clinic will help these people actually access health care.

The problem we are facing is sometimes the weakness of the Palestinian Authority, because they have no stronghold over the areas - so this makes their positions really very weak. Sometimes we face problems with local people, some problems that they cannot really solve. When you call them, they have to coordinate with the Israeli side. The control of Israel over all the natural resources, the borders, and the telecommunications make it impossible. It's like we are just living in a film called "The Palestinian State" or "The Palestinian Authority." They talk about the "two-state solution," which I think is impossible to implement on the ground, especially if you see the Palestinian villages, the settlements, the refugee camps. We hope peace one day will come, if we accept each other and we look to each other in the eye of humanity, not in the eye of "I am strong and you are weak, and I can do whatever." So, this is what we wish to do.

We implement several projects in the West Bank, not only with PCID but with other USAID-funded programs. We renovated several hospitals in the West Bank, we did water networks, we did storm water drainage, we did clinics, we did schools. Recently we completed, in the south, the construction of a school, making additional classrooms for a small Bedouin and refugee community. That's located in the Hebron area. It's a co-educational school. When the girls reach 6th grade, they just stop going to school—the parents would not allow them to cross to the nearby villages because they are afraid for the girls and they go after shepherds and they have early marriages. So we succeeded, with the help of USAID, to construct a school that they were very happy about. And three of the girls came back to the school. So, a lot of success stories within our work with the programs, whether with USAID or any kind of project that ANERA is doing, like kindergartens or helping people with medicine and other programs.

**Your colleague in Gaza was unable to travel here today—do these restrictions on mobility influence your daily work in terms of travel and transporting materials? How do the situations compare in the West Bank and Gaza?**

**Odeh:** I want to say a few words about Gaza. In Gaza, we have different programs. One of them is the PCID program funded by USAID, and we have several other smaller-sized programs funded by Islamic Relief and other organizations through ANERA. Gaza is a different story. It's much harder to work in Gaza. Getting in and out of Gaza needs special permits.

A lady engineer who works with us in Gaza was supposed to join us on this visit, but couldn't simply because the Israelis had denied her the permit to get out of Gaza. They gave her a permit a few weeks earlier to go to the American consulate in Jerusalem to get a visa, and she managed to go there, get the visa, and then go back to Gaza. She had to apply for another permit to be able to come to the United States. The Israelis had denied the permit, under a given reason of being a threat to the security. A week earlier, she wasn't a threat to the security, and then a week later, she's a threat to the security. And she cannot object to that—she now has to wait, at least for six months before she applies for a permit to get out of Gaza again. This is how hard it is.

We have been trying to get permits for us to go and follow up on our projects in Gaza. So far, we have not been successful—it takes time and lots of effort and follow-up only to be able to go and visit Gaza. Getting building materials into Gaza is a different issue. You need to have permits for everything. They have their own classifications for material. A sack of cement is, under Israeli definition, a dual-use material, where you can use it to construct a wall or a building, or you can use it to construct a tunnel that could be a threat to their security. So, basically, with every project we implement in Gaza, we need to submit an application with a very, very detailed bill of quantity or list of items that needs a permit to be brought into Gaza, including electrical wire, paint. Any sort of material you could think of that's needed for a construction project needs a special permit from the Israelis. And that process takes months—like

two or three or four months—only to be able to get the permit to bring in material to Gaza. This is one of the major challenges we're facing in implementing projects in the Gaza strip. Despite that, we're one of the few organizations still able to implement actual projects in Gaza, where people benefit from such projects.

One of the projects that we're implementing in Gaza is PRCS, as I just mentioned, in Khan Younis. One part of the project includes the installation of three elevators for a building. The coordination process to bring in elevators for that particular project took months. And when the elevators finally arrived and were installed, it turned out that a certain part was missing from each and every elevator. It's sort of a sensor so, in case there's an electrical cut off, they won't get stuck between two floors. And that sensor is missing from all three elevators. It might be a manufacturer's fault or something, but it needs to be brought in before the elevators are functioning properly. That would necessitate applying a new permit for those little sensors that probably cost \$10 each, but they cannot be brought into Gaza unless a new process of purchasing and permitting is initiated. And then we'll have to extend the agreement with the contractor until these sensors are brought in and put into use. This is how hard things can be in Gaza.

**Abu Rajab:** The PRCS is a medical center, so the three elevators will be stuck until you get the sensors. So this is a humanitarian issue.

**You both mentioned how the Israeli military has disrupted a lot of your work, but let's shift and talk about settlers and settlements. Do you have worries about the sustainability of the projects if settlers are coming in and tearing down communities in places where you're working?**

**Abu Rajab:** Once, we were implementing a sewage network near Al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron. We implemented about 50 percent of the project, and were stopped by settler complaints. The settlers don't want to see us there in the area and don't want to see the project completed. So, half of the project was functioning and connected, and we were forced to move from the area and go and implement the remaining budget in another area.

But actually, we don't really have problems face-to-face with settlers because we avoid going during the problems. We don't really show up—we do our project, but we avoid going into confrontation because we are implementing projects funded by USAID, and, as a neutral nonpolitical organization, even though we are Palestinian, we still adhere to the goals and the mission of the organization properly. So, we work as Palestinians, but we still respect the roles and regulations of our organization and the donors at the same time.

**Odeh:** True, and just to add to that, we probably have mentioned the zoning that resulted from the Oslo Agreement. All of the West Bank is divided into zone A, B, and C. Zone A is where the PA, Palestinian Authority, has full authority, administratively and security wise. B is the administrative responsibility of the PA, but the security is by the Israelis. Zone C is where Israelis have full control. Now, in zone A and B, permits for buildings, for projects, would come from the Palestinian Authority—except for water projects, these come from the Israelis. In zone C, all sorts of permits need to come through the Israeli Civil Administration in Beit El, Ramallah. In settlements and in areas that are closed, that would most probably be area C. To get started doing projects in the first place would be really hard because they don't give out project permits easily. As my colleague Muhammad explained, the one project within area C where we construct the clinic took more than two years for USAID people, with full pressure and the direct intervention of the head of the mission, just to get the permit.

Confrontation with settlers is very minimal. What settlers usually do, and we've all probably heard about Duma, where they set the house on fire where kids were sleeping, and the mom and dad and one of the

children lost their lives. There was only one child who lived through it, who survived and is still being treated at hospitals and receiving therapy because of his great loss—that happened in a village in a Nablus area called Duma. And settlers usually would come and attack nearby Palestinian communities and small villages at night when everyone is sleeping. Even though they're armed and even though they're protected by the Israeli army, they won't attack people in daylight. Sometimes they do—this is actually the time of the year where Palestinians have the olive harvesting season, which usually takes place in October and November. Palestinian families go out to their lands, if they're allowed to—and underline “if,” because in many areas, their olive trees became parts of the settlements and they cannot reach them anymore—if they can reach their agricultural lands and olive trees, they go out in groups of like ten people or twenty people and harvest their olive trees. There have been cases when settlers attack them. There have been cases when settlers even took their olive produce after they waited for them all day, until they [Palestinians] had collected all the olives, and then when they were ready to take them back home, armed settlers with machine guns attacked them and stole the produce, under the protective eyes of the Israeli soldiers. And this is happening again and again and again throughout the West Bank.

A lot of Palestinian families depend on this olive harvesting season, where they can collect olives, press them for olive oil, sell it, and then the revenue will be enough for them to live on for a whole year—the revenue of this particular one month season of olive harvesting. This is where most confrontations and attacks happen by the settlers and actually under the protective eye of the Israeli army. In many cases, settlers would come and set fire [to trees], and huge amounts of areas of olive trees get burned every year by settlers. But going back to your question, I don't think there is any other than the case that my colleague Mohammed mentioned, since we do have permits for all our projects. We keep an excellent working relationship with the Israeli side because they know who we are, we do things by the book, and we get the right permits. We don't do anything that doesn't have a permit. We are on the safe side, mainly.

**We heard about what had happened with the World Vision director who was arrested in Gaza. Could you talk more about that?**

**Odeh:** He used to get, according to what we heard—we're not the right people to talk about this particular case, and what we heard is that it's only accusations. The Israelis are not giving out information because it's still classified. They are accusing him of using donor money to fund the Hamas activists but nobody knows the truth, and I don't know if we'll ever know the truth because the Israelis will release the amount of information that they want the others to hear. To the best of my knowledge, he's still in prison. This is not directly affecting our work in Gaza. We are continuing our operations. We know that lots of donors are hesitating, and even staff in Gaza are hesitating, when it comes to leaving Gaza to the West Bank, because this guy, the World Vision person, used to go in and out from [Gaza] on a regular basis without any trouble and all of a sudden he was arrested at the Erez checkpoint. That's the checkpoint separating Israel from Gaza. Even staff in Gaza, working for international organizations, are kind of afraid, just in case they go out, and they are given the right permits, that they still might be detained at the checkpoints. This is as much as we know. There is a similar case that has to do with the UNDP guy in Gaza but nobody knows for sure.

**Do you think that this case might be a way for the Israeli government to take a step towards taking advantage and making claims that could put ANERA in jeopardy and start making false claims against your work?**

**Odeh:** I don't think so. We have nothing to hide.

**Abu Rajab:** We've been working since 1968. We have good relations. I can say we are neutral, as I've said from the beginning. We don't really interfere and we do our job by the book, as he said. We don't really go beyond. If we need a permit, we know we have to go for it. Some organizations that don't go for permits, their constructions have been demolished. But, we know the rules. We really abide by the rules.

**Odeh:** But there is no protection. If they [the Israeli government] at any point decide to go after any employee, I mean, if they have certain intentions and they decide to accuse any of our employees in Gaza—or accuse me—they can do that. They operate under the British mandate that allows them, the Israelis, to detain anyone for a period of six months without trial. They can renew that six month period by up to four years. There is no protection. If they want to do that, they can do that. But at the same time, personally, I think that it's in their interest, the Israeli interest, that international organizations keep working in Gaza. It relieves the stress. It helps people, especially ones [organizations] that the Israelis know for sure that they're delivering humanitarian assistance to people who need it. I don't think that it is in the Israeli interest to stop international organizations from working in Gaza. That will backfire on the Israelis.

**Has the arrest changed anything about your work in the West Bank?**

**Odeh:** No.

**Abu Rajab:** Nothing

**Leila Rafei:** I know that even in communications here in D.C., that week of the arrest, we were afraid to publish too many stories about Gaza and tried to keep the profile of Gaza low.

**Leila, since you work in the US, do you find that there is any pushback from pro-Israel lobbies here?**

**Rafei:** As of now, I have not had that. I think we get comments on Facebook sometimes that are pro-Israel. On social media—anything on our website—we get those comments. I don't think we get anything official.

**On the other end, how are your projects perceived by Palestinians, since ANERA is an American-backed organization?**

**Abu Rajab:** Really, the Palestinians respect what we do. Sometimes the politics, they are not in favor of. They don't like the politician. They don't like the decision made. They told us, "You are the proud face of the Americans." We have never been hated by the Palestinians. Our cause is there, our sons are there. We never face any difficulty because they appreciate what we are doing. And they want really more and more. We are being respected by the community. Even the American colleagues, when they come, they [Palestinians] invite them, and they want to see them, and they want to thank them for what they are doing. The Palestinian communities, usually, they are lovely. They like people. The problem is the stress created, as he said, when you steal the olives, etc... This will create no hope, and no hope will create stress, and stress will make life and death equal for people and this is the dangerous issue. Freezing the negotiations is really giving no hope for youth so these things— an accumulation of these things—will be on the negative side for the Israelis even.

**Do you think there is more stress now? Has it increased?**

**Abu Rajab:** It has been rising. We can't say it's a relief.

**Odeh:** If you're riding a bike, and you don't keep cycling, you will fall down. This is probably what is happening now. The unbelievable increase in settlement activities throughout the West Bank, the Israeli measures underground, are all adding to the negative atmosphere. And people, as Mohammed said, are starting to get hopeless. They're saying, "What's going to happen a year from now?"

**Abu Rajab:** --And this will facilitate another group in attracting this youth and directing them in the wrong way and this is not favorable, either for Israel or the Palestinians. When our youth has no hope, he cannot go out, he cannot go abroad, he doesn't have any freedom, then what do you expect from these people? They are on the media and the technology. They see the freedom, they see things, and yet they are not part of the human experience. So this will have a lot of negative impact on these people and will create unexpected results.

**Odeh:** By the way, the Israelis have now an army of people who are following up Facebook and the social media activities of Palestinians. And they do arrest people. Posts—any sentence on Facebook—could mean that this guy or that girl is thinking of doing something. They [the IDF] would go and arrest them. This is new. This is even complicating the situation more and more.

**Especially with that, do you feel like there is an even bigger importance on the education related projects that ANERA does to give kids opportunity and a sense that they can change the environment around them?**

**Abu Rajab:** The education, like health, like other things, as I have said, is a human right. But when the guy is educated he will be more demanding for freedom. Education is a human right. When he is educated and he is going for higher education and he cannot leave the country, or is being detained, or whatsoever, it is really confusing for these people. It is not easy.

**Odeh:** Education is actually part of our culture as Palestinians. A father would sell his plot of land to pay a bill to send his kids to a school, or to university for advanced degrees. The Palestinians believe in investing in education, education of their children for a better future. You can rarely find a community where even girls don't finish at least high school, and this is even much better than other Arab countries. Basically, with what we're doing, whether it's in early childhood programs or in schools, construction of schools, this is as Mohammed said, an example of that particular school, where there was a certain rate of dropout. In some communities, girls in particular have to travel to a nearby community, and with travel I mean walking for an hour (Abu Rajab interjects "10 to 12 kilometers") or by taxi for a few kilometers back and forth. For them it is a reason for their families to tell them, "Hey, you just sit at home. You don't need to go to school." It's either that they care too much for them and they don't want them to be leaving the town and coming back on a daily basis, or they might be poor and cannot afford the transportation costs on a daily basis. When we go in and add a few classrooms to the existing schools that they have, or construct a new school, we provide a place where these girls can get educated, and in a year or two's time will be finishing school, and most probably go into university education. We have at this time excellent universities throughout the West Bank and Gaza even offers doctoral degrees in certain subjects and master's degrees in most subjects. We have all sorts of engineering disciplines, medical schools, very good hospitals. It's a very well-educated community.

**Abu Rajab:** Our problem is not like African countries that they are poor. Our problem is a political issue. As he said, we are really equipped and we can do it—we can hope—with the technology. But the problem is freedom; it's a political issue. If the political issue is resolved, we don't even need to get donations.

**Could you talk more about how Israeli imposition affects Palestinian lives? What are some of the concerns of this generation? Are there any concerns with young people today that are different than generations before?**

**Abu Rajab:** Maybe with technology. With technology, they are really different. With technology they demand much more.

**Odeh:** To put myself in the shoes of my children to see how they think—I guess it's the future real ???. The future isn't that bright. My son will be graduating as a doctor next year, and the only question he keeps asking himself and me is, “What am I going to do next? I’m not planning to get stuck in this country, given the situation.” So his first idea is to leave the country and seek advanced education somewhere else. I guess the future is the main issue on the minds of our children. Rightfully so, it’s not the nicest place in the world to live at, with all the killing and arrests.

**Abu Rajab:** The weakness, even of the PA, that doesn’t prevent these companies that have operating jobs that take advantage of their employees with long working hours. This will really affect these people and they will look to go out, not just stay home—

**Odeh:** Unemployment rates are high.

**Abu Rajab:** And, opportunity is very low. As he said, when they look into the future, not everybody can afford to go out and get higher education. Because he knows that he will come back and think, “What can I do with this higher education?” Losing hope, this is a concern.

**Odeh:** The only sources of income, are basically employment within the Palestinian Authority system, civil employees, and it’s basically health, education, and social services. An employee working for the PA will be getting an average of 1,000 dollars per month and that is way below the poverty line. As Mohammed said, if anything goes wrong, and the PA cannot make these monthly salaries, they [employees] won’t get paid. Basically, others work in Israel. The local market isn’t full of opportunities; we are not open to the world. We don’t have manufacturing and industry. Agriculture used to be one of the main sources of income, but with most of the land taken by the Israelis, confiscated for the construction of the wall, lots of people have lost their land and are not able to cultivate them anymore. The agriculture is becoming increasingly of less income to the people. The economic situation is really hard.

**Abu Rajab:** The farmers are really in a challenge. If the political situation is OK, they [Israel] will allow them to export their product. If not, they won’t allow it. So, sometimes they [farmers] are spending more, and they are getting nothing. They are losing. Some people leave their lands because you are working in something, and you don’t have the income.

**Odeh:** Also, they don’t have access to sources of irrigation. Israel controls sources of water. Israel is providing water to Israelis farmers at subsidized prices and it’s not even making it available to Palestinians, even at higher prices. So, Palestinian farmers cannot compete. They are not allowed to dig their own water wells. We don’t have rivers and flowing waters throughout the country like what you have in the US, so the only source of water would be deep water wells. And Palestinians are not allowed to dig new wells or update the ones that they already have or even to replace a pumping unit on a water well. They need an Israeli permit to do that, and Israelis don’t give out those permits. And on the other side, it sucks all the water from the ground and gives it to the Israelis at a really low, subsidized price. Israeli farmers get to export their produce to the whole world—overnight shipping can export their dates



to the whole world. At the same time, Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley aren't able to export the dates they produce. It's unjust.

**Abu Rajab:** In the southern West Bank, near Hebron, USAID invested millions, constructing six wells for the area while the Israelis on the other side dug deeper and took all the water, and the six wells are not functioning. The money is just for nothing. So farmers cannot really guarantee what will happen and how they are even to gain from what they have spent.

**Odeh:** This is the reality.

**Abu Rajab:** The problem of water in the Oslo Agreements that the Palestinians signed, the Oslo (Accords) Agreement article 40 states that they have no right to find new sources of water. They have to depend on Israel first. This was done in 1996 and we were supposed to have our state five years after this date. Now, we are in 2016 and we are still getting the same amount of water agreed upon in 1996. Sometimes they are giving more, and sometimes they don't give. Once I made a study on the settlements. The settlers are getting 360 cubic meter per capita per day, whereas the Palestinians are getting, the maximum they are getting at best is 60 -80. Why the WHO says 150 and we are getting one third of this is the situation that we are facing.

We are making water nets but we can't guarantee them. We don't know what will happen. Then most of the area—only 6 cities in the West Bank—is connected with the sewage network while the others are not connected; and the Israeli does not allow it because if you have sewage plants, so you should have it away from residential areas. This is area C where you are not allowed to do anything— so what you are investing in pipes, water networks, maybe after 5-6 years will be deteriorated.

They have no sewage net, so this is all what they're facing. It's really complicated. We are trying to give relief, to give human rights, to give these things but—we call it development. But we have nothing, as he said, we have nothing in return. We can't guarantee if the PA has no source to pay their employees. If the donor stops helping, it means everybody is unemployed and this is difficult. They want the PA to just survive, and this is what is going on there.

**Given these constraints that you're facing, what do you feel has been the most rewarding or the most important projects that you have worked on since being with ANERA?**

**Abu Rajab:** All our projects are very important. We work in the different sectors. In education, we enter communities where they never had schools and we constructed schools. We work in the water sector where the municipal water had never been there, and they depended on just getting water through wells and unhealthy water. We made renovations of hospitals, construction of clinics, construction of agricultural roads, and roads in general. So all of our projects are considered—really we are proud of what we are doing with USAID funds, or with other donor's funds. So it is all benefitting the community where we are from.

**Odeh:** You can certainly put it this way, if it's not going to change people's lives, if it's not really needed, then we won't do it.

**Abu Rajab:** And we will continue, Inshallah.

**ANERA has a wide scope of capability and has provided a lot of services that weren't previously there, but are there any current projects or future projects that you are looking forward to?**

**Odeh:** Recently, ANERA has been looking, as an organization—I'm not talking about USAID funds now—ANERA, has been looking into expanding their early childhood development programs, has been looking into expanding agricultural programs that have to do with water reuse, land reclamation and so on; and has been exploring new projects, such as ideas that have to do with tourism and encouragement of tourism because we had a tourism project that was funded by USAID in Lebanon a few years ago and it was valued and seemed to be successful project. So ANERA management is looking into replicating that and probably doing something similar in Palestine. But again, any kind of intervention would need to be looked at and studied very well before even presenting it to a donor because of the political and security situation in the country.

**Abu Rajab:** ANERA is negotiating with Turkey to renovate some of the buildings from the Ottoman era in the West Bank. This is under negotiation. This will also help keep the culture and the old buildings in good conditions

**Are there any kind of efforts to make sure that the profits go to Palestinians and not Israelis?  
Is there any way to make sure that it wouldn't end up helping Israelis rather than Palestinians?**

**Odeh:** Well if it's in Palestinian towns and cities—you know in Bethlehem, for example, the issue in Bethlehem is that tourists would come in, stay in Israeli hotels in Jerusalem, and would just come to Bethlehem, visit the nativity church during the day for one or two hours, and then go back to the Israeli hotel, get their food in Jerusalem and so on. Yes, this could happen because Israel is in control. The idea is how can you attract the tourists and try to have them spend a whole day in Bethlehem instead of going back to Jerusalem? This is part of the thinking that is being done, both at the local level and the organizations like us. The fact that the Israelis are controlling exits and entrances and borders is not helping. They even would send out warnings and tell tourists, "It's going to be dangerous for you to stay in Bethlehem. It's much safer for you to stay in Jerusalem." They play on that. So yes, this could happen.

**Abu Rajab:** We could not prevent it because Israel is benefiting from all materials that we are producing for projects because they are controlling all the entrances. They benefit unofficially from all our projects.

**Marie: Thank you so much. This was incredible.**

**Jada: Thank so much**

Odeh: We hope this was informative, and thank you very much

Abu Rajab: Y'allah