



POLICY PAPER

# The Effectiveness of Civil Society Organizations' Interventions in Supporting Women's Issues in Palestine

Between the Reality of Support, Actual Needs, and Required Policy Responses



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**Published by the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development**

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This material is completely financed by NORAD through Karama Regional Network

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# Contents

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|           |                                                                                                                      |    |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
|           | Executive Summary                                                                                                    | 4  |
| <b>01</b> | Introduction and Background                                                                                          | 7  |
| <b>02</b> | Problem Statement                                                                                                    | 8  |
| <b>03</b> | Objectives of the Paper                                                                                              | 9  |
| <b>04</b> | Methodology                                                                                                          | 9  |
| <b>05</b> | The Political, Social, and Legislative Context Governing the Work of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Palestine | 10 |
| <b>06</b> | The Institutional and Programmatic Landscape of Civil Society Organizations Working on Women's Rights                | 14 |
| <b>07</b> | Funding, Political, and Technical Support Modalities and Their Effectiveness in Addressing Women's Priorities        | 20 |
| <b>08</b> | Rights-Holders and Duty-Bearers Analysis: Responsibility and Accountability                                          | 24 |
| <b>09</b> | Policy Alternatives and Strategic Options to Enhance Effectiveness and Sustainability                                | 26 |
| <b>10</b> | Conclusions and Future Outlook                                                                                       | 28 |
|           | References                                                                                                           | 29 |

# Executive Summary

Women-led and feminist Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) operate within an exceptional and highly complex context. The Israeli occupation, political division, legislative paralysis, and a socially conservative environment, compounded by chronic economic fragility and recurrent humanitarian crises all shape this context. Despite decades of international funding directed toward gender equality and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programs, tangible and sustainable improvements in the lives of Palestinian women remain limited.

This paper is grounded in a central premise: the existence of funded programs does not automatically translate into transformative impact. Interventions can only generate sustainable change when they are context responsive, rooted in a comprehensive rights-based approach, and supported by funding modalities and public policies that promote institutional sustainability, independence, and accountability.

## The Governing Structural Context

Feminist organizations in the oPt operate under three interlocking layers of structural pressure:

1

### The Israeli occupation

which continues to restrict civic space, intensify movement and access restrictions, and redirect feminist work from long-term developmental and rights-based pathways toward emergency and humanitarian response.

2

### Political division and legislative paralysis

resulting in the suspension of the Palestinian Legislative Council, the continued delay in enacting the Family Protection Law, and ongoing legal fragmentation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

3

### A socially conservative environment

which generates resistance to gender transformation and fuels incitement narratives that constrain women's ability to report Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and seek protection.

Within this occupation context, violence and marginalization are structurally reproduced, limiting the ability of short-term or fragmented interventions to produce sustainable change.

## ■ Key Findings

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

While protection and support services have expanded, this has been negated by other factors. The absence of an enforceable legal framework, particularly the Family Protection Law, and the continued production of violence within a politically and economically fragile occupation context have reduced interventions to case management rather than comprehensive justice pathways.

### Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Microfinance initiatives and vocational training programs have improved selected individual indicators. However, they have not produced structural shifts in women's economic positioning within an occupation-constrained economy characterized by low female labor force participation.

### Political Participation

The quota system has increased women's numerical representation, yet women's access to actual decision making and positions of influence remains limited due to structural barriers and entrenched patriarchal political culture.

### Funding Modalities

The dominance of short-term project-based funding tied to rapid quantitative indicators, combined with the scarcity of flexible funding and core funding, undermines long-term strategic planning and reproduces fragmented and unsustainable interventions.

## ■ The Structural Gap

Palestinian women's priorities are safety, legal protection, economic stability, access to justice, and essential services. A clear gap exists between these priorities and the nature of funded interventions, which often prioritize short-term training and awareness activities that are easily measurable but fail to address the structural roots of violence and marginalization within the occupation context.

## ■ Policy Recommendations

| Government                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Donors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Civil Society                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>At the Level of the Palestinian Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Enact the Family Protection Law and reform related discriminatory legislation in line with CEDAW obligations.</li><li>● Institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting and allocate sustainable national resources for Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and GBV protection mechanisms.</li></ul> | <p>At the Level of Donors and the International Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Shift toward flexible funding and multi-year core funding to enhance institutional sustainability.</li><li>● Support gender-responsive early recovery efforts, particularly in the Gaza Strip.</li><li>● Build trust-based partnerships and adapt programming models to Palestinian political and social realities within the occupation context.</li></ul> | <p>At the Level of Civil Society Organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Diversify funding sources and strengthen locally grounded and community-based financing mechanisms.</li><li>● Rebalance service delivery with movement-building and rights-based advocacy.</li><li>● Adopt an intersectional approach and actively engage men and boys as partners in transformative change.</li></ul> |

## ■ Conclusion

Support for women's rights in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) cannot be separated from the broader occupation context and structural political and economic constraints. Sustainable impact requires a shift in the CSO model from crisis response toward policy influence and structural transformation grounded in institutional independence, sustainable financing, and accountability.

**Gender justice in Palestine is not a stand-alone programmatic issue; it is an integral component of a broader emancipatory trajectory rooted in dignity, equality, and freedom.**

# 01

## Introduction and Background

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This paper is prepared in the context of an unprecedented escalation in the scale and complexity of challenges facing Palestinian women. These challenges stem both from violations arising from the Israeli occupation and its ongoing military aggression in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They are manifested in intensified movement and access restrictions, land and natural resource confiscation, destruction of infrastructure, and forced displacement, as well as from entrenched social and cultural norms. These dynamics are further compounded by governance crises, internal political division, and the continued paralysis of the legislative system.

This is a complex geopolitical and socio-political environment, where occupation-related repression intersects with entrenched patriarchal structures. Within that, civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly feminist organizations, have assumed a pivotal role in delivering essential services, raising awareness, advancing rights-based advocacy, and intervening in protection cases and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response. However, despite the importance of this role, it remains constrained by structural limitations rooted in the prevailing political, legal, and economic context.

International funding for gender equality and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programs has extended over many years, and interventions have been repeatedly implemented through successive project cycles. Crucially, however, the presence of funding does not necessarily translate into qualitative and sustainable improvements in the lives of women. This is particularly acute in protracted contexts of fragility. Beyond a matter of resource volume, the issue is the architecture of support itself, whether in relation to GBV protection, participation in decision making, or meaningful economic empowerment.

Global literature on feminist funding demonstrates that women's rights organizations and feminist movements remain among the least directly funded actors relative to total development assistance. Moreover, the majority of available resources are typically provided through short-term, project-based grants, with a clear deficit in flexible funding, core funding, and multi-year institutional support that would enable long-term planning and the generation of cumulative, transformative impact (AWID, 2021).

Accordingly, this paper seeks to unpack the relationship between the nature of feminist CSO interventions in Palestine, the structural context within which they operate, and the funding modalities that shape their programmatic choices. It aims to assess the effectiveness of these interventions and to propose policy alternatives that enhance sustainability, institutional independence, and long-term impact.

# 02

## Problem Statement



This paper is grounded in a central problem: the existence of funded interventions and programs addressing women's issues does not automatically ensure sustainable or transformative impact in the lives of Palestinian women, unless such interventions are context-responsive, rooted in a comprehensive rights-based approach, and supported by funding modalities and public policies that enable sustainability and accountability.

This challenge is further reflected in the operational model of CSOs themselves. Over the past decades, many organizations have evolved within a short-term, project-based framework, largely responding to priorities defined by donor agendas. This shift has reshaped feminist work from a mass-based social movement grounded in collective mobilization and political struggle into professionalized institutions primarily focused on service delivery and crisis management.

Within this framework, several structural and operational challenges undermine the effectiveness of CSOs in advancing women's rights, including:

- ◆ Gaps in institutional and organizational capacity, particularly in long-term strategic planning and the management of complex, integrated programs.
- ◆ Misalignment between certain interventions and the real and urgent needs of women, especially in protracted emergency settings.
- ◆ Conditional funding modalities that influence institutional independence and programmatic direction.
- ◆ Limited capacity of feminist organizations to diversify funding sources in alignment with their mission and priorities.
- ◆ Variability in external support for gender priorities within the Palestinian context, often shaped by political and bureaucratic considerations.

Therefore, this paper examines both what CSOs do in relation to women's issues, as well as how they operate, within which institutional and funding model, and what structural constraints and opportunities this model produces in terms of impact.

Accordingly, the paper poses the following central question:

### CENTRAL QUESTION

**To what extent does the support provided to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) strengthen their institutional capacities and programming in ways that respond to Palestinian women's priorities? And what policy alternatives can enhance the impact and sustainability of such support?**

# 03

## Objectives of the Paper

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This paper seeks to:

- 01 Provide an in-depth analysis of the political, social, and legislative context governing the work of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Palestine and its implications for women's rights.
- 02 Assess the institutional and programmatic capacities of organizations working to advance women's rights.
- 03 Analyse the effectiveness of key intervention areas, including protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), and political participation.
- 04 Examine funding modalities, including financial, political, and technical, and their influence on the nature and scope of interventions.
- 05 Propose actionable policy alternatives aimed at enhancing impact, institutional sustainability, and long-term effectiveness.

# 04

## Methodology

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This paper adopts a mixed-methods research approach, including:

- |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ● A review of relevant literature, studies, and reports issued by Palestinian and international institutions. | ● Qualitative interviews with key stakeholders.                                                       |
| ● Legislative and policy analysis of the legal framework related to women's rights.                           | ● Gap analysis between field-based needs and existing interventions.                                  |
| ● A rights-holder and duty-bearer analysis.                                                                   | ● The adoption of a gender-sensitive and intersectional approach throughout the analytical framework. |

# 05

## The Political, Social, and Legislative Context Governing the Work of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Palestine

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The Palestinian context represents an exceptional environment for civil society engagement. Feminist organizations operate under three interlocking layers of structural pressure: first, the Israeli occupation, which undermines civic space and fundamental rights, restricts institutional freedom, and increasingly seeks to criminalize civil society work; second, internal political division, which has led to legislative paralysis, weakened the rule of law, and expanded executive dominance over both the legislative and judicial branches; and third, entrenched traditional social structures that resist gender transformation.

### Shrinking Civic Space within the Occupation Context

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The Israeli occupation constitutes the primary structural obstacle to the effectiveness of feminist interventions. Its impact extends beyond material constraints to the very core of institutional functioning. In 2021, Israeli authorities designated six leading Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations as “terrorist organizations,” creating a climate of intimidation and contributing to the drying up of international funding streams (Amnesty International, 2021). This designation paved the way for broader measures of closure, asset seizure, and operational restrictions targeting Palestinian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

These measures form part of a broader political strategy aimed at undermining the oversight and rights-based advocacy role of Palestinian civil society. In early 2025, restrictions escalated further through the implementation of new Israeli regulations governing the registration of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and visa procedures for their staff. These regulations grant Israeli authorities’ broad discretionary powers to deny registration or restrict operations based on vaguely defined political criteria (ReliefWeb, 2025).

In parallel with official policies, right-wing Israeli advocacy groups, most notably NGO Monitor, have actively targeted Palestinian CSOs, including feminist organizations, through coordinated defamation campaigns. These campaigns frequently accuse organizations of “supporting terrorism” or “incitement” and seek to pressure foreign governments, parliaments, and donor agencies to suspend or withdraw funding. This ecosystem of coordinated pressure encompassing state actors, advocacy groups, and monitoring bodies, aims to reshape the international perception of Palestinian civil society as inherently suspect.

The impact of such campaigns extends beyond institutions to women beneficiaries themselves. Women engaged in documenting violations or expressing views on digital platforms have increasingly faced digital surveillance, incitement, and, in some cases, arrest or summons by Israeli forces, particularly in the West Bank (PCPD, (personal



interview, 20 January 2026). Documented arrests related to online expression deemed “incitement” have fostered a climate of self-censorship and fear, limiting women’s ability to publicly articulate their experiences and demands (Hamleh,2023).

In the Gaza Strip, challenges have reached unprecedented levels in the context of the ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023. The large-scale destruction has led to the near-collapse of protection systems and essential services. Tens of thousands of women have become sole heads of households (UN women,Gender Alert,2024), facing severe food insecurity, lack of privacy, and heightened exposure to violence. The widespread destruction of CSO infrastructure, including women-led and feminist organizations, has shifted a significant portion of feminist engagement from long-term developmental and rights-based pathways toward emergency and humanitarian response (UN women,voices of strength,2024).

In the West Bank, military checkpoints, roadblocks, and the separation barrier and other movement and access restrictions have resulted in geographic fragmentation that limits institutional access to the most marginalized women. Women in Area C, refugee camps, and Bedouin communities are particularly affected (OCHA, 2024). These restrictions weaken the capacity of CSOs to build cross-regional social movements and create service delivery gaps (Khreisha, Personal Interview, 21 January 2026), as interventions remain concentrated in major urban centers at the expense of peripheral and settlement-adjacent areas.

Analyzing the occupation context and its impact on feminist CSOs cannot be separated from the clear structural correlation between intensified occupation practices and rising levels of violence against women within Palestinian society. The Israeli occupation generates direct violence against women through killing, displacement, detention, and deprivation. At the same time, it produces a form of compounded violence in which occupation-related repression intersects with structural and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) within the domestic sphere.

Escalations in military incursions, home demolitions, arrests, movement restrictions, resource depletion, and forced displacement heighten psychological, social, and economic pressures within households. In many cases, these pressures manifest as increased domestic violence against women and girls (UN women,2016). Intimate partner violence also carries significant social and economic costs for women, families, and the broader national economy (UNESCWA,2024).

Measuring the effectiveness of feminist interventions in isolation from this structural interlinkage risks analytical reductionism. Combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cannot be separated from addressing the broader architecture of occupation-related repression, nor from confronting the economic and social vulnerabilities systematically deepened by the occupation.

Fundamentally, movement restrictions, area closures, and geographic fragmentation limit women’s access to services. But they also constrain fundamental life choices, including education, employment, public participation, and the ability to leave unsafe environments or seek protection. As a result, many women become trapped within a multi-layered coercive reality in which occupation-related control intersects with patriarchal control within the family structure (Khreisha, Personal Interview, 21 January 2026).

## Political Division and Legislative Paralysis

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The absence of the Palestinian Legislative Council since 2007 has resulted in the expanded use of “decrees by law,” a governance mechanism largely dominated by the executive authority. This reality has generated significant legal gaps in relation to women’s protection. Palestine continues to lack an enacted Family Protection Law, despite nearly two decades since the first draft was introduced.

As a result, feminist organizations operate within a legislative vacuum and a fragmented legal framework between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In many cases, they are compelled to rely on outdated penal codes and personal status laws that contain discriminatory provisions. This limits institutional intervention to case management rather than ensuring comprehensive justice pathways and enforceable protection mechanisms.

Political division has further produced dual regulatory and oversight systems. There have been attempts by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank to integrate gender mainstreaming within national policies. The de facto authorities in Gaza have, however, imposed additional restrictions on feminist organizations based on ideological and conservative considerations. This legislative and political divergence obstructs cross-sectoral national strategies and undermines unified rights-based advocacy across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In Gaza, feminist organizations have faced multiple forms of pressure from de facto authorities, including restrictions on organizing activities, interference in program content, requirements for prior approvals for certain events, and security summons of activists and staff working within women-led and feminist organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

In the West Bank, despite official rhetoric supportive of women’s rights, recent years have witnessed restrictive measures affecting Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). These have included attempts to amend legislation regulating associations and NGOs (ALHAQ, 2018), administrative and financial constraints, intensified financial scrutiny, requirements for prior approvals for certain activities (PCPD, Personal Interview, 20 January 2026), and the absence of clear political will to allocate sustainable public budgets to support women’s programs (Khreisha, Personal Interview, 21 January 2026).

This reality intersects with the Palestinian Authority’s cautious response to conservative societal pressures. It is reflected in the continued delay in enacting the Family Protection Law despite the completion of multiple draft versions, as well as the failure to officially publish CEDAW in the Palestinian Official Gazette. These delays indicate a preference to avoid confrontation with conservative social and religious actors opposing the law, at the expense of constitutional and international obligations to protect women from violence.

## The Social and Cultural Environment and Resistance to Gender Transformation

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Feminist organizations also face a significant social challenge manifested in a rising conservative trend that frequently frames feminist work as an externally-driven agenda detached from local cultural values. This perception fuels societal resistance to rights-based awareness initiatives and legal reform efforts aimed at advancing gender equality.

Feminist organizations in Palestine have been subjected to systematic incitement campaigns and hate speech, whether through conservative religious and political platforms or through digital media. These campaigns portray feminist institutions as instruments of “family disintegration,” “moral corruption,” or “Western agendas.”

A review of public statements issued by actors such as the media office of Hizb-Tahrir, as well as widely circulated content on social media platforms, reveals the use of accusatory and delegitimizing language framing feminism as a “foreign ideology” incompatible with religion and social values (Hizb-ALTahrir, media office, 2023). This creates a hostile environment for women working in the field, exposing them to harassment and threats.

Such hostility may discourage women from seeking services due to fear of social stigma and may constrain the ability of organizations to operate openly, particularly in rural and socially conservative areas.

Interventions that focus solely on women's empowerment without engaging men and boys tend to produce limited impact, as men often remain primary gatekeepers of economic resources and decision-making power within both the household and broader community structures. This reality necessitates a strategic shift toward promoting positive masculinities and advancing social norm change from within, rather than solely addressing the consequences of violence.

Accordingly, resistance to gender transformation in the Palestinian context represents a structural barrier to the effectiveness of feminist interventions. It cannot be addressed as merely an issue of individual awareness but must be understood as embedded within intertwined cultural and political power structures requiring sustained, long-term strategies aimed at deep social transformation.

# 06

## The Institutional and Programmatic Landscape of Civil Society Organizations Working on Women's Rights

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The Palestinian institutional landscape is characterized by significant diversity in the structure and composition of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working on women's rights. This diversity is reflected in variations in organizational size, geographic reach, ideological orientation, and levels of institutional professionalism. The field encompasses long-standing feminist organizations with grassroots constituencies, specialized human rights centers, community-based associations, as well as broader NGOs that integrate women's issues within their programmatic portfolios. Institutional mapping and sectoral analyses confirm this plurality in roles, mandates, and capacities, alongside clear disparities in resources and operational capabilities across organizations (Costantini, Gian, 2015).

Despite this diversity, cross-cutting analyses of the Palestinian experience reveal several common structural characteristics shaping feminist CSOs. Chief among these are high dependence on external funding, operation within a short-term project-based model, and direct exposure to donor-driven agendas. These dynamics significantly influence both the nature and impact of interventions.

Global feminist funding analyses demonstrate that women's rights organizations, including those operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings, remain among the least funded sectors in terms of flexible funding and core funding. As a result, many organizations rely heavily on short-term, output-driven grants (AWID, 2019). This pattern is clearly reflected in the Palestinian context, where feminist organizations frequently align their programming with donor calls and predefined indicators, often at the expense of building long-term pathways for structural social transformation.

### Historical and Structural Transformations in Palestinian Feminist Work

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Palestinian feminist activism has undergone profound transformations shaped by broader shifts in the national political context. Prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, feminist initiatives were largely embedded within national and grassroots frameworks closely connected to the broader liberation movement. Advocacy for women's rights intersected organically with struggles for national self-determination and social justice, and feminist organizing formed an integral part of the political and social fabric of the national liberation movement (JAD, 2008).

With the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the influx of international funding, the civil society sector experienced what has been widely described as *NGO-ization*. That is to say the transition of feminist activism from a mass-based social movement into a professionalized, institutional framework largely structured around projects and donor funding. Beyond an administrative shift, this has reshaped the substance, priorities, tools, and discourse of feminist engagement (JAD, 2008).

While NGO-ization contributed to enhanced institutional professionalism and technical capacity within many organizations, it simultaneously narrowed spaces for grassroots mobilization. Increasingly, feminist work was redirected toward service delivery and crisis management rather than sustained investment in building a broad-based feminist social movement capable of confronting the political, economic, and cultural structures that reproduce discrimination (Khreisha, Personal Interview, 21 January 2026).

This transformation also coincided with a reconfiguration of the relationship between CSOs and the Palestinian Authority within a broader state-building framework. Engagement with public policy processes, national strategies, and legislative reform became central components of feminist advocacy. However, such engagement has remained constrained by the limits of the available political space and by governmental calculations aimed at managing social balances. These constraints have shaped the ceiling of advocacy and limited progress on socially sensitive issues, particularly those related to domestic violence and legal equality (UN women, 2016).

Funding modalities have played a structural role in reshaping the feminist agenda. Many programs are now designed in response to donor calls structured around predefined outputs and indicators, reinforcing a logic of short-term and fragmented interventions. This approach weakens long-term strategic planning and undermines the development of cumulative and transformative change trajectories. Consistent with global feminist funding analyses, women's rights organizations remain among the least recipients of flexible and core funding, which contributes to institutional fragility, even among long-established organizations with substantial experience (AEID, 2019).

## Key Areas of Intervention and Assessment of Effectiveness

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Feminist Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Palestine face the dilemma of the institutionalization of response within a politically and legally constrained environment. While multiple interventions are implemented, they remain bounded by structural ceilings that limit their capacity to generate transformative change. The work of these organizations is concentrated in several interrelated areas, primarily protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), and political participation.

The institutional and programmatic landscape can be examined through the following analytical lenses:

### 1. Combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Palestine cannot be understood as a purely "domestic" or family-level phenomenon detached from the broader occupation context and political violence. Patterns of violence within households are shaped by a wider structural environment that produces compounded economic, social, and psychological vulnerability. Military incursions, arrests, killings, displacement, movement restrictions, and deprivation of livelihoods are all forms of occupation-related violence. The experience generates fear and chronic stress but also reshapes intra-family dynamics by eroding social protection, intensifying tension, and weakening support networks. This creates conditions conducive to the escalation of violence within the private sphere.

Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that violence against women within the domestic sphere is widespread and requires a structural analysis that transcends individual explanations. The 2019 Violence Survey in Palestinian Society provided an important statistical framework for understanding patterns and sources of violence. ESCWA has further highlighted the economic costs of intimate partner violence in the State of Palestine, demonstrating that violence is not merely an isolated incident but a social and economic burden that reproduces dependency and deprivation (UNESCWA, 2024).

In the Gaza Strip in particular, recent reports indicate that during the ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023, there has been a sharp escalation in various forms of violence. War, displacement, overcrowded shelters, loss of privacy, scarcity of resources, and the breakdown of social networks have created an extremely high-risk environment for women and girls. Reports indicate that a very high proportion of women have been exposed to at least one form of violence during this period, alongside increased risks of sexual exploitation and abuse in contexts of humanitarian dependency and limited access to services (UNFPA, 2024). United Nations analyses further document the gendered impact of the ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023, highlighting how risks to women and girls intensify in contexts of institutional collapse, displacement, and lack of essential services (UN Women, Gender Alert, 2024).

Despite the critical importance of GBV interventions in providing protection and support, from an effectiveness perspective, the Palestinian experience demonstrates that they remain structurally constrained unless the broader context that produces violence is addressed. Rather than lying solely in lack of awareness or service gaps, the core challenge is the interaction of three interrelated levels that generate and reproduce violence:

#### **The occupation and political violence level**

Chronic insecurity, economic collapse, geographic fragmentation, and the targeting of health and social infrastructure increase household vulnerability under sustained pressure and heighten the likelihood of violence within the private sphere.

#### **The legal and institutional level**

Legislative vacuum or weak enforcement of protective laws shifts interventions toward case management rather than sustained justice pathways and long-term protection, thereby weakening deterrence and leaving women exposed to recurring harm.

#### **The social norms and stigma level**

Social stigma constrains disclosure and help-seeking behavior, particularly in conservative communities or displacement contexts, resulting in underreporting and discontinuity in protection processes.

Women's decisions to disclose violence and seek support are shaped by interrelated factors, including fear, stigma, economic dependency, service accessibility, confidentiality, and trust in institutions. Interventions that fail to address these enabling conditions like safety, confidentiality, accessibility, and institutional trust, are likely to remain limited in impact, regardless of the expansion of services (SALAMEH & others, 2025).

Accordingly, assessing the effectiveness of GBV interventions in Palestine requires moving beyond quantitative indicators such as the "number of sessions" or "number of beneficiaries" toward a broader measure of impact. Effectiveness should be evaluated based on the extent to which interventions are able to:

- ◆ reduce exposure to violence within a context that continuously reproduces violence;
- ◆ provide sustainable protection mechanisms despite restricted access to emergency centers; and
- ◆ strengthen women's economic and social resilience in ways that reduce dependency and enhance decision-making power.

Within this framework, addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) becomes part of a comprehensive resilience-based approach rather than a standalone service sector. The structural architecture of occupation-related repression, marked by recurrent crises, reshapes family dynamics and imposes sustained pressure that renders violence a recurring structural risk rather than an isolated event.

## 2. Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiatives constitute a significant share of feminist CSO programming in Palestine. These interventions commonly include support for small and home-based enterprises, vocational training, the establishment and development of cooperatives, and the provision of productive assets and tools.

A peer-reviewed field study conducted among women beneficiaries of small-scale women-led enterprises in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate found that such initiatives contributed to improvements in selected economic empowerment indicators, including increased relative income, enhanced self-confidence, and greater ability to contribute to household expenditures. However, the majority of beneficiaries did not transition into full economic independence, formal labor market integration, or active political participation ((Safi & Al-Tarawneh, 2019).

The study further indicates that many of these enterprises remain concentrated in low-profit sectors and often lack formal registration and legal protection, limiting their capacity for growth and sustainability.

Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics show that women's labor force participation does not exceed approximately 19 percent, reflecting the limited aggregate impact of WEE interventions on transforming the broader labor market structure (PCBS, 2023).

19%

### KEY FIGURE

Women's labor force participation does not exceed approximately 19 percent

PCBS, 2023

The effectiveness of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) cannot be assessed independently from the occupation-constrained economy. Movement and access restrictions, supply chain disruptions, property demolitions, land confiscation, resource control, and labor market volatility collectively transform small women-led enterprises into high-risk ventures vulnerable to collapse during periods of escalation or closure (UNCTAD, 2023).

In the context of the ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023, United Nations reports indicate severe labor market deterioration, widespread income loss, soaring unemployment rates, and intensified movement restrictions. These conditions deepen household vulnerability and increase economic pressures on women, heightening their exposure to exploitation, coercion into informal or unpaid labor, and disproportionate caregiving burdens (UNFPA, 2024).

Economic violence against women in Palestine takes on compounded dimensions. One dimension is rooted in intra-household and societal power relations, including deprivation of resources, income control, and restrictions on employment. Another dimension is structurally external and linked to the occupation, including asset loss, destruction of livelihoods, denial of land access, and targeting of productive sectors.

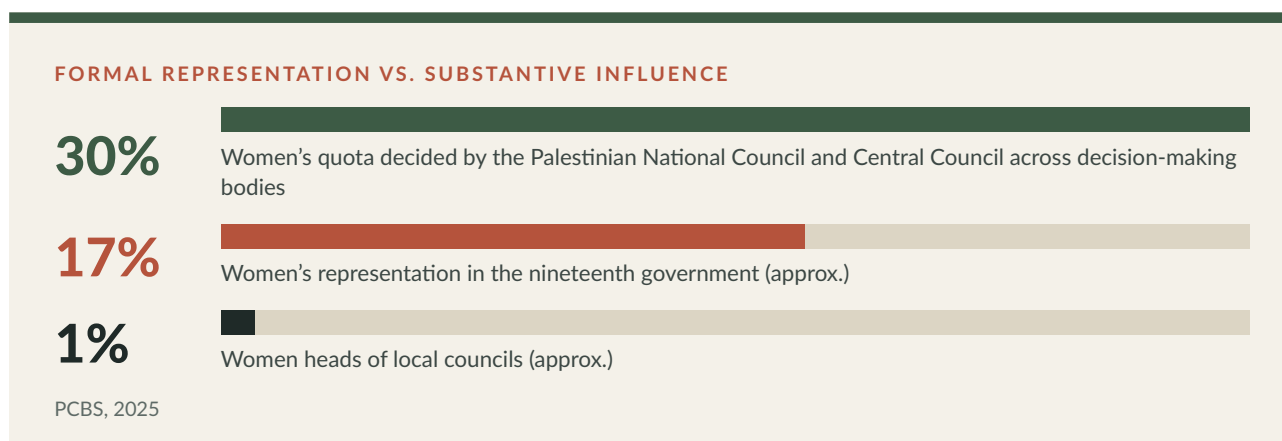
Women's economic conditions are inseparable from the broader system of structural deprivation and violations in Palestine. Addressing Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) therefore requires comprehensive economic, social, and legal protection pathways that move beyond training and microfinance toward the creation of an integrated enabling environment.

### 3. Political Participation: Quotas versus Decision-Making Power

Most feminist programming in the area of political participation focuses on increasing women's representation in local councils and elected bodies and strengthening the capacities of young women leaders through leadership training, campaign management skills, and awareness-raising on civic engagement. These interventions have contributed to expanding women's visibility in the public sphere and challenging certain gender stereotypes associated with political roles (UN Women, 2022).

However, research consistently demonstrates that women's limited political participation is not primarily a matter of skills deficits, but rather the result of deep structural barriers. These include the design of the electoral system, entrenched patriarchal political culture, dominance of traditional elites and party structures in decision-making arenas, political and digital violence targeting women, weak party and community support networks, and unequal access to financial and institutional resources necessary for effective electoral participation (ESCWA, 2024).

Palestinian data reflect the persistence of these structural challenges. Statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that women's representation in decision-making positions remains low despite decisions by the Palestinian National Council and Central Council to raise the women's quota to 30 percent across decision-making bodies. For example, women's representation in the nineteenth government did not exceed approximately 17 percent, and their representation as heads of local councils remains around 1 percent. These figures reveal a clear gap between formal representation and substantive influence (PCBS, 2025).



Within this context, the quota system is widely regarded as a necessary corrective tool to address historical exclusion. However, feminist scholarship cautions against treating quotas as an end in themselves. In some cases, quotas may result in numerical representation without substantive empowerment or decision-making authority—particularly where elected women remain constrained by party blocs, clan-based power structures, or lack access to institutional resources and influence (International IDEA 2020).

Accordingly, evaluating the effectiveness of political participation interventions should not be limited to counting the number of women trained, nominated, or elected. Instead, effectiveness should be measured by the extent to which interventions dismantle structural barriers to influence. This includes confronting political and digital violence, expanding party and community support networks, ensuring equitable access to financial resources, and strengthening the autonomy of women politicians in decision-making processes UN Women, 2022.

In the Palestinian context, this structural approach is particularly critical. The interlocking challenges of occupation, political division, and restrictions on public freedoms intersect with gender-based barriers, rendering gains in women's political participation fragile and susceptible to regression unless anchored in comprehensive structural reforms that move beyond quota logic toward genuine power-sharing in decision-making.

# 07

## Funding, Political, and Technical Support Modalities and Their Effectiveness in Addressing Women's Priorities



The nature of feminist Civil Society Organization (CSO) interventions in Palestine is largely shaped by prevailing financial, political, and technical support modalities. These modalities function as structural determinants, influencing issue selection, program design, implementation mechanisms, and long-term sustainability, rather than being just funding instruments.

Global feminist funding literature consistently demonstrates that the majority of financial flows directed toward women's rights organizations worldwide are delivered through short-term, project-based grants tied to pre-defined outputs and performance indicators. In contrast, flexible funding and core funding, essential for institutional autonomy and long-term strategic planning, remain scarce (UN Women, Women-Led Organizations..., 2023).

### 1. Financial Support: Relative Availability versus Fragile Sustainability

Despite relatively continuous financial flows directed toward gender equality programming in Palestine, several structural characteristics limit the effectiveness of this funding:

- ◆ Dominance of short-term project-based funding cycles (typically 6–24 months);
- ◆ Emphasis on rapid, quantifiable outputs;
- ◆ Limited investment in long-term institutional capacity building.

Recent global reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) have exacerbated uncertainty among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), pushing them into competitive cycles over shrinking funding pools rather than fostering long-term strategic partnerships (OECD, 2025). Complex compliance requirements, restrictive funding conditions, and the absence of adequate core funding further weaken institutional sustainability within the Palestinian civil society sector (PNGO, 2024).

There is also growing concern that a significant portion of donor priorities in Palestine focuses heavily on policy reform, legal frameworks, and governmental plans, while comparatively underinvesting in community-based economic initiatives capable of generating direct and sustainable household-level impact. Examples include support for women-led agricultural cooperatives, collective productive enterprises, and local value chains. This imbalance creates a structural gap between policy-oriented advocacy and grassroots developmental interventions, limiting the tangible improvement of women's daily living conditions (Nakhleh, Personal Interview, 28 August 2025).

Moreover, the Palestinian context (both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) is characterized by systematic financial restrictions affecting public institutions and civil society alike. These constraints undermine long-term planning capacity and shift institutional focus toward crisis management rather than stable development trajectories (Nakhleh, Personal Interview, 28 August 2025). Funding volatility has led to program reductions, staff layoffs, erosion of accumulated institutional expertise, and deterioration in the quality and continuity of services provided to women (PCPD, 20 January 2026).

In a context marked by chronic emergency conditions, a clear gap persists in local institutional capacity to respond effectively and sustainably to recurring crises. Limited access to flexible funding, shortages of qualified personnel, and fragile operational infrastructure result in fragmented interventions with constrained impact.

## 2. Political Support: The Limits of International Protection

Despite recurring international rhetoric supporting women's rights and gender equality, tangible political backing for Palestinian feminist organizations remains inconsistent and insufficient relative to the structural challenges women face within an occupation context.

This contradiction becomes evident when comparing declared commitments under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security with the Palestinian reality. UNSCR 1325 emphasizes protection of women in armed conflict and their participation in peace and decision-making processes (UN Security Council, 2000), while women in Palestine continue to experience severe violations without effective international protection or meaningful accountability mechanisms.

While Resolution 1325 is intended to provide a binding normative framework for advancing women's security in conflict settings, successive United Nations reports indicate that implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the occupied oPt has yielded limited practical impact. This has not translated into effective deterrence or protection measures in response to ongoing violations against women and girls, including killing, injury, forced displacement, destruction of homes, and restrictions on access to essential services ((Shamiyeh, 2025).

The absence of a credible international protection framework for Palestinian feminist organizations, combined with the failure of the international community to ensure accountability for ongoing violations under international law, has contributed to a widening trust deficit between Palestinian society and international institutions. International human rights and gender equality frameworks are increasingly perceived by segments of Palestinian society as lacking the political will to enforce their principles in the Palestinian context. This perception affects the legitimacy of international mechanisms and influences the operating environment of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly feminist organizations (Khreisha, Personal Interview, 21 January 2026).

Accordingly, limitations in political support extend beyond funding or partnership arrangements; they shape the broader environment within which feminist organizations operate. They constrain the ability of these organizations to adopt a clearly articulated rights-based and emancipatory discourse and to engage meaningfully in international accountability efforts addressing occupation-related policies and structural violations.

### 3. Technical Support: Transferring Ready-Made Models

Technical support directed toward feminist Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Palestine commonly includes strategic planning frameworks, implementation matrices (objectives, outputs, indicators, activities), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools, project proposal development methodologies, financial management training, and institutional capacity-building programs. These tools are widely regarded as essential components for strengthening professionalism, governance standards, and administrative efficiency.

However, the uncritical transfer of ready-made models from other contexts—without deep adaptation to local political, social, and economic realities—risks producing standardized interventions. Programs may become structurally similar in logic and design regardless of contextual differences, thereby reducing their relevance and effectiveness in complex and fragile environments such as the Palestinian context.

In Palestine, the limitations of model transfer are further intensified by the occupation context, political division, and chronic emergency conditions. Effective programming requires high levels of flexibility, continuous adaptation, explicit recognition of the occupation context as a defining structural variable, and acknowledgment of rights-based and movement-oriented engagement as legitimate forms of action.

Accordingly, the most effective technical support shifts from a logic of “tool exportation” toward one of mutual learning and co-creation. It involves collaborative development of context-responsive solutions with local feminist organizations, grounded in their contextual knowledge and lived experience. Such an approach supports the emergence of locally rooted intervention models and builds upon accumulated institutional expertise that is often constrained by fragile financial sustainability.

## The Gap Between Women's Lived Priorities and Donor-Funded Interventions

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In the Palestinian context, gender justice cannot be separated from the occupation context, geographic fragmentation, movement restrictions, and recurring emergencies. These factors generate compounded forms of violence that directly shape women's daily lives and those of their families. Women's priorities are therefore formed not only within household or community dynamics, but also in direct interaction with broader structures of repression that produce economic fragility, insecurity, erosion of social protection systems, and diminished capacity for long-term planning.

United Nations reports indicate a growing gap between the urgent priorities expressed by Palestinian women and the nature of interventions receiving funding and institutional support. While women frequently identify survival, protection, economic security, and access to essential services as immediate priorities, a significant portion of funded programming focuses on short-term awareness activities, training workshops, or psychosocial interventions that are not integrated into enforceable legal protection pathways or sustainable economic solutions (UN Women, Gender Alert, 2024).

Following October 2023, several donors suspended funding disbursements pending political reviews, a move that local institutions described as a form of collective penalization of women beneficiaries amid the near-collapse of protection and health systems—particularly in the context of the ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023.

In the West Bank, data indicate that settler violence and movement restrictions are associated with rising patterns of internal displacement. Needs assessments for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern areas of the West Bank show that women prioritize comprehensive protection from violence, legal assistance and access to justice, long-term psychosocial support, restoration of livelihoods, and recovery of official documentation lost during displacement and military incursions (NEED ASSESSMENT, PWWSD, 2025).

Palestinian studies on small-scale women-led enterprises further demonstrate that while such projects may improve selected individual indicators—such as relative income or self-confidence—they rarely produce structural shifts in women's socioeconomic or political positioning, nor do they ensure sustainable economic independence (Safi & Al-Tarawneh, 2019).

A review of donor-funded interventions reveals recurring structural challenges across three interconnected dimensions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Program duplication and weak integration</b></p> <p>Multiple short-term projects operate simultaneously within the same geographic areas without a unified coordination framework.</p> | <p><b>Limited sustainability</b></p> <p>Services often shrink or disappear once grants conclude.</p> | <p><b>Output-oriented evaluation bias</b></p> <p>Short funding cycles incentivize rapid, quantifiable outputs over long-term outcome tracking and structural change measurement.</p> |
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This dynamic produces a clear gap between women's lived realities and what short-term projects are able to demonstrate in periodic reports. The dominance of project logic and easily measurable indicators encourages preference for interventions that generate rapid results, even when their structural impact remains limited (AWID, 2019).

The gap becomes even more pronounced in complex humanitarian settings, where women are frequently framed primarily as “victims” or “beneficiaries,” rather than as political and economic actors with contextual knowledge and agency capable of shaping solutions (UN Women, 2024).

The persistence of this gap constrains the transformative potential of interventions addressing women's rights in Palestine. It reinforces a pattern of partial symptom management rather than enabling a transition toward structural transformation and sustainable development pathways.

# 08

## Rights-Holders and Duty-Bearers Analysis: Responsibility and Accountability

This paper adopts a rights-based approach grounded in identifying gaps in the fulfilment of obligations toward Palestinian women.

### Rights-Holders: Palestinian Women and Girls

Palestinian women and girls, in all their diversity and intersectional realities, are the primary rights-holders addressed in this paper. Particular attention is given to groups experiencing compounded forms of marginalization, including:

Women in Area C

Women in refugee camps, particularly in northern areas of the West Bank affected by ongoing Israeli military operations

Bedouin women

Internally displaced women affected by home demolitions and incursions

Women with disabilities

Women heads of households

Young women and adolescent girls

Reports by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicate that women in Area C and Bedouin communities face intensified movement restrictions, severe shortages in essential services, and elevated risks of settler-related violence and military incursions. These conditions directly affect their access to protection, healthcare, education, and livelihoods (OCHA,2024).

Needs assessments for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern parts of the West Bank reveal that women in camps and host communities experience loss of privacy, increased exposure to Gender-Based Violence (GBV), difficulties in restoring official documentation, and significant deterioration in mental health and psychosocial well-being (NEED ASSESSMENT, PWWSD, 2025).

The intersection of multiple layers of marginalization generates differentiated levels of deprivation, requiring targeted interventions grounded in intersectional analysis rather than treating women as a homogeneous group. Any intervention that fails to account for this diversity remains insufficient to achieve substantive justice or transformative impact.

## Duty-Bearers: The International Community, the Palestinian Authority, and Palestinian Civil Society

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Responsibility for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of Palestinian women rests with multiple interrelated actors:

### 1. The International Community and Donor Actors

The international system bears both legal and moral responsibility to:

- ◆ Address the occupation context as a fundamental barrier to just and sustainable development for the Palestinian people;
- ◆ Ensure effective protection for Palestinian women from grave violations under international law, including accountability mechanisms consistent with international legal standards;
- ◆ Resist political pressures affecting funding decisions and safeguard the continuity of resources without conditions that undermine Palestinian institutional autonomy;
- ◆ Contextualize global agendas and avoid reinforcing short-term humanitarian approaches that fail to address structural drivers of inequality;
- ◆ Adopt a framework that recognizes the interlinkage between women's rights advancement and broader structural conditions shaping Palestinian society.

### 2. The Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority holds legal and institutional responsibility to fulfill women's rights, including:

- ◆ Enacting protective and non-discriminatory legislation, particularly the Family Protection Law;
- ◆ Harmonizing national legislation with international conventions ratified by the State of Palestine, particularly CEDAW;
- ◆ Ensuring effective enforcement of existing laws without discrimination;
- ◆ Institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting and allocating sustainable national resources to gender equality priorities;
- ◆ Promoting cultural transformation that challenges discriminatory norms and strengthens women's political and economic participation.

### 3. Palestinian Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly feminist and human rights organizations, bear responsibility to:

- ◆ Uphold a rights-based approach grounded in accountability to local communities;
- ◆ Avoid reproducing unequal power relations within programming structures;
- ◆ Refrain from replicating externally imposed models that fail to reflect the Palestinian context;
- ◆ Strengthen participatory approaches that center women's agency and leadership.

# 09

## Policy Alternatives and Strategic Options to Enhance Effectiveness and Sustainability



Based on the preceding analysis, this paper proposes multi-level policy alternatives:

### A. At the Level of National Policy (Palestinian Government)

A shift is required from a welfare-based approach toward a rights-and-justice framework:

- 01** Implement decisions of the Palestinian National Council and Central Council to raise the women's quota to 30 percent across decision-making bodies.
- 02** Immediately enact the Family Protection Law and reform related legislation in line with international obligations ratified by the State of Palestine, supported by an implementation budget to ensure effective protection.
- 03** Domesticize CEDAW within national legislation, ensure its official publication in the Palestinian Official Gazette, and clarify legal definitions of discrimination.
- 04** Institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting, allocating clear budget lines for women-led cooperatives, alimony funds, and GBV protection centers in marginalized areas to reduce reliance on volatile international funding.
- 05** Activate private sector social responsibility mechanisms, including the establishment of a National Women's Empowerment Fund to support women-led agricultural and service initiatives in areas at risk of land confiscation.

### B. At the Level of Donors and the International Community

A reconfiguration of the donor-local organization relationship is required, grounded in partnership rather than dependency:

- 01** Adopt flexible, multi-year core funding models to strengthen institutional sustainability and human resource retention.
- 02** Support rights-based advocacy pathways without conditioning humanitarian assistance on political positioning.

- 03 Direct support toward grassroots and rural organizations by simplifying grant procedures and reducing bureaucratic barriers, particularly for initiatives in Area C and refugee camps.
- 04 Invest in gender-responsive early recovery in the Gaza Strip in the context of the ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023, prioritizing reconstruction of women-led institutions and productive assets rather than exclusively emergency relief distributions.
- 05 Strengthen support for the Women, Peace and Security agenda under UN Security Council Resolution 1325, particularly its pillars of prevention, protection, participation, and recovery.

### C. At the Level of Civil Society Organizations

CSOs should undertake strategic recalibration to enhance legitimacy and sustainability:

- 01 Revitalize community-based financing models, including crowdfunding mechanisms and diaspora engagement, to reduce external dependency.
- 02 Shift from project implementation logic toward community resilience frameworks, investing in cooperatives, solidarity economy models, and structured volunteerism as essential social capital.
- 03 Rebalance service delivery with movement-building and rights-based advocacy, ensuring grassroots participation of women in camps and rural areas in program design.
- 04 Adopt an intersectional framework linking women's rights with disability, poverty, and broader structural conditions shaping Palestinian society.
- 05 Engage men and boys as partners in dismantling patriarchal norms.
- 06 Build cross-sectoral advocacy coalitions uniting trade unions, feminist organizations, and human rights centers to advance legal and policy reform.

# 10

## Conclusions and Future Outlook

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A careful assessment of Civil Society Organization (CSO) interventions in Palestine reveals a central paradox. These organizations have demonstrated remarkable resilience in preserving social cohesion and sustaining essential services for women under extreme conditions. Yet they remain constrained in achieving structural transformation and financial sustainability.

The ongoing crime of genocide under international law in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023 has underscored that safety and rights for Palestinian women are indivisible. Protection from domestic violence cannot be separated from protection from occupation-related violence, nor can economic empowerment be achieved within a structurally constrained and externally dependent economy.

Continuation of an NGO-driven model heavily shaped by donor agendas risks perpetuating cycles of dependency. The future of Palestinian civil society engagement on women's rights requires a recalibrated model grounded in institutional sovereignty, sustainability, and strategic autonomy.

This paper therefore calls for a localized development strategy that re-centers community-driven initiatives and context-specific innovation. The effectiveness of civil society in advancing women's rights will depend on its capacity to transition from crisis response to policy influence, from grant recipient to national resource mobilizer, and from service provider to structural change actor ensuring that Palestine remains a space of dignity, equality, and freedom for all its women and men.





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This material is completely financed by NORAD through Karama Regional Network  
NORAD and Karama do not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed.