



# Research Study

Rural Women's Economic Rights  
Analytical Reading within a Legal and Policy  
Framework

October 2020



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Framework**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction:</b> .....	6
<b>Objective and Methodology</b> .....	8
<b>Concept of Rural Women’s Economic Rights and International Conventions</b> .....	10
<b>The Reality of Palestinian Rural Women</b> .....	14
<b>The Legal Environment</b> .....	19
<b>Policy Frameworks</b> .....	23
The Strategic Plan to Combat Violence 2011-2019 and the National Plan on Resolution 1325 .....	28
Cooperative Work .....	29
Agriculture .....	30
<b>Implementing Strategies and Policies</b> .....	32
The National Policy Agenda 2017-2022.....	32
The Revision of the Sustainable Development Plan 2030 .....	32
The Agricultural Sector Strategy.....	36
Cooperative Work Strategy.....	37
CEDAW Reports.....	38
Revision of Previous Plans and Strategies.....	41
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	50
• Support the presence of rural women in local councils in every way, capability building, promotion, continuous support, having a code of conduct/honour, .....	53
• Encourage the councils based on the past experiences of PWWSD, and to expand the creation of shadow councils and specialized women’s committees.....	53
<b>Appendices:</b> .....	56

## Preface

Within the framework of its endeavour towards a free and democratic Palestinian society based on gender equality, respect for human rights and social justice, the Palestinian Working Women Association for Development (PWWSA) works to strengthen the gender-responsive environment in the field of rural development and in the cooperative sector through its experience as a human rights organization working towards sustainable development. PWWSA is doing this through efforts to mainstream gender in the private and public spheres and within the context of its "Equality First" program, which aims to strengthen representatives of civil society working for rural development and gender equality in Palestine.

With these aims in mind, the project "Strengthening the Gender Responsive Environment in the Field of Rural Development and in the Cooperative Sector" is implemented in partnership with the Economic and Social Development Centre of Palestine (ESDC), Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives Union (PACU), the Land Research Centre (LRC), the Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ), and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC).

**The overall objective of the project** is to contribute to consolidating an environment of gender equality by increasing women's access to land and means of production through improving their living conditions as well as opportunities for active participation in development processes, ultimately forming an advanced gender integration system within the framework of partner institutions that reflects different models in thinking styles, values and objectives of rural and cooperative development.

This project was developed through an analysis of the legal environment and policy frameworks through a gender-based lens as a means of improving the lives of women and girls and men and boys, though taking into account their differing circumstances based on their social position and lifestyle as well as class and social affiliations. Public policy as a mechanism for bringing about change was focused on as it has the power to bring about or curb strategic change including the power it has to either perpetuate or eliminate gender discrimination and to either prevent or promote gender equality. Policies also have the potential to bridge the historical gap in power relations based on gender, to promote women's rights, and to prioritize gender equality and women's needs and concerns a priority. However, it must be taken into consideration that the inclusion of women's issues in public policies will not automatically lead to the desired changes,

as effective policies must be coupled with the political will and determination to design and implement them, the allocation of necessary resources and systems, as well as clear procedures, standards and mechanisms for their implementation and finally the monitoring evaluation, and impacts-based assessment of said policies in order to determine their effectiveness in achieving the necessary changes.

-Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development

### Introduction:

Power relations, class distinctions and gender roles are shaped by economic conditions, particularly related to the means of production and the fluctuations of the market. This determines the social, political, and economic based gender roles based on perceptions of sex, and has deep-rooted implications regarding social protection. This is due to the ways in which economic conditions are fundamental to whether the most marginalized people in society, including women and especially women who are further marginalized, such as by their class position, can access livelihood opportunities; as such, these conditions have a direct impact on the lives of people in a given society.

Thus, rural communities in Palestine under Israeli military occupation are particularly marginalized and poorer rural Palestinian women especially so. This is in large part due to how disproportionately women shoulder the burdens of unpaid work which while consisting of crucial efforts and services which make paid work possible, is undervalued because it is not monetarily compensated and thus does not directly increase household income and is significantly undercounted if taken into account at in national GDP estimates. As a result, poorer rural women in particular are most egregiously denied their labour rights and excluded from labour organizing and workplace condition protections, such as regarding equal pay to men or minimum wage rights, the regulation of their work hours for proper work-life balance, the right to a safe and decent work environment, the right to health insurance and employment injury insurance, paid leave including sick leave and vacation rights, and the right to end-of-service benefits including social security and retirement benefits.

The enforcement of the economic rights of rural women is especially crucial during these times where inequality is only deepening. The lack of commitment to implement the economic rights of Palestinian rural women denied by Israeli military occupation policies and Israeli settler attacks on one hand and Palestinian patriarchal violence on the other, foremost of which is the right to own land and control productive resources contributes to the deep-set economic, social and political marginalization of Palestinian women in general and rural women in particular.

Within this context, an analysis of policy contents and frameworks that takes into consideration economic rights and their implications, as represented by the right to access resources and develop capabilities and livelihoods must be undertaken, as based on the obligations put forth by international agreements that reflect through their clauses a detailed and clear conception of the economic rights of rural women. This analysis should then be relied upon when designing development programs and interventions directed towards rural women.

Consequently, this report aims to provide a quick analysis of the reality of rural women that can be instrumental in the designs of economic empowerment programs and interventions. It first does so by outlining the existing movement for economic rights in the Palestinian countryside, and the current conditions as shape by family relationships, customs and traditions, property and production relations and gender and other social roles. There was found to be a decline in some of the traditional roles of rural Palestinian women as they move towards new horizons, including increased education and employment rates, small business ownership, organized feminist work, and stronger movements towards economic rights, including the right to inheritance. This accumulation of new experiences presents an opportunity for existing power dynamics to either be strengthened or weakened through governmental policies and interventions that support the empowerment of women. This report then goes on to analyse the legal and policy environment in which the economic rights of rural women are situated in before reaching a set of conclusions, the most prominent of which is regarding the complete inadequacy of the Palestinian legal system in guaranteeing the economic rights of rural women. While a portion of the national policies and strategies included in the sustainable development plan, the National Policy Agenda, and the cross-sectoral strategy plan relate to women's rights and gender equality which can assist in promoting the economic rights of rural women, most frequently they lacked an explicit emphasis on promoting the economic rights of Palestinian rural women.

Through a review of the implementation of plans and policies, it became clear that despite the efforts made by Palestinian and international civil society organizations, grassroots bodies and governmental institutions particularly regarding the development process, the Palestinian legal environment is still not conducive to bringing about change and pushing the development process forward in a gender-responsive manner, nor is it consistent with Palestinian obligations per signed international conventions and treaties. It was found that while women's exposure to violence decreased during the past ten years from 37% to 27% according to recent survey results, the rate of women's economic participation is still modest, with less than 2 out of every 10 women of working age considered “economically active” meaning (formally employed) or actively job-searching. All reviews confirm deficiencies in the implementation of policies for various reasons, related to insufficient budgets and the allocation of resources resulting from the lack of political will to properly enforce these policies; as a result, improvements to the reality of women and increased access to their economic rights are not meeting the full potential of how transformative these policies could be.

After a thorough analysis of the obstacles and impediments to the realization of rural Palestinian women’s economic empowerment, it became clear that the ongoing Israeli occupation and the ways in which the occupation has undermined Palestinian sovereignty over land and natural resources and borders, represent the main impediment to the implementation of sustainable (and thus, gender-responsive) development policies.

Finally, this reports concludes with strategic recommendation across the following 3 axes:

- 1) The legal and institutional environment
- 2) Community support (social capital measures)
- 3) Women, human capabilities, access to and control of resources

This research aspires to constitute a modest contribution to a national development dialogue that enhances resilience and resistance, and in a way that promotes the economic rights of rural women and positively affects issues of equity and equality for women.

## Objective and Methodology

The main objective of this report is to provide information on Palestinian legislation geared towards the economic rights of Palestinian rural women as well as a critical analysis of policies

through a gender-based lens to identify gender-related gaps in order to guide development programmes and policies in an informative manner. Additionally, this report aims to reflect the voices of women on the ground in the Palestinian countryside and their daily experiences, to turn their concerns into demands and recommendations, and to review the required interventions to improve the National Policy Framework, which can effectively contribute to the national dialogue on guaranteeing the economic rights and the overall empowerment of Palestinian rural women.

## Methodology

The methodology for preparing this report is based on participatory research methods and the associated tools and methods, including:

1. Review the literature related to the research topic, including:
  - Relevant Palestinian laws (companies, labour, cooperatives, agriculture, investment)
  - International treaties (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women or CEDAW)
  - A series of national plans
  - Cross-sectoral national plans and their reviews
  - Report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Palestine
  - The first official report of the State of Palestine from the Committee for the Implementation of CEDAW and the shadow report submitted to the same committee by the Palestinian National Women's Coalition for the implementation of CEDAW
  - Related studies i.e related to relationship dynamics in the Palestinian countryside, women's access to land etc.
2. Preliminary meetings with the programme team
3. Individual interviews with stakeholders, including with:

- Programme Manager with the Rural Women's Development Society
- Deputy Director and Programme Director with the Economic and Social Development Centre Palestine (ESDC)
- Member of the Administrative Board of the Palestinian Agricultural Cooperative Union (PACU) with cooperative leaders and Director of the oil council within PACU
- Chairman and Program Director of the Cooperative Work Agency (CWA)
- Ministry of Agriculture, the Planning Department and the Gender Unit
- Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Planning Department
- Ministry of Labour, the Gender Unit
- Ministry of Economy, the Gender Unit

It is worth noting here that repeated attempts were made to meet with the representative of the Council of Ministers that were ultimately unsuccessful

4. Holding a working group with rural women
5. Holding a working group with cooperatives on saving, credit and productivity
6. Holding a working group with rural production cooperatives
7. Holding an analytical workshop with partner institutions in the project
8. Developing the draft and developing the report based on the contributions of the programme team

A list of the names of the participants in the search is annexed along with the results of the field work.

### **Concept of Rural Women's Economic Rights and International Conventions**

Economic rights encompass the rights of all to access resources such as land and water as well as the right to form and develop their knowledge, skills, and personal abilities. The right to access capital including social capital, the right to access the market and production inputs, including

the right to work and the surrounding social rights (including health, educational and cultural rights) are also all crucial to a person's economic right to have a dependable livelihood.<sup>1</sup>

This was confirmed by individual interviews, with among the most notable of these interviews with what Hanin Zaidan, the Programmes Manager of the Rural Women's Development Society, who reported that "The concept of women's economic rights in general is broad, including the right to property, the right to act and make decisions as she sees fit, the right to access financial resources and information, and the right to decent work".

The right to work is fundamental to the economic rights of every human being in accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which also affirmed in tandem with civil and political rights the right to non-discrimination, as Article 3 stipulates: "The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant." Prior to this, the Covenant affirmed in its introduction "that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights", while as Article Six indicates In the Covenant that the right to work "includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain her or his living by work which she or he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right. Including "the technical and vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment". The Covenant also affirms that the individual has basic political and economic freedoms, which Article 7 defines as including the right to enjoy fair and satisfactory conditions of work, the right to form trade unions and the freedom to join them (8), and what follows. Other articles affirm the right to social security (9), protection of the family, mothers, children and adolescents, the right to an adequate standard of living for the person and his family and freedom from hunger, and the right to health, education,

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<sup>1</sup> See results of the Partner Institutions Working Group See also: Sustainable Living Trends Capital Assets at

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318018970\\_The\\_Sustainable\\_Livelihoods\\_Approach](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318018970_The_Sustainable_Livelihoods_Approach)

and education, while Article 15 affirms the right to participate in cultural life.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the right to work can be considered a basic foundation for the economic rights of every human being and necessarily applies to the economic rights of Palestinian rural women.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) expands upon these rights even further, stating in Article 11<sup>3</sup>: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular: **The right to work** as an inalienable right of all human beings, the right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment, the right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training, the right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work, the right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave, and the right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.

In order to prevent discrimination against women because of marriage or maternity and to ensure women’s right to work, all relevant parties must work for the national implementation of appropriate measures, including: the prohibition of dismissal from service due to pregnancy or maternity leave or on the basis of marital status, the introduction of a system of paid maternity leave without the loss of seniority status, bonuses or work entitlements including special workplace safety provisions for pregnant women, and to encourage the provision of the necessary supportive social services to enable parents to properly balance family obligations with work responsibilities while being able to participate in public life, in particular by encouraging

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<sup>2</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted and offered for signature, ratification and accession by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force: January 3, 1976, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

the creation and particularly through the support and development of a network of childcare facilities.

Furthermore, Article 12 of CEDAW affirms the right to health care, while Article 13 does the same regarding the prohibition of discrimination in other areas of economic and social life in order to guarantee, on the basis of equality between men and women, the same rights, especially :

- (A) The right to family benefits,
- (B) The right to obtain bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit
- (C) The right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life

Article 14 of CEDAW is of particular interest to this report as it is specifically about **the rights of rural women** and it states as the following:

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
  - (a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
  - (b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
  - (c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;
  - (d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;

- (e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;
- (f) To participate in all community activities;
- (g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
- (h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

The provisions contained in the CEDAW agreement represent a detailed and clear concept of the economic rights of rural women which should be taken into account when analyzing the contents and policy frameworks as well as when developing development programs and interventions, by virtue of its comprehensiveness and its development-based outlook regarding rural women reaching their full potential to effectively contribute to the development process, free from discrimination and the exclusion of their basic rights.

As the State of Palestine has gained in international recognition, so too has it signed on to more international agreement. Thus, in 2014 the State of Palestine joined on to a set of basic human rights conventions without reservations, including the International Covenant and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) according to the text to 2 of the 10 articles of the amended Palestinian Basic Law. These acts represent an entry point for embodying the provisions of international agreements and treaties into Palestinian legislation as well as calls for the development and elaboration of implementation policies and strategies. The "National Cross-sector Strategy to Promote Equality, Gender Justice and Empowerment of Women 2017-2022" can be seen as an indication of the policy frameworks that reflect the State of Palestine's move implement its commitments to CEDAW.

## The Reality of Palestinian Rural Women

According to the 2017 census results, the percentage of residents in rural areas amounted to 14.6%, the percentage of residents in urban areas reached 77.1% and the percentage of residents in refugee camps reached 8.3%. It should be noted that the percentage of residents in rural areas was 17.1% according to the 2007 census results.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of women in these communities is around 50%. In reality, the rural living pattern depends on the relationship with the land, reliance on agricultural work partial self-provision of food, widespread agricultural economy, and home gardens and livestock raising. This pattern is prevalent in at least two thirds of the Palestinian communities, including in some governorate centers, such as Salfit and Toubas, as well as in some towns and cities, such Dura, Qabatia and others. Accordingly, NGOs target rural women in a much broader scope than the official percentage mentioned above.

Rural women live and practice their work in agriculture in the different environments based on the agricultural patterns, which are distributed on five agricultural patterns (areas), as per the Ministry of Agriculture's classification:

- The Jordan Valley area, where irrigated agriculture is prevalent, including winter vegetables and irrigated fruit trees.
- The mountainous areas (Shafa Ghauri lands): where the main economic activity is livestock raising.
- The central mountainous areas: olives, crops, nuts, vegetables and animal feed.
- Semi-coastal areas: mixed farming between irrigated and extensive agriculture, such as vegetables and fruit trees, and rainfed agriculture, such as olive trees, nuts and field crops.
- The coastal plains area: irrigated vegetables, strawberries, flowers, nuts, dates, guava and other irrigated produce.

The roles and responsibilities of women vary; they are based on the production pattern, nature of work and how they are connected to housework. The changes in the Palestinian agricultural sector constitute the grounds on which roles and gender relations are based in Palestinian rural areas. The quick review of the agricultural sector data revealed some changes that affect rural life

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<sup>4</sup> Considering that a rural residential area is a community not rung by a municipal council and not a refugee camp, where the population does not exceed 4000 people. This classification was adopted to serve the local governance classification of communities.

in general, social relations and economic rights, particularly with relation to agricultural land ownership. The following is noticed:

- Family agricultural possessions has decreased, as smallholdings became most common amongst rural households; 47.7% of them own less than five Dunums<sup>5</sup>, 71.4% own less than 10 Dunums and 89.7% own less than 20 Dunums. Households who own 100 dunums and above are relatively called land owners and do not exceed 0.6%.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that large holdings are centered in semi-mountainous agricultural pattern. This was accompanied by a radical transformation from extended families to nuclear families, where nuclear families composed of the mother, father and children constitute 80% of total families, while compound and extended families not exceed 18% and most of them are in Bedouin and herding communities.
- This transformation was in parallel with broader market relations in Palestinian rural areas to include agricultural lands and transform them into goods for sale and purchase. 31.2% of research subjects in the abovementioned study noted that the source of possession is purchase or personal investment and not inheritance.
- The third change is related to women getting their inheritance. The percentage of lands obtained by women as inheritance is 8.4% of total holdings managed by the household. The study showed that there is discrepancy in how women's inheritance is addressed based on geographic location. The highest percentage is in the coastal plains and the lowest is in the Jordan Valley. The study showed that 10.3% of lands are registered in the wife's name, and the difference in the percentage is in the lands purchased.<sup>7</sup> This is a clear indicator on the movement in women's ownership of lands, as the "Palestinian Farm Structure Survey 2004/2005" shows that the percentage of female land owners ranges from 3% in Gaza Strip and southern West Bank to 57% in the northern West Bank<sup>8</sup>, and PCBS confirms that 5% of lands are registered in women's names.<sup>9</sup> A recent study on Palestinian women "Ownership and Ability to Access Land and Production Resources" gives a more optimistic estimate on the movement in women's ownership

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<sup>5</sup> One Dunum equals 1000m<sup>2</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Conditions and Roles of Women Working in the Agricultural Sector Compared to Men in the West Bank, The Palestinian Women Research & Documentation Center, 2011

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: based on the same source, 55.5% of agricultural lands owned by households are registered in the husband's name, 10.3% in the wife's name, 1.3% in the name of male children, 1.25% in the name of female children, and 22.7% unregistered lands (public property).

<sup>8</sup> PCBS 2006

<sup>9</sup> PCBS 2010

of land. The study notes that 15% of female participants, from families who own agricultural land, said that they have sole ownership of agricultural land, and that 1.3% of them have shared ownership of agricultural land with other women. 7.3% noted that they own agricultural land with their husbands and 1.3% have shared ownership of agricultural land with another male member of the family. The remaining 74.9% of agricultural land is owned by a male family member. Based on information obtained from the Land and Water Settlement Commission, the study showed that 32% of lands settled by the Commission up to February 2020 are registered in women's names.<sup>10</sup>

The multiple sources of income played an important role in the transformation from extended families that depend on agriculture to nuclear families. However, as part of the diversity in sources of income, the majority of rural households maintained agriculture as either a primary or a secondary source of income. This was confirmed by the "Conditions and Roles of Women" study, which showed that 86.9% of researched households practice agricultural work in some form.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the majority of household members are involved in agricultural work, although at varying rates. Of the total researched heads of households, the percentage of male heads of the household are involved by 89.6% and female heads of the households are involved by 83.1% in agricultural work. Male children who work in agriculture constitute 63.8% of total male children, while female children constitute 47.2% of total female children. The research above noted that women in farming households participate in all stages of agricultural work based on the production cycle. Women contribute in farming projects in the harvest and collection of produce more than any other field of work. 50% of researched women noted that they participate in collection of produce and the harvest process, followed by the planting of seeds and seedlings at 36.3%, their participation in the preparation of land, particularly in plowing is low at 18.3%, and tending to crops (fertilization, trimming, weeding...) at 18.7%. Women's involvement notably increases in livestock raising and is at rates equal to that of men and even more. 39% of women noted that they clean the farm compared to 44% of men, 36% participate in tending to animals, production and selling of products compared to 28.8% men. The increase in women's participation in livestock related work compared to their peers in plant

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<sup>10</sup> Palestinian Women's Ownership and Ability to Access to Land and Production Resources, The Palestinian Working Women Society for Development, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> The Conditions and Roles of Women Working in the Agriculture Sector Compared to Men in the West Bank, The Palestinian Women Research & Documentation Center, 2011

production could be attributed to the fact that the majority of livestock projects, particularly family owned ones, are normally close or adjacent to the residence.

Agricultural work in Palestine is based on joint efforts of both men and women. The efforts exerted by women are not less than the efforts of men. PCBS<sup>12</sup> notes that women working in agriculture work for 40.1 hours a week compared to 40.7 hours for men. Therefore, they contribute greatly in creating added value in the agriculture sector. Despite the official statistics above, the study data shows that women spend more time than men in agricultural work, as men mostly work in other economic sectors and public jobs, while women stay at home and take care of the family project.

The above clarifies the movement for women's ownership of agricultural land and the distribution of work and roles. In order to activate and support this movement to change the gender relations, policies and procedures must be developed to encourage women to claim their right to inheritance and increase the chances of them accessing resources.

Opposite to participation in agricultural work, there are many practices that highlight gender inequality, such as management and handling of lands owned by the household, regardless of their source. Data reveals that in 54.4% of households, the husband decides how to use the land compared to 4.4% where the wife has the decision. Husbands decide on selling or renting the land by 40.6% compared to 2.7% wives. A joint decision is made in 22.9% cases in the first example and in 24.8% cases in the second example. It is normally portrayed that the decision is made jointly, but in reality, the husband makes the decision without the wife's knowledge. In the few cases where the wife has the decision, it is mostly in households headed by women (the husband is deceased, divorce, the husband is impotent).

The high participation of women in animal production, and relatively lower participation in plant production, is not reflected on the management of the project or marketing of the product. The study showed that 87.8% of projects are managed by men compared to 10.3% managed by women. The percentage of men who maintain records on the project reaches 71.1%, while the percentage of women who maintain records on the project is as low as 23.8%.

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<sup>12</sup> PCBS – Labor Force Survey 2009, annual report

Despite the continued restrictions on rural women, it would be beneficial to look into the feminist movement connected to modernity and development at the economic, social and human rights level, which is in parallel with the decline in some traditional roles of rural women. Women in Palestinian rural areas are moving towards new prospects, such as education, employment, entrepreneurs, organized feminist work, and movement towards economic rights, including the right to inheritance. With the change in knowledge and accumulation of new experiences, it can be said that a dynamic process is in the making in Palestinian rural areas, it can be either strengthened or weakened through governmental policies and interventions supporting the empowerment of women. If this movement survives a relapse resulting from external factors, such as the occupation or political struggles and disasters, it must be manifested in reorganizing gender relations in Palestinian rural communities.

### The Legal Environment

Despite Palestine's accession to international conventions and treaties, the Palestinian National Authority's implementation of its commitments based on those conventions is still limited and not tangible, particularly with relation to laws and legislations.

The legal environment is considered the foundation on which policy frameworks are based, and laws represent one of the components and pillars of the legal environment. The revision of a number of laws, such as the Investment Law, Companies Law, Agriculture Law, Labor Law and Cooperative Work Law can create a picture on the economic rights of Palestinian women in general and rural women in particular, and can reveal the commitment of such laws to the economic rights of rural women.

Based on the **Basic Law**, which prohibits discrimination based on gender "Palestinians are equal before the law and judiciary without discrimination based on race, gender, color, religion, political opinion or disability"<sup>13</sup> article 9, the abovementioned laws do not include any discriminatory provisions against women, however, this does not mean that they include provisions that reflect women's economic rights, and do not include any positive discrimination to establish the economic rights of rural women.

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<sup>13</sup> See the amended Palestinian Basic Law of 2005. <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=14138>

**Law No. 1 of 1989 on Encouraging Investment in Palestine:**<sup>14</sup> there is no mention of female representation in the general assembly to encourage investment (article 14) and in chapter four relating to incentives and their regulation, starting with article 22 on investment incentives and ending with article 38. There are no incentives for women's investments and there is no mention of motivating women to invest, including encouraging investment in income generating small and medium enterprises.

**The Companies Law:** with regards to the companies law, work is implemented in accordance with Law No. 12 of 1964, with amendments made in 2006 and 2008, which do not include any mention of rural women or motivating or encouraging the economic rights of women.<sup>15</sup>

**The Law on Agriculture No. 2 of 2003**<sup>16</sup> does not follow a different path, as it focuses on the technical aspects of the sector while neglecting regulation and human development factors, also there is no mention of the rights of female farmers.

In our case, the **Labor Law** is a point of entry to deal with the economic rights of women in general and rural women in particular. When reviewing the Palestinian Labor Law No. (7) of 2000<sup>17</sup> from the perspective of protection and encouraging the economic rights of Palestinian rural women, we can notice a number of milestones: first, the law refers clearly in article 2 that labor is a right for every citizen, without any reference to gender. It should be noted that the Palestinian Labor Law does not apply to a number of working categories, including: civil servants and local government employees on whom the Civil Service Law applies; house servants and similar professions for whom the Council of Ministers issued a bylaw to regulate their work, which has not been applied yet; the law also does not apply to workers who are first degree relatives to the employer, which has strong connection to the work of rural women (see article 3), as the majority of rural women work at family owned farms and establishments. Unregulated labor in Palestine reached 58.5%, and it is difficult to identify the number or percentage of female workers in unregulated labor. Estimates show that approximately 60% of women in the labor market work in the unregulated sector. The unregulated sector survey shows that 90% of female workers in the unregulated sector work for no wages. This means that the

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<sup>14</sup> Law No. 1 of 1989 on Encouraging Investment in Palestine <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=12442>

<sup>15</sup> See <https://maqam.najah.edu/legislation/17/> and <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=15866>

<sup>16</sup> Law on Agriculture No. 2 of 2003 <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=14461>

<sup>17</sup> Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of 2000. <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=13975>

majority of them work in family businesses, which are exempt from labor legislations, therefore, women working in family businesses are denied the legal protection provided by the labor legislations and their work remains part of housework and reproductive role rather than productive role. In addition to workers in family businesses, unregulated labor for women in Palestine is broader and includes house workers.<sup>18</sup> The Labor Law has a special chapter, **Chapter Seven, to regulate women's work**. The chapter includes a number of articles, including article 100 on prohibiting discrimination between men and women; article 101 that prohibits the employment of women in dangerous jobs and overtime during pregnancy and in night shifts; article 102 that stipulates on providing accommodations for women; article 103 on maternity leave; article 104 on breastfeeding hour; and article 105 on fostering the child and accompanying her husband.

It should be noted that the Labor Law has no special provisions on the rights of rural women at work. The law also does not take into account the work particularities in the agricultural sector, where the majority of women work either in unpaid labor at family businesses, seasonal work, or unofficial establishments, as there is no obligation to register and license agricultural businesses and enterprises, and are considered informal or what is called shadow economy.

**Cooperative Work Law No. 20 of 2017:**<sup>19</sup> despite it being recently issued as a law by decree in 2017, and despite strong female presence in cooperative work, the Ministry of Labor records<sup>20</sup> indicate that the total number of cooperatives registered at the ministry's electronic system reached 1445 by the end of December 2017, 690 of which were dissolved and terminated. The total number of unterminated societies is 755, 7 of which are cooperative federations. In terms of the sectoral distribution of active societies (362 societies): 45% are in the agricultural sector, 29.3% housing, 18.2% services, 4.4% crafts, and 3% consumption. In terms of gender, the active societies (362) were distributed as 24% male societies, 10.8% female societies and the majority of 65.2% were mixed.<sup>21</sup> Despite the great importance of cooperative work in empowerment and economic rights, it is difficult to say that the law on cooperative work is gender sensitive.

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<sup>18</sup> The National Cross-sectoral Strategy to Promote Gender Equality and Justice and Empower Women, Partners in Development, 2017-2022, Ministry of Women's Affairs, p. 23

<sup>19</sup> Cooperative Work Law No. 20 of 2017. <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=16980>

<sup>20</sup> The available information is limited to data on the West Bank available at the Ministry of Labor's database due to reasons relating to the ministry managing its affairs during the division.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Saed Jaser Thura: Cooperative Work and Women Empowerment Policies, The Association of Women's Action for Training and Rehabilitation, 2018.

Reference to women empowerment was noted only once in the law. Article (5) of the law “The Goals of The Cooperative Work Commission” stipulates in the sixth goal that the commission aims at “empowering women and youth, and integrating persons with disabilities and liberated prisoners in the cooperative sector.” The articles and drafting of the law is pure patriarchal and does not refer to non-discrimination. It does not give any attention to the existing gap in terms of gender, for example, there is no mention of women in the membership and formation of the Cooperative Work Commission’s board, and there is no mention of encouraging feminist cooperatives.

The best evidence on the weak legal environment for economic encouragement of women is what was affirmed by the Cross-sectoral National Strategic Plan (Partners in Development) 2017-2022, which states that “legislations and laws relating to economy, finance and labor are not responsive to gender issues due to the shortcomings in existing legislations in providing an enabling environment for small and micro enterprises and entrepreneurship for women and men. For example, the Jordanian Companies Law of 1964 in force in Palestine does not give incentives or enabling procedures for women in the companies sector. The current laws do not protect national products, particularly products of women. Moreover, the majority of women work in the unregulated sector, which subjects traditional products of women to unfair competition from imported products.”<sup>22</sup> The shadow report submitted to “the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women-Geneva” asserts that “there are still a number of inherited laws that include discrimination against women and are still in force and applied in the State of Palestine. They have negative effects on achieving results towards realizing gender equality.”<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Hanin Zeidan confirmed that “there are several legal gaps that impede women’s access to their rights. It is well known that rural women work in the informal sector, and normally in agriculture. Statistics indicate that 60% of agricultural work, direct and indirect, falls on women, however, the labor law does not include women working in this sector, and they do

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<sup>22</sup> Cross-sectoral National Strategy to Promote Gender Equality and Justice and Empower Women, Partners in Development, 2017-2022. Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

<sup>23</sup> Report on the conditions of women and girls in the State of Palestine, submitted by the General Union of Palestinian Women and the Non-governmental Women Coalition for the implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine. Submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women – Geneva, May 2018.

not have any rights, insurance, guarantees or even end of service pay. On another hand, they problem is that they consider women's work in agriculture as an extension to housework.

Rural women do not feel that the existing legal environment provides them protection or promotes their economic rights. The participants in the rural women working group in Al-Ouja stressed on the violations against their economic rights and exposure to violence. The productive cooperatives group also stressed on the difficulties they face in dealing with official regulations, procedures and papers and the complex procedures they face reveal the weakness of the legal environment.

In light of the legal environment lacking factors for encouraging and motivating the economic rights of women in general and rural women in particular, the analysis of policy frameworks is of special importance to identify the presence of encouraging the economic rights of rural women in the official national priorities by analyzing the national strategies as frameworks of development policies.

### Policy Frameworks

Due to the efforts exerted by development agencies who work on and believe in equality and fairness for women, the last decade has seen tangible changes in the absence of women from developmental plans and efforts. Through multiple partnerships and to reduce the existing gap between men and women in their role, status, participation and social power relations, the Palestinian Authority worked in two parallel directions to integrate gender in its plans and interventions. The PA developed cross-sectoral plans with the leadership of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and integrated gender in national and sectoral plans.

To ensure the sustainability of integrating gender, the PA institutionalized the integration process and considered, still considers, it one of its strategic objectives. It is still forming committees and councils and establishing gender units at each ministry.

National development strategies and the resulting sectoral and cross-sectoral plans lead official and non-governmental development efforts. Policies are normally included in the framework of strategic plans under different names, national policies, policy interventions...etc., which exist regardless of their name, if we look at them (policies) as statements or texts that determine approaches or interventions and are based on strategic commitments, and the supporting tools,

regulations and activities.<sup>24</sup> They are defined in the strategic plans manual.<sup>25</sup> The national development plan has a specific name in each stage, which identifies the approach: the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan 2008-2010, the National Development Plan 2011-2013 Establishing the State and Building the Future, the National Development Plan 2014-2016 Building the State and Establishing Sovereignty, and the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 Citizens First.

This section aims at analyzing the extent to which the economic rights of rural women are included in the national policies and goals. The process of analyzing the implementation is in the following section.

### The National Policy Agenda

Based on the latest national plan (National Policy Agenda 2017-2022)<sup>26</sup>, the plan seeks to “identify realistic policy approaches that promote the resilience and improve the quality of life of our people in this difficult period. At the same time, it focuses on achieving our ultimate goal of obtaining freedom and independence, which is the foundation for ending the vicious cycle that deprives us from benefiting from the capacities available in our Palestinian state optimally.”

The economic rights of women are indirectly addressed in the third component of the plan, Sustainable Development, under the seventh national priority, Social Justice and Rule of Law in the framework of the national policy (eighteen) Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. In its framework, a number of policy interventions were included: removing all forms of discrimination against women and girls, eliminating all forms of violence against them, and removing all barriers that prevent the full participation of women in social and economic development and public life.

The national policy “Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment” and the relating policy interventions are, without a doubt, an ambitious policy approach that addresses or faces gender gaps that impede women’s participation and limit their access to their rights. The

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<sup>24</sup> Sectoral policies are defined as: a set of crosscutting laws, regulations and rules, and/or funding arrangements that contribute together to achieving the sector’s strategic goals. The recommendations stipulate that there needs to be one to three policies to support each strategic goal. Interventions in the field of policies are known as tangible activities necessary to implement a policies in a specific timeframe.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Finance and Planning, Strategic Plan Development Manual 2017-2022

<sup>26</sup> The National Policy Agenda (2017-2022) Citizens First. The State of Palestine, December 2016

implementation of these policy interventions could contribute directly and indirectly to encouraging the economic rights of rural women, as they include approaches that reduce discrimination between men and women, and reduce violence and the resulting exclusion, marginalization and violation of rights. They also include approaches to activate participation by removing all barriers.<sup>27</sup>

In a subject relevant to the economic rights of rural women, the national policy (29) Revitalizing Agriculture and **Strengthening Rural Communities**, under the tenth priority has two policy interventions: increase agricultural production (plant and livestock) and develop value chains; and protect and support farmers, particularly in areas under threat (which are in the Ministry of Agriculture's Plan). It is noted that the policy interventions are general and do not include gender specification, despite its importance in this field. No mention of women resulted in their exclusion in the implementation of activities and projects, and the special needs of rural women continued to be neglected by believing that the interventions serve the society and family as a whole. Accordingly, the gender gap has widened and the exclusion continued. This applies to national policy (27) Resilient Communities, which includes a policy intervention aimed at providing the basic needs of communities.

Supporting cooperatives is a policy intervention in the national policy (13) Providing a Suitable Investment Environment, which is under the sixth national priority (Achieving Economic Independence), without any mention of women or rural women.

#### The Sustainable Development Goal

The plan is composed of 17 strategic goals and 169 targets. The goals guarantee the elimination of poverty and hunger, the provision of food security and the provision of healthy living patterns and education. The strategy allocates the fifth goal (policy priorities) **for promoting gender equality and women empowerment**. This priority includes a number of policy interventions: removing all forms of discrimination against women and girls, eliminating all forms of violence against them, removing all obstacles before women's full participation in social and economic development and public life, and integrating gender in the government's policies, programs and budgets.

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<sup>27</sup> Work is underway on reviewing the plan from the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals and developing cluster plans for development based on interviews with different ministries and commissions.

Commitment to the sustainable development framework and using it as grounds for developing and reviewing national plans indicates that women's issues in general and promoting gender equality and women empowerment in particular (goal five), as well as the related policy interventions that include economic rights of women can be positively reflected on the economic rights of rural women from the perspective of removing obstacles, gender equality and ending discrimination and violence, even if they are not included in the text. It should be noted that not including rural women could lead to overlooking their issues in implementation, as usual.

The interviewees, representatives from ministries, noted that their current policies are related to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. For example, Khitam Hamayel<sup>28</sup> noted that the Ministry of Agriculture “is working through these goals, particularly the second goal, which is eliminating hunger. Additionally, work at the ministry is related to the fifth goal, which is gender equality and women empowerment.”

Sami Sihwail<sup>29</sup> stressed on “the Ministry of Women's Affairs' interest in policies relating to economic empowerment. The ministry uses gap analysis to identify its goals and interventions, such as providing decent work and wages.” On her part, Abeer Omran<sup>30</sup> stated that “the Palestinian government understands the importance of integrating women in economic activities due to its belief that sustainable development cannot be achieved without investing in human capital,” without specifically mentioning rural women.

Contrary to the above, Adleen Karajah<sup>31</sup> stressed that “the existing policies do not include the economic rights of women. The government does not currently have a clear plan to develop women's conditions in particular.” Jamal Al-Mubaslat<sup>32</sup> also stressed that “there are no special policies on empowering rural women, and there is not text from the policies in writing. From the center's experience in registering trademarks and names and licensing of establishments at the Ministry of National Economy, such policies are not found and there are no encouragements or exemptions for female owned enterprises. Through the meetings with the Ministry of Labor and

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<sup>28</sup> Director of the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Agriculture

<sup>29</sup> Director of Planning at the Ministry of Women's Affairs

<sup>30</sup> Director of the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Economy

<sup>31</sup> Executive Director at the Agricultural Cooperatives Union in Palestine

<sup>32</sup> Deputy Director at the Palestinian Center for Economic and Social Rights

Ministry of Economy, importance of encouraging and motivating women in actions rather than words was emphasized.”

It is difficult to say that the policies in the sustainable development plan have a tangible impact on rural women, despite their importance and the emerging plans from them, such as the National Policy Agenda, sectoral plans and cross-sectoral plans. The participants in the three working groups confirmed that they had no knowledge of such policies. The participants in the rural women working group from Al-Ouja noted “the widespread violation of economic rights and violence,” they added “none of the participating associations in the productive rural cooperatives working group were targeted by interventions from ministries, nor did they receive any support from ministries.” The savings, credit and productive cooperatives working group noted “the cooperatives build themselves and face a number of obstacles, complications and bureaucratic procedures that reflect the lack of policies supporting rural women.”

#### The Cross-sectoral Strategy 2017-2022

Cross-sectoral plans are considered a cornerstone for integrating gender in the Palestinian Authority. When the strategic goals and related policies and interventions in the cross-sectoral plan (2017-2022) are reviewed, it is noted that the work priorities in gender equality and women empowerment were listed in five strategic goals<sup>33</sup> (like the previous plan)<sup>34</sup>

- Institutionalizing gender: this priority is a structural condition for the integration process, based on this and up to this date, 22 gender units were established at ministries and gender units were named at directorates at districts. The goal included ten policies.
- Women’s participation in politics and decision-making positions: women’s participation in politics and decision making is a strategic requirement for inflicting change on gender relations. Nine policies were identified to realize this goal.
- Women’s economic participation: economic participation is a key requirement for independence and changing power relations. Due to the fact that economic participation is under review, it should be noted that there is a goal in the cross-sectoral plan 2017-

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<sup>33</sup> Cross-sectoral National Strategy to Promote Gender Equality and Justice and Empower Women, Partners in Development, 2017-2022. Ministry of Women’s Affairs

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs, revision report of cross-sectoral plans on gender equality and women empowerment, Ramallah - Palestine

2022 in economic participation phrased as follows “Promoting the participation of women in the economic sector.” The goal includes five policies: circulating decent work standards for working women; adopting legislations that motivate and protect small enterprises and working women; enable women entrepreneurs and persons with disabilities to access the necessary funding and expertise; increase the competitiveness of women’s and women societies’ products at the national level and in regional and international markets; and an educational and vocational and technical training system that takes into account gender issues, which is organized and efficient in providing the labour market with the needed skilled and semi-skilled labour force from both genders.

- Social participation and protection: which is considered a key step towards reducing discrimination against women.

#### Women’s Economic Participation in Previous Plans

- The goal was mentioned in the 2011-2013 plan, to increase the participation of women in the labour market through five policies, including: taking all legislative and executive procedures that guarantee the protection of working women from all forms of discrimination, taking all the necessary measures to provide work opportunities, and the right to social security.
- The goal was mentioned in the 2014-2016 strategy “increased participation of women in the labour market” through three policies: ensuring decent work for working women, ensuring the provision of work opportunities for women, and increasing the competitiveness of women’s and women societies’ products.

#### **The Strategic Plan to Combat Violence 2011-2019 and the National Plan on Resolution 1325**

The Strategic Plan to Combat Violence 2011-2019 is composed of six strategic goals and 19 policies, including six policies under the sixth goal of the strategy relating to social culture. The goal states: changing social approaches on violence against women by promoting the principle of prevention of violence in the strategic approach of organizations working in the field of protecting women’s rights. The strategy was developed to address violence against women on the national level from a perspective which includes all factors that influence violence, such as

the culture, legislations, laws, protection services, procedures, institutional structures and the exchange of information and knowledge and networking between all relevant parties.<sup>35</sup>

The National Plan on Resolution 1325 included three strategic goals and five policies that stipulated on: protecting Palestinian women and girls, particularly in facing the Israeli occupation violations; holding the Israeli occupation accountable; preventing impunity; in addition to making amends for the damage caused to Palestinian women and girls through international and national mechanisms.

### **Cooperative Work**

Despite the failure in including the subject of empowering rural women and their economic rights in the form of a direct and independent policy, however, there are some policies that include encouragement of women's rights and empowerment, which can contribute to supporting the rights of rural women. The Cooperative Work Commission developed its strategic approaches for the years 2021-2023. The commission's draft plan notes in the second strategic goal that the financial and organizational performance of cooperatives has improved. The third result states that the boards and oversight committees at registered cooperatives have the necessary knowledge and expertise to perform their roles and assume their responsibilities based on their bylaw and nature of work. It also refers to activating the participation of youth and women in boards. In the third strategic goal, the plan notes that cooperative work includes new categories and fields of work, and in the third result, it states: organizations concerned with economic and social empowerment of youth, and persons with disabilities from different age groups support initiatives to establish or associations based on the principles and concept of cooperative work.

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<sup>35</sup> The plans of 2011-2013 and 2014-2016 include some goals relating to justice, empowering Jerusalemite women, enabling women to enjoy a family law and civil rights that guarantee equality and justice, increasing protection of women's health and access to essential services without discrimination by focusing on marginalized areas and categories in accordance with gender needs. The goals included policies relating to legal measures and local and international mobilization to protect women's rights, particularly Jerusalemite women, such as movement and residency. The 2017-2022 strategy also included goal five, which stipulates on improving the quality of life of poor and marginalized households, and included eight policies relating to education, water and power services, developing infrastructure for working women, quality health services, after birth services, diet, and sexual and reproductive health services. The goal included a policy relating to culture: enabling organizations and youth and cultural clubs in all cities, villages and refugee camps to provide services for creative and amateur boys, girls, men and women in all creative fields and sports.

In this context, there seems to be a point of entry for joint work from the margin mentioning women. The mentioned encouragement, capacity building and empowerment can be utilized in working on developing interventions directed at enabling rural women to manage and operate cooperatives effectively and expand the opportunities for women to be engaged in cooperative work.

### **Agriculture**

The Ministry of Agriculture is in the process of completing its cluster plan according to the new approach of the government, which is based on the comprehensive economic development program in accordance with the cluster system. The plan is based on the Strategy to Develop the Agricultural Sector “Resilience and sustainable Development 2017-2022”. Khitam Hamayel refers to the existing policies at the ministry, which are in the agricultural sector strategic plan. The policies include all working organizations; the ministry, partner organizations or the supporting organizations in the agricultural sector, such as FAO. The strategic goals include two main goals directed at women and male farmers: first, providing better services and promoting their resilience on land, particularly in (C) areas and areas adjacent to the wall; second, support entrepreneurs and farmers in the agricultural sector, which is mainly directed at youth. Samer Al-Titi<sup>36</sup> noted that “the policies mentioned above represent the Ministry of Agriculture’s approach towards empowering rural women economically in the agricultural field. The government is also working on a policy to encourage innovation in green farming by using solar power. There are currently two projects with the Ministry of Economy that target girls in the age group 19-29 years to encourage them on innovating in the agricultural field and propose new rather than traditional projects.

Based on the available documents, a quick review of the plan to develop the agriculture cluster in Qalqilia<sup>37</sup> reveals that the language used is gender sensitive, for example, promoting the resilience of male and female farmers. The plan is based on the strategic objectives of the agricultural sector, which are: the resilience of male and female farmers and attachment to land; sustainable management of natural resources; increasing the production, productivity and competitiveness of agriculture; and access of male and female farmers and entrepreneurs to quality agricultural services that meet the needs of the value chain in the agricultural sector. To

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<sup>36</sup> Director of the Planning and Policies Department at the Ministry of Agriculture

<sup>37</sup> Developing the Agriculture Cluster in Qalqilia, Ministry of Agriculture, July 2019.

achieve these goals, the cluster plan is composed of seven components and a number of interventions in each component. The first component is on managing natural resources and includes 14 interventions relating to the production, pumping and transportation of water; opening roads; land restoration; and producing alternative energy. The second component is on planting new lands with tropical fruit trees and water and fish farming. The third is on improving the work environment in agricultural production, manufacturing and marketing. The fourth component on marketing directly and explicitly mentions supporting rural women, and includes the establishment of food production units, thyme processing equipment, food preservation and storage and dairy production equipment. The same component mentions supporting cooperatives with farming equipment, a tractor and food processing equipment. The fifth component addresses supporting farmers damaged by the occupation violations, including an intervention to support Bedouin communities and establishing agricultural chambers. The sixth component is on supporting new graduates with agricultural loans. The seventh component is on community awareness and capacity building.

As is the case in all plans, with the exception of the fourth component that includes supporting semi-traditional female projects and cooperatives, the plan does not mention women, but rather addresses farmers in general. It should be noted that the implementation of the plan depends on partnership with NGOs and the private sector.

It is not easy to find explicit and clear policies directed at promoting the economic rights of rural women. A researcher may find texts in some policies that target women in general, and by extension serve rural women without necessarily mentioning them, such as what is found in the Sustainable Development Plan relating to equality and justice, which were manifested in the Cross-sectoral National Strategic Plan to Promote Gender Equality and Justice and Women Empowerment 2017-2022, though policies to remove discrimination, impediments and barriers preventing women's active participation and access to their rights. Sometimes, some direct text relating to the development of rural women can be found, such as in the Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy 2010-2020 whose fate is unknown<sup>38</sup>. The rural development program (tenth and last program), in the part related to improving the income level of poor rural households, includes a fifth goal under the heading "Including women in the agricultural

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.moa.gov.ps/Books/strategy1/25.htm>

developmental process.” The fifth program was allocated for promoting the role of rural women. Five million USD were allocated for this program but never spent. The program includes 5 goals: working on improving the performance of women in agricultural work; encouraging and training women on establishing small and medium production projects; supporting and training women on marketing their agricultural products; guiding women on the importance of rationalizing water use; and promoting rural women in all health, social, education fields... etc.

## Implementing Strategies and Policies

### The National Policy Agenda 2017-2022

It is difficult to say that the national policy “Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment” and the relating policy interventions were applied, and that their implementation led to tangible changes in the reality of rural women, their economic rights and obtaining their rights, which can be measured through different indicators on access to and control of different resources. To avoid repetition and self-judgment, this report addresses many reviews that were made and indicate the implementation level of plans and policies, mainly the revision of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Plan, which highlights the implemented aspects and the gaps still existing in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. In addition to the revision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative Work Strategy, the revision of the official report and shadow report on the implementation of CEDAW, and a quick scan of the revision of previous cross-sectoral plans.

### The Revision of the Sustainable Development Plan 2030

The revision of the Sustainable Development Plan 2030 conducted in mid-2018 highlights the achievements and pending issues.<sup>39</sup> The revision report entitled “The First National Voluntary Review on Monitoring and Implementing the Sustainable Development Plan 2030<sup>40</sup>” refers to a number of achievements in the implementation of the plan. In the policy priority on **Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women** and its policy interventions, the report notes that the achievements included: Palestine’s accession to CEDAW without reservations, in addition to

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<sup>39</sup> Since its adoption at the UN Summit by heads of states and governments in September 2015, national development plans are based on the Sustainable Development Plan 2030, and the Palestinian Authority is committed to it.

<sup>40</sup> The First National Voluntary Review on Monitoring and Implementing the Sustainable Development Plan 2030. State of Palestine, Prime Minister’s Office, June 2018

accession to a number of international conventions and treaties relating to promoting the rights of women, which constitutes a framework for gender equality. The government ratified the Security Council Resolution 1325 and a strategy to implement it was developed. On another hand, “a number of laws and legislations relating to international conventions that promote women’s rights and non-discrimination in work, political participation and public life were reviewed and developed.”

Some implemented activities were mentioned in individual interviews and working groups. For example, Abeer Omran noted that the Ministry of National Economy **sought** to pay attention to and reach rural women. The ministry organizes awareness raising workshops for women in remote and marginalized areas to encourage registration, activate liaison points through the ministry’s directorates at governorates and find mechanisms to motivate women to register small and micro enterprises. The ministry is pushing towards a regulated sector through some incentives, such as reducing registration costs, reforming regulatory laws to create a suitable work environment that encourages joining the regulated sector (Companies Law) and improving opportunities to access loans through the ministry’s developmental projects. Abeer Omran also referred to a number of incentives implemented by the ministry to encourage investment, particularly in C areas. She noted that the government, in cooperation with the Palestinian Monetary Authority, allocated a 300 million USD fund to finance small and medium projects with a declining interest rate that does not exceed 3%, and a 36-month payment period, in addition to other initiatives and interventions.

In her interview, Lama Awad stressed that the Ministry of Labor is working on a number of interventions in accordance with SDGs 5 and 8 (gender equality, decent work and economic growth). The ministry is also working on achieving women’s right to work on equal grounds with men; equal pay for equal work; receiving the minimum wage; the right to a healthy, safe and secure work environment; the right to the implementation of the Labor Law provisions with relation to seasonal agricultural work; and empowering women economically to own and access resources, enjoy the right to handle them and know how to manage them. The ministry is working on removing and reducing obstacles, as we are working on gender sensitive legislations and laws that protect women’s rights in unofficial, unregulated, unpaid and home labor sectors, which some may consider to be unproductive work. Awad noted that despite the discrepancy in

applying laws regulating women's work and the extent to which they are obligatory, such as promotions, equal pay, the right to female projects, decent work conditions, the right to handle inheritance and income and owning and managing resources, the ministry is working on developing and expanding the work of the monitoring and inspection system to do its role in reducing such phenomena in the Palestinian labor market.

Jamal Al-Mubaslat referred to a number of success stories, such as Mrs. Jarrar who had the initiative to start a production business, and after overcoming the licensing and registration issue with the help of the Ministry's staff, she now has a successful business that employs ten women and markets their products abroad. Another success story involves another woman who owns 25 Dunums, plants them with leaf vegetables and employs five women. Civil society organizations have played a major role in training women's societies on the manufacturing and production of preservatives free products in a healthy manner.

On another hand, Hanin Zeidan stressed on the presence of some limited achievements and successes for rural women, such as the success in establishing ten agricultural and food processing societies, the establishment of home gardens and even including animals for the garden to be complete, and the preparation of greenhouses because they provide food for the household throughout the year. However, this effort is limited and not at the level of a public and comprehensive policy.

Sami Sihwail noted that when the Ministry of Women's Affairs reviewed the interventions developed by gender units in the ministries' plans were reviewed, it was found that the interventions are not included in the programs budget at the Ministry of Finance, and these interventions were not considered. Following this, the ministry followed a new work mechanism based on integrating the gender unit in the planning and budgeting teams at ministries. The work of gender units was supposed to be monitored directly by the minister's office in order for them to raise issues at the highest level. An example of cooperation with cooperatives, annual exhibits are organized in order to highlight women pioneers and their products.

It should be noted that the review process did not result in amending existing laws relating to economic rights or the issuance of relevant laws. Some indicators may provide evidence on shortcomings in implementing policies, from the perspective of the reference itself, the review confirms that 37% of women were subject to violence according to the Violence Survey of 2011.

The percentage declined to 27% according to the Violence Survey results of 2019.<sup>41</sup> It is important to note the difficulty of obtaining accurate data on sensitive issues that are normally kept secret due to cultural inheritance. Therefore, experts believe that the culture of covering up and concealing sensitive issues is widespread, and they believe the percentage is much higher. Despite the tangible improvement in education indicators for women, it was not reflected on tangible increase in the participation of women in the labor force, as the percentage remained the same with a clear gap in the percentage participation between women and men. The participation of women in the labor force reached 18% of total women of a working age in 2019, which is the same percentage as in 2015, and the participation of men reached 70% in 2019, which is the same percentage as in 2015. There is also a clear gap in the daily wage between men and women, as the daily wage for women reached 98 NIS compared to 102 NIS for men.<sup>42</sup> Simply said, the low participation rate means that out of each 10 women of working age (18 and above) there are 2 women economically active, either working or seeking employment. Of course this does not include women working from home, family businesses and in unofficial economy, unofficial seasonal work and unpaid work.

The review report refers to a number of obstacles that faced the implementation process, including: the Israeli occupation and the impact of the annexation and displacement policies on women, the negative social perception on women's participation and the limited social acceptance and its impact on the participation process. The report also stresses on a number of obstacles relating to the Palestinian Authority, mainly: the weak implementation of laws and legislations; the limited executive programs for policies and policy interventions; and the limited responsiveness of public plans and budgets to gender priorities despite the prime minister's decision to take into account gender in plans and the general budget. Moreover, despite Palestine's accession to CEDAW and preparing its first report, the convention is still not published in the official gazette, and there is delay in harmonizing national legislations with the convention.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> PCBS, Initial Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society, 2019

<sup>42</sup> See: Dr. Ula Awad <http://www.pCBS.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=3678>

<sup>43</sup> The first voluntary national presentation on monitoring and implementing the sustainable development plan 2030, state of Palestine, Prime Minister's Office, June 2018.

Although the report notes that “the Palestinian government is committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and will promote the institutionalization and mainstreaming of gender equality and women empowerment in planning processes, the development of plans, preparation of budgets...etc. The government is seeking to integrate women in all fields of social, economic and political life, and remove all obstacles ahead of achieving this, mainly reforming and developing laws and legislations to limit discrimination against women in them and take the necessary procedures to ensure their implementation. Moreover, the Palestinian government is committed to working on developing safety networks for women victims of violence, adopt the Family Protection Law... etc.”<sup>44</sup>

Although the Palestinian government’s commitment is to eliminate all forms of discrimination is affirmed, the above gives a clear indication on the weak harmonization of the legal environment to enable women to obtain their economic rights. Laws are still being developed and prepared, and the implementation process is yet to be seen.

### **The Agricultural Sector Strategy**

Samer Al-Titi and his colleague Khitam Hamayel stressed that there are achievements at the Ministry of Agriculture in the field of empowering women economically, particularly rural women, but such achievements cannot be reflected in numbers. For example, providing sufficient equipment for women in Beit Ummar and facilitating access of their products to the market through certain mechanisms and agreements with suppliers and marketers. There was reference to a condition that the percentage of women amongst beneficiaries from projects is not less than 10%, including projects relating to land restoration. In case women are unable to provide the necessary documents, the ministry overcomes the existing obstacles in the field of land registration “Tabo” or community participation by replacing the land ownership deed or “Tabo” with a document issued by the village council or a rental agreement related to the land, or through delegation from the women’s partners in the land in order for women to benefit from and manage the land. It was stressed that the positive discrimination practiced by the Ministry of Agriculture is connected to policies from the Council of Ministers and the National Policy Agenda.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 38

Amal Khreisheh<sup>45</sup> stressed that the economic rights of female farmers were not considered during the coronavirus pandemic. For example, the Farmers Compensation Fund did not compensate the losses of female cooperatives in rural areas, such as those working in food processing who lost their jobs as a result of schools closing, as they run school cafeterias after winning bids in many villages.

### **Cooperative Work Strategy**

In the Cooperative Work Commission's revision of its implementation of its strategy<sup>46</sup>, there is reference that "the number of members in cooperatives classified as active in the West Bank increased from 38,515 individuals in 2017 to 39,370 individuals in 2019. The percentage of women amongst those members increased from 27.6% in 2017 to 30.9% in 2019. Moreover, cooperatives with new specializations have been established. In this context, during the first half of the strategy's timeframe, 53 cooperatives were registered, including 11 female cooperatives and 14 male cooperatives. Based on their economic activity, they were distributed as follows: agriculture (16), housing (18), services (9), crafts (6) and consumption (4). It should be noted that the Cooperative Work Commission was established early 2018 in order to regulate and supervise the cooperatives sector in accordance with Law by Decree no. 20 of 2017 on Cooperatives.

The number of registered cooperatives at the Cooperative Work Commission reached 866 by the end of 2019<sup>47</sup>, 677 in the West Bank and 189 in Gaza Strip. Cooperatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip formed five sectoral cooperative unions, which are: agriculture, housing, services (savings and advances), crafts and consumption. The five unions established a general federation amongst themselves called the General Federation of Cooperatives in Palestine.

The data of the latest adopted budget of 330 active cooperatives out of 677 cooperatives showed that they have total assets amounting to 193 million Jordanian Dinars, including 121.5 million JD that represent the assets of 101 housing cooperatives, which are mostly fixed assets. On another hand, and based on the income list, the total revenues from the sales of 229 non-housing

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<sup>45</sup> General Director of the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development

<sup>46</sup> Cooperative Work Commission Strategy 2021-2023, unpublished draft

<sup>47</sup> The information was presented in writing from the commission's official records during a meeting with the head of the commission and the programs and projects director.

cooperatives reached 20.1 million JD. These cooperatives include 50 cooperatives who had no revenues from sales (products or services).

### **CEDAW Reports**

**Palestine's initial official report** on the implementation of CEDAW<sup>48</sup>, addresses the level of Palestine's implementation of its commitments towards CEDAW, as well as the achievements and obstacles that prevented the implementation of its commitments in a sequential order based on the articles of the convention.

The report addresses **article 11 on equality at work**, in the first point (201) it refers to the laws regulating labor and affirms that they do not have any discriminatory articles against women. Items 202 and 203 refer to equality in wages between men and women in accordance with the law and to the minimum wage, and that any discriminatory provisions against women included in work contracts are considered null. Item 204 addresses protection of women from hazardous labor. Article 205 is on subjecting women to the same controls and procedures at work as men. Item 206 addresses women's right to promotion and incentives on equal grounds with men and women's right to job security as men and not threatening their job security because of marriage. Item 207 covers working women's right to professional training without discrimination. Item 208 is on the right of working mothers (maternity leaves, breastfeeding leaves, accompanying children and the husband). Item 209 obligates the employer to provide means of comfort to working women. Item 210 warns against pregnant women working overtime and in hazardous jobs. Item 211 addresses the quota for employing persons with disabilities.

All the above provides flashes of what articles the Labor Law includes that regulate women's work in chapter seven of the law.<sup>49</sup> The report addresses a number of obstacles that prevented the improvement of the situation, which included the Israeli occupation, the economic crisis and the weak budgets.

The report addresses article 13 on equality in economic and social rights. It affirms in item 264 Palestine's accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and its approach to apply the covenant. Items 265, 266 and 267 address equality in financial rights between men and women in accordance with Law No. 1 of 1996, the housing projects that

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<sup>48</sup> The First Official Report of the State of Palestine on CEDAW, State of Palestine, March 2017

<sup>49</sup> See the Palestinian Labor Law No. 7 of 2000. <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=13975>

targeted less fortunate categories and the establishment of the Palestinian Housing Council in 1991. There is no reference relevant to gender and equality for women.

The report then addresses article 14 on rural women. Item 291 provides information on the distribution and percentage of population in rural areas (16%), based on the consideration that a community with less than 4000 people is rural. This classification has resulted in neglecting a large portion of rural population, as the majority of Palestinian towns and cities are rural in their nature due to their living and connection to agricultural activities. The activity of rural women is low, and the report neglects the fact that the majority of rural activities are unofficial and the responsibility of women. Item 293 refers to including workers in agriculture in the scope of the Palestinian Labor Law, which includes identification of work hours for seasonal work. Item 294 addresses mentions issuing the law on Risk Prevention and Agricultural Insurances No. 12 of 2013 (which is yet to be applied). Item 295 addresses the Development Plan of 2014-2016 and the attention it gives to rural women by targeting C areas, knowing that the plan has not allocated any strategies or policies to improve the conditions of rural women. When the report addresses the gaps, it provides a lengthy narration on the destructive effects of the Israeli occupation, the division of territories, its control over land and water, the settlement activity and the violations and attacks of settlers.

In the revision of the Shadow Report submitted by the General Union of Palestinian Women and the Non-governmental Women Coalition on the implementation of CEDAW<sup>50</sup>. In article 11 on Economic rights, the report directly notes that “Discrimination against women continues to exist, indicating that they do not enjoy their economic rights...etc. and at the level of the labor market and investment, as well as their weak chances at technical and vocational education,” and low economic participation in general. The report also notes that although the Labor Law is a positive turning point, it does not refer to women in article two on nondiscrimination. Moreover, the law does not apply on women working at family owned businesses, which is the reality of most rural women. I also refers to a number of issues relating to the Labor Law, including the ambiguity of some articles (relating to women working night shifts) and the lack of reference to

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<sup>50</sup> Report on the conditions of women and girls in the State of Palestine. Submitted by the General Union of Palestinian Women and the Non-governmental Women Coalition on the implementation of CEDAW in the occupied State of Palestine. Submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women – Geneva, May 2018

nondiscrimination in vocational training. The report mentions that the majority of working women work in the services sector followed by the agricultural sector, the high percentage of women working in the unofficial sector, the notable increase in unemployment rates amongst economically active women compared to men of the same category, the gap in wages and membership in unions. The report also refers to the shortcoming in the Palestinian Investment Law No. 1 of 1998 in encouraging women investments. It notes out the major shortcomings in the field of labor monitoring and inspection, opposite to what was mentioned in the official report. The report also refers to the lack of budgets for interventions targeting women in rural and marginalized areas that are mentioned in the Ministry of Women's Affairs' Cross-sectoral Plan (2017-2022). With relation to article 14 on the rights of rural women, the report notes that the majority of agricultural work is the responsibility of women (65%), and it is unpaid as it is performed in family owned businesses. It addresses the changes on the role of rural women in the agricultural sector as a result of the Israeli control and other factors that contributed to the decline in women's participation in agricultural work and youth from both genders avoiding agricultural work. The report refers to a number of obstacles facing rural women, including: denial of property and capital; low valuation of women's agricultural work and not including it in national calculations; considering work at family owned businesses complementary to the reproduction role; the control of men on the revenues from work and different resources; the weak access of women to land, water, technology and vocational training; the lack of market protection and protection of women's production; in addition to the lack of all forms of protection. The report recommends pressuring the occupation, enabling women to access agricultural lands and water, targeting women with development and empowerment programs, facilitating women's access to loans and training and including the work of women in national calculations and statistics.

The shadow report concludes; "regarding economic participation, women are absented from economic development programs, and the measures that encourage women to engage in private sector activity, start their own businesses and enable women to access resources and property are still deficient. The larger rate of women participation in the informal sector continues to be unaccounted for in the official statistics and in its contribution to the national income. Women continue to suffer from the lack of legal or executive protection, especially protection from violence at the workplace.

Regarding vocational training and rehabilitation, the state of Palestine continues to adopt a stereotypical approach based on gender-based division of roles, which orients women towards the service sector, considered complementary to their reproductive role. On the other hand, most available professions for women lie at the bottom of the professional pyramid, hence aggravating the process of marginalization.

### Revision of Previous Plans and Strategies

Regarding previous plans, with the efforts of UN Women, several reviews were conducted on cross-sectoral plans and national plans from a gender perspective, most important were the review reports of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. **The Institute for Gender Policy Research conducted a survey** on gender equality and women empowerment policies, which were adopted by the Palestinian governments during the period 2010-2017.<sup>51</sup> They included three cross-sectoral strategies led by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs with partners (2011-2013, 2014-2016, 2017-2022), the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women 2011-2019, and the National Plan to Implement Security Council Resolution 1325 for the years 2017-2019.

The survey identified a total of 29 strategic goals (what has been included as a strategic goal) and 90 policies<sup>52</sup>. The survey divided the policies based on their subject into five fields and evaluated their implementation based on the conducted reviews. The results were as follows:

The Distribution of Policies and Their Implementation 2010-2017

Field	Total Policies	Implemented	Partial Implementation	Under Implementation	Not implemented, implementation has not Started or Included in Future Plans	No Information
Social	32	1	7	3	17	4
Legal	17		7		8	2

<sup>51</sup> Institute for Gender Policies Research, Qualitative Analysis of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Policies, Palestine, in the period (2011-2017), October 2018

<sup>52</sup> Policies are previously defined in accordance with the instructions of the Plan Development Manual

Political Participation	28		4	3	18	3
Culture	7		1		5	1
Economic Participation	13		3		9	1

The review reports show the following:

- Although a number of interventions in the field of empowering women economically were implemented, they have not achieved the policy, which is an indicator on the limited ability of proposed policies to bridge the gender gap in the labor market. The revision of the plan of 2011-2013 revealed that the performance and achievement indicators for the goal “activating economic participation” show that the percentage of women’s participation in the regulated sector increased from 7% to 8%, the participation of women in the labor market increased from 15.7% to 17.4% and the daily wage of women compared to men (in NIS) increased from 81.6% to 86.8%.

PWWSD

The audit reports revealed the following:

- Despite the implementation of a set of interventions in the field of women's economic empowerment, they did not achieve the policy, which indicates the limited ability of the proposed policies to bridge the existing gender gap in the labour market. Upon reviewing the 2011-2013 plan, the performance and achievement indicators for increasing women’s economic participation indicated that the rate of women's participation in the organized

sector increased from 7% to 8% while the percentage of women's participation in the labour market increased from 15.7% to 17.4% and the average daily wage of women in NIS increased compared to men from 81.6% to 86.8%.

- The review of the 2014-2016 plan indicated that the legislation related to decent work had not been developed, that the capacity building program had not been completed but that the General Administration of Inspection and Labour Protection within the Ministry of Labour had been provided with additional support. The review of the plan regarding performance indicators and gaps demonstrates that official and non-governmental financial and international institutions have been able to make progress in some areas related to providing training and capital needed to establish projects for women, which contributes to providing job opportunities. Nevertheless, institutions have not succeeded in fully achieving the desired goals.
- The government, civil society and international organizations have contributed to the implementation of policy interventions of the 2017-2022 plan in the field of awareness, capacity building, legal reviews, implementation of lobbying and advocacy campaigns, work on programs in economic empowerment and humanitarian relief work, and through providing grants and microcredit programs to women, cooperatives and youth. Male and female farmers, producers (especially small-scale producers), and have worked to target the agricultural sector, particularly remote rural areas in Area C and highly marginalized areas. While there are no available statistics on the volume of production, it is noted in the review of the National Policy Agenda that ten thousand job opportunities were ultimately created

### **Existing gaps and obstacles**

The issue of sovereignty is influential on the development process in general and on organization efforts in particular. Thus it is reflected in the development, design and implementation of policies, and has a direct reflection on the control of space and resources and restrictions of movement. Therefore, when talking about political processes in Palestine, the lack of sovereignty under the Israeli military occupation must always be taken into account. Within this context, the Palestinian National Authority still lacks control over its borders and its various sources and resources while simultaneously contemporary institutional structures are weak and traditional

tribal structures continue to dominate, all of which act as impediments to policies and measures in the interests of all Palestinians and in the interest if Palestinian rural women in particular. Overall, these impediments narrow policy opportunities which would help transform Palestinian society to one more accepting of justice and gender equality and as a result obstructs development as a whole. This lack of sovereignty by the Palestinian Authority thus lends importance to the in-depth analysis of policy frameworks and the need to build on the results of said analysis to deal with this reality in a way that serves development goals.

For the purposes of facilitating analysis, the overall obstacles and gaps have been classified into 3 axes:

The first relates to **the legal and institutional environment** and includes legislation, regulations, procedures, policies, institutional structures, interventions and budgets.

With regard to the legal environment, the most prominent gaps and obstacles are as the following:

-Although Palestine has signed international treaties and conventions that guarantee equality and fairness for women, Palestinian laws still do not include these obligations and lack gender-awareness and the specificity of women's needs. (Sustainable Development Plan Review Report, CEDAW Official Report and Shadow Report)

-While there is a section on regulating women's work included in the Labour Law, the way it is written has meant that it does not apply to women working in the informal economy, in seasonal agricultural employment, in family enterprises or in the home economy. Furthermore, investment and corporate law do not include any language of encouraging small and medium women's enterprises.

Participants of the workshops on savings and credit and productive cooperatives emphasized the many complexities and obstacles that exist in cooperative law, and that the law depends on the employee's understanding of the law, and each time it is interpreted in a certain way in addition to the difference in the interpretation of the procedures of the law. The productive cooperatives group emphasized that there is a lack of clarity in the law and procedures, which caused

problems with the Ministry of Finance regarding exemption from fees and taxes, and there are no encouragements of women's cooperatives, while the Monetary Authority's procedures for cashing checks and postponing loan payments caused many problems for savings and credit groups.

Samira Qawasmeh, the Acting Director of the Studies and Research Unit at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and Adeline Karaja, Executive Director of the Palestinian Agriculture Cooperative Union both indicated that the most prominent challenges and obstacles are the presence of legal loopholes that hinder women's access to the rights they are legally owed. Another obstacle is the lack of general protection laws for women and society as a whole. Qawasma pointed out that there are challenges in imposing a quota on some projects and in ensuring the continuity of such measures before going on to suggest less strict criteria for women to be eligible as a form of affirmative action. This is needed as not all women have sufficient guarantees to obtain necessary loans, and while one of the policies of the lending institution is directed directly to rural women, the current financial crisis has postponed its implementation until financial matters are resolved.

Overall, it can be said that despite its economic, social and political importance, the issue of rural women's rights is far too absent from laws, regulations and legislation.

With regard to policies, plans and budget:

-Issues of the economic rights of rural women appear within the framework of policy interventions that include women in general with no interventions specific to rural women while national policy is usually devoted to the issue of women's rights and empowerment within the framework of one of the national priorities that is supported by three specific policy interventions.

-The cross-sector strategy includes the Ministry of Women's Affairs which include the rights of rural women as a necessary political intervention, and as according to the plan document, the plans are based on a broad cross-regional participation so crucial to addressing the issues faced by rural women

- The local government has the potentially to positive impact community gender relations due to its direct representation of citizens and because of how the service and interventions it provides

has the potential to improve the lives of all its constituents. Nevertheless, local government bodies continue to be male-dominated with measures undertaken not sufficiently gender-responsive and as such is not developing tangible interventions to strengthen the economic rights of rural women, whether by providing the appropriate space for mobility, or allocating and directing development programs to strengthen the status woman.

-The national policies as part of the strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture towards the development of the agricultural sector prioritize supporting remote and marginalized areas, but they lack political interventions that enhance the rights of rural women

The productive cooperatives group shared in their experiences the local councils are not at all encouraging or helpful. In fact, in the village of (...)the local council refuses to cooperate with the cooperative, even going so far as threatening the leaders of the cooperative, requesting the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) stop dealing with the cooperative, and refused to help restore old houses to be used by the cooperative even though the restoration was externally funded. In another location, the local council is working on trying to control the cooperative and impose leadership on it to extent that (...) the leaders of the cooperative were summoned by security services on their behalf.

Karaja also pointed out that the existing policies do not include women's economic rights, instead leaving institutions and organizations to act as they see fit. There is no oversight of the work of cooperative societies which has resulted in the prioritization of personal interests as well as slow implementation. Karaja cited another challenge to work to empower rural as the entrenched social norms, customs and traditions that prevent women from freely joined mixed-gender cooperatives, let alone taking on leadership positions, oftentimes enforced by husbands who prefer their wives do not work outside the home at all and certainly not in mixed-gender environments. Success has been much more forthcoming in women's only cooperatives where power dynamics are less pronounced, positions are more organized and members tend to be more active and passionate in their mission.

Participants in a working group among partner institutions emphasized that the absence of the Legislative Council since it ceased to function in 2007 and the resulting lack of legislative oversight of the executive branch represents a challenge to the full implementation of legal rights. This is in addition to the insufficient budget allocated to women's economic

empowerment, particularly to policies that would better ensure women's empowerment in general and women's economic empowerment in particular.

### **Community support (Social capital measures)**

- Policies are still failing to target and improve social relationships, specifically regarding the general societal reluctance to the presence and participation of women in the public sphere and thus women's independence. These social norms presents serious barriers to women's economic rights as power relations continue to favour and concentrate male power under patriarchy. The orientation of social capital in Palestinian society, including shared norms, interpersonal relationship customs and the ways in which reciprocity in favours is conducted continued to be conducted through the prism of traditional structures, including family and clan organizations and through the prism of cultural heritage as a whole. Under these contemporary societal structures, women's lack of access to the same social capital as men thus undermines efforts to support women or for women to support themselves. Women's access to this social capital is seen as an affront to tradition and ingrained social norms and thus an affront to men's social standing leading to stark clan/tribal opposition to women's leaders and women's rights institutions.
- In spite of some available programs, the narrow social space available for the rural women's movement due to the hegemony of patriarchal family and clan relations contributes to the exclusion of women and the absence of their rights, including economic rights. Upending these power dynamics gives space to the mobilisation and thus increases opportunities for women to demand and obtain their economic rights, including through increased access to information and capacity-building opportunities, and the right to property, labour rights, and rights to inheritance are strengthened

A group of production cooperatives affirmed that community acceptance is limited, regarding women's participation. Women ceasing their participation with cooperatives under pressure from their husbands is not unheard of in addition to restrictions on their movement. An additional burden is lack of societal respect for or understanding of cooperative work in general, including pushback against production locations, such as demands that apiaries be relocated on the pretext that the bees are harming the population despite the exact opposite being true.

The Minister of Agriculture reiterated that the general community underestimation of the importance of improving gender relations remains one of the largest challenges to ensuring rural women's empowerment, in addition to the undue focus on purely technical matters. While there have been improvements, the Minister stated that they were not to the extent needed, while cultural barriers have meant that there is mistrust regarding, or the underestimation of, the benefits of a trainer or agricultural guide in addition to the taboo surrounding male trainers or guides working with women. A further challenge to levelling the playing field between men and women is men have increased access to service and SMS numbers such as those that provide weather forecast information due to how women are less likely to have access to their own phones in general. Overall, the minister affirmed that there are significant barriers to women's economic participation even as they bear the majority of economic burdens.

Participants of the working group also emphasized that society discourages women's projects and that small enterprises in general are overwhelmed by the burdens of taxes, customs, registration fees, etc., all of which are expenses women are less likely to be able to inform, thus driving women towards unregulated informal work in the "shadow economy" (black market).

Jamal Al-Mubaslat, Assistant Secretary-General of the General Union of Arab Peasants and Agricultural Cooperatives (GUAAPC) in Palestine refers to the cultural challenges regarding reaching women working in the field as this must be done in a sensitive and respectful manner so as not to cause offense by violating social norms on gender mixing among strangers, which also negatively impacts integrating women into work groups and community committees.

### **Women's capabilities and access to and control of resources**

-Despite the policies directed towards women's equality and equity, the audit indicated challenges in forms of the modest share of women in inheritance, their limited control over the means of production, their difficulty in accessing financing, lack of market experience, their limited opportunities to benefit from social capital, and most importantly the limited opportunities available to build the skills and human resource capabilities needed to start and manage businesses

-Though there has been increased awareness as to the importance of capacity building and the absence of women from human resource development, including skills and knowledge related to

production, and increase in professions and activities that women can practice, there is still a forced concentration of women in fields that require limited technical capabilities and skills or skills that are not transferable or the perpetuation of the gender gap through the constant relegation of women to the services sector, especially regarding domestic and child-rearing services.

Despite women's deprivation from capacity building and skills-building opportunities and the pernicious gender-coding of certain professions and activities, working women overall have demonstrated creativity and the willingness and ability to learn and acquire new skills and knowledge related to high-level professional and technical work as well as business and project management.

According to working group participants, women's organizations face challenges including women's limited ownership of land and property, challenges in marketing women's produced products, the flooding of the market with often times cheaper imported and Israeli products, as well as the increasingly detrimental impact of climate change and the management of natural resources. They affirmed that it is important to raise awareness of these challenges and the need for supportive legislation and the ways women can adapt to these challenges. The participants went on to emphasise the existing challenges in the field of declining returns from the agricultural sectors and the challenges to continuing to grow and sell traditional crops which rural women are the most accustomed to growing and selling.

The interview with the Minister of Agriculture indicated the challenge that rural women face in marketing products in various agricultural value chains, including women being exploited by intermediary companies that then obtain the product at very low prices or women being sold production inputs for exorbitant prices. As a result, the Ministry of Agriculture In partnership with the Ministry of Women's Affairs are working to strengthen market and commercial contracts in ways that protect women, and to support more marketing platforms, including online shopping. Overall the Minister emphasized the importance of community solidarity in supporting women especially in meeting product demands despite their limited land and property ownership and too frequently overridden inheritance rights.

Samira Qawasma, the Acting Director of the Studies and Research Unit at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, added that another obstacle that hinders women's access to economic rights is the lack of women's awareness, in addition to patriarchal social thinking which is reflected in the interconnected system between communities based social norms, patriarchal domination and legislation.

Hanin Zaidan, the Programmes Manager of the Rural Women's Development Society believes that the most prominent challenges facing her organization in general and rural women in particular, is how totally undervalued women's work in agriculture is, as it is treated as an extension of domestic work (which is itself undervalued) to the extent that it is not at all accounted for in GDP calculations. Women's work in agriculture not being formally regulated also means that for women it is more risky as it lacks any kind of insurance and guarantees. Furthermore, women are often subjected to harassment and violence by their employer, lack adequate transportation, and oftentimes even basic amenities such as bathrooms. These rights violations are allowed to happen because of the lack of oversight and follow-up by officials regarding everything from infrastructure to decision-making.

### Recommendations

In addition to the long list of immediate and long-term conditions to be met towards supporting rural women obtaining their economic rights, a set of strategic needs must also be met in order to improve gender relations in the Palestinian countryside and to champion fairness and equality.

In the field of the legal and institutional environment:

- Creating an enabling legal environment to meet the demands for women's economic rights, especially regarding the rights of rural women and the right of women to decent work as stipulated in international agreements and treaties, and moving towards:
  - Amendments to the laws and regulations in force, including clear and affirming texts on justice and women's equality, in line with international treaties and conventions.
  - Issuing laws, and implementing regulations and procedures necessary to protect women, prevent violations of their economic rights, and encourage societal acceptance of women's participation.

- Providing subsidies and other incentives for women's products and income-generating projects, including privileges and exemptions, and overall make the private sector more inviting to women (including in Investment law, corporate law, tax law, cooperative law, agriculture law, and any legislation related to land and property registration

•Developing and approving a law to encourage the development of small and medium enterprises through including this in the investment law with a clear reference to rural women's investments and projects such as through issuing patent permits and issuing licenses for small women's enterprises that are exempt from fees and customs for a period of five years.

Strengthening the political will to pass and implement laws that guarantee women's rights in general and economic rights in particular, such as through including women's issues in more budget lines, and working to develop a system that stimulates women's participation.

- The categorization of the rights and empowerment of women as national priorities, and within this framework, the creation of a number of national policies directed towards realizing the rights of rural women, supported by a system of programs and interventions and coupled with the commitment to implement government plans and oversee the implementation of these plans by non-governmental institutions related to the work of rural women.
- Ensure that existing systems and structures (institutions and procedures) facilitate gender equality for women and ensure their economic rights, including activating women's presence in decision-making centres in relevant institutions, bodies, and committees, providing mechanisms for receiving and responding to feedback including regarding the performance of official agencies. All the aforementioned should be in accordance with gender indicators; thus, gender should be mainstreamed into major reports, legal protections should become more gender-sensitive, and units and employees should be gender-sensitive specialists (Especially the Employment Directorate, Employment Fund, and Registration Department), to supplement inspection work.
- Supporting, facilitating and empowering women's increased presence in local decision-making centres, at the local, provincial and national levels

- Organizing a national campaign to increase the percentage of women's quota in local councils and in the Legislative Council,
- Advocacy to implement the decision of the Palestinian Central Council to have women represent at least 30% within PLO structures and in the frameworks of political parties,
- Enforcing the rule of law, including limiting the power of traditional structures and clans

-Reforming rural women's working condition and incorporating considerations of their work into production regulations and providing them with the labour protections that should be standard across all work environments

- Adopting measures to evaluate the value of rural women's productive work in informal establishments, and to then include them in national GDP estimates as well as in the census in accordance with United Nations standards and measures
- Organizing and leading a broad national dialogue on the issue of women's unpaid work in informal establishments, family farms and in temporary agricultural seasonal work
- Organizing and leading a campaign of lobbying and advocacy to appreciate the value of thus far unpaid work and to turn it into official work and the rights and entitlements which that entails.
- Stimulating the registration and accreditation of family-economic enterprises.
- Subject work in family enterprises to the supervision and control of the competent authorities, in order to regulate the safety and suitability of the work environment including regarding any health risks or the violation of any rights thereof. (Such as the spraying of pesticides, exposure to the sun for long hours, etc).
- Conducting statistical surveys and including women's work in family enterprises and the informal sector in official statistics and in national accounts,
- Organizing women's work in the home economy and in family and informal enterprises into trade unions and committees, in order to provide women with all their labour rights
- Providing opportunities for women working in the family farm and other informal sectors and seasonal work to obtain health insurance, social security benefits, workplace safety insurance and compensation, the right to vacations, paid time off

and unemployment pay, and the right to capacity building and knowledge development, all within a system of simplified procedures and facilities,

- The prioritisation of a suitable work environment, which calls for classifying family enterprises as an economic, productive or service unit.
- Developing mechanisms and systems to ensure that women receive their fair share of profits resulting from family work objects, consistent with effort exerted and their work output
- **Support the presence of rural women incll councils in every way, capability building, promotion, continuous support, having a code of conduct/honour,**
- **Encourage the councils based on the past experiences of PWWSD, and to expand the creation of shadow councils and specialized women committees**
- Community support and acceptance in terms of access and utilization of social capital

Obstacles that impedes women's access to social capital and its benefits from it can be similar to the obstacles impeding women's access to other forms of capital is women's insulation into the private family space and as such, their exclusion from the social space. Thus, the movement for women's economic empowerment rights must expand the space, tools and concepts/vocabulary necessary for women to be able to demand their economic rights, including the right to decent work, labour rights, the right to family assets (inheritance), the right to own property, access to markets and financing, and the ability to organize collective efforts to obtain these economic rights. This can be done through:

- Supporting improved contemporary societal structures and institutions and enabling them to play a role in combatting the power held by traditional structures and clans
- Building on the experience of civil and women's institutions in working in the field of forming organized rural groups, women's clubs, production groups, women's centres, cooperatives, and popular movements and committees as local frameworks for claiming economic rights
- Building the capabilities of grassroots institutions that provide space for women's mobilization

- Activating networking and collective education between grassroots institutions as well as between them and civil institutions
- Building links with official institutions to facilitate the tasks and work of women's groups,
- Supporting local women's initiatives and empowering local rural women to lead societal interventions significant in women's economic rights.
- Confronting the ideas and efforts of discrimination against women with community awareness campaigns with various tools and methods that appeared from schools, through the family, and community institutions (local councils, community centres, clubs and work groups)
- Activating the role of local councils towards increasing social acceptance for women's active and leadership roles and increase women's participation and the consideration of women's needs in the structures and programs of local bodies.

Women's capabilities, access to and control of resources:

- Organizing and managing capacity development programs in the field of: labour rights, teamwork skills, project management and others as required.
- Providing the means for women to build their technical capabilities in various fields including training on the use of technology in work and production such as: driving and using agricultural tractors, using honey sorting machines, mills, packaging and milking machines, cheese and dairy machines, computers, and social media platforms as well as to engage with the market and suppliers and to be able to learn from and share past business experiences
- Organizing women into support groups, self-learning and building the capacities of these groups.
- Women's projects
- Developing a system to facilitate, encourage and register family enterprises and informal establishments in the agricultural and rural sector within corporate law

- Activating and establishing follow-up, support and empowerment centres for women's projects (such as projects incubators which can be established within the framework of rural centres and clubs),
- Encouraging women's groups organized for collective work, whether they are cooperatives or production groups (similar to groups that currently work in school canteens), and encouraging women to join cooperatives.

#### Access to financing:

- Establishing loan guarantee funds for rural women and encouraging lending institutions to increase lending to rural women within the framework of a facilitated loans system and technical support thereof
- Encouraging women to operate cooperative savings and credit funds.

#### Access to markets and marketing:

- Providing support in being able to access markets/ market women's products and protecting them through subsidies to make them more affordable as well as the imposition of tariffs on competing foreign goods including Israeli goods
- Building capacities on how to conduct relationships with suppliers for improved marketing operations and access to bulk-buying options

#### Access to rights:

- Providing awareness programs on economic rights, including through a helpline and legal advice.
- Providing bond and legal support to enable women to legally fight for their economic rights
- Facilitating and supporting women's access to justice

## Appendices:

### First Workshop

### Project Partners

Thursday 24/9/2020

#	Name	Position Title	Organization
1.	Abeer Qateeri	Project Coordinator	Palestinian Coalition for Economic Social and Cultural Rights
2.	Jamal Imbaslat	Centre Vice President	Palestinian Coalition for Economic Social and Cultural Rights
3.	Muayid Basharat	Agricultural Committee Coordinator	Union of Agricultural Work Committees
4.	Rasha Al Yateem	Organization Director	ARIJ
5.	Mariyam Karmawi	.....	We Effect
6.	Raed Theeb	.....	Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives Union
7.	Abeer Istanbuli		Palestinian Centre
8.	Said Jasir	Research Team	
9.	Lubna AlAshqar	Research Team	

## Second Workshop

### Farmers' Workshop

Sunday 27/9/2020

#	Name	Position Title	Area
1.	Lubna Masaeed	A worker in an agricultural facility and the president of the women's centre	Jericho/Jordan Valley
2.	Yusri Mahmoud Shatiwi	Homemaker and worker in Family Facility	Jericho/Jordan Valley
3.	Itidal Mohammad Rumadeen	A homemaker with a self-made agricultural project (greenhouse)	Jericho/Jordan Valley
4.	Ayida Ahmad Nujoom	Homemaker with a sheep project	Jericho/Jordan Valley
5.	Ataf Nujoom	Kindergarten principal who works on a family agricultural project	Jericho/Jordan Valley

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### Third Workshop

#### Women's Cooperatives for Savings and Credit

Monday 28/9/2020

#	Name of Participant	Branch
1.	Maryam Abd AlGhani Zabn	Mazari al Nubani village
2.	Zawiya Ilyas Bashariya	About village
3.	Majd Hussein	Beit reema village
4.	Ala Hussein Mahmoud Duha	Deer al Sudan village
5.	Yasir Mahmoud Hammad	Silwad Village
6.	Naheela Nasr Khaseeb	Aroura village
7.	Aziza al Deek	Kufr Naama village
8.	Awatif Mahmoud AlThufr	Kobar Village
9.	Nazeeha Mohammad Al Thafir	Kobar Village
10.	Minwa Mahmoud Omar Zeidan	Beituniya
11.	Norma Ahmad Saheel	Deer Ghassana
12.	Manal Shareem	Ramallah
13.	Nafiza Shamasna	Kufr Ein Village

## Table of Individual Interviews

Interviews took place between 14/9/2020 and 7/10/2020

#	Name	Title of Position	Ministry/Organization
1.	Samir al Teeti	Director of Planning and Policy Department	Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture
2.	Khitam Hamayil	Gender Unit Director	Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture
3.	Sami Suhweil	Director of Planning Department	Ministry of Women's Affairs
4.	Samira Quwasma	Representing the Director of the Planning and Studies Department	Ministry of Women's Affairs
5.	Lama Awad	Director of Gender Unit	Palestinian Ministry of Labour
6.	Abeer Omran	Director of Gender Unit	Palestinian Ministry of Economy
7.	Jamal Imbaslat	Vice President	Palestinian Centre for Economic and Social Rights
8.	Abeer Qateri	Project Coordinator	Palestinian Centre for Economic and Social Rights
9.	Haneen Zeidan	Project Manager	Rural Women's Development Society
10.	Adeleine Karaja	Implementing Manager	Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives Union
11.	Fayad Fayad	Implementing Manager	Olive and Oil council (local)
12.	Rubhi Bakr	Administrative Committee Member	Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives Union
13.	Yusuf Altirk	President	Cooperative Work Authority
14.	Fuad Khirma	Programmes and projects Manager	Cooperative Work Authority

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