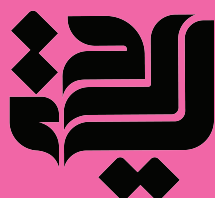


Women in Palestine between the trilogy of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel

**Needs Assessment for Palestinian
Feminist Movement**



**Doria Feminist Fund
2022**



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Objective

This needs assessment aims to inform funding pathways for Palestinian feminist movements across geographies (West Bank, Gaza, 48, diaspora and refugees) and undertake a review of funding trends targeting various conduits in Palestine (humanitarian, crisis funding and emergency support, mental health support, etc.)

Research Methodology and Approach

The research adopts the feminist research methodologies to collect and analyze contextual data on the current situation of Palestinian women and girls and the obstacles being faced. The research integrates contextual data on challenges and inequalities facing Palestinian women with primary qualitative data from women activists from the different geographies (West Bank, Gaza, 48, diaspora and refugees) on feminist movement priorities and funding trends. It echoes the reflections of the civil society organizations and women active in the local communities and their perceptions of the structural violence and obstacles facing women with particular emphasis on women's participation in the political arena.

Data Collection Tools:

The tools used within the context of this research are Secondary Data Review and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with women leaders of CSOs from the various areas in Palestine:

- Secondary Data Review: this includes the review of documents and other related references and material available on the challenges facing Palestinian feminists and the funding mechanisms and challenges. This review was a strategic step in the identification of the multifaceted discrimination faced by Palestinian women and Women Rights Organizations (WROs). The findings of the review in terms of the obstacles identified, set the basis for the discussions during the key informant interviews and focus group discussions.
- Key informant interviews: one on one interviews with key informants, representatives of civil society organizations and active non-governmental organization, and feminist activists were conducted, which are all considered as national experts and leads in their respective fields.
- Focus Group Discussions were conducted with women activists and representatives of women CSOs in Palestine. The selected CSOs were included based on their representation of the various groups of women whose voices need to be represented.

Research questions:

What are the emerging needs of Palestinian feminists and exploring the aggravating needs in light of the continuous Israeli attacks and injustices and the similarities and differences between the different areas (West Bank, Gaza, 48)

What are the different funding mechanisms and trends (humanitarian, crisis funding, mental health support, emergency support, etc.)? Explore whether these mechanisms are responsive to the emerging needs and suggestions/recommendations for new modalities of funding.

Introduction

According to the data of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of women in Palestine is about 2.57 million females, or 49% of the total estimated population in mid-2021, at about 5.23 million individuals. The number of women in the West Bank reached 1,530,924 females, while the number of women in Gaza reached 1,039,200 females.

Within the same context, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics stated that the population of interior Israel reached around 9.190 million by the end of 2020, including 6.806 million Jews (74%), and 1,930 million Arabs (21%), with some reports indicating that the proportion of the population in the mixed interior is divided between men and women by 50% for both sexes.

Women are one of the main determinants of the electoral process's accomplishment and success, whether as employees within the committee, candidates, voters, or observers on the conduct of the electoral process, in addition to the Palestinian Central Elections Committee announcement indicating that women constitute roughly half of those registered for Palestinian elections.

Women in the Gaza Strip

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas recently adopted some decisions that sparked great controversy in light of the restrictions it presents on women and intransigence against them. In last July, Hamas issued instructions to the Ministry of Women's Affairs requiring prior coordination with the movement before implementing any project related to women's rights, which was considered by the ministry as a new restraint on women in Gaza, and a constraint on civil and human rights work in general. Also, and in last February, the Supreme Council of Sharia Judiciary in Gaza - which is governed by Hamas - issued orders and instructions to prevent the travel of unmarried, young, widowed and divorced woman, without the permission of her guardian, and this imposes additional obstacles on women's travel in Gaza. Furthermore, and in March 2017, Hamas decided to cancel the Women's Day leave.

On the other hand, in mid-March 2021, Hamas announced that the movement's Shura Council had elected for the first time a woman as a member in the movement's political bureau in addition to a women's movement head. Hamas tried to promote this step as a reflection for their increased support for women in the Gaza Strip and the efforts devoted to this issue, however, many have viewed this step as just a formulaic procedure aiming at polishing the movement's public image.

In addition to the above, Hamas continuous oppression and repression acts are practiced against the Palestinians in general in the Gaza Strip, including women, where many international organizations have monitored and documented such repressions in their reports. This repression was clearly demonstrated by the Hamas movement's approach towards the demonstrations that took place in Gaza On March 14, 2019, when the Palestinians went out with slogans carrying some kitchen utensils as a rejection of the living realities in the Strip and the imposed taxes on food supplies, where some of them carried banners with slogan "We want to live" by the name of a communal movement called by pioneers and influencers of social media networks, and some youth groups that do not have any political or factional affiliation, alongside women whose participation in the demonstrations was widely highlighted in many media reports.

However, the Palestinian security services and police affiliated with the parallel government in Gaza mobilized all their security and intelligence forces to keep a tight rein on the situation. The citizens marching in the streets were faced with beatings and repression. The government viciously commanded its affiliates to take the streets as anti-demonstration movements to confront those demanding decent living conditions. In parallel, "Hamas" media outlets were directed to challenge the demonstrations through social networking sites. The attack was not limited on the participants, but went beyond by attacking the documentation authorities, where Hamas members beat the director of the Independent Commission for Human Rights, and beat and arrested a number of journalists, confiscated their equipment and erased their content.

In the same context, Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip face a number of challenges of an economic nature. According to the Palestinian National Information Center, woman head of households in the Gaza Strip constitute around 9% of families, and the manifestations of "economic gender based violence EGBV" are increasing against women in the Strip. Also, following the paralysis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic life in the Gaza Strip and its severe effects on families compounded by the income disruption of the husband, son or brother, women face increasing economic burden in managing the logistical and health affairs of the home, as well as to achieving food security. It is worth noting that the economic indicators of Palestinian women in the Strip were already low before the pandemic, as the unemployment rate among women in the Gaza Strip reached 68%, according to the Center for Women's Affairs which is a non-governmental organization, compared to 35% for men. The center also indicated that despite the quantitative progress in women's participation in the educational process, and the existence of knowledge and capabilities enabling them to participate in the labor market, this participation remained limited and did not exceed 21% of the workforce for women.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicated that while the general poverty rate in the Gaza Strip is about 64%, women are the poorest, with the poverty rate among them reaching about 87.7%. Among families that are headed by women, which amounts to about 10%, the poverty rate is about 52%, and these economic conditions were worsened as women have become supervising all the details of the family as a result of the home quarantine after the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent full lockdowns. Consequently, and in addition to the severe economic conditions, women became worried about enabling their children to access educational resources via the Internet, concerned with providing and achieving food security for them, and also troubled with monitoring their and providing them with needed tips in light of the spread of the Corona virus.

It is worth noting that there are several important governmental and non-governmental organizations in the Gaza Strip engaged in women's affairs including: the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Gaza - Gaza Women's Affairs Center - Palestinian Developmental Feminist Studies Association - Aisha Association for the Protection of Women and Children - Creative Women Association - Wefaq Association for Women's Care and the child - Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association - Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution - the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees - Palestinian Working Women's Association for Development – Rural Women's Development Society - UNRWA Gender Initiative Program - Center for Research and Legal Consultations for Women.

Palestinian women in the West Bank:

Palestinian women are facing a dire reality, which also manifests itself in the weak institutional and political participation. Despite the creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs by the Palestinian Authority in 2003, and the establishment of many units concerned with women in governmental bodies to deal with women's problems, particularly regarding political participation between 2012 and 2014, headed by Minister Haifa Al-Agha, the efforts of such units and achievements remain minimal. Among the fifteen members of the Executive Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization, there is only one woman, Hanan Ashrawi (Head of the Department of Diplomacy and Public Policies).

Of the sixteen governorates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, only one, the Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorate, is headed by a woman, "Laila Ghannam". Also, the Palestinian government headed by Muhammad Shtayyeh includes only 3 women ministers out of 22 ministerial positions. They are the Minister of Health, "May Kaila," the Minister of Tourism, "Rola Ma'ayeh," and the Minister of Women's Affairs, "Amal Hamad." All of these women, with the exception of Hanan Ashrawi, belong to the Fatah movement.

Also, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for the year 2020 indicated that the participation of women in the decision-making process is still limited, as the data showed that only 5% of the members of the Central Council, 11% of the members of the National Council, 13% of the members of the Council of Ministers, and 11% of the Ambassadors in the diplomatic missions are women. At the level of municipalities, there are no woman mayors in the municipalities classified as A or B. As for the municipalities classified C, we find that there are only three women mayors against 97 men. Additionally, about 91% of the heads of trade union organizations registered with the Palestinian Ministry of Labor are men, compared to 9% of women. As for the members of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, the percentage of men reached 96%, compared to only 4% of women in 2019. Furthermore, only 8% of the Shari'a judges in the West Bank are women compared to 92% of men, where the presence of women, even in small percentage, is an indication on the possibility of increasing women's involvement in this sector, since the percentage of women as members of the Shari'a Prosecution reached 71% compared to 29% for men for the year 2019.

It is worth noting that although the Palestinian Authority ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2014, without making any reservations, however, there are numerous problems facing this step so far, as the text of CEDAW wasn't published yet in the official newspaper, and therefore, it is ineffectual over the local law. Also, the Supreme Constitutional Court, which is authorized to regulate the status of international agreements in the Palestinian legal system, issued a decision in November 2017 allowing courts to refrain from implementing international agreements that violate the Palestinian law. This allows the issuance of executive authorizations that are not based on clear regulations and mandates and permits the legislature to maintain the dominant patriarchal authority.

It is important to note that the recent amendments to the Palestinian election law granted a quota for women by ensuring that women are represented by at least one woman in the first three names and then one woman out of every four names, meaning that a list of 16 candidates must have at least 4 women candidates. As such the minimum quota for women's candidacy reached 26%. Moreover, the Palestinian Central Elections Committee announced that women constitute about half of those registered for the Palestinian elections, and the number of women registered for the Palestinian elections 2021 has reached 1.247 million, constituting about 49% of the total number of registered voters.

However, and despite these amendments, there are no assurances that these women will reach the Parliament due to the position of women among the lists, and the expectations that a large number of lists will not reach the minimum

required rate estimated at 1.5%, that is, 28 thousand votes if the participation rate reaches 75%.

Palestinian legislations and laws include articles that exempt the killer of women from punishment and explicitly provide permission for the male guardian in the family to kill a woman in some cases that are related to articles referring to first-degree kinship. For example, articles 340 and 98 of the Penal Code are related to mitigating the penalty, and in some cases discharging it, if a woman is killed when she is caught in a sexual affair outside marriage. As for Article 99 of the Penal Code, it gives the guardian the right to drop the personal rights that are applied in most cases in which the offender is exempted from punishment, and bearing in mind that the offender is himself the guardian, it means that he exempts himself from punishment or his partner in crime. Article 308 states that the rapist is exempted from punishment if he marries the girl he raped. The Palestinian government was pressured to cancel these articles, and indeed they were canceled or frozen. But nevertheless Palestinian women's associations indicated that the main problems remain in the lack of legal and social frameworks that criminalize violence against women, punish the offender, or protect the victim and help her to overcome this violence. This can be resolved by adopting the draft law on family protection from violence that was developed in 2004, but until this moment, it hasn't come into force. Furthermore, there is the new personal status law, and the new penal code that should be compatible with the personal status law and the law of protection of the family from violence since at the current moment, it contradicts with them. Also, by amending the set of laws that were introduced with the advent of the Palestinian Authority, such as the cybercrime law, labor laws (the Labor Law, the Military Service Law, and the Civil Service Law) and all other applicable laws, to include articles that prevent violence and protect from harassment and abuse, criminalize the aggressor and bring justice to the victim.

According to estimates by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of female-headed households in the West Bank is 12% of the total households. The gender pay gap between men and women is about 24%, unemployment rates among women are 39%. The rate of women's participation in the labor market is about 19%, and the percentage of women working in the civil government sector is 42%. These indicators reflect the poor conditions of women in the West Bank. And on the economic level, the situation has worsened in light of the Corona pandemic.

In addition to the above, the Palestinian Authority's approach towards the Palestinian protests and demonstrations does not differ much from that of Hamas. In late June and early July, hundreds of Palestinians went out in demonstrations calling for the resignation of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, altered by the death of the political activist and critic for Abbas regime, "Nizar Banat", during his arrest.

This movement in the West Bank, bypassed geography, gender, and the generational categorizations, as all segments of Palestinian society participated in this movement. The Palestinian authorities once again used repressive and aggressive methods in dealing with these demonstrations, and resorted to mobilizing some of their military units and using the logic of putting a street against another street - i.e. a loyal street against another street with opposite affiliations, as one of the mechanisms for dealing with and defeating this movement, which led to more oppression of West Bank society, including women's demands.

It is worth noting that there are many governmental and non-governmental agencies concerned with women issues in the West Bank governorates, the most important of which are: The Ministry of Women's Affairs – Al-Quds Center for Women – The Union of Palestinian Women's Committees – The Union of Women's Committees for Social Work – The General Union of Palestinian Women – The Union of Palestinian Women's Work Committees - Center for Women's Studies - Institute for Gender Policies - Adwar Foundation for Social Change - Association for Women's Development and Media - Working Women Association - UNRWA - Asala Foundation - Women's Affairs Staff - Women's Center for Legal and Social Guidance - Palestinian Women Forum - Business Women Forum – Arab Women's Union.

Women in the occupied interior:

Palestinian women, who are citizens of the occupied interior, constitute nearly half of the Palestinian national minority which amounts to approximately 20% of the total population of the mixed internal community. Generally, Palestinian women within the interior community face various consequences due to the Israeli policies of racism and discrimination. However, the effects of these policies are two-fold on women's rights due to the social concepts about the status of women and due to the laws and social traditions imposed on them. These consequences were confirmed in the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on “The Status of Women and Assistance” presented to the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in May 2019, expressing its deep concern about the serious situation of Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territories as a result of the severe effects resulting from the continuation of the illegal Israeli occupation in all its manifestations. Another report by the Lebanese Arab newspaper Al-Safir on July 20, 2020, indicated that the women of the occupied territories may be the most disadvantaged among Palestinian women in general, in light of the dominant patriarchy and fundamentalism which contribute to the spread of violence against them, in addition to the practices of the Israeli police and judiciary who abdicated the enforcement of the law against the perpetrators of murder.

The Director-General of the Kayan Association, a women's organization in Haifa, stated that the death toll of women during the year 2020 is eight, explaining that

the percentage of women who filed complaints and reports due of their exposure to domestic violence increased by 40 percent during the past months, specifically during the spread of the Corona epidemic. And in 2019, it was documented that 11 Palestinian women were killed in the occupied territories as a result of gender based violence, while in 2018 it was recorded that 14 women were killed, in 2017, 10 women were killed, and in 2016-2015, 24 Palestinian women were killed.

Concerning the legal prevention mechanism, the Kayan Association confirmed that the Israeli police and judiciary were complicit in dealing with the perpetrators against Arab women, and that 80 percent of those killed had filed complaints in the Israeli police stations, however, they were ignored. And if the perpetrators are arrested, the Israeli judiciary often works to release them.

Women, peace, and security agenda

While UNSC resolutions on WPS are global and do not address the situations of countries under foreign occupation, such as the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Palestine has adopted the National Action Plan on WPS (2017-2019). However, the passage and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) by authorities have proven difficult, mainly due to insufficient political will, a dearth of governmental leadership, a lack of necessary resources, and lack of awareness which presents a major obstacle to both launching viable campaigns for 1325 and recruiting actors necessary for its implementation. Women in Palestine continue to face intentional exclusion from national reconciliation and peace building efforts, the implementation of NAP-WPS seems impossible due to the systematic human rights violations committed by Israeli authorities which disproportionately impact women. Palestinian women's needs and priorities in resolving conflicts and peace-building are completely neglected.

The National Coalition for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 held an international conference called "Women's Freedom, Peace and Dignity in Palestine UNSCR 1325 for Accountability". WCLAC General Director was the first Palestinian woman from Civil Society in Palestine to brief the UNSC during the open day of the WPS week in 2018, to highlight sufferings of Palestinian women under occupation and call on the international community and SC to meet their legal obligations and end the longest belligerent occupation worldwide. The Palestinian civil society has led the way in raising public awareness and advocating for the adoption of WPS national action plans. The NGO Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) framed resolution 1325 as essential for both the national struggle against Israel and the social struggle against patriarchy.

Recently, Palestinian NGO Coalition developed the second generation WPS NAP (2020-2022) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and official duty-bearers and framed it under the three main pillars of prevention & protection

accountability and meaningful participation. (The second NAP was launched on 28 October, 2020)

General highlights

There is an inordinate contradiction regarding the practices of Hamas towards women in the Gaza Strip, a contradiction that may be due to the conflict between the preaching ideological wing (Radical) within the movement, and the (pragmatic) political wing that wishes to distance the movement from the criticisms of the international community and international organizations, especially human rights organizations.

Controlling organizations in Gaza, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, do not differ much from violent extremist organizations regarding the employment of women, and the nature of their roles in the organizational hierarchy. Such roles are limited to the jihadist education of children, public propaganda, and other matters that are far from leadership, planning and decision making within the organization. Hamas employs women in the Gaza Strip at the grassroots and public level, faraway from having real representation and presence at the organizational and political levels.

What Palestinian women suffer the most, whether in Gaza or the West Bank, is the political exclusion and marginalization, which is embodied in the level of women's political representation as well as their economic conditions.

Despite the recent amendments to the Palestinian election law, which grant a quota of 26% for women's representation, there is a legislative shortcoming as it fails to reach the 30% as per the Beijing Agreement of 2005, in addition to the challenges facing women participation related to the societal dimension manifested by the dominance and rootedness of the patriarchal mentality and culture in Palestinian society.

Main Findings

Feminist priorities should be considered within the context of Israeli occupation, which affects women's economic participation as manifested in the high unemployment rate particularly among youth which comprise around 45% of the population.

Despite the ratification of CEDAW without any reservation, no laws that respond to CEDAW commitments were enacted. Feminists and civil society organizations advocating for CEDAW commitments have faced threats and hate speech in order to silence women and impede their efforts.

There have been many initiatives and efforts to empower women running for municipal elections in terms of capacity building on advocacy, running campaign, negotiation and communication skills, community needs, how to deal with the

media, and how to respond to hate speech. However, this was not able to change or alter the status quo of Palestinian women. Women should be politically empowered, where despite the endorsement of the quota on candidacy of lists for women as the parties have signed with feminist organizations, yet this quota hasn't been fully adopted and won't guarantee women's access to the parliament since its only on candidacy.

Existing trends in funding

- Many NGOs were closed, other were categorized as governmental, others as terrorist groups or anti-Semite ones. Some organizations are formed and build on certain momentums but they disappear after a short time. There is a strong need to support and sustain unregistered and grassroots organizations, and individual initiatives.
- Donors stipulate conditional funding which categorize all forms of resistance as terrorism. The main conflict governing the NGOs' relations with the donors is on how to deal with occupation, and another conflict is the insufficient efforts to ease the state's restrictions on women's rights. Donors have different priorities and agendas, and as such, NGOs are trying to modify and tailor their activities to adhere to the donor requirements and call of proposals. This is driving many NGOs far away from their objectives or from responding to urgent needs. This lack of responsiveness from donors to the priorities of Palestinian and local CSOs is drifting funds to other issues that are not a priority.
- Innovative approaches are deemed essential for funding, however, and within the Palestinian context, priorities of NGOs should be supported to respond to only to local contexts and needs as envisioned by the NGOs and women themselves. As such, initiatives should be impact oriented not activity oriented.
- The imbalanced geographical distribution of funds, where all funds are directed to the center and not to the rural contexts.

Since not all NGOs have strategic plans, it is important to create a funding that ensures sustainability and supports pathways for humanitarian issues. Donors are funding urgent and emergency actions, where most of the funding is humanitarian. For example, if there are water shortages in households, young women are unable to go to school due to their reproductive health and needs, thus creating a new form of school dropout.

The necessity of having feminist studies was emphasized as a prerequisite for changing the status quo. Vulnerabilities intersect and the groups facing intersectional forms of discrimination are at an increased disadvantage such as the displaced LGBTQI+ members with lack of social safety nets. As such, addressing each and every layer of discrimination is a must. There is a need to develop the discourse so that it is in line with reality. "Feminists need to work between the analytical and the political"

Also, intergenerational tensions surfaced among activists working on resolution 1325. For example, UN Women Agora Youth Group are politicized and it's important to work with them to keep them grounded within the feminist values and agendas. As such, activities should include intergenerational dialogues where young women can benefit from the expertise of old women activists and provide new forms of social reconstruction. It is crucial to support the younger generation within feminist organizations.

All existing funds are being used to combat GBV, however, GBV interventions are not comprehensive and doesn't support women survivors in terms of housing, or securing a stable income. There is a crucial need for economic empowerment, enhancing women's participation in politics, and enhancing their participation in peace and security agenda and negotiations. Future funds must work to create accountability and protection mechanisms.

The Way Forward

At the level of feminists and activists:

- Feminists need to read and analyze what the media is saying, and must understand how feminists can reshape the narrative and deliver it to the wider audience including governments, CSOs and individuals. The Israelis' have many speakers and representatives that distort the truth and there is oppression and silencing practiced by private companies, as Facebook and Instagram, who are blocking certain hashtags or special words (resistance, martyrs, occupation, Palestine, etc) This leads to the complete absence of truthful stories, and all the lobbying and advocacy content being wiped out.
- Protection from GBV with an intersectional lens that targets the intersectional violence against women inflicted by men, tribes, and the occupation; the legal framework doesn't exist neither in the personal status law nor the penal code. There is no political willpower to enact gender related laws. The legislative council has been inoperative since 2006 and the president hasn't been issuing any gender related laws, whereas other laws that undermine the power of law and bestow more executive power to the security forces have been enacted. There have been persistent efforts to develop the law of protection for family members against violence, however, and despite the civil society activism and the formation of national coalition, this law has not been enacted yet.

At the level of donors and international actors

- Form a regional and international coalition to support women in Palestine, amplify and raise their voices to fight all forms of intersectional and structural discrimination imposed by gender, occupation and religion. There is a need for collective actions from women rights organizations, NGOs, and feminists towards international donors.

- Emphasizing women's economic empowerment which will lead to better participation in the public spheres; this dimension is constantly overlooked by donors and local GBV interventions. For instance, Gaza's utmost needs are the economic empowerment initiatives, and the rebuilding process is gender blind and doesn't take the needs of women into consideration. Feminists in Gaza are isolated and efforts should focus on enabling them to leave Gaza.
- Coordinate with local authorities in rural areas, where the governmental authorities have no presence and the law enforcement mechanism are weak.
- Support advocacy actions, and provide the technical skills and capacities to avoid censorship, combat the silencing of women, expose the Palestinian content, and encourage the freedom of speech.