



Women participation in water access and management: the case of Palestine

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen;

Friends, partners and supporters;

I would like to thank the FPSC to open the door for talking about water issues in Palestine and relate them to the women participation, access, and control of water resources.

The information provided is gathered from different NGOs such as PARC, UAWC, ARIJ institute, PCBS, OCHA, Birzeit University and for sure MoA and PWA.

I hope this presentation will provide a helpful framework on the issue related to women access and management of water resources.

1-Background

This paper will shed the light on the issue of access and management/control, using the different statistical information related to women issues and water. From the gender mainstreaming and balance approaches, it is very important to keep the eye on the issue of access and management and not only the access issue. Some of the statistics that we can see are high in comparison to the other countries, but we have to seek the in between information and statistics which may be less than expected or less than they should be.



This paper will compare the information between women access and women access and management of water resources; through studying the results of different projects and interventions in Palestine.

The Palestinian population lives under a deteriorating socio economic situation, as well as the rest of the developing countries, adding to that; the factor of the Israeli occupation. Currently and after the second Intifada (break out), the situation is getting worse, the needs are increasing parallel to the natural increase of the population and the limited resources, combined with the climate change. This widens the gaps between the needs and the availability of services. Adding to that the human rights violations and practices by the Israeli forces; against the international conventions and treaties of Human Rights.

This paper will not focus on water statistics, nor on the human rights perspectives and approaches; but will read in between the numbers to highlight the realities related to both access and management of women to water resources.

1.1 population

¹According to PCBS in the year 2016, the Palestinian population reached 4,816,503 inhabitants, 2,935,368 live in West bank and 1,881,135 live in Gaza strip. The sex ratio is 103.3, while the total fertility rate is 4.1. The percentage of children under 14 years old is 39.2%, the youth rate between 15-29 years old reached 29.9% according to the same sources and same year.

The latest updated poverty rate study was in the year 2011 and it reached 25.8. The unemployment rate in Palestine reached 25.9% in the year 2015; in West Bank it reached 17.3% and in Gaza strip the unemployment rate reached 41% for the year 2015. The percentage of women participating in labor force reached 16.6% while it reached 68.7% among men. These numbers show the huge needs of social services to cover the gaps of the needs and to reach the highest development levels of the livelihoods of the population.

1.2 Political situation

Lands and water resources confiscation, the prohibition of building houses and the deprivation of issuing the licensing for building houses, wells, and digging cisterns especially in area C, uprooting the trees especially the olive trees, imprisonment and detention for the people (mainly the youth, women and children), the killing and assassination of the people and innocents, the apartheid wall and the wars the siege on Gaza, the different checkpoints and road blocks, the settlers attacks on the

¹ http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang_en/507/default.aspx



lands and people and exposing them to death; are all practices done by the Israeli forces. It is a must to talk about the numerous laws and practices in Jerusalem to empty the city from the Palestinians; such practices include the withdrawal of residency rights, houses demolitions and kicking the Palestinians out of the city using safety and security measures and excuses.

1.3 Agriculture in Palestine

According to PCBS the agricultural holdings for the year 2011 reached 238,105 holdings, 2.68% of them are plants and horticulture, 10% are livestock and 81% are mixed holdings, while the women holdings reached 6.7%. The highest rate of holdings among the females was in Jerusalem, it reached 13.9% but still it is low. Here related to women holdings we are talking about formally registered holdings, some of the women own lands and livestock but they are totally managed by their men and sometimes they are not legally and formally registered.

After reading the different reports from different NGOs working in agriculture in Palestine, the statistics related to women participation, access and management of their projects differ according to the nature of the project. We can find that there are projects dedicated 100% for the women, in other projects, 30% of the beneficiaries are women. It is clear in the reports from such statistics that the women are benefiting, but on ground and in reality we can find many cases telling about women who work in agriculture and have access to water but they lack the management and control over their resources; either due to political and economic situation or due to social norms and restrictions. Unfortunately the facts are different than the results gathered so far; and are not well documented and measured; there is a need to have well-formed and prepared quantity and quality indicators to measure the access rates and management/control rates on many levels related to water and women. This is one of the major challenges in this paper that need to be tackled and dealt with.

1.4 Facts about water issues in Palestine

The Palestinian population lack the water supply amounts that should be, according to the standards recommended from the World Health Organization. In the remote marginalized areas and especially area C, the SEAM zones and the isolated occupied areas; the households lack the availability of sustainable water resources and many of them are not connected to the water networks and still receive the water amounts through the tanks and other traditional tools.

The Israelis receive and use the treated water from the treatment units used by the Palestinians. Accordingly, the PA is obliged to pay fines for the Israelis regarding the Trans boundary waste water; according to Palestine Policy Research Institute



(MAS) roundtable on 19 November 2016, the accumulated fines which are cut from the PA's clearing reached 487 Million NIS between (2010-2016). While in other cases the Palestinian areas, lands and water resources are polluted by the sewage and chemicals dropping down from the settlements and they are not allowed even to stir the sewage water stream away from their place.

According to a study held by Arij Institute in the year 2015; Palestine has three main sources of freshwater including; the Jordan River, the West Bank's Aquifers (Western, North Eastern and Eastern Aquifers) and the Coastal Aquifer in Gaza Strip. Israel controls almost all Palestinian water resources and is exploiting around 85% of the available water; leaving only 15% to the Palestinians. Moreover, since 1967 Palestinians' have been denied their right to access and utilize their water share as a riparian of the Jordan River System.

1.5 Challenges, Obstacles:

- 25% of the amounts of water in general are lost due to traditional transfer tools of water and traditional irrigation systems and water extraction, in addition to high cost and pollution resulted.
- Lack of awareness regarding water management, and gender issues in water among institutions, communities and women themselves.
- Lack of domestic water networks and using water tanks.
- Lack of proper planning of using the water treatment units, and the increase in water salinity, in addition to lack of coordination among the player and stakeholders.

1.6 Facts about women in agriculture, especially water access and management:

The Palestinian women are exposed to two main different kinds of oppression or violations. In addition to the traditional social aspect, the Palestinian women suffer a lot of the political situation which does not only worsen their situation, but also deepens the gap between the needs and the services provided for them.

Recalling the social status and norms of the Palestinian women during the period between 1948 till 1987; that period holds a lot of achievements done by the women. They were the decision makers regarding lands purchase and sell, gold purchase and sell and marriage decisions. The women were the main players and decision makers of using the family income.² During the first Intifada in Palestine, the Palestinian women had the ability to participate in the struggle against the

² Here we can bring different resources related to this issue.

Israeli forces. Little by little, the Palestinian women started being set under the NGOs sector and their role changed.

Focusing on the water issues and access and management of the women to water resources we elaborate the situation as follows:

First of all, on the household level, most of the Palestinian women have the access to water inside their houses, the reason lies behind this; is that most of them are responsible for the house duties. Decision making or management of water resources is another issue that has different aspects and conditions. No clear statistics or studies tackling the management/control issue. During some visits to different projects; some women could not make a decision related to having a cistern in the land, even if they serve in the family and do the household duties.

The women are in need for the water in order to continue their agricultural production and food processing. The access and management of water resources in agriculture is very much a complicated issues in West Bank and Gaza and especially among the women working in agriculture. Most of the Palestinian female farmers live in the remote marginalized areas. They need to access and manage their water resources to be able to reach the best levels of food security for themselves and their families, they need to be partners in decision making and management because they are the most people who give and know when, how, why and where to use the different resources.

1.7 Women's Rights in Palestine:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women that was signed in May 2014³.
- United Nations Convention Against Torture that was signed in May 2014.
- CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was signed by the PA in April 2014⁴.

Such conventions were signed, but on ground the implementation is questionable, as long as there are no indicators measured, only the reports are submitted to the UN, with no reference to advanced achievements.

According to UNFPA report in 2006:⁵

³ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4515765,00.html>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_parties_to_the_Convention_on_the_Elimination_of_All_Forms_of_Discrimination_Against_Women

⁵ <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/human-rights-women>



"The inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the eight [Millennium Development Goals](#) was a reminder that many of those promises have yet to be kept. It also represents a critical opportunity to implement those promises.

In spite of these international agreements, the denial of women's basic human rights is persistent and widespread."

1.8 Some statistical information related to the status of women in water sector: ⁶⁷

- 4% of the high management ranks from the second stage in water sector are women. Only 11% of the higher ranks of the second stage in related sectors are occupied by women.
- Women occupy 30% of the institutional positions and 20% of the 3rd level ranks.
- According to gender mainstreaming in environment and water strategy, Women participation in water and sanitation is 8% in average, and is 32% in the ministries and other related institutions.
- The women occupation of the higher ranks of positions is rare.
- 33.3% of the women working in the PWA are master's degree holders from different specializations and 60% of them are B.A degree holders which means that 93.3% of the women in the PWA are university undergraduates and graduates. (this is a good indicator but at the same time, it is not known to which level such women have the authority to decision making)
- According to PCBS The percentage of ever married women who are exposed to violence from husband reached 37.0% while the husbands reported the rate 17.0%, and the rate of ever married women who exposed to economic violence from husband reached 55.1% while the husbands reported 4.9%. Such statistics exclude the unmarried women who are exposed to different kinds of domestic violence, not forgetting that some statistics are underreporting due to stigma and social conservation, which may be higher. In addition such statistics apply to agricultural and water sectors as part of economic indicators.
- According to agricultural practices and the participation of women in agricultural labor force, 4.0% of wage employees are women, and the rate of unpaid women working in agriculture reached 63.5% for the year 2014. 93.3% of the Palestinian households are connected to water networks, according to 2015 statistics.

⁶ <http://www.apis.ps/up/1417421984.pdf>

⁷ http://www.pwa.ps/userfiles/server/policy/stra_social_type.pdf



- There should have been higher jobs opportunities in Palestine, if water amounts for the Palestinians was given according to what was agreed on, and if natural water amounts available were not confiscated by the Israelis. Such jobs may for sure affect the status of women if gender perspectives were taken into consideration.

Such statistics show only the realities on career and professional levels, and the numbers of women who have only access. But thinking deeply in the numbers and in between the lines we can see that the roles of women to manage and control water issues are not measured, and can be estimated from the application and practice results, which show the limited roles of management and control of women in water issues; starting from the related institutions' levels and reaching the household and grassroots levels.

Obstacles and deficits related to the participation of the women in water access and management; according to the strategy of integration of gender issues in environment and water 2013-2017:

Women find a difficulty to engage in water sector due to limited jobs opportunities, the social stigma and traditional division of labor, less salaries offered to women, lack of information and awareness, lack of female engineers and lack of willingness among the women to work in the field.

Institutional situation among water institutions that prohibits and disables the women participation in decision making positions are as follows: weakness in policies, weak capacity building opportunities, weakness of women participation in local communities regarding environmental issues, weakness in strategic planning among the institutions and weakness in gender mainstreaming policies, absence of tools and equipment for implementation, weakness of monitoring and evaluation techniques. This reveals the realities of lack of awareness among the institutions in gender equality, equity and mainstreaming, weakness in the political will to respond to the gender issues.

As a result, the weakness extends to the existence of SMART indicators and systems of monitoring and evaluation, related to measure women participation in decision making; including access and management of water resources. This also includes lack of gender sensitive budgets, planning, tools and techniques, policies, guidelines and executive regulations, and weakness of effective units for complaints and monitoring related to gender sensitive issues. Reaching the human resources, media and information management and dissemination systems, which lack gender sensitive tools, plans and systems.



All the deficits mentioned above show the situation of gender mainstreaming in the different water and environment institutions, resulting in a weak access and management/control of women in water, and this extends to the rest of the relevant institutions. Such situation affects the water sector when the needed support and power is missing.

General conclusions:

- Water resources in Palestine are declining due to occupation, water resources confiscation and control by the Israeli side.
- Water resources amounts decline on annual basis due to the fixed amounts of water according to OSLO agreements related to water share, climate change and water annual loss amounts due to traditional ways of water extraction.
- Women are the most affected groups regarding water access and management, nevertheless of the international Human Rights and treaties that the PA already signed; the application of laws needs revision and more focus on needs assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- There is a big difference in the issue of access and the issue of Management or control. Even if the women have their access to water resources it is not necessary they have the management or the control over water resources to be able to enjoy their right to water, the difference is big and they need to be aware of the difference.
- The issue starts from within, there has to be reforms related to the laws application, systems, bylaws, guidelines, regulations, policies and practices on ground and public awareness to ensure the equal distribution, access and management, and to ensure gender balance, mainstreaming, equality and equity related to women access and control to water.
- The different institutions (ministries, NGOs, universities, research and standards institutions, and private sector) need to collaborate for complementarity and for better results; this include coordination and division of national strategies.
- Finally, the different players and institutions including, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and universities have to work on national reporting standards including gender indicators which reveal the gender mainstreaming standards, the gender equality, equity and balance, and awareness raising in order to have clear and sufficient reporting related to qualitative and quantitative indicators showing the levels of access and management/control of women over water resources.