

Towards
Gender Equality
in
the Palestinian
Territories

A Profile on Gender Relations



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Census can also be found at PCBS's web site (<http://www.pcbs.org>). The report has also benefited from data from the National Poverty Report 1998 and the data and analytical reports of UNSCO, among others. It should be noted that some data is subject to seasonal and event-specific variations, such as labor force statistics in general and unemployment figures in particular. The general trends in this report hold fairly constant. The Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University may be contacted for any further clarifications or explanations of data.

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Executive Summary

This country gender profile for the Palestinian Territories was prepared as the five-year transitional period mandated under the Oslo agreements drew to a close in May 1999. It provided an opportunity to evaluate, at least in brief, the wealth of new information, data, projects and initiatives in this period, both in order to understand the structural constraints and opportunities for gender equality in Palestine and to point to new directions for gender-aware developmental and rights-based strategies for the society as a whole.

As Palestinian society enters a new phase and attempts to set a course for human development, human capital may well be its key resource, given the weak natural resource base and other political and economic constraints. The potential for social and economic development will be stunted if women are marginalized from the development process, and their work and contributions undervalued and underutilized. At the same time and in difficult circumstances, both Palestinian men and women are in the process of defining and claiming their rights as citizens, within the context of yet unfulfilled national rights and aspirations. Grounding women's rights into this larger framework of citizenship and national rights is also crucial to prevent marginalization, and even hostility and misunderstanding.

To date, development and rights-based approaches to gender issues in Palestine have not been fully integrated, sometimes weakening these initiatives. This profile hopes to contribute to strengthening the strategic link between rights and development – between legal reform and human rights on one hand, and poverty alleviation and employment creation on the other – through an examination of issues, indicators, initiatives and opportunities in six key areas: health, education, labor and economy, poverty law and human rights, and political participation.

This executive summary highlights the major gender equality issues related to development identified in each of the areas covered by the profile. Readers are referred to the report itself for a discussion of the overall context for consideration of gender equality issues in West Bank and Gaza, and detailed discussions of developments, initiatives and issues in specific sectors. Annexes A-C delineate gender integration and policy mechanisms in the Palestinian Authority (A), the policies of the donor community (B), and the history and

contemporary structure of the Palestinian women's movement (C).

Law and Human Rights

The women's movement has emerged from the transitional period with a strong awareness and growing expertise in addressing legal issues from the standpoint of gender equality. A gender agenda for legal reform has been developed and "ratified" through the model parliament process, although the overall strategy for personal status law reform remains a subject for sustained discussion. Developing a successful strategy requires further linking of legal reform with the needs and interests of women in various social and economic settings (and significant numbers of men) in Palestinian society in order to mobilize crucial public support.

Initiatives for gender equality in the law cannot be successful without the strengthening of the Palestinian legal system, the capacity of an independent judiciary and the promotion of the rule of law and human rights in general. Initiatives to address these issues within a framework of gender equality should be encouraged.

Important directions in the area of law and human rights include:

- **Engendering the peace process by integrating gender into the critical negotiating issues**, with particular attention to the problems and rights of women refugees, the right of family reunification, and to problems of residency in Jerusalem.
- **Linking women's rights to national and citizen's rights, and placing these rights in a developmental context. Actualizing the slogan "women's rights are human rights"** through working links between women's and human rights organizations, including joint campaigns.
- **Linking efforts to draft and lobby for gender-aware legislation, particularly family law, with public campaigns that identify basic needs of women and men in society.**
- **Linking law and development by utilizing legal reform and legal literacy to address the needs of poor women**, through legal protection for informal, domestic and agricultural workers, gender-aware social security and welfare legislation, and assisting

poor women to attain their legal rights to maintenance, inheritance, or other assets.

Political participation

Palestinian civil society generally evolved in a pluralistic and progressive direction in the period of military occupation, as the population sought democratic alternatives to counter repression and as the full participation of the society was sought in the national struggle. This experience created the often-voiced aspiration to avoid the centralist and bureaucratic state models prevalent in the Arab world, and advocated democratic and participatory leadership. The Palestinian women's movement devoted a great deal of effort and attention to an empowerment agenda for women, emphasizing skills, leadership, and democracy through a plethora of workshops and courses in all regions of the West Bank and Gaza. While of benefit both to individuals and the capacity of the movement, Palestinian governance in fact had problems of centralism and nepotism that hindered new forms of participation and women's leadership. Issues of participation were joined by issues of reform and change.

Representation of women remains critical, but within a framework that includes:

- **Participation in building new agendas.** The crisis in Palestinian nationalism and political parties means that increasing women's political participation requires not only a strategy of representation, but building new agendas that address social and economic issues facing Palestinian women and men within the context of citizen's and national rights.
- **Linking empowerment to basic needs**
Linking
women's representation to community
social and economic needs and development

Labour and economy

Israeli policy continues to put severe limitations on Palestinian economic planning and growth. Resulting imbalances in various sectors of the economy include: the enormous trade deficit with Israel, dramatic decline in the agricultural sector, limited and under-capitalized manufacturing and industrial sectors, and heavy dependence on employment in Israel. The political-economic situation constrains the creation of viable alterna-

tives to employment in Israel. Most recent job creation has been in the public sector and through semi-formal and informal sector household self-employment strategies. Unemployment rates of men and women remain high; at the same time, high fertility rates mean steady labour force growth and continuing urgent requirements for job creation.

The job creation and make-works schemes developed to absorb the male labor force who lost jobs in Israel ignored the issue of female joblessness. The absence of real commitment by donors or the Palestinian Authority to female employment illustrates a lack of understanding of the link between female employment and economic and human development. Major gender equality and development issues in the labour and economy sector include:

- **Links between female employment, fertility and household survival strategies.** The high disparity between income earners and income dependents in Palestinian society has multiple and negative outcomes. The pivotal role of female employment in not only reducing fertility but in redressing many of the socio-economic challenges facing family well-being and human development has not been recognized by policy-makers and the development community working in Palestine. Female employment would play a positive role in raising familial living standards, investments in children's education and well-being and ending the cycle that produces the current dependency ratios on both the micro and macro levels.
- **Major structural obstacles to women's entry into the formal labor force,** indicated by low employment rates in the formal economy in conjunction with persistently high female unemployment rates.
- **Limited opportunities and resources.** Constraints to women's employment and income are evident in all sectors.

Poverty

Until recently, gender-segregated views of poverty – reflected in job creation and social security measures targeted to men, and special social welfare measures targeting women – have restricted the development of comprehensive and effective policies. However, opportunities do exist to develop

more multifaceted and gender-aware approaches and programs, as both the Palestinian Authority and the donor community begin to address poverty in a more serious and systematic fashion. Employment generation, social security and social safety net programs should address the needs, circumstances and interest of men and women in their various settings. A wider approach that includes other aspects of poor women's lives – through the provision of legal counseling, reproductive health services, youth services with an emphasis on services for girls, training and educational opportunities – and explores opportunities both to learn more about the reasons for poverty and to find strategies to allow women and their families to exit from poverty.

Major gender equality and development concerns that should be considered in the formulation of anti-poverty strategies include:

- **Gender inequalities contribute to poverty and poverty contributes to gender inequalities.**
- **De facto female-headed households are major recipients of formal social assistance, but this assistance does not permit an exit from poverty or address other rights and needs of poor women.** The very low amount of monthly assistance means that poor households generally seek multiple forms of support, but even these coping strategies constitute survival, rather than mobility strategies, particularly for female-headed households, where access to income and resources is particularly limited. At the same time the poorest households – households of over 10 persons in Gaza, for example – often fall outside formal social assistance programs. Social assistance and poverty alleviation programs aimed at women have to address women who are located in different types of poor households.
- **Poor women are marginalized in Palestinian development and economic projects.**

Health

Palestinian health policies and programs at the governmental, UNRWA and NGO level have begun to move beyond treating women's health primarily within the framework of mother-child health which was the dominant perspective up

until the 1980s. However, resource constraints, including human resources, infrastructure priorities, and a non-developmental view of health contribute to a possible marginalization of women's health issues and to the non-sustainability of current initiatives, particularly if donor support decreases. It is thus important to develop initiatives and projects that link a gender-aware health and rights perspective to health entitlements for the entire population and to developmental objectives, such as clean and adequate water, adequate housing, environmental quality (particularly pesticides), and social security in old age, disability and chronic illness.

Major directions supporting gender equality and development include:

- **Holistic approaches to health** that take account of health status issues in the larger context of violence and conflict, including the differential impacts on women and men and on male and female children
- **Access to services and type of services**, with gaps particularly in mental health, adolescent, menopausal and post-natal services, as well as regional and socio-economic gaps between women.
- **Approaches to women's health and reproductive health** that encompass women's life cycle
- **Family planning within the wider context both of reproductive health and rights**, with specific understanding of population issues within the political, social and economic context of Palestinian society. The participation of both women and men in family planning is also important.
- **Support for health provisions and insurance for poor women**, particularly female-headed households, widows and the elderly, casual and informal laborers and others who fall outside the present health insurance entitlements.
- **Additional health education and services for adolescents**, including education in reproductive health and sexuality.

Education

The status of females compared to that of males in almost all levels of education (particularly in terms of enrolment) shows a smaller gender gap than other sectors (labor, health, governance etc.).

Gender equality and gender integration are taken more seriously in the Ministry of Education than in other ministries. However, the improvement in the educational level of females and the narrowing gender gap are not reflected in a greater share of women in the labor force or in public life as a whole. The education sector faces a major challenge in moving gender equality issues from the quantitative to qualitative levels if it is to contribute to effecting real changes in gender roles and responsibilities.

Major gender equality and development issues in education include:

- **Narrow range of female specialization.**
In higher education, girls primarily enroll in the humanities and in “soft” commerce and business tracks rather than technical fields such as engineering or computer science
- **Gender differences in dropout rates.**
While the gender gap in both enrolment and dropout rate is minimal in the lower grades, dropout rates increase and the gender gap grows as students move from one grade to another in the secondary cycle, dropout rates increase and the gender gap grows.
- **High demands of meeting basic needs.**

Introduction

The writing of a country gender profile for the Palestinian territories comes at both an apt and a difficult time. The timing is apt because the five-year transitional period mandated under the Oslo agreements drew to a close on 4 May 1999, although it was de facto extended, presumably until resolution of final status issues between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. This five-year period, with its achievements and frustrations, witnessed the institutionalization of the Palestinian Authority and concomitant initiatives to promote Palestinian development and democracy, whether by local organizations, including women's organizations, or by international donors, whose material aid was conceived as a critical element in sustaining the peace process. A country gender profile thus provides an opportunity to evaluate, at least in brief, the wealth of new information, data, projects and initiatives in this period, both in order to understand the structural constraints and opportunities for gender equality in Palestine, as well as to point to new directions for gender-aware developmental and rights-based strategies for the society as a whole.

The timing is also difficult, however, in that the future is precarious and difficult to predict. Although some form of statehood for Palestine may well be on the agenda, its territory, population and powers are deeply contested. This project is therefore a country profile for a country still in the making, and positing strategies for gender equality and development must therefore take into account both the current political context and the possibilities of positive and negative change.

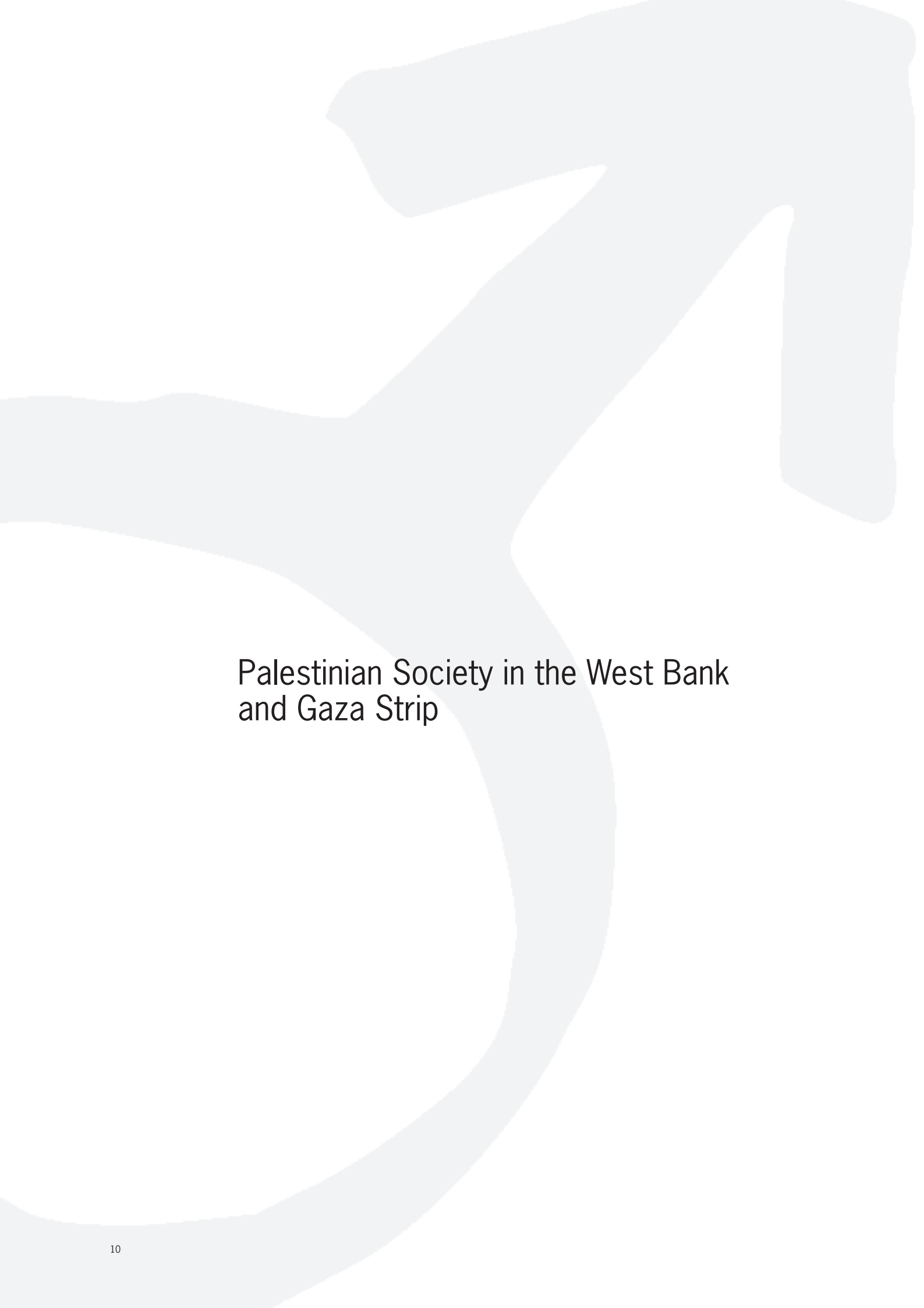
The political context and its economic and social consequences has consistently been an important factor in shaping the opportunities, or lack therefore, for Palestinian women and men to exercise and change their gender roles and responsibilities. As we examine the most obvious human development indicators in the chapters that follow, we find that Palestinian women inhabit a seemingly contradictory set of circumstances. On the one hand, rising educational levels, including a sharp rise in female literacy and in female enrolment in primary, secondary and post-secondary education, and high political involvement, including the development of a strong and visible women's movement, would seem to herald the expansion of women's roles and opportunities, and the accompanying positive development of society as a whole. On the other hand, persistent and unusually high fertility rates and unusually low formal labor force participation (both most acute in Gaza) would seem to signal major barriers for women, as well as having serious implications for

society, in restructuring the utilization of human resources.

A brief analysis of the societal context is given in the next section, and the indicators themselves are discussed sectorally. In discussing obstacles to the advancement of women in Arab societies, there has sometimes been a tendency to statically invoke "tradition and customs," or religion (Islam), as a sufficient explanation for restrictions on work, public life or family roles. The case of Palestinian women, however, points to the inadequacy of this framework. To take one pertinent example, the decided preference for sons in Palestinian society – which drives up fertility rates – certainly has roots in patriarchal tradition and values, but is better explained and addressed by also understanding the material circumstances of Palestinian families, where sons in particular and large families in general continue to be seen as the major source of security and family well-being in a highly insecure world. In the same vein, women's low labor force participation is better understood by examining how labor markets are gendered and restricted, than in simply invoking religious proscriptions against women's work outside the home.

As Palestinian society now enters a new phase and attempts to set a course for human development, human capital may well be its key resource, given the weak natural resource base and other political and economic constraints. The potential for social and economic development will be stunted if women are marginalized from the development process, and their work and contributions undervalued and underutilized. At the same time and in difficult circumstances, both Palestinian men and women are in the process of defining and claiming their rights as citizens, within the context of yet unfulfilled national rights and aspirations. Grounding women's rights into this larger framework of citizenship and national rights is also crucial to prevent marginalization, and even hostility and misunderstanding.

To date, developmental and rights-based approaches to gender issues in Palestine have not been fully integrated, sometimes weakening these initiatives. This profile hopes to contribute to strengthening the strategic link between rights and development – between legal reform and human rights on one hand, and poverty alleviation and employment creation on the other – through an examination of issues, indicators, initiatives and opportunities in six key areas: health, education, labor and economy, poverty law and human rights, and political participation.



Palestinian Society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

To understand the structure of society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGs), it is important to note that these territories are actually two separate fragments of a larger Palestinian social structure that was dismembered in 1948. A crucial outcome of the war of 1948 was the loss of the main centers of Palestinian urban economic and cultural life (the coastal cities) and the loss of the majority of the educated and upper classes who upon becoming refugees, migrated overseas in search of economic opportunities. Until 1948, the West Bank had been a peasant hinterland of the coastal urban cities, while Gaza was a marginal and poor traditional market center. Thus, Gaza's originally poor population was overwhelmed by the influx of refugees who overnight tripled the population. The West Bank was relatively more able to absorb the population influx, although its agricultural economy was not capable of providing more than marginal labor opportunities to the population there. At the same time, the West Bank remains the only area of original Palestine whose social and economic structure was not entirely destroyed and bears some continuity with the historical past.

1948–1967

Between 1948 and 1967, Gaza and the West Bank were completely cut-off from each other, the former being under Egyptian administration while the latter becoming part of Jordan. Labor migration in search of economic opportunities was an ongoing phenomenon in both regions. While women from the middle classes or with higher education were part of this migration to especially the Gulf, many poorer refugee and peasant women remained running the family farm or household while spouses migrated. The larger outcome of these processes was internally a large degree of social and economic leveling – at the same time at which the lack of a central state and the dependence on labor migration for economic betterment meant that few forces of national cohesion existed.

These processes also had important implications for family structures and gender ideologies. Actual family structures tended to become fragmented in the processes of dispersal and later labor migration. At the same time, impoverishment, political crisis and insecurity worked to strengthen the importance of the family as a basic force of economic and social solidarity and support. In addition, the political role of family

structures was strengthened by the ruling authorities that used “clan” structures as a means to control the population as part of a policy of hindering the re-emergence of modern political party structures. These massive changes also placed a special and contradictory burden on women. On the one hand, material loss, labor migration and dispersal presented them with new roles and responsibilities – while on the other hand, the shock and insecurity felt by the society as a whole, tended to impose on them the crucial symbolic role of representing continuity with the past – women became markers of national identity and “tradition”.

Military Occupation

Israel's occupation deepened some of these features while also changing them. The economic integration of the WBGs into Israel has had far-reaching implications for the development of Palestinian society. Access to wage labor in Israel – allowed for peasant and refugee populations to get access to income locally; simultaneously Israeli integration put limits on capital formation in West Bank and Gaza – limiting the growth of a wealthy middle class. As such, the occupation also intensified certain processes of social and economic leveling among the population. Access to wage labor in Israel also had implications for the structure of the family. Young generations of males were now able to make a living independent of familial and patriarchal authority – thus in some manner leading to an undermining of patriarchal authority over young males – while the same was not true for females who had little access to Israeli labor markets. For females this process seemed to set in place a situation in which authority over them (as well as dependence) shifted from larger familial structures to husbands within the confines of the nuclear family.

National Movement

The rise of the national movement in the occupied territories since the 1970s has also played an important role in challenging familial authority over the younger generations – as well as in providing opportunities for social mobility. Additionally it was able to present opportunities for younger generations of women to renegotiate aspects of gender roles within Palestinian society. The national movement provided sources of

political authority to younger generations through modern party structures that bypassed and marginalized the older clan forms of political authority. By creating structures that gave women active roles in national resistance and organization it was able to legitimize new roles for women as individuals independent of familial authority – and to some extent, challenge women’s symbolic roles as bearers of tradition. The growth of subsidized institutions of higher education was an important component of these larger processes – providing spaces where younger generations of male and female could shape new identities separate from the family, gain access to new tools of social capital and different forms of knowledge. At the same time, the larger constraints of the economy meant that especially among women – higher education did not necessarily translate into access to the market.

Intifada and its Aftermath

The Palestinian uprising of 1987 initially strengthened these processes, and then set the stage for a relative reversal of them. The first stage of the intifada generated a range of formal and informal political structures that represented alternative ways of organizing to the family and “traditional” hierarchies across all sectors of the society. Much of the early leadership came from the generation who had recently gotten access to higher education – and thus imbued the uprising with many of the values of democracy, self-help and empowerment that had been part of that experience. For women, this early phase was an opportunity to both extend and widen the new gender roles and identities that had emerged during the 1970s.

By 1990, however, these positive trends had been radically reversed due to both direct political repression of the uprising by Israel added to the enormous economic and physical costs of sustaining the mass rebellion. Mass imprisonment, long-term closure of schools, the breakdown of internal political authority and growing militarization of the intifada all led to a retrenchment of the population from the public to the realm of the safe haven of the home and family. This process was particularly acute for women who were seen as most vulnerable to the anarchy of the streets – at the same time in which their burden as caretakers for the well being of family members seems to have increased. The sustained economic hardship

faced by the population during this period was dramatically worsened with the Gulf War. The prolonged curfew which kept the population from the workplace, immediately followed by a sustained closure which greatly reduced the numbers of population allowed to work in Israel has led to a growth in both relative and absolute poverty among the population. An important outcome, was the re-strengthening of the family as a source of economic and social support in the face of heightened economic and long-term political insecurity. The rise of Islamist movements presented both a challenge to Palestinian nationalism and to women’s expanding roles within it and the society as a whole.

Tradition and Change

These same social, economic and political processes that have shaped the differing features of Palestinian civil society have also shaped Palestinian culture and notions of what constitutes tradition. Approaches that view Palestinian culture as somehow fixed and homogeneous cannot explain both the radical changes that have taken place in everything from ways of dress, practices of religion, forms of consumption and family patterns. At the same time, cultural change has not been linear (i.e. from tradition to modernity) nor have various “local” and subcultures been subsumed under an overarching mass culture. Gender roles, norms and identities in Palestinian society have thus been effected by these larger socio-economic processes and by related processes of cultural change. But the outcome is varied according to region, class, religion and sub-group identities.



Law and Human Rights

Context:

After three decades of living under military occupation and five years of limited transitional self-rule, Palestinian women and men in the West Bank and Gaza have experienced law and human rights largely through their abuse and denial. The last period, however, has witnessed both Palestinian initiatives to develop laws and serious obstacles to enacting legislation and promoting the rule of law and human rights. In this complicated context, issues of gender equality in the law began to be addressed, primarily by the Palestinian women's movement, finding both allies and opponents.

On 4 May 1999, the five-year transitional period mandated by the interim peace agreement (the Oslo agreements) between Israel and the PLO drew to a close, although the impasse in final status negotiations caused a de facto extension. Final status agreements, which should have resolved the outstanding issues of Jerusalem, settlements and refugees, have made little progress to date. Nonetheless, some form of Palestinian statehood is on the agenda, although its territory, population, and sovereignty seems to be very much in question. It is thus crucial that the experience of the past five years should be carefully evaluated in order to strengthen and adapt gender-aware legal reform and rights strategies for this next phase.

Taking inspiration from a similar initiative by South African women, the Palestinian women's movement began the transitional period with the issuance of a well thought-out Palestinian Women's Charter, which affirmed gender equality and women's rights in economic, political and social life. The Charter was a basis for a series of initiatives by women's groups utilizing a gender equality strategy to advocate legal reform, culminating in a year-long model parliament project that formulated and passed draft legislation in labor, personal status and criminal law, among others. While the legal reform strategy led to increased legal awareness and expertise, gender-aware draft legislation in a number of critical areas and important public debate, its guiding assumption – that the Palestinian Legislative Council would be able to pass significant new legislation – proved untrue. Even the Basic Law, the only primary legislation mandated in the Oslo agreements, was not signed into law. The limitations of the transitional period are largely responsible for this failure, as well as problems of powers and responsibilities between

the executive and the legislative. In the next period, it is possible that these initiatives will bear real fruit.

In the same period, Palestinian human rights organizations struggled to formulate new strategies to promote human rights and the rule of law in a complex and changing reality. While keeping their historic focus on the continued Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, particularly torture and maltreatment, arbitrary arrest, illegal land confiscation, restrictions on freedom of movement and restrictions on rights of residency in Jerusalem, these organizations also sought to encourage the rule of law in Palestinian society and to direct attention to abuses by the Palestinian Authority and its numerous security and police forces. Concerns with women's rights and gender equality had only an erratic presence in the agendas of these organizations, while women's NGOs sometimes addressed Israeli human rights violations, but much more rarely grappled with the thorny issues of human rights and the rule of law under the Palestinian Authority. At the end of the period, the public debate sparked by the model parliament led women's organizations to strengthen their link with human rights organizations, and a process may be underway where common initiatives bring together gender equality issues with the issues of the rule of law and democratic freedoms.

Public debate raised by the model parliament underlined the sensitive nature of personal status issues (family law) in the Arab and Islamic world, particularly in the face of political Islamist movements. Problems of personal status are sometimes reduced to the problem of Islamic *shari'a* (Islamic jurisprudence) which organizes gender relations on the basis of complementarity, rather than equality, but in fact are better considered in the wider context of the social organization of society and its legal underpinnings. In Palestinian society, then, the question becomes whether changing social organization (of families and households, male and female labor, marriage patterns, and public participation) and the needs and interests of women and men require legal reform. The fact that prevailing personal status laws are of either Jordanian (West Bank) or Egyptian/Ottoman (Gaza) origin also argue in favor of a Palestinian family law that reflects local society and its dynamics. Social change, however, also brings reaction. Women become a marker of cultural and national preser-

vation in the face of troubling change, uncertainty and conflict, circumstances which characterize Palestinian society today.

At issue for both women and men are pressing issues of citizenship and citizen's rights as Palestine emerges as the last state of the twentieth century. The statelessness of Palestinian refugees, particularly in Lebanon, is a critical problem which women and men both share and which may affect women in different and acute ways. In the Palestinian territories, citizenship as claims and entitlements is being negotiated in daily transactions, with accompanying trends of patronage that are generally detrimental to women, the poor and the marginalized. Placing women and the majority of society at the center of the struggle for equal citizenship is the difficult challenge of the next period.

Basic Law, Draft Legislation and Laws Enacted

The failure to date to enact the Basic Law (mandated in the Oslo agreements) means that there is as of yet no constitutional framework of citizen's rights. The enactment of the Basic Law is still a critical issue for Palestinian democracy, as a Basic Law was passed by the Palestinian Legislative Council but not ratified by the Executive. The successive drafts in the Palestinian Legislative Council, however, weakened gender equality provisions: in the draft passed by the Council, a single article forbids discrimination "because of race, language, religion, sex or disability." The *shari'a* is cited as "a principal source of legislation," a formula similar to many Arab states.

At the same time, other draft laws that was of central concern to women's organizations, human rights organizations and other NGOs, like draft labor legislation, were also not enacted. According to the official schedule, only thirteen laws were enacted in the two years between the establishment of the Legislative Council and the end of 1998, and most of these were establishing government agencies or one-time regulations. One of the most important laws was the Law to Encourage Investment, in which the Legislative Council barely participated. The women's movement, and legal reformers in general, have to empower the Council, as well as lobby it.

Gender, Equality and Development Issues

- Engendering the peace process by integrating gender into the critical negotiating issues. Particular attention should be paid to the problems and rights of women refugees, the right of family reunification, and to problems of residency in Jerusalem. These issues, particularly advancing the right of return of women refugees under UN Resolution 194, were prominent in the National Strategy, but need concrete strategies and mechanisms.
- Linking women's rights to national and citizen's rights, and placing these rights in a development context. Promoting the national entitlements of women as derived from their past contribution to nationalist struggle and their importance to present and future national development is essential in this context. Here, educational and cultural consciousness-raising, through schools, theatre, television, radio, could be combined with specific campaigns for the rights of women ex-prisoners, families with imprisoned, injured, or disabled members and victims of house demolition or land confiscation. Issues such as early marriage, the right to work, and freedom of movement should be placed in the context of their importance to national development, as well as gender equality.
- Actualizing the slogan "women's rights are human rights" through working links between women's and human rights organizations, including joint campaigns. National rights, rule of law, equal rights for all citizens without discrimination, and strengthening of an independent judiciary are crucial elements for common work.
- Linking efforts to draft and lobby for gender-aware legislation, particularly family law, with public campaigns that identify basic needs of women and men in society. Close attention to the social and economic needs and interests of various social groups in society (particularly the poor and vulnerable and working class families) can serve to link gender equality with the needs of a wide majority of society, and weaken oppositional arguments that legal reform and women's rights is in the interest of only a small Westernized minority.
- Linking law and development by utilizing legal reform and legal literacy to address the needs of poor women, through legal protection for informal workers, social security and welfare legislation, and assisting poor women to attain their legal rights to maintenance, inheritance, or other resources.

Indicators

Gender Equality Provisions

- The Palestinian Declaration of Independence (November 1998) affirms equality between women and men in its provisions. Successive drafts of the Basic Law prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex (as well as religion, disability, political opinion, ethnicity and race), although affirm *Shari'a* as a principal source of legislation.

Personal Status

- The **legal age for marriage** is set at 15 for females and 16 for males in the West Bank. In Gaza, the minimum age for marriage with the consent of a judge is legally set at puberty, with the age of legal majority at 17 for females and 18 for males. At present, women in about 25% of marriages are 16 or under. A vigorous campaign to raise the marriage age to 18 is being waged by a wide coalition.
- **Polygamy** is allowed, with no condition to notify the existing or intended wife. The proportion of polygamous marriages (4%) is relatively low. The final session of the model parliament in Gaza voted to ban polygamy.
- **Divorce:** Although a husband may unilaterally divorce his wife, the most common form of divorce is by mutual consent, whereby women often give up their financial rights in order to obtain a divorce from their husbands. Divorce is relatively low at 1.1% of the female population over 14, but higher in certain populations: for example 6.5% of women residents of refugee camps age 40–44 are divorced. Legal reform initiatives have focused both on abolishing unilateral divorce and on strengthening women's claims to child custody and support.
- **Inheritance:** Although women are entitled under law to inheritance (a daughter receives one-half the share of a son), many women renounce their rights in order to maintain family social support and relations. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women advocates guaranteeing "women's legal rights for social security and inheritance rights," but this area to date has not been addressed by systematic campaigns.

Labor Rights

- Existing labor legislation does not protect domestic labor, agricultural labor, informal labor, or family enterprises, whereas women are

disproportionately located in all of these areas. In addition, places of work of less than five employees are excluded from most provisions. Draft labor legislation notably extends maternity leave to conform to international standards, but does not adequately protect informal or family labor.

Nationality Rights

- The women's movement has successfully lobbied for women to receive Palestinian passports without the permission of a male guardian, as well as passports for their children, but there is no general nationality legislation as yet that regulates citizenship and its rights.

Legal Profession

- In 1995, about 11% of lawyers or lawyers-in-training in Gaza and 29% in the West Bank were women. This proportion will probably rise as current enrolment in the new law school at Al Quds University is 42% female. However, during the past five years, only two judges have been women, and no female judges are allowed in *shari'a* or ecclesiastical courts which govern personal status laws in the Muslim and Christian communities respectively.

Violence against Women

- Past surveys identify domestic violence as an important problem, but a majority of respondents are against resort to the police. Existing crime statistics do not contain adequate data on violence against women, but women's hotlines are actively used by women seeking protection from rape, incest and other forms of violence.

Reproductive Rights

- Abortion is illegal and statistics for illegal abortions are unavailable.

Key Actors and Initiatives

The initiatives for gender-aware legal reform have been conceived and activated primarily by women's NGOs, particularly the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, as the umbrella for local women's committees and NGOs, and the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling, which has the most legal and human rights expertise and which spearheaded the model parliament project. The General Union for Palestinian Women has formally sponsored the post-Beijing National Strategy, which advocates legal reform on the basis of gender equality, and has lobbied for specific measures, like raising the age of marriage to 18.

The women's movement is engaged in a generally positive dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, particularly the Legislative Council and, to a lesser extent, the Executive, and has met with success in specific measures, such as changing passport regulations or combatting specific acts of discrimination. The fact that the Authority's main political opposition is Islamist raises the danger of gender issues becoming a political football, which can be countered by the women's movement developing strong public allies in many sectors of civil society.

In the wake of the model parliament, initiatives to follow through with the comprehensive legal reform advocated there is the main task of the next period. Initiatives to develop a Palestinian family law, to develop awareness and utilization of international instruments (such as CEDAW), and to widen existing specific campaigns, such as against early marriage, are currently underway. Protection for women against domestic violence, as well as gender-sensitization and training of police, is a major concern of two women's NGOs, WCLAC and the Working Women's Society, while the Ministry of Social Affairs has proposals to develop shelters for women under consideration.

Analysis and Opportunities

The women's movement has emerged from the transitional period with a strong awareness and growing expertise in addressing legal issues from the standpoint of gender equality. A gender agenda for legal reform has been developed, and "ratified" through the model parliament process, although the overall strategy for personal status law reform remains a subject for sustained discussion, the primary question being whether to advocate civil law in personal status matters or to promote legal reform within the *shar'ia* system. Developing a successful strategy requires further linking of legal reform with the needs and interests of women in various social and economic settings (and significant numbers of men) in Palestinian society in order to mobilize crucial public support. Here, linking redressing the unequal features of existing law with support for family survival and development is also important. Support for women's NGOs to reach the community, as well as training and support for women legal professionals and legal counseling tied to poverty alleviation for poor women and their households are interventions that would be timely and beneficial.

However, initiatives for gender equality in the law cannot be successful without the strengthening of the Palestinian legal system, the capacity of an independent judiciary and the promotion of the rule of law and human rights in general. Initiatives to address these issues within a framework of gender equality should be encouraged, and alliances between the women's movement and non-governmental organizations and campaigns promoting human rights, the rule of law, and democracy should be promoted.



Political Participation

Context

Like women in nationalist struggles elsewhere, Palestinian women entered public life through their roles in national resistance, ranging from forms of political protest (street demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions) to formal participation in political parties and political decision-making. As Palestinian politics moves from resistance to state-building, however, the question arises: will women be able to enter formal political institutions and take a greater role in the decision-making of their society? Do they generally gain more equal gender roles? At the end of wars or national revolutions, women are often expected to return to their domestic chores and the majority of married women are once again barred from the public sphere. There are many examples to show that when conflict is ended, women find themselves, once again, unequal citizens.

For Palestinian women the struggle for gender equality has been inextricably bound up with the national struggle for self-determination. (For a brief history of the Palestinian women's movement and its contemporary structure, see Annex C). On the practical side, nationalism has provided a legitimate base for Palestinian women's activities outside the home. Strategically, Palestinian women gained a very rich political experience through their participation in informal politics during the national struggle, and were aware that organising themselves during the national struggle could empower women in social and political arenas. Therefore, until 1997, almost 23% of the administrative personnel of charitable organisations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) were women, and the largest and most effective mass-based organisations were women's committees. Women also participated in the labor unions and other professionals and students' unions, but their percentage remained very low.

Soon after Madrid peace talks were launched in 1991, Palestinian women began actively preparing themselves for leadership and decision-making roles and the building of an infrastructure for Palestinian statehood. While valuable experience was gained during the Intifada, it was generally recognized that new kinds of skills would be required for the future. In this stage it is presumed that the national authority together with the people will continue to struggle to reconstruct Palestinian society after over three decades of

military rule and half a century of dispersion and exile. However, the Palestinian Authority has generally not promoted a participatory approach to nation building, although line ministries and the Legislative Council do conduct dialogue and even, in the case of ministries, plan and implement projects with NGOs. Indeed, the security-led nature of the Oslo agreements and the constraints of the transitional phase have sometimes meant an emphasis on control of citizens, rather than their participation.

The whole Palestinian population, but women in particular, are confronted with major challenges to participate in the crucial stage of state-building in the face of processes of exclusion and the undefined nature of citizenship and citizen's rights. For example, in 1991 the infra-structural (technical committees) established by the PLO after the Madrid conference had only six women in 300 appointees. Later, due to initiative of women activists to establish a Women's Affairs Technical Committee and to increase women's representation on other committees, this number grew to 66 women in 366-member Technical Committees.

When the Palestinian Authority was established, the first government included only one female minister, and one under-secretary. Inside the ministries, some women were appointed in other high positions at the director-general and director levels. When the electoral law was discussed, the Palestinian women's movement called for a quota in the Palestinian Legislative Council to guarantee their representation. Another proposal regarding the parliamentary elections was that elected members of either sex should number not less than one third of the total membership. However, the Palestinian Authority officials generally asserted that the Palestinian State is democratic and both men and women are equally welcome to run for office.

Women's minority status in the Palestinian political parties limits their participation in governmental and legislative structures since these parties provide a pool of candidates for appointments to the expanding Palestinian Authority bureaucracy. This relationship is also evident in PLO structures.

The Oslo agreements, among their other effects, brought a crisis in Palestinian nationalism and, as the transitional period advanced, increasing frustration as progress in the peace process towards fulfillment of Palestinian rights was

stalemated. Furthermore theoretical poverty and organizational paralysis have marked the political parties, including the parties of the left, as its leadership lost the ability to mobilize people and solve their problems. The relative strength of the Islamic opposition draws from its clear agenda and its strong organizational and service networks.

The recession of secular and left influence has undermined the role of women in the public sphere. This change did not only happen in political parties, but also in the mass-based organisations and other institutions in the public arena, such as the women's organisations and the labour union. A process of disenfranchisement can be identified where women's presence in the public space is regulated, suggesting that women's visible and active role in the national struggle threatened the gender order, leading to a systematic reassertion of male power. This process in turn has spurred the women's movement to develop increasingly clear gender and feminist agendas.

Gender Equality and Development Issues

- **Participation in Building New Agendas:** The crisis in Palestinian nationalism and political parties means that increasing women's political participation requires not only a strategy of representation, but building new agendas that address social and economic issues facing Palestinian women and men within the context of citizen's and national rights. Citizen's rights cannot simply be claimed by women (or men); they must be constituted through participation. The women's movement has the experience and the ability to contribute to these agendas and to place gender equality and development issues in the context of these social and economic agendas.
- **Linking Empowerment to Basic Needs:** Giving the deteriorating economic situation and inadequate state of public services and goods, strategies and projects for empowerment and participation need to be linked to basic needs. The need for this link has emerged clearly in women's movements work with women at the grassroots level and has been implemented in at least one major project, the Sanabel project of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, where women in deprived communities identify an important basic need in the community and empowerment and

advocacy training is directed at giving women the tools to address this need.

Within these frameworks, representation does remain crucial, as the indicators below show.

Indicators:

- The disenfranchisement started before the Palestinian state came into existence, as there are no women on the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, whose 16 members are all men. As of the end of 1996, women comprised 7.5% of the 744-member PNC, the representative body of the PLO. Of 100 members of the PLO's Central Council only three are women.
- Although several women played important roles in the Madrid Peace Conference and subsequent public negotiations, women were excluded from the crucial peace process negotiations and their outcomes, the Oslo, Cairo and Wye River agreements, which were designed and signed by men.
- Women's contribution, and sacrifice, to the nationalist struggle is present, but not captured well in existing statistics. In 1997, five women prisoners remained in the Israeli jails compared with 500 male prisoners; about 10% of those injured by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the WBGS between 1987–1996 were women; 7% of Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers or settlers between 1987 and 1997 were women. These statistics cannot capture the multiple informal roles of community and family support and mobilization, or the sacrifices and burdens, both gender-specific (such as abortions due to tear gas, sexual harassment from soldiers) or with differential gender impact (home demolitions, school closures).
- Today men dominate public life in Palestine. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of women in leadership positions is not even 10%. In the cabinet there is only one female minister and one under-secretary. Of the 185 general directors in thirteen ministries there are only 22 women or less than 10%. Women are found in other positions in slightly higher proportion, such as 15% directors, 25% heads of departments.
- Female participation in the leadership of political parties is relatively low. Despite the

impressive activism of many women's organizations, women are sharply underrepresented in the Central Committees of the political parties, women's percentage is low, 10% of the Central Committee of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, 19% of Fida's Central Committee, 19.5% of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and only 5% of the Central Committee of Fateh, the largest by far of the political factions and the main political party in power today.

- Only 35 out of the 672 candidates for the Palestinian Legislative Council in the January 1996 elections were women. Only five were elected, two of whom became ministers for varying periods. Only nine of 25 female candidates were nominated by their political parties. five women were nominated by Fateh, the largest and most conservative of the parties, and four women by parties on the left.
- In professional and trade associations, women's participation is also very low. In 1997, women comprised only 7.6% of organised labour, and among professionals unions (doctors, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, journalists and veterinarians) comparatively more women were found in health-related fields, particularly dentistry and pharmacy. In the WBGS 11.7% of medical doctors, 8.5% of lawyers, and 7.4% of engineers were women. Women are more visible in Palestinian NGO networks.

Initiatives and Key Actors

Palestinian civil society generally evolved in a pluralistic and progressive direction in the period of military occupation, as the population sought democratic alternatives to counter repression and as the full participation of the society was sought in the national struggle. This experience created the often-voiced aspiration to avoid the centralist and bureaucratic state models prevalent in the Arab world, and advocated democratic and participatory leadership. The Palestinian women's movement devoted a great deal of effort and attention to an empowerment agenda for women, emphasizing skills, leadership, and democracy through a plethora of workshops and courses in all regions of the WBGS. While of benefit both to individuals and the capacity of the movement, Palestinian governance in fact had problems of centralism and

nepotism that hindered new forms of participation and women's leadership. Issues of participation were joined by issues of reform and change.

Post-Beijing National Strategy and Government Policies

The Interministerial Coordinating Committee on gender issues (see Appendix A) and the General Union of Palestinian Women issued "A National Strategy for the Advancement of Palestinian Women" in June 1997, drawing on the Beijing Platform for Action. The document is more a statement of principles than an actionable strategy, but it does offer broad guidelines for rights and legal reform, as well as objectives in health, education, and the economy among others. It strongly affirms women's commitment and roles in achieving Palestinian national independence.

Inside the Authority, various types of gender units or coordinating committees (about ten across ministries, including the Gender Unit at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics) work to implement these objectives sectorally, and the Coordinating Committee itself oversees at least one major project in vocational education (see chapter 8). However, the institutionalization of the ministries – and hence their ability to formulate new policies – has been an uneven and slow process, and thus gender integration into policy is very much at an initial stage.

At the beginning of the transitional period, the Palestinian Women's Movement drew up a "Women's Charter" as an expression of women's socio-political development. In this document Palestinian women addressed women's issues which are linked to the struggle for justice, democracy, gender equality, and development". The charter essentially delineated gender equivalence and a secular vision of women's rights. It also adopted the UN CEDAW and called for full protection of equal rights in political participation, including decision-making at the highest levels of education, work and land ownership; an end to discriminatory legislation against women; legal protection against family violence and restrictions of women's freedom; and a woman's right to pass on citizen-

ship to husband and children. The women's movement also devoted enormous effort at the grassroots to the January 1996 elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, but was more successful in mobilizing women voters than in electing women candidates, due partially to an electoral system and conditions that favored the dominant political party.

On the governmental level, the Department of Gender Planning and Development in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation was founded with the aim to ensure gender equality at the national level in all spheres of life, and to enhance women's potentials to participation in decision making at all levels. The department is responsible for establishing women's departments in the various ministries and provides the training needs of women employed at ministries.

Analysis and Opportunities

The close of the transitional stage and the possibility of some form of statehood once again offers an avenue for increasing participation in executive, legislative and judicial structures. The lessons of the transitional stage, however, warn that increased participation requires empowerment of women in the political parties as well as developing clear agendas that link women's participation and rights with basic developmental and economic needs of the society as a whole.

Elections for municipalities and local authorities, postponed during the transitional phase, might offer women candidates an especially strong field of action to link local community needs and gender issues. The women's movement has to date lobbied for a quota of 30% for these elections; more discussion is probably due to assess and activate this demand.

And the coming of statehood also means an opportunity for democratic and gender agendas to coincide and for the women's movement to not only work for participation, but for participation in democratic, participatory and accountable governance and in active citizenship. Women inside political parties, the women's movement, human rights and development NGOs, and other unions and associations may be natural allies in the next critical period.



Labor and Economy

Context

Since 1967 the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGs) economies have been profoundly shaped by their relationship to Israel and following Oslo, Israeli policy continues to put severe limitations on Palestinian economic planning and growth. During the occupation, the major contours of Israeli economic policy towards the WBGs were to allow relatively free movement of labor and commodities between Israel and the WBGs while restricting its trade with the rest of the world. Major restrictions were put on Palestinian agriculture, manufacturing and industry that might compete with Israeli producers. This was combined with minimal public sector development for the occupation period.

By the end of the 1980s, the effects of these policies could be seen in the strong imbalances in various sectors of the economy. The WBGs had an enormous trade deficit with Israel, its agricultural sector had declined dramatically, manufacturing and industry remained limited and under-capitalized. While commerce was the largest economic activity within the WBGs, employment in Israel, almost exclusively unskilled and semi-skilled male labor, accounted for more than 40% of the Palestinian labor force and provided more than 30% of Palestine's GNP.

Since 1992, this overall situation has worsened dramatically due to the intermittent but almost constant closure of West Bank and Gaza labor and goods to Israel. Since that period real per capita GNP has declined by 35%, labor flows to Israel dropped from 120,000 on a monthly basis in 1992 to under 25,000 in 1996 – leading to an unemployment rate in Gaza of 39% and 24% in the West Bank during the same period and commensurate drop in income. Israel's continued macro-control of the Palestinian economy has made the creation of long term viable alternatives to the Israeli labor market almost impossible. While a number of short-term emergency make-works schemes operated during the worst closure years (1992–1996), longer-term alternative employment has come about predominantly through public sector employment (approximately 18% of the labor force) – with new jobs concentrated in the security services and governmental bureaucracy. Additionally, the post-1992 period has probably witnessed major growth in semi-formal and informal sector self-employment strategies by households within

the WBGs. Long term development strategies put forward by the Palestinian Authority and supported by donor efforts include a series of industrial parks located on borders of the WBGs with Israel. The attempt by the Palestinian Authority to attract foreign investment into the WBGs has been severely hampered, both by Israeli security policies and by the Authority's lack of creating a sound regulatory environment for investors.

In addition to the constraints put on Palestinian economic development by political economic factors, is the formidable challenge posed to the economy by current and long term demographic trends. The age structure of the Palestinian population is extremely young, with 47% of the population under 15 years of age. Given current fertility rates, the Palestinian labor force grows at a rate of approximately 6% percent per year – translating into an average of 4,600 job seekers entering the work force each month. It has been estimated that half a million new jobs will need to be created by the year 2002, simply to keep employment at its current levels.

Gender Equality and Development Issues

The link between female employment, economic and human development are still not understood by policymakers. The issue of female employment is still framed largely in terms of "rights" – with the unintended effect of marginalizing it from economic planning as a luxury issue. A major gap in understanding that the investments in female employment has profoundly positive long term development impacts for the population as a whole still needs to be argued. Aside from its important direct impact on economic growth and development, it has a key role in population, sustainability and development, as discussed below.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics assesses the dependency ratio in the WBGs at 102.2 – which means that slightly less than one working age (15–65) person exists for every dependent. However, if the low employment levels of women, in addition to high unemployment among working age males were factored in, the extent of this imbalance would be shown to be much greater – with approximately two dependents for every income earner. This high disparity between income earners and income dependents in Palestinian society has multiple and negative outcomes which are apparent in household coping strategies,

as well as impact on budgetary priorities at the national level. At the level of the household, early marriage of daughters and child labor among sons are common ways in which families attempt to redress the gap between income and consumption needs of household members. At the level of governmental budgetary priorities – the education system has had to overwhelmingly focus its energies simply on meeting basic infrastructural growth to keep up with new entrants to the education system.

While persistent high fertility is both a cause and an outcome of this problem – addressing fertility solely in terms of family planning programs without addressing the very real material dimensions of household survival strategies will not have much impact. Higher education levels of spouses and wives has been shown to significantly lower family size. The impact of education on female fertility seems to be most significant in that it delays marriage and thus the onset of their reproductive lives. In 1996, females with a post-secondary (13+) education have a Total Fertility Rate of 4.5 compared to the 6.6 for the overall female population. However, the role of female labor force activity further reduces female fertility to a dramatically lower 2.85 Total Fertility Rate. The pivotal role of female employment in not only reducing fertility but in redressing many of the

socio-economic challenges facing family well-being and human development has not been recognized by policymakers and the development community working in Palestine. Female employment would play a positive role in raising familial living standards, investments in children's education and well-being and the ending of the cycle that produces the current dependency ratios on both the micro and macro levels.

Current low rates of female employment in the formal economy, in addition to persistently high female unemployment rates suggests that there are major structural obstacles to women's entry into the formal labor force. Female new entrants to the labor force can spend on average four times as long as men in search of work while overall, data indicates that many more women want to work than the WBGS labor market can absorb. However, in the few labor markets which witnessed significant growth in the past five years women have not benefitted – most importantly, there is a huge disparity in the numbers of females versus males who have been taken into the public sector. This is predominantly due to the fact that the biggest growth area of the Palestinian Authority has been in the security services and police. For women, employed in the formal sectors of the economy – education ranks as the most “female dominated” sector – although they comprise a

GENDERED LABOR MARKETS

The table below shows how labor markets accessible to Palestinian women and men in the WBGS are highly gendered, and result in low formal labor force participation of Palestinian women. One of the largest labor markets, wage labor in Israel, effectively excludes women. While policymakers have focused on the negative impact of Palestinian dependence on the labor market in Israel, predominantly in terms of closures and their impact on male workers and national income, its structural role in keeping women from access to wage workers should be a crucial policy consideration when developing alternative labor markets that address the wider development needs in Palestinian society. Only the first three labor markets are recognized in national statistics; the informal economy and the domestic economy (household production), where women predominate, are not found.

Females as percentage of total employment in five labor markets, 1996

National Agricultural		National Non-Agricultural		Wage Labor in Israel		Informal Economy	Domestic Economy
WB	Gaza	WB	Gaza	WB	Gaza	WBGS	WBGS
39.4	20	18	12	3.6	.6	Over 50%	Over 80%

Derived from Hammami, 1997

minority of overall employed in education. However, women in this sector are concentrated at the lower stages of education, as well as at the lower occupational rungs. In addition, as a profession which tends to be “female-defined”, education shows overall down-graded salary scale (for both male and female) in comparison to other professions which require lower qualification and skill. In addition, gender-based wage disparities exist at all occupational levels. While women are a significant part of the workforce in the West Bank textile industry, this work is becoming increasingly home-based and informalized. However, the textile industry is the only area of industrial production where one finds any female representation at all.

Females make up a large part of the agricultural labor force in the West Bank, however, the majority of them work as “unpaid” family labor. Despite their legal rights to inherit land, few women actually claim their land rights. In addition, women continue to have little access to agricultural training or extension, agricultural cooperatives and marketing schemes.

Although family-based small businesses and workshops form a major backbone of the economy, there are extremely few female small business owners. While a number of credit and training programs exist for small and medium size enterprises, women tend to represent a small proportion of borrowers as well as tend to take the smallest size loans available. Women in general have few capital resources, and limited knowledge of economic networks and markets, which have been historically male-dominated, presents another series of obstacles to women becoming entrepreneurs in the local environment.

Data exists that suggests that women form the majority of the workforce in the informal sector. Particularly women with less than a secondary education and not part of a family farm who face the most obstacles in finding wage employment – seem to create jobs for themselves in the informal sector. Additionally, the informal sector seems to offer more flexibility to married women with children. Although a number of credit schemes exist aimed at this group, there is little infrastructural support (daycare) or technical support available to them. Also, current indicators suggest that income levels earned from informal sector work are too low to be considered anything but poverty alleviation.

Existent community college and vocational education has conservative and limited training opportunities for women that do not prepare them for the conditions of the local labor market.

Population

- 47% of the population is under 15 years old, 3% is over 65 years old
- 19% of women currently aged 15 to 19 married at 16 or under; this percent is higher in Gaza (25%) than in the West Bank (17%). Only 1% of men in the same age group married by age 17. Of the total married female population in the WBGS, half of them were married by age 18.
- The highest age specific fertility rates are among women in ages 20 to 24, this higher fertility is one outcome of early marriage,

Employment / Unemployment

- Since 1995 women’s labor force participation rate has not risen above 12%, rates in Gaza has stayed around 8%, while the lowest rate for males was 67%.
- Female unemployment rates have averaged about 20% of the female labor force between 1995 and 1997 – a number disproportionately high given the already limited size of the female labor force. Male unemployment rates during the same period were a similar average of about 20%.

Sectoral Activity

- 27% of employed women work in the education sector, 29% in agriculture, 15% in manufacturing (predominantly in the clothing industry), and 8% in health. There are strong regional disparities with more than 50% of employed women in Gaza concentrated in the education sector there.
- Only 5% of women are employed in public administration (the Palestinian Authority bureaucracy and military) compared to 12% of employed males.

Employment Status

- 31% of employed women in the West Bank work as un-waged family laborers (predominantly in agriculture). In contrast only 7% of employed males there work under this status. In Gaza, unpaid family work among women seems much lower (6% of employed women) possibly due to the limited nature of agriculture there.

- While 14% of employed women in the West Bank and 8% of them in Gaza are self-employed, less than 1% of employed women employ workers besides themselves – in other words female owned businesses are overwhelmingly single-person enterprises.
- On average employed women in the West bank make 66.2% of male salaries, while employed women in Gaza make a slightly better 81.3% of male wages.
- Data suggests that women constitute the majority of workers in the informal sector

Opportunities and Analysis

While the structural context of job creation policies and programs for women is very constrained, major opportunities do exist in the current situation.

Primary among these is the basic fact of women's desire to find work opportunities, as well as the society's relatively positive view towards women working outside the home. As mentioned earlier, there is an almost constant and high female unemployment rate in the WBGS, despite the fact that many women regularly fall out of the labor force after giving up hope of finding employment. These indicators suggest that especially new graduates of community colleges and universities are an important target group for female job creation schemes. Large-scale job creation projects, such as the Gaza Industrial Estate, should be analyzed to incorporate elements of training and job placement for women. The previous job creation and make-work schemes developed in order to absorb the male labor force who lost jobs in Israel ignored the issue of female joblessness. A constraint to be overcome is the lack of real commitment by donors or the Palestinian Authority to the issue of female employment – here development agendas that link jobs for women with their strong positive effects on social and economic development have to be pursued.

In addition, the positive experience of micro-credit schemes for women in the West Bank and Gaza shows that married women with children and lower education achievement levels are also an important constituency for income generation and job creation programs. In addition, the overall downturn in standards of living paradoxically presents another opportunity – conservative families and spouses may be more open to female family members working under such circumstances.



Poverty

Context:

According to research undertaken by the National Poverty Eradication Commission, almost one-quarter of Palestinian households (23%) fell under the poverty line in 1997, and 14% of Palestinian households lived in deep poverty (National Poverty Report, 1998). Despite the small size of the Palestinian territories, large regional differences exist, particularly between the West Bank and Gaza with the poverty rate over twice as high in Gaza (38%) as in the West Bank (16%). The highest incidence of poverty, an astonishing 51%, existed in Southern Gaza, while in the West Bank, the Hebron (24%) and Jenin (28%) districts were the poorest.

A number of the overarching factors for poverty in Palestine are easily identified, including legacies of military occupation and dispossession, political instability and insecurity, highly restricted labor markets and a distorted and dependent Palestinian economy. It is less understood how these conditions over time, in such areas as labor supply and demand, prices, commodities and services, and the inadequacy or absence of public provisions and goods, as well as the sustained climate of profound insecurity and violence, may differentially affect the capabilities and vulnerability to poverty of women and men. It is equally less understood how this will influence family composition and formation, including the status, roles and responsibilities of men and women, and of male and female children.

The two main formal social assistance programs, that of the Ministry of Social Affairs, serving the population of the West Bank and Gaza, excluding Jerusalem and UNRWA, serving the refugee population. These programs basically target the poorest of the poor, and do not provide enough assistance to allow an exit from deep poverty. (An individual receives from the Ministry of Social Affairs a maximum of 96 New Israeli Shekel, NIS, per month, or roughly \$23, whereas the poverty line for an individual is NIS 418 and for deep poverty NIS 343). Although family and kin networks are mainstays of social support for Palestinian households, particularly given the historic insecurity of Palestinian society and the absence or inadequacy of public provisions, the evidence suggests that such support is irregular and inadequate (Hilal and Malki, 1997), as well as gendered.

As Palestinian society underwent a series of economic shocks, particularly in the post-Gulf War period, the provision of informal social support by

women through taking on more care-giving responsibilities, as well as increased informal, often home-based work, increased the burden on women. Here income measures are inadequate to capture the many dimensions of gendered poverty: a capability-based approach, which looks at outcomes like health and educational status, might usefully examine poverty in terms of school dropouts (particularly in Gaza), early marriage and early pregnancy, health status of female and male children under 5, and access to public life, assets and employment.

Gender Equality and Development Issues

- **Gender inequalities contribute to poverty and poverty contributes to gender inequalities.** Reviewing the regional and district poverty rates noted above, we find that there is some evidence to suggest that these regions also have higher rates of early marriage (Hebron in comparison to the rest of the West Bank), lower female enrolment in secondary education (Jenin in comparison to the rest of the West Bank) lower formal female labor force participation (Southern Gaza in comparison to Gaza and the West Bank) and higher fertility (Hebron in comparison to the rest of the West Bank and Southern Gaza). **Therefore policies that take a gender rights-based approach to poverty alleviation and gender rights strategies that specifically address poor women are essential.**
- Household headship and composition are related to poverty and have strong gender dimensions. **De facto female-headed households are major recipients of formal social assistance, but this assistance does not permit an exit from poverty or address other rights and needs of poor women.** The very low amount of monthly assistance noted above means that poor households generally seek multiple forms of support, but even these coping strategies constitute survival, rather than mobility strategies, particularly for female-headed households, where access to income and resources is particularly limited. At the same time, large households, over ten persons, especially in Gaza, are extremely vulnerable to poverty.
- **Increasing poverty, coupled with economic (market) transformations, suggests that the gender roles of male**

breadwinner and female-care-giver are under strain.

The majority of poor households are headed by male labor force participants, whose poverty stems from casual or part-time labor, low earnings or unemployment, while women may be faced with increased burdens of care and home-based work. Policies for poverty alleviation, job creation, social security and Palestinian development need to take into account these new realities, rather than assuming a single male breadwinner can bring in a “family wage” to adequately support a household.

- **Poor women are marginalized in Palestinian development and economic projects.** The deteriorating economic situation in the Palestinian territories since Oslo, and in particular the economic shocks caused by Israeli-imposed border closures, has placed the crisis in male unemployment at the center of the Palestinian Authority’s agenda. Although the Palestinian Development Plan (PDP, 1998) does state that the government “must provide, as best as it can, a societal safety net for the poor and disadvantaged”, the Plan gives scant attention to the multifaceted nature of poverty, to vulnerable social groups, or to gender and poverty. Other governmental and non-governmental proposals for a social security system, including drafts of social security law, tend to focus on covering workers in regular formal labor, with the strong assumption of a regularly-employed male breadwinner, while excluding categories where women are found (family labor, agriculture, informal and part-time work, non-market work).

Indicators

- Women’s differential access to resources and assets make them generally poorer than men. While almost half of women possess some saleable jewelry as their main asset, less than 10% of women own land or a house.
- Whereas households formally headed by women constitute 8% of Palestinian households in 1997, they constitute 11% of poor households. 30% of female-headed households fall below the poverty line, while 22% of male-headed households do so, despite the fact that female-headed households are major beneficiaries of social assistance.
- Of female-headed poor households, 73% live in

deep poverty as compared to 63% of male-headed poor households.

- The gap between male and female-headed households widened between 1996 and 1997, with the poverty of male-headed households declining slightly, while the poverty of female-headed households increased by 4%.
- De facto female-headed households constituted one-half of the beneficiaries of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1998 and were poorer than male-headed beneficiary households as measured a wealth index (possession of washing machine, refrigerator and television).
- 60% of female recipients of social assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs were widows, 15% were divorced and 13% were separated in 1998. Given that in the female over-14 general population, only 7.6% are widowed and 1.1% divorced, the vulnerability of women in these categories to poverty is evident.
- Whereas female-headed households tend to be of a smaller family size than male-headed households are, the highest incidence of poverty is found with the largest households of over ten members, particularly in Gaza. Going beyond headship to examine gender, household composition and poverty is an important new research area, with important policy implications.

Key Actors and Initiatives

Since the Ministry of Social Affairs took over the social welfare program of the Israeli civil administration/military government, the main change has been an increase in the number of recipients, with other policy changes still under review and discussion. Both the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) and UNRWA organize categories of assistance in highly gendered terms, and in both, women separated from male income (widows, divorcees and women with absent husbands), constituting de facto female-headed households, are at least one-third (UNRWA) to one-half (MSA) of all cases. (The other two major categories are the elderly and households with a chronically ill or mentally or physically disabled head of household). Households with able-bodied men between the ages of 18–60 are excluded from both programs of social assistance, although the working poor are the largest category of poor in Palestine. The assumption that male breadwinners can adequately provide for their families is highly questionable.

Poor Female-Headed Households: Constraints and Opportunities

The National Poverty Report 1998 showed that female-headed households were poorer than those headed by men. What are the sources of vulnerability of these households and what are the avenues to strengthen the access of female-headed households to adequate resources and income? Vulnerability comes both from restricted and highly gendered labor markets, and from lack of access to assets and social support. Given that many of the poorest female-headed households are widows and divorcees, of which a substantial portion are relatively elderly, the legal and social restrictions on female inheritance, and the legal absence and social lack of support for divorced women are key issues to address. Under prevailing Islamic law, women have inheritance entitlements, but they are more limited than men; a widow is entitled to inherit one-eighth of her husband's estate if there are children and one-quarter if not. In practice, many women – both widows

and daughters – renounce their inheritance rights for presumed family and kin social support. Addressing both legal and social issues in an integrated framework is crucial, as is strengthening public provisions and social security for widows and other female-headed households. The prevailing charitable concern with support for widows – such as is evidenced in the zakat committees – should be broadened to explicitly include other poor female-headed households and form a base of public support for both government and NGO initiatives.

At the same time, formally-defined female-headed households – at 8% in 1997 data used in the Poverty Report and at 9.5% in the subsequent national census – represent only a portion of a larger group of female-managed households and families that may require social support and labor opportunities.

UNRWA's major poverty alleviation initiative targeting poor women refugees, particularly those receiving UNRWA special hardship assistance, is a successful microcredit program. The Ministry of Social Affairs has developed proposals for training, skill enhancement and income generating projects for poor women – included in the Palestinian Development Plan as "Training and Employment for Poor Women". These projects probably need further development for effective targeting (given that many female recipients of social assistance are elderly or in difficult circumstances) and for economic feasibility. Inter-ministerial coordination would also be helpful to bring a focus on poor women into larger employment generation projects, labor policies and social security initiatives.

Among NGOs, the major provider of social assistance are the *zakat* (Islamic alms) committees, who in fact provide assistance to a larger number of people than either UNRWA or the Ministry, although amounts can be very low. Their approach is charitable, and widows and orphans are a strong focus. Health NGOs are involved in service delivery to poor communities, while NGOs working in agriculture also tend to provide training and assistance to the rural poor, and include gender units. Several NGOs have micro-credit or other credit programs. The NGO Fund supported by the

World Bank and administered by the Welfare Association aims to support projects that address the poor and marginalized; a gender component is not explicit.

Analysis and Opportunities

The deteriorating economic situation in the Palestinian territories since Oslo, and in particular the economic shocks caused by Israeli-imposed border closures, has placed the crisis in male unemployment at the center of the Palestinian Authority's agenda: "Unemployment and economic decline are considered two of the most pressing problems" (PDP, 57). Male unemployment, however, is generally not addressed through the mechanisms of poverty alleviation, but through job creation, such as the planned Gaza Industrial Estate, which aims to create 20,000 new jobs. Proposals for social security also tend to focus on supporting the male breadwinner in old age, disability or unemployment. The other tier of social assistance, found currently in the special hardship programs of UNRWA and the Ministry of Social Affairs, target women in particular but do not offer enough assistance, training or rehabilitation to allow an exit from poverty.

This gender-segregated view of poverty restricts the development of comprehensive and effective policies. Employment generation, social

security and social safety net programs should address the needs, circumstances and interest of men and women in their various settings. Opportunities do exist to develop more multifaceted and gender-aware approaches and programs, as both the Authority and the donor community begin to address poverty in a more serious and systematic fashion. Aside from UNRWA and the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Authority has taken up the task of developing a poverty eradication strategy through the work of a Poverty Eradication Commission and a National Poverty Report, which has a gender analysis. There are opportunities to disseminate these findings in a wider government and NGO public discussion to develop strategies to alleviate or eradicate poverty that are multi-faceted and gender-aware. Dissemination and discussion with local authorities and NGOs in the districts where poverty is most prevalent offers opportunities for a participatory approach to poverty alleviation and for a greater understanding of poverty's gender, age and class dimensions in different settings.

Poverty in its gender dimension is also primarily addressed through a substantial increase in micro-credit and other credit schemes directed at women, whether through NGOs or UNRWA. Widening the focus of these programs to address other aspects of poor women's lives (as well as other family members) – through the provision of legal counseling, reproductive health services, youth services with an emphasis on services for girls, training and educational opportunities – offers an opportunity both to learn more about the reasons for poverty and to find strategies to allow women and their families to exit from poverty.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has a strong, expressed interest in developing training and income generation programs for recipients of social assistance, but has not generated adequate support. Here, material support should be seen as a result of other forms of support in project analysis, formulation and design, including mechanisms of coordination with other ministries and NGOs. The participation of women's NGOs, who have not directly addressed poverty but who have a rich experience in gender issues, could both encourage these NGOs to develop gender and poverty agendas, and contribute a gender-aware and rights-based approach to social welfare and entitlements.



Health

Context:

In 1994, the Palestinian Ministry of Health took over government health services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) which had previously been the responsibility of the Israeli military government and its civil administration. These services had serious infrastructure, service and human resource deficiencies, due to a low level of government spending and neglect. For example, the number of beds in governmental hospitals remained the same for twentyfive years, while the population doubled. (World Bank, 1993), and low levels of staff and an absence of programs obstructed development.

During the years of military occupation, some of these weaknesses were addressed by a burgeoning grassroots health movement, focused in Palestinian NGOs and by Palestinian charitable organizations. Until the present, UNRWA serves as the major health provider for registered Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as elsewhere in the region. The NGO health movement developed an approach emphasizing primary health care, which has been adopted into current Palestinian health policies (Palestinian Health Plan), but not always reflected in budget appropriations or balance of services. In the six years before the Oslo agreements, grassroots NGOs doubled the number of primary health care facilities. Several of these organizations also began to develop women's health and reproductive health initiatives. The establishment of a Women's Health and Development Directorate in the Ministry of Health in 1995, funded by various donors, allows the Ministry an active focal point for women's and reproductive health.

The Ministry of Health ran a budget deficit of 60% in 1995, with roughly the same deficit present in 1999. Thus, major financial constraints affect the Ministry's ability to administer and develop programs and to give material support and priority to women's health and reproductive health. The restrictions on movement imposed by border closures have also deeply affected communication and coordination in the health system and patients access to services, particularly to specialized care in East Jerusalem hospitals. Governmental health insurance now covers 39% of the population, principally public sector employees and workers in Israel, for whom it is obligatory. Earlier studies had shown more males than females covered by health insurance.

Overall disease patterns in the West Bank and Gaza have a dual nature (Barghouti and Lennock) with diseases of "underdevelopment" prevalent alongside a rapid increase in "modern" diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Life expectancy is relatively high (at 69 for males and 72 for females). Trends that need further research include the impact of increased urbanization and consumerism, as well as growing inequality, on changes in diet, lifestyle, disease patterns and treatment, and gender differentials in Palestinian households.

In the last five years, family planning/reproductive health programs have developed rapidly but very unevenly in response to persistent, if slightly declining, high fertility. Initial findings from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reports a Total Fertility Rate of 5.6 in the West Bank and 6.9 in Gaza, while PCBS's 1996 figures assessed fertility in Gaza at 7.44, both figures placing Gaza among the highest in the world. These programs have not been enough focused on population and development policies, although they have generally been attentive to women's rights. With a relatively high contraceptive prevalence rate and knowledge of contraception (see below), high fertility cannot be addressed simply through better access to services, however important. The attitudes and behavior of women and men towards family size and fertility decisions are strongly linked to social and economic factors in the Palestinian context, including family and individual survival strategies in the context of instability, conflict and economic uncertainty, the gender roles and responsibilities of women and men, and the absence of inadequacy of social provisions. Such key fertility determinants as son preference and early marriage need to be seen in this wider framework to be addressed properly.

The Women's Health Center in Breij: Women's rights and family planning

With knowledge of contraception among married women at about 98% and contraceptive usage (modern and traditional methods) at about 45%, approaching Palestinian high fertility rate clearly requires means to address the root causes and men's fertility choices and practices. From early marriage and son preference to the absence of basic social provisions and the exclusion of women from gendered labor markets. The Women's Health Center in Breij refugee camp in Gaza, established in 1996 and administered by an established local women's NGO (the Culture and Free Thought Association), offers a significant example of a wider gender-aware development and rights view to family planning, women's health and reproductive health. In addition to offering a wide variety of family planning services, the Center refers women to legal or social counselors, makes home visits which include women and men, and offers awareness and education activities about such subjects as early marriage, family violence, and women's legal rights.

Gender Equality and Development Issues

Major gender equality and development issues can be identified as:

- A holistic approach to health needs to take into account health status issues in the larger context of violence and conflict, with differential impacts on women, men and male and female children. Additionally, issues of environmental degradation differentially affects the health of women and girls, as well as possible differential treatment of girls and boys in the family.
- Access to services and type of services, with gaps particularly in mental health, adolescent, menopausal and post-natal services, as well as regional and socio-economic gaps between women.
- Approach to women's health and reproductive health that encompass women's life cycle, with the concomitant development of women's health programs that address health needs at all stages of life and not only women's reproductive health.
- Family planning to be seen in the wider context both of reproductive health and rights, with specific understanding of population issues within the political, social and economic context of Palestinian society. The participation of

women and men in family planning.

- Support for health provisions and insurance for poor women, particularly female-headed households, widows and the elderly, casual and informal laborers and others who fall outside the present health insurance entitlements.
- Additional health education and services for adolescents, including education in reproductive health and sexuality.

Indicators

Mortality

- Recent data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reverse the gender gap found in earlier surveys of infant mortality, placing the Infant Mortality Rate at 30 male and 25 female deaths/100 live births. However, figures for post neo-natal (1–11 months) mortality, when social effects are more pronounced, at 10 male and 12 female deaths/1000 live births suggest the possibility of differential care contributing to higher female mortality. (PCBS, January 1997, PCBS, 1998).
- Maternal mortality rate is estimated at 60–80 per 100,000 live births, with the rate in the West Bank, excluding Jerusalem, slightly higher than Gaza. Maternal mortality is the third leading cause of death among women of reproductive age and is highest in the extreme reproductive age groups, rising to 104 for the 15–19 age group. (Women's Health Plan, 1998, Barghouti and Lennock, 1997), highlighting the link to the prevalence of early marriage and consequent early pregnancy, as well as continued inadequate pre and post-natal care.

Family Planning and Reproductive Health

- Women's knowledge of contraceptive methods is very high (over 98%) and contraceptive use for any modern method is 31% and for any method (including traditional methods) 45%. (PCBS, January 1997). At the same time, fertility remains persistently high (with evidence of a slight decline) at 6.9 in Gaza and 5.6 in the West Bank, underlining that fertility needs to be addressed in a multifaceted way (including social security and employment opportunities) rather than simply through family planning. The average age for the receipt of family planning care is 30, which indicates that women seek family planning to space children or after achieving their ideal family size.

- 20% of women do not receive any prenatal care, and 80% do not receive any postnatal care (PCBS, 1996, PCBS 1998).
- Abortion is illegal and statistics for illegal abortions are unavailable.
- Although almost 90% of births in 1996 were in a health facility, specialized physicians and nurse midwives only attended about 60% of these births in the West Bank and 34% in Gaza. (Women's Health Plan, 1998).

Environment and Health

- Environmental factors, particularly the degradation and inadequacy of groundwater in Gaza, the lack of piped sewage systems in rural areas in the West Bank (only 2% have such systems), and other problems of water quality and sewage, contribute both to health problems in the family, particularly children, and to the burden of women in the home. Rapid and chaotic urbanization contributes to housing problems especially affecting women and children.

Mental Health

- 40–50% of women interviewed in a 1995 mental health study reported psychological distress, particularly depression, somatization disorders and obsessive-compulsive behaviour. (Sansur, 1995).

Disease Patterns

- Breast cancer is the leading type of cancer among Palestinian women (13%), (Women's Health Plan, 1998) and cancers related to the reproductive system accounted for 55% of cancer cases among women in 1992. (Barghouti and Lennock 1997).
- AIDS seems to have a low prevalence, with 24 cases reported between 1987–92), but there is no real reliable data for AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases. (Women's Health Plan, 1998).

Disability

- Females have a higher rate of disability due to congenital, genetic and birth disorders, while males have a higher overall disability rate (2302.1 per 100,000 to 1802.4) and a higher rate of intifada, accident, and injury-related disabilities. It has been suggested that the “missing” disabled females deserve investigation to see if early death due to neglect might be a factor (PCBS, 1998).

Health Profession

- Only two gynecologists in Gaza are female, although women seem to prefer gynecological care by female doctors (Palestinian Coalition for Women's Health, 1996)

Key Actors and Initiatives

The Women's Health and Development Directorate (WHDD) of the Ministry of Health, in both the West Bank and Gaza, have active programs based on a holistic approach to women's health and reproductive health and that attempt to address both women and men in taking responsibility for family planning. These programs are coupled with advocacy and IEC (information, education and communication) initiatives, which are particularly important as the WHDD is almost wholly externally funded and will not be able to develop sustainable programs unless local support among policymakers and the public is generated and women's health/reproductive health are seen as important elements for Palestinian development. UNRWA has also developed new programs focusing on reproductive health and family planning in its primary health care clinics. Major health NGOs continue to develop new services, including women's health. Women's NGOs have advocated gender-aware health legislation and linked women's health with the social issues such as early marriage, violence against women, and economic opportunities.

In the wake of the Oslo agreements, major donors showed a strong interest in supporting family planning programs, probably in response to current high fertility patterns. While dialogue with Palestinian government and NGO health experts resulted in placing these initiatives in the wider framework of reproductive health, the need for an overall women's health strategy is very clear, in order to set priorities and manage a multiplicity of sub-policies, as well as to establish a basis for partnership with health and women's NGOs. Some issues, particularly mental health, are addressed only in limited and conventional ways on the government level. Only one major NGO, the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, and a handful of NGOs offering counseling services, address mental health issues in a serious and innovative manner. Other pilot NGO projects, such as the Women's Health Center in Breij refugee camp, which offers reproductive health

services in a context of legal, social and economic counseling, should be evaluated and their experience incorporated into wider strategies. Attempts to form a lobby for women's health have not yet been fully realized; in this context, the formation of the General Union of the Palestinian Disabled remains the most successful effort to mobilize marginalized groups to advocate their own health needs.

The recent initiatives of Palestinian universities to establish post-graduate programs in public health, to upgrade nursing curricula and to found a medical school in Jerusalem offers new opportunities both to develop qualified health professionals and to develop a strong research base for health policies. Medical education in local institutions increases the access for women, but gender-aware admission policies need to reinforce this access.

Analysis and Opportunities

Palestinian health policies and programs at the governmental, UNRWA and NGO level have begun to move beyond treating women's health primarily within the framework of mother-child health which was the dominant perspective up until the 1980s. However, addressing women's health in the lifecycle context and addressing gender gaps in both health services and status is not widely taken into account by policymakers and providers, except in specialized initiatives like WHHD and some NGOs. In these contexts, initiatives are underway that need to be strengthened, and linked to these initiatives reproductive health and rights are being addressed: Issues such as menopause and adolescent health are beginning to be incorporated into programs objectives and to a lesser extent service provision: A multifaceted approach to gender and health, including legal, social and economic dimensions, has been taken by some NGOs.

However, resource constraints, including human resources, infrastructure priorities, including hospitals, clinics and equipment as donor and government priorities and a non-development view of health contribute to a possible marginalization of women's health issues and to the non-sustainability of current initiatives, particularly if donor support decreases. It is thus important to develop initiatives and projects that link a gender-aware health and rights perspective to health entitlements for the entire population and to

development objectives, such as clean and adequate water, adequate housing, environmental quality (particularly pesticides), and social security in old age, disability and chronic illness.



Education

Context

When the Palestinian National Authority took control of the administration and management of the education sector in August 1994, it inherited a system that had increasingly deteriorated during over two decades of Israeli occupation. Prior to 1994, the West Bank education system followed the Jordanian education system and curricula, while in the Gaza Strip, the education system followed Egyptian regulations and curricula. However, in terms of funding and administration, both systems were under the control of the Israeli military authorities.

Throughout the period of the occupation, the education sector was under-funded and little attention was given to develop either its physical or human infrastructure. School building did not keep pace with the expanding school age population. School facilities such as playgrounds, libraries and laboratories were treated as luxuries. More importantly, programs to improve the quality of teachers and teaching were extremely limited. The large student to teacher ratios, in addition to low salary scales meant that teaching became a low-prestige profession in which only the extremely motivated individual teacher was able to focus on more than meeting basic requirements. Vocational education and training at the secondary level similarly suffered from the same attitudes and policies – but were also impacted by the fact that these were reshaped to meeting the needs for semi-skilled labor in the Israeli labor market. For similar reasons, agricultural training programs, at both the secondary and higher education levels, were either closed or practically phased out.

Community college and vocational education and training, while relatively autonomous from Israeli policies, did not adapt to changing needs of the local economy, nor keep up with global trends such as emphasizing skills tailored to the computer age and service economy. Although higher education was developed and run by an independent Palestinian Council for Higher Education, the quality of education programs suffered from a variety of policies of collective punishment that saw universities as one of the “front-lines” of resistance to the occupation.

The Palestinian uprising and Israeli attempts to quell it had far reaching negative effects on the education system and the quality of education across all levels. The almost continuous closure of

schools, universities and community colleges marked the first few years of the intifada while the latter years witnessed near constant interruptions of the school cycle. The outcome of the eight-year period of the uprising was a dramatic lowering of student knowledge and skill level – a legacy which continues to impact the education system in 1999 given that most students continued to pass on to higher grade levels regardless of actual achievement. The intifada period also witnessed the growth of school drop-outs – another legacy which continues to the present.

Palestinian society is a youthful one with about half of its population falling within the age range of 4 to 14 years old. As such, almost half the society is of school age – meaning that the age structure of the society is in itself a formidable challenge to the Palestinian Authority in preparing youth to be able to access jobs and developing the country's economy. Major investments in education need to be made if Palestine is going to be capable of maximizing the potential of its main resource – people.

Having inherited a rundown system with a weak infrastructure, and a student body with poor knowledge and skills, the Palestinian Authority has been facing difficulties in trying to meet the needs of the constantly increasing number of children enrolling in basic education every year; at a current level of around 100,000 children entering first grade each year.

Paradoxically, the status of females in almost all levels of education compared to that of males (particularly in terms of enrolment) shows the narrow gender gap in comparison to other sectors of life such as labor and governance. Additionally, due to the efforts of key individuals in the education sector, the issue of gender equality and gender integration is taken very seriously in the Ministry of Education. However, this improvement in the educational level of females and the narrowing gender gap are not reflected itself in greater share of women in the labor force or in public life as a whole. Consequently, the education sector is facing a major challenge in moving gender equality from a quantitative to a qualitative level, if it is to contribute to effecting real changes in gender roles and responsibilities.

Gender Equality and Development Issues

- **Weak link between female education and labor force participation:** Despite narrowed gender gaps in enrolment at all levels of the education system, female participation in the formal labor force remains minimal. Low rates of female participation in labor (at around 11% and only 4% in Gaza) and the high unemployment rates among women of working age (see Labor Chapter) raise significant issues for education. The level and type of education women access do not seem to qualify them for existing labor opportunities and markets. The fields of specialization in both academic and vocational and technical training gives them access to an extremely limited range of professions.
- **Weak link between education and changes in gender roles:** Although higher education does have an impact on fertility levels, the overall educational achievement rate of women has only a limited impact. Although women in Gaza are overall better educated than their West Bank counterparts, Gaza fertility is considerably higher than that of the West Bank. In effect, the education system and women's integration in it has not effected fundamental changes in gender roles and responsibilities, nor has it brought about real improvement in women's status or life conditions.
- **Gender and streaming (tracking):** The policy of streaming (tracking) students into academic (science and arts) and vocational/industrial tracks begins at the end of the basic education cycle. Streaming occurs at an early age in the life of students (both males and females), and severely limits their future educational and life opportunities. Studies have shown that it has a greater negative impact on girls than on boys. Due to socio-economic and cultural reasons, more girls than boys seem to be streamed into arts, and fewer girls than boys have the opportunity to enroll in vocational/industrial streams. Opportunities for girls primarily exist in the commercial stream (secretarial work).
- **Constraints on Educational Choice:** Concentration of female labor mainly in two sectors, education and services, indicates that education and training opportunities that women access are limited in terms of specialization. In higher education, women primarily enroll in the humanities and in "soft" commerce and business tracks, and do not enter into technical fields like engineering or computer science, which have long been considered as a male domain. Despite the fact that admission rules and regulations are not gender biased, and thus there are no legal obstacles or formal constraints that deprive girls from enrolling in any field of their choice, in practice several factors interfere in directing them to a limited set of fields. These include factors that emerge from the education system (such as the curricula, teaching methods, lack of school facilities, hidden curriculum, and the lack of non-conventional vocational training programs). Other factors (such as lack of transportation facilities, education expenses, lack of funding to build schools or to add secondary classes to existing schools) are socio-economic factors operating at the levels of the institution, the community and family. Cultural attitudes, such as mobility constraints, early marriage and perceived "appropriate" education for girls form a third major factor. Last but not least are the perceived goals for educating males and females. Assumptions about the function of education are often deeply gendered; education for boys is assumed to be about the creation of "breadwinners", while for girls it is assumed to be about the creation of good mothers, carers and educators.
- **Gender and Drop-outs:** Dropout rates at the secondary level represent a serious problem facing the education sector. In grades one to six in basic education, the gender gap in both enrolment and dropout rate is minimal, or almost non-existent. As students reach the ninth and tenth grades, enrolment rates for both males and females start falling, with a slightly lower enrolment for females. As students move from one grade to another in the secondary cycle, dropout rates increase and the gender gap grows, forming a dangerous phenomenon needing serious consideration. Male and female students may be led to dropout for common reasons, yet these factors have gender differential impact. For example, severe economic conditions may lead families to withdraw their children from school and thus deprive

them of the opportunity of completing their education. In general, boys are usually expected to seek work, and girls seem to enter early marriages.

- An important issue is related to the current political and economic conditions, emerging as a result of the peace process. The political severing of the integrity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, and the imposition of movement restrictions on Palestinians, have added to further limiting students' opportunities, particularly those of women and of Gazan students as a whole. This is particularly serious in constraining the choices of Gaza women seeking higher education, as West Bank universities offer more specializations and, very importantly, a more open and secular culture. Political and cultural restriction on mobility of women has limited them to areas of specialization existent in their own area of residence, which will result in larger constraints on accessing work opportunities.
- **Political constraints restrict women's opportunities:** As a result of the political and economic conditions that the Palestinian institutions are under, all levels of the education sector are facing funding difficulties in trying to meet basic running costs. Currently, the Ministry of Education has to deal with strengthening the infrastructure (building and reconstructing schools and school facilities, training and qualifying employed teachers and staff, paying salaries, employing new teachers, and equipping vocational schools and technical training institutions with the needed facilities). At the same time, it is trying to develop the sector, like planning and executing national curricula, launching new vocational and technical training programs, providing schools with social workers and counselors, trying to design and conduct extra-curricular activities, and finally, integrating subjects such as fine arts, physical education, and civic education that have long been excluded. In such difficult and complicated conditions, it becomes even harder to make demands for gender aware policies and programs to be undertaken. What mechanisms are appropriate to assist in seeing gender integration as necessary for sustainable development in a situation where the "basics" are seen as difficult to achieve?

Indicators

- Official data do not show a gender gap in enrolment rates of girls and boys between the ages of 6–11 and those between 12–14. In the former age category, boys enrolled in basic education form 90.7% and girls form 91.6%. In the second age category, the gender gap is in favour of girls, whose enrolment rate is 90.9% while that of boys is 89.2%.
- However, the gender gap starts expanding as students progress to grades 9–12, that is between the ages 15 and 17, whereby 63.7% of girls compared to 67.4% of boys (ages 15–17) and 5% of girls and 6.7% of boys (ages 18+) are enrolled in education.
- Enrolment by region show an interesting gender gap. In the Jenin district 55.3% of girls aged 15–17 are enrolled in secondary education compared to 69.7% of boys of the same age category. In the southern and central areas of the Gaza Strip, data show that female enrolment for the same age category is 70.2% while it is 78.2% for males.
- Enrolment rates by streams indicate a real gender gap in disfavour of girls who form about 41.67% of the total number of students enrolled in the science stream and 51.61% of those enrolled in the arts stream. As for vocational education at the secondary level, the gender gap seems to be large with girls forming only 13% of total enrolment. Moreover, this low rate of female enrolment is concentrated in nursing and commercial streams.
- Dropout rates for both males and females in basic education are equal, reaching about 2.4%. Of the total number of female enrolment in secondary education, the dropout rate is 8%, while it is 6.1% of the male total enrolment for the same category. The highest dropout rates were found in Jenin where it reached 12.6% for females and 11.6% for males, and in East Jerusalem where it reached 12% for females and 11% for males for the same age category.
- Higher education enrolment data show that females enrolled in community colleges form 60.79% of the total enrolment, while they form 42.54% of the total enrolment at the universities. Such enrolment rates seem promising; however, gender differences by region and fields of specialization seem less encouraging.

Females enrolled in agriculture form only 6.29%, in computer and technical sciences 15.4%, in engineering 26.25%, and in commerce and business 28.97%. In the Gaza Strip female university students form only a third of the total enrolment rates, while their enrolment in the College of Education is about 62.5%.

- Global and regional data show that fertility rates drop with an increase in the level of education for women. However, drop in fertility rates in the Palestinian context is not within the regional range. Differences between fertility rates by the level of education (PCBS, 1997) are not broad; they are 6.62% for those women whose education is lower than secondary education, 5.57% for those with secondary education, and 4.72% for those with education higher than the secondary level.

Initiatives and Key Actors.

At the government level, the Palestinian Authority does not seem to have a clear stand regarding gender integration into development, and thus, it has not formulated a strategic national plan for the purpose. This does not in any way mean that there is a total absence of interest and efforts in favour of achieving gender equalities. At the same time, initiatives for integrating gender in education as a sector in the development process are introduced by several, but sometimes scattered efforts. The most notable initiatives include:

- The Ministry of Education has issued a regulation allowing female students who get married to continue their secondary education. A formal law that deprived them of that chance never existed in writing, but was widely practiced. To enforce the law and ensure fruitful outcomes, social workers and consultants were employed at schools to meet the needs of married students.
- Major efforts are exerted to reform and create national school curricula. The national plan for that states that curricula should avoid gender bias, both in text and illustrations. This position came as a result of the efforts of the women's movement, particularly the Women Affairs Technical Committee's watchdog role, and research conducted on gender bias in existing curricula.
- Engendering vocational education at the secondary level. An initiative in this respect has

been introduced through the efforts by the Ministry of Education and the Gender Directorate at MOPIC. The pilot initiative involves introducing a non-conventional training program (computer maintenance) for girls at a secondary industrial school in Hebron. Although outcomes in this pilot program have not yet been analyzed, the Directorate of Planning at the Ministry of Education is keen on promoting new vocational training programs for girls at the secondary schools. They have presented three project proposals for funding to be included in the three-year national plan for development.

Opportunities and Constraints

As the Ministry of Education and Palestinian educators seek to unify and transform an inadequate and often inappropriate education system to meet Palestinian development needs, unique opportunities exist to integrate gender and develop policies and practices that expand choices, opportunities and knowledge for Palestinian female and male students. However, these opportunities also bear a string of constraints: So much needs changing. The system's infrastructure is very inadequate. Educators are faced with making hard choices about priorities, and gender objectives may be overlooked unless they are firmly linked to well-understood development objectives.

ANNEX A:
The Palestinian Authority: approach and
mechanisms on gender equality issues

A number of mechanisms have been established to support consideration of women's position and gender equality issues in government planning and programs. These are:

- Directorate of Gender Planning and Development of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) – which is concerned with gender planning both within MOPIC and by line ministries;
- Gender Statistics Program of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – established to address the gaps in statistics required to bring a gender perspective to policy analysis and planning;
- Women's departments, gender focal points, or women's committees in line ministries – which have been set up in a number of ministries, including health, education, youth and sports, local government, social affairs and several others; with varying structures and functions;
- Inter-Ministerial Women's Coordinating Committee – consisting of representatives of some 16 ministries.

Most prominent among these are the units in MOPIC and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The Gender Statistics Program is making available statistics and analytic articles in key areas through the internet and a recent publication, *Women and Men in Palestine: Trends and Statistics*. The Gender Planning and Development Directorate at MOPIC, led by a knowledgeable and experienced gender equality advocate, has a broad strategic vision of the objectives and requirements of gender mainstreaming in government policy and planning. Established in 1996, it has focused on equipping its own staff with analytic skills, training staff of women's units in line ministries, and coordination within government on gender issues. It is now seeking means to take more systematic approaches to reviewing sectoral plans and projects from a gender perspective. While the Directorate is potentially a major resource to government on gender equality, it is still struggling to define its role within MOPIC and government more generally and to gain legitimacy for attention to gender issues in policy and planning.

The women's departments, focal points or committees in line ministries vary considerably in vision, functions and capability. In a number of instances, the lack of a clear mandate and backing from senior leadership limits their functions and their perceived legitimacy within their ministries. Unclear or shifting hierarchies and weak systems for coordination within

ministries also limit the ability of such units to be effective catalysts for action. The mechanisms in the ministry of health (where the women's department is an operational unit) and the ministry of education (a sector in which there is broad consensus on the need to reduce inequalities) are generally regarded as the more successful of these units. About such units generally, however, there is some concern that they have provided the Palestinian Authority with "window-dressing" on gender issues while at the same time marginalising them – that issues of mandates, institutional support and adequate training need to be addressed if these mechanisms are to be effective in mainstreaming gender issues.

The Inter-Ministerial Women's Coordinating Committee (in cooperation with the Gender Union of Palestinian Women) prepared a *National Strategy for the Advancement of Palestinian Women*, which draws on the international Platform for Action formulated in Beijing in 1995. The document outlines objectives in the political, economic, legal and social realms, but is more of a statement of principles than a plan of action as it does not outline the sectoral actors or actions required for implementation. It was followed up in 1997 with a document summarizing ten project proposals from seven ministries that the Committee recommended to government and donors, a number of which were subsequently funded. The project document is still in circulation, despite weaknesses in project concepts and selection that reflect the inexperience of the Committee and the Palestinian Authority on gender issues at the time the document was prepared.

The future role and functioning of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, or more generally of a mechanism to provide leadership on gender issues with government and facilitate cooperation in planning and implementation, is currently unclear due to the confusion introduced by new committees and leadership to prepare for Beijing plus 5.

In summary, progress within the Palestinian Authority in addressing gender issues relies on the commitment and initiatives of particular individuals within the bureaucracy rather than a clear statement of policy and institutional systems. That gender issues are on the "official" rather than the "de facto" agenda was a view voiced by many observers. While this must be understood in the context of the wide scope of demands and priorities entailed in developing new government structures, it is of concern in a period when new institutions and long-term strategies are being developed.



ANNEX B: Donor approaches to gender equality issues

Support has been provided by non-governmental, bilateral and multilateral donors to a range of activities targeting women, as well as to a more limited number of initiatives concerned with gender equality. These have included support to Palestinian NGOs concerned with women's centres, the provision of services to women, electoral activities, community awareness of gender equality, health services for women, credit for micro-enterprise and small business, research and advocacy activities, etc. Support to the Palestinian Authority has included initiatives in specific sectors, such as education initiatives for girls and women's health, as well as support for government mechanisms concerned with women or gender equality.

All the major bilateral and multilateral donors have organizational policies to mainstreaming gender equality issues throughout their programmes – i.e., to complement specific initiatives addressing women's situation and gender equality concerns with systematic efforts to integrate analyses and action on gender equality in all sectoral programmes. To date, there seems to have been limited progress in implementing this organizational commitment in programmes in Palestine. In part, this may result from the particular circumstances of programme development in the post-Oslo period, including the commencement or rapid expansion of development cooperation programmes, the pressures for quick disbursement of funds and quick and visible results, and the needs of many new Palestinian Authority institutions for basic support. However, it also reflects uncertainty among donors about whether or how to pursue gender issues in private sector development, water and sanitation, agriculture, etc. It is generally easier to formulate a project or project component targeted to women.

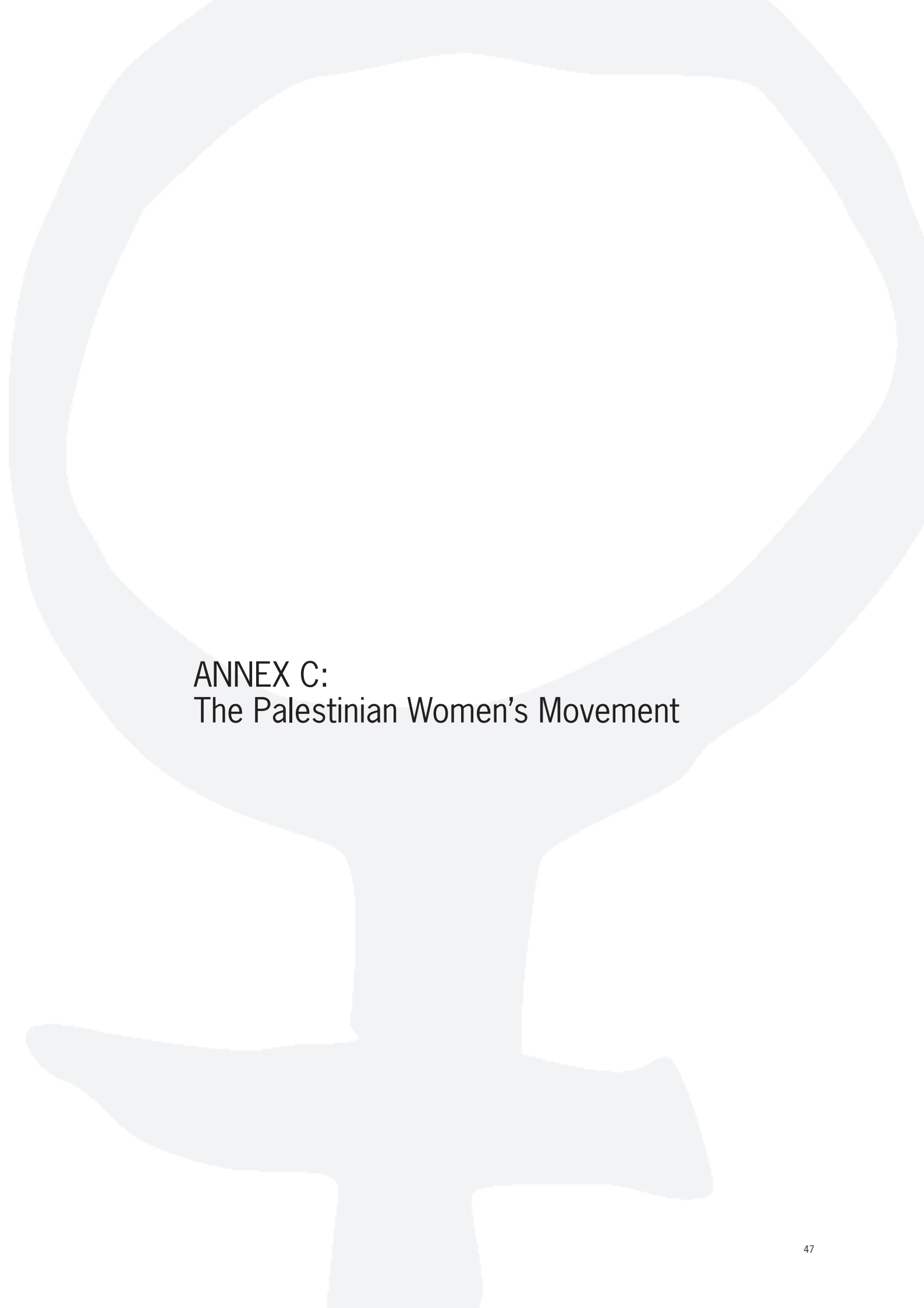
Several donors are taking initiatives to broaden their approaches. UNDP and the European Commission, for example, are planning gender training for their programme staff and the World Bank has set up a regional committee of experts to review its programs from a gender perspective. At UNICEF, a "gender audit" of sample programs in its major sectors provided insights into ways of thinking about and addressing gender issues. This was an input into the development of UNICEF's overall strategic plan for 1998–2000 and was shared with other agencies through workshops and a publication highlighting findings and their

implications for programming approaches.

The recently-established Task Force on Gender Issues with representatives of the UN agencies in West Bank and Gaza may also contribute to increased attention to gender equality issues and strategies to address them. The Task Force is coordinated by UNIFEM and has had senior participation from key agencies such as UNICEF and UNDP, both of which have an influence beyond the UN system due to their collaboration with many bilateral donors as well as Palestinian agencies. Among bilateral donors, no mechanisms have been established to share information and experience on women's situation and gender equality.

Two broad issues that could be considered further by the donor community in their approaches to gender equality include:

- 1) Further consideration of the objectives they seek to support on issues of women's position and gender equality in Palestine, and the implications of these objectives for programmes and projects (e.g. what does the emphasis on micro-credit for income-generation assume about women's aspirations and alternatives? What does marginal attention to gender equality issues in community development initiatives imply about the role women can/should play in the development of their communities); and
- 2) The need for broader strategies in which an initiative such as a gender training seminar takes place in the context of the management leadership, professional accountability requirements, and processes for learning from experience that are required to have a real impact.



ANNEX C: The Palestinian Women's Movement

The contemporary Palestinian women's movement is composed of distinct types of organizations, including a general union, committees affiliated to political parties, independent women's NGOs, charitable societies and women's studies and research centers. Relatively consistent and strong coordination links these different organizations, which can thus properly be placed in the framework of a Palestinian women's movement. Organizational forms and vision are shaped by the history of the women's movement, which can be usefully periodized into three waves.

First Wave: 1919 – early 1970s

The women's movement emerged from the Palestinian national movement in the wake of World War I, when a Women's Union was founded in Jerusalem in 1919 to protest the post-war British Mandate over Palestine and the Zionist movement's increasing settlement in Palestine. From its beginning, national protest had social consequences, even in the absence of a social agenda. Urban women appeared unveiled in a public demonstration in 1929, for example, while peasant women developed avenues of participation in the Arab Revolt of 1936–39.

After 1948, the desperate plight of Palestinian refugees, as well as those remaining in historic Palestine, led middle-class women in particular into charitable work and service provision. This focus was strengthened by the restrictions on political activity under Jordanian law (in the West Bank) and the crisis of Palestinian nationalism. When the national movement re-emerged under the banner of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964, the founding of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) provided an umbrella for women's representation in Palestinian communities throughout the Arab world and beyond. Banned in the Israeli-occupied territories after 1967, the GUPW nonetheless functioned clandestinely, often with the support of women leaders of charitable societies, whose provision of material assistance, social services and skills (such as embroidery and sewing) were seen as assisting the population, particularly women, to preserve their families and resist occupation.

Second Wave: Mid 1970s – 1990

A clearly articulated link between social and national agendas emerged in the West Bank and

Gaza Strip with the launching of the women's committees. Affiliated with Palestinian political factions (themselves banned), and initiated by women active in the student movement, the committees had a strong grassroots focus, linking political mobilization with a participatory and empowerment approach to social services, kindergartens and income-generating projects in villages, camps and poor urban neighborhoods. By 1987, approximately 3%, or 15,000 women, were affiliated to these committees, despite attempts of the Israeli military authorities to block their development through arrest or town arrest of women leaders. The peak of women's power occurred during the intifada, which erupted at the end of 1987, with women's mobilization in public space – visible in demonstrations and confrontations with the Israeli army – and the emergence of new forms of organization, such as the neighborhood popular committees. At the same time, a number of factors, including entrenched male political power, a conservative backlash, and the militarization of the later part of the intifada, propelled seasoned women's activists to formulate their own social agenda.

Also of significance is the development of links with the international women's movement, during the intifada and in the wake of the Nairobi Conference. Coupled with the double experience of empowerment in the streets and disenfranchisement in the political parties, a gender agenda was in the process of formulation that was clearly articulated in the next stage.

Third Wave: 1991 – present

In the present stage, Palestinian women active in the national and women's movement began preparing themselves for participation – and leadership – in the building of an infrastructure for Palestinian statehood and Palestinian democracy. Some of these initiatives are discussed in Chapter 4. New forms of organizations, noted below, include research and policy centers, lobbying networks, and coordinating bodies between governmental and non-governmental gender advocates. Constituencies remain an important question, as the post-Oslo period is also characterized by a demobilization of the population. Indeed, both the organizations and issues of the previous stages – particularly the unresolved issues of Palestinian nationalism – are still very much

present and the question of linking national and social agendas effectively remains at center stage.

The structure of the contemporary women's movement:

- The oldest women's organizations are the **charitable organizations**; these societies comprising 82 organizations are widespread in all districts in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The major aim of the charitable societies is to serve the specific needs for women, particularly widows and divorcees, disabled people, disadvantaged children, and other poor and marginalized groups. Main programmatic foci include mother and child health, vocational training such as sewing, knitting and home economy, as well as services, like nurseries and kindergartens. One of the largest of these societies is Inash Al Usra (Family Rehabilitation Society) in El Bireh, whose former head, Mrs. Samiha Khalil, also headed the local branch of the General Union of Palestinian Women and ran for President against Yasser Arafat in the January 1996 elections.
- The **General Union of Palestinian Women** (GUPW) was established in 1965 as a body within the Palestine Liberation Organization. It is considered to be the official representative body for Palestinian women around the world. It is also an umbrella for women's organizations in Palestine and in exile. Since the return of GUPW leadership after Oslo, however, a strategic, programmatic and organizational gap has existed between the Union and the local women's movement, which has been addressed through coordination initiatives (such as for Beijing) and the production of a National Strategy.
- **Women's Committees:** The emergence of the women's committees (mass-based women's organizations), described above, was an initiative of women activists to mobilize the mass of Palestinian women around national rights and women's rights, and to move away from a charitable approach and build links with women in villages, camps and poor urban neighborhoods. These committees are affiliated to the Palestinian factions and political parties. The Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) now constitutes two different factions, one affiliated with the Demo-

cratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and one with FIDA. The Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) is affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP); the Union of Women's Committees for Social Work affiliated with Fateh and the Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees is affiliated with the People's Party. In the post-Oslo period, a number of the committees are reevaluating their relation with political parties, as well as developing serious gender agendas and programs. The Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees, for example, runs a domestic violence hotline and is actively campaigning on issues of violence against women, including legal reform and police training, as well as working on issues of democracy and representation.

- **Women's Research Centers and NGOs:** Another form of women's organization was established in the early 1990s to meet new needs for research-based gender agendas identified by independent women and the women's committees themselves. These centers have different goals and agendas; along with the women's committees, they also are members in the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, which serves as a coordinating and lobbying network. **Women's Affairs Technical Committee:** Established in 1992, WATC's main goals include promotion of democracy and women's participation in government at all levels, lobbying/networking with a focus on legal reform, training and awareness and empowerment of women, particularly at the grassroots level. Among the research, policy and action centers are the **Women's Studies Center** in Jerusalem (Ram) (different from the Women's Studies Center at Birzeit University) whose activities include training in management, marketing and writing, as well as producing documentary films about women and gender. The Women's Center for Legal Aid & Counseling (WCLAC) offers legal aid service, legal literacy, social work and health advocacy, training, and lobbying, and was the major organizer of the women's model parliament. **The Women's Affair Center** in Gaza conducts research on women's issues, video and writing courses, training, development clinic

and public events, while the **Culture and Free Thought Association** in Gaza and the **Women's Empowerment Project** of the Gaza Mental Health Programme offer gender-aware programs within NGOs with multiple activities. **The Women's Studies Center at Birzeit University** offers teaching at the undergraduate and master's level, research on gender relations in Palestinian society, and policy intervention/community outreach. The above are by no means an exhaustive list, but cover some of the most active and typical NGOs that consider themselves part of the women's movement.

Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities for the Palestinian women's movement today stem from specific local conditions of political transition – where fundamental citizen's rights are being determined and a development and political agenda being set – which offer opportunities for participation in shaping the emerging state and society. Arguably, opportunities also arise from a global context where women's movements are strengthened by global gender agendas as well as direct support from international women's movements and the international community. However, the latter's support has to be carefully utilized by the women's movement to address gender inequalities and women's practical and strategic needs and rights are addressed within the context of the development of Palestine and Palestinian democracy. Constraints are related in particular to the nature of the political transition, whose adverse circumstances to date have caused a profound crisis not only in Palestinian nationalism, but in Palestinian identity as well. The effects of the crisis, whether social conservatism and polarization (with growing inequality) or the strength of Islamist movements, certainly constrain the women's movement, but it is the crisis itself which the movement needs to address.

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Towards
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