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Palestinian Women Empowerment in Rural Areas; 35 years of achievements long way side by side PARC and rural women

Palestine is a country that located in the Eastern Coast of the Mediterranean Sea, its considered part of Levant with estimated area of 27 thousand square kilo meters; extend to reach the Jordan Valley. Its population recorded during the mid of the year 2016 to be estimated 4.81 people at both West Bank and Gaza Strip. 73.9% of those people are living in urban areas, 16.6% live in rural areas, while 9.5% of them are living in refugee camps.

Palestine has the most density population in the world especially Gaza Strip. The estimated population density for the year 2016 is about 800 persons/km²; 519 persons/Km² in West Bank and 5.154 persons/km² in Gaza Strip.

For the sensitive political situation that Palestine has, the percentage of families that headed by women had been raised to become 10.9% of the total of the Palestinian families for the year 2015, 12.2% at West Bank and 8.6% at Gaza Strip. Adding to this, the percentage of female participation in the labor force is low compared to males. The female participation rate is 19.4%, 17.7% in the West Bank and 22.3% in the Gaza Strip. While the unemployment rate among female recorded 42.8% against 22.3% among male.

The National strategy for the Agricultural Sector and the Millennium Goals

Implementing the 17 sustainable development goals for the year 2030 has officially started on January 2016. These goals were adopted on September 2015 during a historic international summit; that their countries including Palestine through the upcoming fifteen years will work on mobilizing efforts toward eliminate poverty in all its forms. In addition of fighting against inequality and tackling climate change, although it is not legally binding, but it is expected that the governments take-driven development of national frameworks to achieve them, that the Palestinian national strategy for the agricultural sector intersects with nine goals out of the 17



Agricultural Development Association

goal of the sustainable development. Especially those came under the second goal “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”

Agricultural Sector and Rural Woman in Palestine

Agricultural sector in Palestine is considered one of the most important pillars of Palestinian resilience in facing Israeli occupation. It is a major component of the cultural, social and economic of the Palestinian people. This sector provides great support through food security and reducing unemployment and poverty. This sector characterized by its diversity in terms of agricultural production due to the climate diversity in Palestine. It has good opportunity in expansion in irrigated and exported crops. In addition of its ability to keep the latest technical developments due to the suitability of existing agricultural patterns and the availability of pioneer farmers and producers. In which reflect the agricultural sector ability to develop rapidly and effective participation in employment, and development.

Since the 1990s agricultural sector faced several difficulties due to Israeli occupation by attacking agricultural lands and its control on water resources. The imposed siege on Gaza Strip since 2007, that 20% of the agricultural lands is not accessible due to Israeli occupation and considered safe borders area. More than 3,000 fishermen are unable to reach 82% of the marine areas agreed under Oslo Accords 1992. These restrictions cause annual losses in agricultural production and development. The losses of the fishing sector are estimated at 80 million US dollars annually.

Rural Woman

Woman plays major role in the comprehensive development process in communities specially development communities that work in agriculture and grazing. Official statistics in Palestine shows that women participation in economic activity does not exceed 16% (19% in WB and 9%



Agricultural Development Association

in GS). Women practice 87% of agricultural animal production works, while 54% of agricultural plant production works that formulate source of income for thousands of Palestinian families in Palestine, in addition to its role to securing the food basket and main supplements of fruits and vegetables.

Results show that agriculture provides 11.5% job opportunities and participate in 5.6% of GDP and 21% of total exports. The agricultural sector is considered the main employer of women that about one-sixth of women work in the agricultural professions 20%, the services sector secondly ranked as the employer of women. Women participation percentage in the agricultural sector is 35.4% (32.3% in WB and 46.1% in GS). The percentage of agricultural holdings owned by women is estimated at 6.7% of total agricultural holdings which indicate that the large holdings goes for men, The agricultural sector suffers from low wages, the average wage in agriculture sector including forestry and fishing is NIS 65 in the WB and NIS 20 in GS.

Challenges Faced by Rural Women

Rural Palestinian women face different challenges in their life including; 1. The traditions, since the Palestinian community considered as male dominated society, this will affect the women effectiveness in terms of studying, working and specially leaving their houses. Knowing that rural women up to this moment face different types of gender based violence. 2. Limited access and control of resources by the rural women including funding resources, educational institutions, and the difficulties in controlling her rights due to the weak policies supports women rights.

PARC: 35 Years Working with Rural Women

PARC achieved 35 years working in sustainable rural development context. The idea has been launched by group of volunteers of agricultural engineers to support farmers and rural areas, in order to protect the Palestinian lands from confiscation by Israeli occupation, and



Agricultural Development Association

secure the rural families with good income to live with dignity while protecting their lands against the Israeli occupation.

PARC has adopted several approaches including social participation, volunteerism, transparency, accountability, experiences, and learning. Based on the previously mentioned approaches PARC become a pioneer institution in rural development in Palestine.

PARC is pioneer on its approach working with rural communities, aiming at achieving sustainable development through targeting all community's levels including women in several interventions. PARC found through its work, especially through its technical agricultural extension program in 1983 which targets men only at that time, PARC found that there is a need to provide such program for women too. PARC works toward attracting female agricultural engineers and extension workers to provide them with proper extension services due to the social restrictions and barriers that prevent these women to receive guidance through male agricultural engineers.

Through PARC's experience in agricultural extension program provided for farmers, PARC found that 67% of agricultural work carried by women, while extension services provided only for men, from this point PARC believes on the huge need of providing such services for women, PARC started by targeting female agricultural engineers and providing them with the needed extension.

During 1987–1992 PARC focused its work working with rural women on home economics program for the purpose of achieving food security for the rural families and the rural community in general. This was during the first Intifada that witnessed road closers, curfew and boycott of Israeli products and others practices. These practices affected positively rural communities' resilience to become more dependent on local products and food processing, through using the surplus of fruits and vegetables, to be marketed in areas lack to these products such as Frekeh, Jams and Maftool. Women at that time were working individually and collectively in team works.



Agricultural Development Association

PARC's approach has been changed from individual to collective approach, through working with different regulatory framework especially with special focus on women frameworks. This come from PARC's believe on the local community capabilities of making change through these different types of regulatory.

In 1997 PARC was unique in adopting gender focus program that resulted in integrating gender including its policies and procedures in PARC's life. Gender is considered as one of the main policies at PARC that included on its all programs and activities. This was obvious due to the availability of women in all legal references such as; general assembly, board of directors and monitoring committee. It's also obvious on the level of executive team there is no discrimination on the basis of sex in various privileges and even women get their rights from holidays and salaries and allowances as announced in international laws and charters.

After five years PARC worked with qualified team of rural women on developing comprehensive development program specialized for rural women. Then PARC developed its steps toward having specialized centers for women that women clubs established in 1994 in rural areas for its desired need to work in such clubs for its privacy due to cultural issues.

Economic Empowerment Program

PARC also believes on the importance of empowering women economically for their need to develop their skills and enroll them in the production process to become able of having their own small income businesses. This refers to the women needs to be regulated within economic frameworks enabling them to access financial resources. As a result a projects incubator has been established by PARC aims at providing women loans to facilitate the establishment of small income-generating projects and productive work to achieve self-sufficiency and provide a source of income for women's families.

Credit and Saving Program



Agricultural Development Association

In 2000 PARC introduced credit and saving program aims at empowering women economically and increase access for income resources, by having a diversity of grants options such as individual and collective grants for the purpose of encouraging women to work in cooperatives. As a result we can conclude that PARC had built largest social and economic rural women regulatory gained their legal and societal legitimacy after hard work and to overcome many of the obstacles they faced and pave the ground for women to ask for their rights in its different aspects civil, economic or political rights.

It would be important to introduce one of the success stories that show how women had challenges in achieving their purposes. Madlein kallab 17 years old had challenged the hard condition that she faced. Madleen challenged the traditions and fishing tradition by becoming one of the fishers after her father illness which prevents him from providing his family of a proper income. She had proven that women can't be confined to the restrictions and it is able to ride the wave and raft to achieve its objectives. To throw away all the customs and traditions, and struggle waves of siege and the bullets of Israeli cruisers at sea.

Madeleine the daughter of the sea as described by the fishermen did not choose to work in the sea but the sea has chosen her. She loved the sea in her childhood during her trips accompanied by her father on a fishing journey, and mastered the art of cohabitation with him when she found herself in front of the sea. The difficult circumstances gave birth to a challenge, so she learned to ride the sea to get fishing protected from the people's question, and created between the nets a bridge from the safety bar for her fear of being falling into poverty and destitution.

The paper concluded its results with two recommendations:

1. Improving the legal environment for rural women, this will be through:



Agricultural Development Association

- a. Organizing advocacy campaigns to encourage female farmers to claim their right to inherit agricultural land and to consider the inheritance of the Shari'a Court as an executive, thus facilitating their access to finance and land control. This requires the relevant institutions to be registered in the name of the applicant.
 - b. Submit demands on Palestinian laws' amendments (Agriculture Law and Labor Law) to benefit women's issues and comply with the international conventions and agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority.
 - c. To promote the role of women and their integration into union work and their participation in cooperative work and their integration into specialized agricultural cooperative societies and agricultural committees and enable them to obtain leadership roles.
 - d. To support rural women's participation in public life and the promotion of women's institutions to support them in all fields (institutions can partially contribute in the registration's fees and membership of female farmers in cooperatives).
2. To improve the base ground that supports rural women, this will be through:
- a. Rehabilitation and improvement of agricultural roads, to facilitate farmers' access to markets.
 - b. Provide appropriate support to rural women for land reclamation in border areas, which enable them to register land in their names.
 - c. Expansion the process of formal agricultural extension, both in terms of quantity and type (number of guides and specializations).
 - d. Establish sufficient and competitive storage and cooling companies to maintain surplus production and improve sales in different seasons.
3. Rural women capacity building and economic empowerment through;



Agricultural Development Association

- e. Determine the real needs of rural women in the agricultural sector and build plans for rapid intervention as needed and provide integrated services for them.
- f. Build their negotiating capacity and provide different choices through networking among them and promote collective work to get the best prices in selling and buying and looking for new marketing means.
- g. Provide specialized technical training for them and introduce new techniques in production for post-harvest operations.
- h. Administrative and financial training for rural women on the feasibility study of projects and bookkeeping to improve revenues reduce costs and increase profits.
- i. Provision of grants and soft loans for rural women to develop their projects.

References

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