Delivering Women Farmer’s Rights
Introduction

Since the Declaration of Independence issued by the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1988 that developed the foundations of legal principles to build a Palestinian state, one of the most important and basic foundations that had adopted is "principle of equality" as one of the main pillars that the Palestinian legal system must build on. But 29 years later, the situation for women farmers and their status across Palestine has hardly changed. Even the diversity and varying policy and legal contexts, there disproportionately low levels of access to and control over productive resources (land, labor, capital, and technology) by women, in addition to limited efforts were performed to match policy directives with programs on the ground in Palestine.

Women farmers - especially smallholder women - remain under-represented or excluded from state-led efforts to improve land, water management, rural infrastructure, market access, and agriculture by not enough participation in planning and decision making. Until now, women have the highest average agricultural labor force participation rates in Palestine, forming more 66% of the agricultural labor force especially in the olive sector; Moreover, Palestinian women farmers make this major contribution to the agricultural sector despite the lack of support, inequality and unpaid care work.
The Palestinian women's rights Document (4th Edition), International and regional policy documents - such as: International conventions (UN, ILO, and ALO), Millennium Developmental Goals and post 2015 agenda in addition to National instruments such as: Declaration of Independence (1988), Constitutional Framework and Palestinian laws and legislation - recognize the important role women smallholder farmers play, and the need for sustainable forms of agriculture.

Even that, two major gaps facing Palestinian women farmers remain; the first is a persistent shortfall in adequate financial and human resources to deliver on the commitments to equitable and sustainable agriculture generally, and gender commitments in particular. The second is the absence of gender-specific targets, indicators and procedures to guide implementation of some of national and international instruments.

As Palestine is building its agenda’s foundations through the constitutional frame work that based on the Declaration of Independence1988 and reflected through Palestinian Laws and Legislations and goes paralleled with international Development Agenda. A paradigm shift is necessary to deliver these often well-articulated policy positions. The time is right to design and implement policies that effectively empower ‘the majority’ of the agricultural labor force in Palestine: women smallholder farmers.

Given the extent of women’s contribution to agriculture and Palestinian governments’ commitments to gender equality broadly through joining several international agreements emphasize gender equality, Palestinian government has an obligation to fulfill these commitments and put in place measures that challenge and transform factors that sustain structural gender inequality as outlined below.

**Structural barriers for women smallholder farmers**

There are four main ways shows the absence of women smallholder farmers in Palestinian’s national agricultural policies which are:

**First:** Women’s access to and control of land.

**Second:** Women’s lack of access to finance and extension services offered by the state.

**Third:** Limited state investments in the agricultural sector.

**Fourth:** Unpaid care work such as childcare, family farms, household maintenance, etc.

**Women’s right to land**

Agriculture remains the backbone of Palestinian economy and livelihoods, so land tenure systems remain important and have significant impact on productivity and profitability. For smallholder farmers land is considered an asset and social security. Land is considered the key income source for farmers that enable them caring for others, including children and adults. Women depend on agricultural land for subsistence farming and cash crop farming to generate household income and ensure food security for their households. Land is needed for the collection of firewood
and water, grazing for livestock, and provides fruits and medicinal plants necessary for the care of others. Women’s gendered responsibility for care provision means they have multiple uses for land beyond farming. Yet women do not enjoy secure and equitable land rights in most of the Palestinian communities as access is controlled by male family members.

Further, the existence of traditions and cultures which give the rights of inheritance to males only increases the widespread denial of women’s equal rights to access and control land and natural resources. The men hold primary power over the use, ownership and inheritance of land which continues to reinforce the denial of women’s equal rights to land even when constitutions provide for it.

**Access to finance, markets and extension services**

The lack of ownership and control over factors of production such as land and labor, in addition to burden of unpaid care work, women farmers also have limited access to finance, extension services and technological innovation.

**First,** access to finance, including credit services within banking institutions and cooperatives, is constrained by a lack of collateral, therefore the given interest rate for their loan (6%-15%) is the highest in the country. The profits of production process will being not able to cover the interest, thus credit system will be not supportive to women empowerment.

**Second,** lack of markets accessibility (Main pillar for food security), limited market information, lack of transportation and a lack of appropriate market spaces and services such as toilets, child-care facilities, and adequate lighting and security measures such as crime prevention programs in market places.

**Third,** extension services tend to be tailored to men rather than women. The consultation meeting held in West Bank June 9th 2015 shows, women farmers continue to have limited access to extension services despite commitments to gender equality.
Public financing for agriculture

The crucial role women smallholder farmers’ play in agriculture is further hampered by the allocation of financial resources to the agricultural sector. A review of Palestinian government’ agriculture budgets and policies conducted lately and analyses of National Agricultural Plans and sup sector olive oil strategy reveal two major trends in spending on agriculture Palestine. The first trend is the lack of adequate financial resources to the agricultural sector mainly for smallholder women farmer who forms %66 of the Agricultural work force in Palestine. The second trend is the fact that too high a proportion of agriculture budgets is spent on recurrent costs such as salaries. Comprehensive government investments in agriculture can be directed towards robust gender-sensitive and climate resilient sustainable agricultural research, support to farmers’ seed networks, the development of and support of storage facilities and market infrastructure, and access to finance and extension services to name a few.

Unpaid care work

Unpaid care work, which includes collecting firewood and taking care of the home and children is critical for creating and sustaining social ties in all societies. The care of children and adults sustains and reproduces the current and future labor force for the state and private capital. Despite society’s dependence on care work, the responsibility for care rests disproportionately on women’s shoulders because of the stereotypes that define what is deemed men’s or women’s work. Care work is time-consuming and more difficult to undertake in the context of poverty – in which most women farmers find themselves. More time is spent on unpaid care work when access to public services is limited and there is a lack of adequate infrastructure in rural communities. “The term ‘unpaid’ differentiates this care from paid care provided by employees in the public and non-governmental organization sectors and employees and self-employed persons in the private sector. The word ‘care’ indicates that the services provided nurture other people. The word ‘work’ indicates that these activities are costly in time and energy and are undertaken as obligations (contractual or social).” Improved access to quality public services and infrastructure reduces the long hours spent by women and young girls on agricultural activates, food preparation and other domestic and care activities. A 2014 study by ActionAid in Rwanda illustrates how small investments in care support structures can improve women’s ability to participate fully in agricultural activities. Unpaid care work denies women time to participate in local decision-making forums, thus perpetuating the stereotype of women as second-class citizens, and men as decision-makers in the community. States need to acknowledge, work performed by women as part of key economic indicators of national production. Additionally, governments need to invest in quality public services and infrastructure that would facilitate the re-distribution of unpaid care work, thus freeing up women’s time for social, economic and political empowerment. As noted by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme poverty, “care work is a social and collective responsibility that should be distributed more fairly between women and men, between the state and households.
Recommendations

In light of the factors above we offer the following recommendations to member decision makers.

1. Ensure women’s right to land:

A. We call for decision makers to secure women’s land rights by holistically implementing the law of Tenure of Land.

B. We urge decision makers to ensure a suitable use for public land, which allow women to use it for agriculture as factor of production – and making land affordable and accessible by women who are working in agriculture.

C. Government should ensure the proper use and management of public land whose historical and current illegal allocation and use has denied women secure and equitable land rights.

2. Access to finance, markets and extension services:

A. The Government needs to develop a mechanism to guarantee the participation of women smallholder farmers in Gender Program on climate change, as well as resource allocation for investments in research and extension for climate resilient and sustainable agriculture. In this regard we recommend developing a program to empower women smallholder farmers to have control over productive resources such as land.

B. We urge government and key players to increase spending on extension services for sustainable agriculture. This will include recruitment of more female extension
workers, and training for extension staff and increased outreach for women farmers’ in order to maximize their food security and food production.

C. We call for substantial investment in infrastructure and services that complement sustainable agriculture such as land reclamations, roads and markets, toilets for women.

D. We recommend that Government and key stakeholders quantify access to credit as flexible and credit friendly facilities to women, including soft loans that do not require collateral such as land that women smallholder farmers do not have.

3. Increase public financing and gender-responsive budgeting in agriculture:

A. We recommend that Government (MoA) adequately mobilize domestic resources to finance agricultural investments and public services that support rural women farmers.

B. Call for government and key donors to ensure that financial resources are allocated to sustainable agricultural investments at a national level.

C. We urge MoA and donors to invest in gender disaggregated data collection in the agricultural sector to inform appropriate gender program within national agriculture plans especially in olive sector.

4. Address unpaid care work:

A. The Government and key players should support the proposed Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality that calls for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of women’s unpaid care work between women and men by financing the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies.

B. We recommend the development of a clear framework that integrates unpaid care work and climate resilient sustainable agriculture by the government in collaboration with the National and international organization.

5. Ensure an integrated and coordinated multi-sectoral approach to women’s empowerment and development:

A. We recommend that the Palestinian government and its ministries set up a clear gender goal and targets for women’s empowerment within the Comprehensive Palestinian Agriculture Development Program. This will ensure that financial resources are allocated to address the challenges that women smallholder farmers face (which are captured in this policy brief) and institute accountability measures for effective delivery of programs.
This Publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the Agricultural Development Association (PARC) and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the EU.

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