Fact Sheet on

Women Agripreneurs Rights from a Food Sovereignty Perspective



September - October 2022







The Context of Agriculture in the Gaza Strip

A food and agribusiness are the driver for economic growth and development. It contributes to state food sovereignty, stability and create the prospects of a viable Palestinian state. According to the data collected from the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) of approximately 6.023 million dunums, which make up the total land area of Palestine, with the largest percentage (%94) in the West Bank, %20 is used for agricultural purposes (1.2 million dunums). Ninety per cent of agricultural lands is located in the West Bank, while only %10 is located in the Gaza Strip¹. Palestinian agriculture is currently estimated to be operating at one quarter of its potential: the total area of agricultural land currently used by Palestinians does not exceed half of the Palestinian agricultural land area available for cultivation. In recent years, there has been a steady decline in the area of agricultural land in the GS for many reasons including the accelerated population growth (%3.5), the urban sprawl and the increasing conversion of agricultural land for housing². The importance of the agricultural sector in Palestine stems from the contribution of its production to the food security of Palestinian households, in addition to the creation of job opportunities in the Palestinian local market.

An estimation of 1.32 million people in Gaza were assessed to be in need of humanitarian assistance (%63.0 of Gaza residents), including food security³ A report in December 2018 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that "over 68 per cent of households in the Gaza Strip, or about 1.3 million people, are severely or moderately food insecure" Food insecurity is a major issue facing Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt.) Food insecurity is defined as a situation in which a state or household does not have access to the proper amount of "sufficient, safe, [and] nutritious food [required] to maintain a healthy and active lifes.

2 Urban agriculture in the Gaza Strip - GUPAP

¹ Ministry of Agriculture. National Agriculture Sector Strategy (2022-2017).

³ REACH_OPT_Key-Sectoral-Findings_Factsheet-Booklet_MSNA2022-_Gaza.pdf

⁴ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (14 Dec 2018.) "Food insecurity in the opt: 1.3 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are food insecure." The Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin | November 2018. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/food-insecurity-opt-13-million-palestinans-gaza-strip-are-food-insecure Retrieved on 2020/04/07.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID19-, food insecurity in Palestine remains at very high levels, with a nearly one third of population – 32.7 percent or 1.6 million people – could not afford nutritious food. Food insecurity is high among women – 33.7 percent of families headed by women are food insecure – particularly in the Gaza Strip, where it is around 64 percent⁶.

Food security in the oPt is largely dependent on the lack of Palestinian food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is broadly defined as, 'the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems⁷. In its strategic for the year 2020-2010, the MoA uses the term "resilient agriculture economy" to indicate food self-sufficiency, food security, importation replacement and necessity to produce the agricultural inputs locally such as fertilizers, seedlings and fodders⁸. The used term by the MoA is interconnected with the concept of food sovereignty.

The oPt lacks this sovereign ability to define its own food polices. Locally, Palestinians produce only %60 of the consumed food items, including rice, flour, bread, meat, and fish, and only %5 of the total cereals and pulses. Therefore, the Palestinian local production can only meet its local demand in the categories of vegetable production (tomato, cucumber, eggplant, squash, beans, cabbage, and cauliflower), grapes, plums, citrus, poultry, eggs, and olive oil. For almost all other products, the oPt depends on foreign imports, primarily from Israel. This is also the case for agricultural inputs as the oPt only produces %20 of the required fertilizers and animal foodstuffs, while the rest are imported, mainly from Israel. **Incomplete in the categories of the required fertilizers and animal foodstuffs, while the rest are imported, mainly from Israel.**



The number of females in Palestine reached 2.63 million out of the total estimated population in mid2022-, comprising a percentage of %49 of the total Palestinian population, whereas the sex ratio reached 103.3; meaning that there are 103 males for every 100 females. Women headed about %12 of households in Palestine (%12 in the West Bank and %11 in Gaza Strip in 2021).¹¹

6 Palestine | World Food Programme (wfp.org)

7 Nyéléni Forum. 2007. "Nyéléni Declaration." Presented at the world Forum on food sovereignty.

Reorienting Local and Global Food Systems Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, Sélingué, Mali. [Google Scholar]

8 Abu Shammala Nabll» <u>Facilitating development of Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture in the Gaza Strip for the local market</u>», 2016.

9 amal-raghad-food-insecurity.pdf (communityresearch.org.nz)

10 Ibid 9

11 PCBS | H.E. Dr. Awad, Highlights the Reality of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of International Women's Day, 2022/03/08

The PCBS data reports that only %1.4 of the female workforce is employed in the agriculture, fishing, and forestry sector, compared to %7.9 of the male workforce employed in this sector. 12 The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture claims that 20 per cent of the 66,000 farmers in Gaza are women who either own farms or work as farm employees.13

During the FGDs, it was cited that the need for a stable economic situation and the unavailability of job opportunities catalyzed women to start a business idea. Furthermore, the reasons behind starting a business were to alleviate poverty, improve the household income, achieve self-esteem and financial autonomy. The majority of women holding academic degrees best utilize their education and knowledge to establish their businesses. In fact, a significant number of agri-prenuer women are the main bread winner of their families in spite of their social status, being whether widowed or divorced.

In Gaza, women play a prominent role in the agricultural sector and contribute to achieving one of main pillar of food sovereignty, which focuses on fulfilling people's food needs through local production. No accurate or reliable statistics were found about the number of women-led agri-enterprises; this is because a great portion of small firms operate within the informal sector and are not officially registered. However, it has been established that approximately 1,000 women-led agri-enterprises are located in the Gaza Strip, representing a large cross-section of the country's food system14. Other estimates indicated that there 2,500 registered and unregistered 2,000 to agri-enterprises. Indeed, these women-led farms and agri-enterprises maintain seed banks of locally cultivated crops and produce a great diversity of foodstuffs - fresh vegetables and fruit, herbs, salted fish, poultry, eggs, mushrooms, cheeses, olive oil, honey and traditional ingredients such as ajweh (date paste), maftool (hand rolled couscous), stevia sweeter, jam and pickles. It has been found that %50 of Gaza agri business is shouldered by women¹⁵.

For agri-preneur women, land is often the most important household asset for supporting agricultural production and attaining food sovereignty and nutrition. PCBS indicated that %27 of Palestinian households in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip own a home garden; which %91 use for farming⁶. This shows that about a quarter of Palestinian households depend on gardens for a significant portion of their food consumption. Moreover, %10 of Palestinian households raise livestock. Garden or livestock products are mostly consumed by the families that produce them, especially given that home-grown gardens are small in area (203 m² on average), and the number of animals raised is also quite small.17

17 Ibid.

¹² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. (13 Feb 2020.) "Labour Force Survey: (October-December, 2019) Round (Q2019/4). Press Report on the Labour Force Survey Results." Ramallah -Palestine. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_-2020-2-13LF4th-en.pdf
13 Amjad Ayman. (18 Apr 2018.) "Harvest under fire: The plight of Gaza's female farmers." Middle East Eye. https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/ harvest-under-fire-plight-gazas-female-farmers.

14 Rebuilding Women Owned Farms in Gaza Sustain

WL11_40_the_role_of_women.pdf (ciheam.org)
16.9, PCBS, 2016. Family farming survey in 2015: main findings.

In fact, the agri-entrepreneur women have significantly participated in the local food system. According to the agribusiness women, they have highlighted that their gardens are a source for their daily food consumption. In addition, the household surplus of the food used in providing the community with food. About %16.3 of the respondents use urban agriculture products to supply their household with food and %9.3 of them used to sale the product in the market. The ultimate use of the products for more than two-third of the respondents was household food supply and market sale with %74.4, according to a study finding ¹⁸



Despite the significant role women play in food sovereignty, women-led agri-enterprises face numerous social, political and economic challenges that hinder growth, sustainability and food sovereignty.

Conclusions from the FGDs summarized that entrepreneur women encountered major problems embedded in the social and traditional views toward women. Among these issues were the society's patriarchal set-up and the nature of roles assigned to women, especially confining women's role to child care and house work. According to the study conducted by Suhail Sultan (2016), women faced cultural limitations that reduced their image to a typical housewife. It was believed that norms, traditions and attitudes of the conservative society posed a burden on women. Moreover, the society still perceive women only as housewives no matter how educated they are or how successful in their businesses they are ". Women stated that they faced challenges in fulfilling some of the business requirements or activities such as dealing with vendors which socially did not accept a woman to complete the business procedures.

Entrepreneurship education is important for women agripreneurs. It was evident during the FGD that the basic business education offered by universities in Gaza Strip is mostly academic, which does not provide the fundamental business and entrepreneurship practical competencies. In the Gaza Strip, women have been facing a multitude of issues concerning entrepreneurship education such as limited business management skills, compared with men. Besides, women agripreneurs have less exposure to formal business training, especially in the areas of marketing and financial management, and are more likely to operate their enterprises

¹⁸ The Role of Women in Urban Agriculture and Food Security in Beit Lahia City, Gaza Strip.

¹⁹ Sultan, Sami «<u>Women entrepreneurship working in a conflict region: the case of Palestine</u>», World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sust. Development, Vol. 12, Nos. 2016, 3/2.

remotely from their homes²⁰. Furthermore, lack of training, information and support services also perform against the growth of women's entrepreneurship. Entrepreneur women stated that they do not possess the required knowledge or skills of a successful businesswoman though they believe that they cannot grow without the right tools and skills. Simultaneously, women find it hard to acquire these skills due to training high costs. Throughout the FGDs, women agripreneurs required to receive technical training that support their entry to the labor market, which is niche and competitive in the Gaza Strip.

As well, women face a challenge in promoting their products amid the existence of imported products and local large enterprises. Hence, there is a need to organize special exhibitions to market and promote women's products in the local market. There is also a need to encourage women to participate in national and regional exhibitions. In this respect, women in the FGDs emphasized their need for support in the marketing and their need for networks to facilitate the marketing of their products, in addition to training on the basics of marketing such as packaging, product design and advertising. Yet, such a matter will basically depend on registering and licensing women's agribusinesses, noting most of women-led agri-businesses are not registered, which exacerbates another major challenge. Generally, the Palestinian agricultural sector suffers from weak marketing capacities due to lack of organization and coordination between the different actors involved. These problems negatively influence the farmer's income, and hinder the achievement of high level of self-sufficiency²!

Other challenges include the electricity outage, which imposes another major problem when women operate their businesses. According to a report published by the OCHA, the ongoing power shortage has severely affected the availability of essential services, particularly health, water and sanitation services, and undermined Gaza's fragile economy, particularly the manufacturing and agriculture sectors. The report indicated that the electricity availability in 2022 is 12 hours power on and 12 hours power off. The chronic electricity outage worsens the operation of the food processing businesses that women lead in the Gaza Strip. This problem compels agripreneurs to pay for electric generators to operate their agri-enterpises, such as food processing businesses, which heavily depend on electricity, adding another financial burden on women.

²⁰ Althalathini, Doaa « Women Entrepreneurs in Gaza Strip, Obstacles and Opportunities», 2015

²¹ The Ministry of National Economy The Ministry of Agriculture» <u>Palestinian Agricultural Production and Marketing between Reality and Challenges</u>», 2015.

he study conducted by Althalathini (2015) found that the main problem for the majority of women entrepreneurs in Gaza Strip is financing, %85 of the surveyed 100 entrepreneurs women said they faced difficulties when they started up their business and when they want to expand them since they don't meet the conditions of microfinance institutions (MFIs) or banks²². Moreover, women indicated that they don't have enough awareness and information about the finance institutions and types of loans. In this regard, women highlighted other complications in getting approvals from their husbands to accept loans, securing guarantors for their loans, and the unaffordable loan's high interests; these challenges hinder the women-led businesses to expand, make profit, and compete.

In addition, the agri-entrepreneur women in the FGDs indicated that they face high competition with the low prices of the imported goods, the willingness of the community to buy the imported commodities threaten their businesses. Agri-prenuer women also faced a challenge in competing with the local established enterprises, which are large and

competitive. Further, women complained from the high cost of inputs which limit the profit margin and lead to major price fluctuations and subsequent financial losses. Other factors that may hold up women's venture's growth is the complicated and cumbersome business environment. Obtaining license and permits procedures from the Ministry of Economics (MoE) are complex, prolonged and costly. Another issue is paying taxes, which make women reluctant to register their businesses officially; hence, affecting the accessibility to the local market. For example, the registration fee for the industrial businesses is 100 Jordanian Dinar per year, the fee of the trademark investigation is 74 NIS, and 1,000 NIS must be paid for the trademark ownership. Other costs include the label statement (80 NIS) per product and the product testing (Ranging 100 to 500 NIS) paid when a product fails to pass the required test. Other hindering factors are the political instability and war threats, the limited market expansion opportunities, poor infrastructure and lack of access to technology and innovation?

Other challenges include the electricity outage, which imposes another major problem when women operate their businesses. According to a report published by the OCHA²⁴, the ongoing power shortage has severely affected the availability of essential services, particularly health, water and sanitation services, and undermined Gaza's fragile economy, particularly the manufacturing and agriculture sectors

²² Althalathini, Doaa « Women Entrepreneurs in Gaza Strip, Obstacles and Opportunities», 2015.

²³ Sultan, Sami «<u>Women entrepreneurship working in a conflict region: the case of Palestine</u>», World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sust. Development, Vol. 12, Nos. 2016, 3/2.

²⁴ https://www.ochaopt.org/page/gaza-strip-electricity-supply

Access and control of to water resources are vital for food sovereignty. The issue of water scarcity and high salinity limited agripreneurs women opportunities for crop diversification or rotation. The salty water is an issue that enforces women to grow specific type of agriculture that is suitable to salty water. The agribusinesses in the FGDs indicated that they grow the same crops because the salty water could not grow profitable products such as sweet pepper and cherry. In case women wanted to use clean water to grow profitable products, it would expensive as they will be purchasing water.

The high price of purchasing suitable water has rendered irrigated crops, such as vegetables and fruits, unprofitable for many farmers ²⁵. As a result, some farmers are resorting to rain-fed seasonal crops such as wheat and barley, which are low revenue. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, in 2017 as much as 60 per cent of the agricultural water need went unmet due to the combination of water and electricity shortages ²⁶.

Furthermore, Gazans farmers must deal with several obstacles of different forms stem from the Israeli occupation.

the most serious problem facing the agripreneurs women is the Israeli escalation on the Gaza Strip that intentionally destroyed their businesses, as indicated by the women in the FGDs. Following the bombings and eleven-day Israeli assault of May 50\$,2021 million of vegetables, field crops and fruit trees were destroyed. Another 9\$ millions of greenhouses and crops were lost, and over 11\$ million worth of livestock farming.

Amongst these devastating losses, over half of the women owned farms and agri-enterprises of Gaza were partially or completely destroyed. MoA indicated that there has been a delay in supporting businesses that have been damaged due to escalations. The Ministry stressed that the last aid was supported post the war of 2009-2008, which shapes another challenge in supporting other businesses which have been destroyed in other wars. Another challenge faces the agriculture sector and women in agriculture is the unilaterally declared "buffer zone" along the Gazan side of the Israel-Gaza border after Israeli withdrawal in 2005. The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture indicated that %40 of all agricultural land in the Gaza Strip, totaling 62 square kilometers, inaccessible because of the "buffer" or "border" zone. Even in lands near the border that Palestinian farmers can access, their agricultural activities are disrupted by Israeli military gunfire, which is known to leave Palestinian farmers injured or killed.

²⁵ The Water Channel. 2013. "Farming in Despair. Water for Agriculture in the Gaza Strip." https://thewaterchannel.tv/videos/farming-in-despairwater-for-agriculture-in-the-gaza-strip/.

²⁶ Premiere Urgence International. 2019. "Gaza farmers encouraged to use solar energy." https://www.premiere-urgence.org/en/gaza-farmers encouraged-to-use-solar-energy/

²⁷ Rebuilding Women Owned Farms Of Gaza — The Empty Square

²⁸ Ibid 14

Power Dynamics in Rights Advocacy Influencing Positive Change

Many stakeholders can play pivotal role in supporting women agriprueners and advocating for the women agribusiness entrepreneurs and promoting their rights such as governmental institutions, relevant NGOs and the private sector. These institutions are considered active actors for innovation and safeguarding food sovereignty for all subsectors in agriculture.

MoA is viewed as the main legal entity responsible for all aspects of agriculture covering both the plant and animal subsectors. Its role includes developing the laws, regulations, policies, regulatory measures, and performance improvement plans for the sector, coordinating with partners, providing technical/extension services to farmers and supervising projects implemented by local/international agencies. According to the representatives of the MoA in Gaza, the import substitution policy that was followed has recorded a number of successes, represented by reaching self-sufficiency in several crops, including olives, onions, and the main vegetables such as potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, leaf crops, watermelons, grapes and figs. There are expectations that self-sufficiency will be achieved in some crops, such as citrus fruits, where the self-sufficiency rate has reached %80²⁹.

The role of MoA can be extended to supporting and aiding the agri-enterprises that were damaged or destroyed by the Isreali assaults, which can help in restoring and recovering the businesses.

- Ministry of National Economy (MONE) is responsible for the improvement of business environment. Also, the MONE can have a role in activating a protection policy at imported products to protect the local products. The MONE can play an important role in facilitating the Products Labeling Statement, business licensing, and branding. Its role also extends to supervise the quality of the products and provide guidance for the agri-enterprises.
- Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) can assist in purchasing food parcels from women-led agri-enterprises. This can catalyze and encourage these women to continue expanding their businesses, which help them achieve food sovereignty.

Municipalities can assist the agribusiness women in exempting of licensing fees, water subscription. Municipalities also can assist and facilitate provision of adequate and good quality water with reasonable prices to assist the women to diversify their products and respond to the community needs of food. Furthermore, the Municipalities can cooperate with the agriprneure women through allocating special spaces to promote their products in the public markets. In addition

local municipalities can help in facilitating the electricity and water licensing of the agri-enterprises.

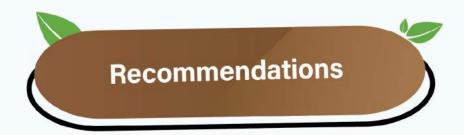
The international and local NGOs can support agribusiness women to advocate for their rights through several ways, including providing complementary activities to the MoA. INGOs is expected to play a role in advocating the entry of agricultural inputs, seeds, fodders, etc. Moreover, INGOs and NGOs can have a supportive role in terms of providing extension technical visits to the women led enterprises. Women feedback emphasized the need to, expand, and sustain their businesses. INGOs and NGOs can assist in considering the products of these agri-enterprises when they aspire to purchase and prepare food parcels.

Finance Institutions and banks can also provide support for the agri-entrepreneur women through facilitating soft loan for the businesses to assist them to expand and develop their businesses and to ease the loan procedures. As cited, the agricultural sector is the least beneficiary of banking services in Palestine, compared to other economic sectors. Lending to this sector did not reach even %1 of total bank loans across all economic sectors. This sector does not receive enough support from institutions lending to small-or micro-enterprises: access to such support has not increased more than %11 in the past twenty years 30.

Private sector should have an active and supportive role in marketing for the women agripruners products, especially the local malls.

Other bodies are also expected to be supportive of women agriprueners such as existing syndicates and business associations. This could have a meaningful support to agripruners. Thus, there is a need to create representative bodies of female agriprueners, which aim to advocate for their women agriprueners' rights.

³⁰ Marzin, Jacques and Uwaidat, Ahmad «<u>Study on Small-scale Agriculture in the Palestinian Territories</u>», 2019.



Ministry of Agriculture

- Utilize political influence on the international community to encourage investment in the agriculture sector and to facilitate exporting.
- lt is important that the government keeps women's agribusinesses enterprises within the framework of a medium-term development plan and to pay particular attention to this sector as an important contribution in achieving food sovereignty in Palestine.
- It is recommended to allocate an emergency fund that can be utilized to subsidize the women agri-businesses, support and provide relief in cases of unexpected losses.
- MoA is recommended to communicate with relevant international organizations to create a fund specialized to support agri-pruener women.
- MoA is recommended to conduct regular technical support and extension visits to the women entrepreneurs to provide them with the adequate information on legal and technical issues.
- Organizing special exhibitions to market and promote women's products in all regions of Palestine and outside Palestine. There is also a need to encourage women to participate in national, regional and international exhibitions.

Ministry of National Economy

- MoNE is recommended to facilitate issuing the products labelling (exemption of labelling fees) and facilitate the product's branding process.
- MoNE is recommended to help women in registering/licensing their agribusinesses through exempting or minimizing the registration fees.
- MoNE is recommended to apply protection policy for the imported materials and commodities.

MoNE is recommended to supervise and monitor the quality of the products and provide technical guidance.

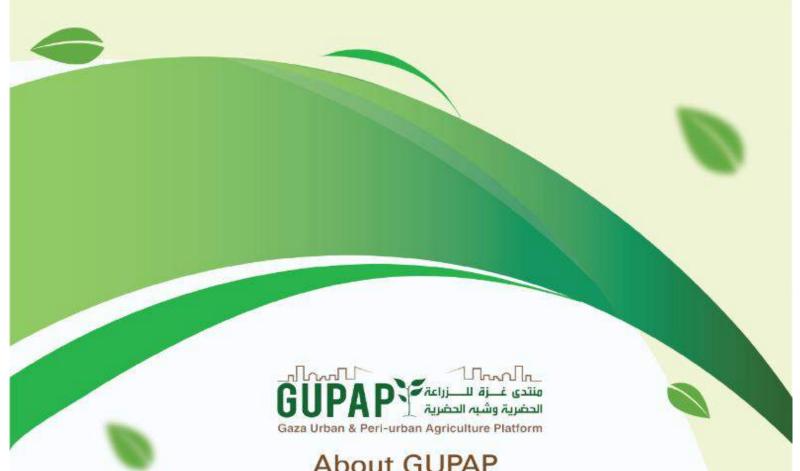


- INGOs and NGOs should advocate for the rights of women-led agri-enterprises.
- INGOs and NGOs should place political pressure on the Israel side to abandon unjust policies towards Gaza, lift of the blockade, restrictions on movement of people and goods, and to abide by its obligations under international law.
- INGOs and NGOs are recommended to provide training on business management and product marketing are also needed, since marketing and pricing are found among the most important difficulties for women running a business.
- INGOs and NGOs are recommended to create a positive social environment to encourage agri-entrepreneur women to sustain and develop their businesses. This can be attained by increasing the community awareness about the role of women in the economy.
- INGOs and NGOs are advised to promote and encourage women agriprueners' products to be included in any humanitarian interventions of in-kind assistance / food parcels' distribution. Hence, this will market the products of women agriprueners' and support them to grow, and continue operating their businesses, which help in achieving food sovereignty.









About GUPAP

The Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP) is, a participatory space, launched in 2013 that brings together critical actors and stakeholders who are involved in developing the Palestinian agricultural sector resilience.

GUPAP mandates advocate for integrating and adapting the urban agroecology, urban family farming, and food sovereignty concepts and approaches; it effectively coordinates with municipalities, civil society organizations, and other actors to facilitate its mandate.

GUPAP is an active member of various national, regional, and global networks and platforms; it engages in discussion groups for exchange, capacity sharing, influencing relevant food policies/strategies, and advocating the right to food; GUPAP has been awarded the influence Spring Prize 2021

https://springprize.org/shortlisted/gaza-urban-periurban-agriculture-platform/



"Sponsored by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung with funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany. This publication or parts of it can be used by others for free as long as they provide a proper reference to the original publication"

«The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of GUPAP and does not necessarily reflect a position of RLS»

For communication





