



WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Preliminary Study

Submitted to

Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale (PU-AMI)

In the framework of

Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Project

by

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January 31, 2014

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
ICDL	International Computer Driving License
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
MOWA	Ministry of woman affairs
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PU-AMI	Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
TEVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WEE	Women Economic Empowerment
WFL	Women for Life

I. INTRODUCTION

Under the framework of “Women economic Empowerment” (WEE) project (hereafter: the Project), funded by the European Union (Europe Aid), Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale (PU-AMI) is partnering with a local organization, Women for Life (WFL), to promote and support the empowerment of women in 10 disadvantaged villages that follow Salfit and Qalqilya districts (i.e. Azzun, Marda, Haris, Kifl Haris, Kufr Thalth, Sannirya, Alzzawia, Deir Istia, Kafr Qaddum, Deir Balut) through activities aimed at raising awareness, strengthening women employability and entrepreneurship.

PU-AMI commissioned Alpha International to conduct a preliminary study (hereafter: the Study) on the economic empowerment of women in 10 targeted localities.

The immediate objective of the Study is to generate reliable, representative quantitative and qualitative data to assess women economic empowerment opportunities with a view to develop and update information about current trends and realities. More specifically, the Study aimed at establishing a baseline to monitor gender-equity within the Palestinian labor market, focusing mainly on women living in Palestinian villages in Area C.

In addition, the Study aimed at assessing the obstacles preventing women economic empowerment and suggesting corrective measures based on the needs identified by the communities themselves.

The present report includes the main results of this study. It consists of four main sections:

- Literature review
- Analytical framework used to study women empowerment
- Study methodology
- Study findings
- Main recommendations

II. ABSTRACT OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study commissioned by PU-AMI within the framework of the Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Project aimed at collecting the perceptions of the Project targeted communities on the economic empowerment of women in general and women with disabilities in particular. It also focuses on the main obstacles they face to achieve economic emancipation as well as the corrective measures and interventions needed to improve the current situation.

The findings reveal first that the surveyed communities understand the concept of “women economic empowerment” as an enhancement of women’s integration in the labor market, which is seen as the principal way to reach a higher degree of financial independence. Yet, Palestinian women’s participation in the labor market, equivalent to a mere 11-15%, is one of the lowest of the whole Mediterranean area. The reasons for this phenomenon as identified by the surveyed communities can be classified into three main areas, i.e. socio-cultural, political-legislative and lack of economic and other resources.

According to the literature review and the field study, local traditions and patriarchal societal values appear as one of the greatest hurdles to women economic empowerment. In particular, the Study’s participants identified the following socio-cultural obstacles:

- Social norms and cultural traditions, including
 - ~ Negative stereotypes against women working outside their homes and outside their villages with strangers
 - ~ Traditional representation of women as mere wives and mothers.
 - ~ Husband’s or family’s objection to women’s work by fear of stigmatization since men are regarded as the sole legitimate breadwinners and decision-makers
 - ~ Confinement of women in a limited set of socially approved professions
 - ~ Lesser value attributed to women’s work in comparison to men’s work
 - ~ Communities’ disapproval of women traveling alone and getting home late
 - ~ Early marriage, with negative consequences on women educational achievements.
- Women’s family responsibilities and chores associated with their reproductive role, unbalanced division of house chores between wife and husband.
- Lack of education and professional skills.
- Reproduction of traditional values and negative stereotypes by the media.

At the political level, the research showed that the active role of Palestinian women in the political struggle has not been rewarded, with their participation in the political leadership being extremely limited. In addition, although the Palestinian law theoretically recognizes women as equal citizens, in practice they suffer from much discrimination, particularly with regard to employment opportunities. The main political and legal hindrances identified by the sources were:

- Legal framework (particularly Labor Law) discriminating against women.
- Unequal remuneration.
- High tax fees for registration of new businesses.
- Communities’ shortage of knowledge about women’s rights and economy/labor related legislation.
- Insufficiency of legal aid support, including in cases of rights violations in the workplace.
- Women’s lack of participation in the political sphere.

Lastly, it appeared that the key obstacle to women economic empowerment is actually the structural limitations of the economy and the labor market. The Palestinian labor market is highly gender-segmented, offering women access to an extraordinary limited number of sectors. These few sectors are in non-growth areas of the economy and are unable to absorb new female entrants, resulting in a persistently high rate of female unemployment.

This situation is exacerbated by women's lack of access to resources –such as property, funds, transportation means, support services, security, education, etc. – which are yet considered as basic ingredients for women empowerment and employability. The main challenges identified by the Study's sources in terms of access to resources were:

- Lack of access to property, land and financial resources necessary to open new business.
- Insufficient access to funders/donors, including lack of knowledge about funding opportunities, donors' activities and services, and formal requirements to obtain funding
- Lack of sufficient and secure transportation
- Movement difficulties related to political/security situations.
- Lack of child-care and other family and personal support services.
- Shortage of vocational and technical skills.
- Lack of access to bank lending and credit.
- Absence of career counseling.
- Lack of marketing support, and discrepancy between women's productions and actual demands of the market.

In addition to suffering from the above difficulties, disabled women have to face further challenges due to their condition, such as a shortage of services adapted to their handicap, the social stigma and negative perceptions of society towards the capabilities of people with disabilities, the shortage of job opportunities adapted to disabled women in the Palestinian labor market, and the lack of governmental policies aimed at improving disabled women economic conditions.

On the basis of these perceived obstacles and the related practical and strategic needs expressed by the surveyed communities to enhance women economic empowerment – e.g. provision of support services to help women assuming their family responsibilities; provision of job opportunities inside and outside the village; improved provision of transportation; more equalitarian legal framework; education and capacity-building training; awareness raising of the community on the importance of women's participation in the labor market. Accordingly, Alpha suggested a set of recommendations to be taken into consideration by PU-AMI and its partners upon working at improving Palestinian women economic empowerment. These include:¹

Corrective measures to socio-cultural obstacles:

- ▶ Organize awareness-raising campaign to change communities' perceptions towards women's participation in labor market and wider economic and public sphere:
- ▶ Help create support services for working women so as to mitigate the burden of duties associated with their productive role.
- ▶ Help create new businesses and job opportunities inside or near the women's places of residency, in particular help identify non-traditional typology of works that women can assume from home or within the village.
- ▶ Help improve access of women to education and vocational training.
- ▶ Help improve family planning support.

Corrective measures to political and legal obstacles:

- ▶ Help draft legal framework combating legal obstacles to women economic empowerment.
- ▶ Raise awareness and lobby for the amendment of the current legislation in a sense favorable to women economic empowerment.
- ▶ Educate women about their rights according to national and international laws, and about the current legislative framework (especially Labor Law).
- ▶ Help establish legal counseling units to provide legal aid to women.

¹ For details see the Conclusive Recommendation section.

- ▶ Lobby policy-makers and political leaders on the need to enhance women's participation in the political sphere and decision-making processes and work with them to develop specific strategies.
- ▶ Help enhance the enrollment of women in trade unions and ensure women's rights guaranteed in trade unions regulations.
- ▶ Conduct effective monitoring to assess the integration of women in labor market.

Corrective measures to obstacles related to the lack of access to resources:

- ▶ Provision of capacity-building and vocational trainings to women and women CBOs
- ▶ Provide information on existing funding opportunities from international donors and assist in fundraising activities
- ▶ Help establish career counseling units providing information on labor market and training opportunities, assisting in starting own businesses and developing existing businesses, providing marketing support
- ▶ Lobbying the Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Women's Affairs to better coordinate their work and develop a common national strategic plan for women employment, in close cooperation with private sector employers.
- ▶ Help women CBOs cooperate among themselves and unite efforts
- ▶ Raise awareness of private sector companies on the importance of employing female staff, work with employers to find strategies to enhance women's participation in the labor market
- ▶ Raise awareness of banking institutions on the importance of facilitating women's access to credit, loans and other financial products

Specific actions to enhance disabled women economic empowerment:

- ▶ Lobby concerned ministries on the necessity to integrate disabled women in the labor market and work with them to develop policies adapted to disabled women's needs.
- ▶ Build the capacity of women's organizations to deal specifically with disabled women.
- ▶ Organize awareness-raising campaign to change communities and employers negative perceptions about women with disabilities and to highlight their rights and positive contribution to the society.
- ▶ Educate disabled women about their own rights.
- ▶ Enhance professional skills of disabled woman based on their needs, interests and the requirements of the labor market.
- ▶ Help develop the profession of care givers for persons with special needs, including providing support to disabled women in the workplace.
- ▶ Help identify alternative typology of works adapted to disabled women
- ▶ Raise awareness of private sector companies and employers on the importance of employing women with disabilities; work with them to find strategies to enhance their participation in the labor market.
- ▶ Conduct effective monitoring to assess the integration of disabled women in the labor market.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

III. 1 Introduction:

A literature review was conducted to provide a detailed description of the current status of women economic empowerment in the West Bank in terms of gender-equality; social, political and economic obstacles; interventions conducted so far in this field.

First and foremost, it is important to provide a definition of the concept of 'women empowerment'. The Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2010 states that: "Women economic empowerment comprises the following: economic opportunity (e.g. expanding employment and entrepreneurship, promoting decent and productive work, improving access to finance), legal status and rights (e.g. improving women's property inheritance and land rights), and voice inclusion and participation in economic decision-making (e.g. developing mechanisms to enhance women's involvement in political and decision-making bodies)."

This definition entails working at three separate and interconnected levels: i.e. economic, social and political.

Accordingly, the present report addresses the obstacles facing Palestinian women in their bid for economic empowerment at the socio/cultural, legal/political and economic levels. It describes previous interventions and provides recommendations on their improvement and maximization.

III.2 Participation of Palestinian women in the labor market

According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2003, the participation of working-age women in the labor market in the Mediterranean area is between 22-25%. Regarding more specifically the Palestinian situation, figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) indicates that women's participation in the labor market ranges between 11-15%². It is one of the lowest rates in the whole Mediterranean area.

III.3 Socio-cultural and educational obstacles

While the Palestinian law recognizes women as equal citizens, local traditions and cultural values constitute a real obstacle to their economic empowerment. Indeed most of the obstacles faced by women in the economic sphere are connected to socio-cultural factors since the concept of gender is based primarily on the prevailing culture defining social roles for both sexes. In Palestine, this culture is mostly patriarchal and has marginalized women to their reproductive role, which is considered as less valuable to the productive role of men due to the low consideration given to any work not measurable in financial terms. It is therefore expected that socio-cultural factors play a major role in the process of women's integration in the public sphere and the economy.

Discriminations against women start at the Palestinian household level. Within the Palestinian family structure, women are classified as dependents whose value and status is derived from their male "protectors". While their male counterparts are brought up to become the providers of the household, women are constrained to remain within a rigid structure which limits them to house-keeping and reproductive roles. The unequal division of house chores between male and female leaves the whole burden on women. Since most households cannot afford to hire housekeeping assistance, women end up having no time to practice a paid professional activity.³

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Labor Force Survey, 2008.

³ Alpha International for Research, Polling and Informatics, Palestinian Women's Work: a Study on Palestinians' Impressions and Orientations Towards Women's Work in Palestine, UNESCO publications, 2010.

In terms of education, while a larger number of females are enrolled in Palestinian higher education institutions, they are however concentrated in disciplines traditionally reserved to women such as education sciences or social and human sciences. The inability of female students to clearly break away from these limited fields of study could be viewed as mirroring the reproductive and care-giving role assigned to them by the society. These educational patterns prevent women from acquiring knowledge and skills required in non-traditional jobs, as illustrated by the fact that women are almost totally absent from professional fields such as business, law, science engineering and manufacturing although these are the fields offering major employment opportunities.⁴ This phenomenon therefore limits even more women's access to the job market and, consequently, their economic empowerment. We see here that education levels, societal restrictions and employability are closely interrelated, as traditional constraints can result from – and be reinforced by – a lack of education, and a lack of education will further decrease employability.

Besides, even within their traditional job categories, women tend to occupy lesser positions than males. Data shows indeed that although women constitute the almost absolute majority of teachers at the preschool education level, their participation tends to decrease as the educational level increase. This means that as the focus shifts from care giving to the actual educational content itself, the role of women regresses. In 2007/2008, women constituted 55.4% of the teaching staff at schools level, but their participation dropped to 27% at the college level, and to 15.9% at the university level.⁵

The educational gap between male and female is even more visible at the postgraduate level. Data shows that the percentage of Palestinian women holding a PhD (Doctorate) degree is very small compared to that of men. In Palestinian urban areas, only 225 women hold a PhD degree as opposed to 1,811 men (12.4% of the population), while only 1,748 women hold a Master's degree as opposed to 4,601 men (38%).⁶

It is interesting to note that women without formal education have the lowest unemployment rate (2.7%), while on the contrary women with 13 or more years of education score the highest unemployment rates (37.5%). This can be explained by the fact that highly educated women would not accept jobs they deem not sufficiently paid or "respectable". Another important factor is the absence of a clear link between higher education outputs and the needs of the labor market.⁷

III.4 Legislative and political obstacles

The political uncertainty associated with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the blockade on Gaza presents further difficulties that Palestinian women have to endure. For instance, recent reforms advanced by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to improve the status of Palestinian women have been seriously hindered by restrictions imposed by Israel on the functioning of the PA, which limits rooms for maneuver when implementing projects benefiting the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, although the political struggle is mostly carried out by men, women are indirectly left with a huge burden to bear. For example, a large number of them have to deal with the imprisonment of their husbands and must carry the costs resulting from their detention, including the substantial investment in time, efforts and financial resources necessary to organize visits in prisons as they are located in Israel proper and non easily accessible to West Bank and Gaza ID holders.

4 ASALA, Women Economic Empowerment in the West Bank, 2010.

5 UN Women and the Palestinian Ministry of Women Affairs, Cross-Sectorial National Gender strategy: Promoting Gender Equality and Equality 2011-2013, 2010.

6 Ibid.

7 Anne Marie Golla, AnjuMalhotra, Priya Nanda and RekhaMehra, Understanding and Measuring Women economic Empowerment. Definition, Framework and Indicators, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2011.

Besides, the many sacrifices and active participation of women in the political struggle have not been rewarded at the political level, with the participation of Palestinian women in the political scene being extremely limited. Data shows that in the formal political body of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), women's participation was limited to 9% (25 women) in 1980, rose slightly to 10% (35 women) in 1992, but dropped again to 7.5% in 1996.

Even in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords (1993-95), women's political participation remained unimproved. In the 1996 legislative elections, there were merely 27 women candidates as opposed to 646 males, and only five of them managed to win seats, a meager 5.6% of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) 88 members. At the executive level, women's representation in 1999 was limited to only two women among 30 ministers (6%)⁸.

In general, whether for men or women, the availability of financial resources generally plays an important role in political participation, facilitating access to and influence in the political arena.⁹ This is not limited to the actual owning of financial capital but extends to the ability to manipulate key personnel and set leaders' agendas. The lack of financial power of Palestinian woman thus hinders their ability to play a prominent political role, which is another motivation to enhance their economic empowerment as it would also help advancing them on the political front.

III.5 Economic obstacles

In addition to the above connection between financial resources and political empowerment, the primary obstacle to women economic empowerment is actually the structural limitations of the economy and the labor market themselves. As mentioned earlier, the Palestinian labor market is highly gender-segmented, offering women access to an extraordinary limited number of sectors. These few sectors are in non-growth areas of the economy and are unable to absorb new female entrants, resulting in a persistently high rate of female unemployment.

The current economic crisis has played an important role in pushing women out of the "comfort zone" of the household to search for jobs outside. Indeed, with the household income declining sharply, the need to assist their male counterparts in providing for the family became urgent. This contributed to highlighting the disadvantages women have to deal with at the employment level: Not only do they have to compete with other women for limited jobs available, but they also have to deal with a surge in males looking for employment in the sectors traditionally reserved to women. Data from the 2008 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics show that the women's rate of participation in the labor market is low compared to neighboring countries and is significantly lower than that of men (in 2007, the rate of female participation in the labor market was 15.7% compared to 67.7% for males¹⁰).

Another set of challenges faced by women, related once again to traditional mindsets, is wage discrimination and the existence of salary gaps in favor of men. While salary disparity admittedly exists even in developed countries, it is of a much larger dimension in Middle Eastern countries, including the Palestinian territories. This can further discourage women from entering the labor market.¹¹

IV. FEMINIST THEORETICAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

After presenting the general employment situation of women in Palestine, it is important to understand the feminist analytical framework for women economic empowerment so as to help external practitioners better analyze and understand the process of transition from practical planning to achieving the strategic goal of economic empowerment.

8 Women Studies Institute, Birzeit University, Palestinian Women Empowerment: an Assessment, UNESCO publications, 2006.

9 Alpha International for Research, Polling and Informatics, Women Political Participation, UNESCO publications, 2012.

10 Women Studies Institute, op. cit.

11 Women Studies Institute, op. cit.

Palestinian women suffer from a burden increase in the face of growing political and economic difficulties. The analytical framework used in this study aims to identify elements of social change in relation with gender.

Practical and strategic needs must be taken into consideration by the intervening institutions in their project planning. We understand that needs and interests are determined on basis of gender roles, which means that both men and women have diverse roles and responsibilities; which leads to different needs and interests. These are called practical and strategic needs. The practical needs in the analytical feminist framework refer to women's daily life. The achievement of these needs lead to minimal gains because they are short-term and differ from a woman to another and from a society to another. In addition, they vary according to political and economic situations. Meeting the practical needs of women is important to enable them to reach psychological, economic, and social stability, and thus give them a chance to think about how to maintain such stability and take it to a higher level, which is development. This, eventually, will lead to fulfilling their strategic needs which revolve around their status in the society versus that of men. Fulfilling the strategic needs is a long term goal that aims at altering the gender-based work division, changing the nature of development and infrastructure, and thus altering the inferior status of women in society.

To achieve the objective of women's empowerment, NGOs and development institutions, including donors, must address and meet the practical needs of women.

Sara Longwe, in her analytical framework,¹² focused on the importance of women's empowerment and equality as a main strategic goal that passes through several stages, starting from meeting actual needs to enjoying equality in terms of food, shelter and clothing. Longwe affirms that when women exercise and enjoy their actual needs, then they can think of equal wages and equal education, job and work opportunities, and move to other levels of thinking, awareness, and culture. What is important here is to increase male and female awareness and seek cultural adjustment to achieve equality for women and allow them to take part in decision-making and reach the highest level of empowerment, which is control over resources and equality in ownership.

In order to move from the phase of meeting their practical needs to becoming agent for change and fulfilling their strategic needs, women must have access to resources and control. Naila Kabeer¹³ identified three crosscutting dimensions for achieving empowerment: sources, power, and achievements. In other words, facilitating access to resources and power will lead to achievements not only in the economic sphere but also from a human and social perspective, including the ability to exercise free choice. Access to resources encompasses different levels, ranging from self-esteem, family, community and state institutions.

The present study, by shedding light on women's perceptions on issues related to economic participation, wages, obstacles, job opportunities, training, and awareness-raising, aims at helping stakeholders defining women's actual needs and at defining a successful strategy for economic empowerment.

12 Sara Longwe, "Gender Awareness: The Missing Element in the Third World Development Program", in Candida March and Tina Wallace (Eds), *Changing Perception: New Writings on Gender and Development*, Oxfam, 1995.

13 Naila Kabeer, "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment", in *Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice*, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2001.

V. STUDY METHODOLOGY

In order to complete the Study's objectives, Alpha used both quantitative and qualitative survey methods. The quantitative approach included surveys with women and business holders. While the qualitative approach included focus groups with women and men as well as in-depth interviews with different stakeholders.

V.1 Questionnaires design

Alpha developed two questionnaires (women and businesses) with the close cooperation of PU-AMI team. The objectives of the study were transferred to indicators that could be measured through specific questions. It was decided that the questionnaires should not take more than 25 minutes to be completed. After the questionnaires were finalized, Alpha reformatted them in a way that makes data collection and data entry manageable.

V.2 Piloting

A pilot survey was conducted on a small sample of 10 women to test the understanding and validity of the questions. Following the pilot study, a meeting was held with the field researchers to acquire their comments and feedbacks on the questionnaires and the problems they faced in the field. A final version of the questionnaires was then produced for the full survey.

V.3 Survey size and composition

For the women's survey, Alpha selected a sample of 513 women aged between 16 and 65 years old from 10 localities of the Salfit and Qalqilia governorates.¹⁴ The survey also included interviews with 30 disabled women from the same localities. This sample gave a marginal error of around 4%, which is statistically acceptable.

For the businesses survey, Alpha selected 114 businesses (i.e. supermarkets, pharmacies, clothes shops, restaurants, beauty salons, sewing workshops, agricultural and livestock farms) from the same localities of the women's survey in the Qalqilia and Salfit districts.

V.4 Focus groups and in-depth interviews

Subsequent to the survey, Alpha conducted a series of focus group discussions and individual interviews in order to collect qualitative data difficult to measure and obtain through questionnaires. Indeed these kind of qualitative research methods allow participants to express more freely and in more detail their feelings, attitudes, perceptions, impressions, and concerns.

Five focus groups were therefore conducted: three with women and two with men from the ten targeted localities in Salfit (two villages) and Qalqilia (one village). A total of 30 women and 20 men, selected randomly, participated in these discussions.

Women participants were mostly married unemployed and having accomplished less than secondary education. They were aged between 20 and 55 years old. Male participants' characteristics were different, with half of them being married and holding a university degree, and the majority being employed and aged between 18 and 60 years old.

In addition, Alpha conducted 29 in-depth interviews with different stakeholders, such as:

- Members of women's associations in the targeted localities
- Disabled women in the targeted localities
- Village Councils members in the targeted localities

¹⁴ In numbers proportional to the total population of the different targeted villages.

- Other stakeholders such as representatives of Chambers of Commerce, Ministries, Microfinance institutions, Women Centers Affairs, and the General Union of Disabled Palestinians

V.5 Data collection (including training of field researchers)

Ten female fieldworkers were recruited to conduct the data collection for the surveys. They received a one-day preparation workshop aimed to train them on the research instruments (questionnaires), provide them with a comprehensive explanation of the aims and objectives of the Study, as well as the different indicators to be measured. The criteria for quality and accuracy control that Alpha International abides by in all its survey studies were also presented, as were logistical, administrative and financial issues related to the field work. The importance of not jeopardizing the quality of data collection and the need for continuous communication and coordination with the Project coordinator were also discussed and emphasized.

V.6 Data entry

The collected data were entered into an Access2010 database. The same questionnaire layout was used in the Access database to facilitate data entry. Control and logical rules were defined to prevent data entry errors (for example, if one of the questions takes only two values (1 or 2), the database does not allow any other values to be entered for this variable). More logical checks were imposed on the data entry process to ensure logical consistency among logically inter-related variables.

V.7 Data cleaning

Alpha used stat-transfer software to transform data from Access format to SPSS format. Data cleaning was conducted by cross-validation of results through various cross-tabulation operations.

V.8 Data Analysis

a. Qualitative methods

The analysis of the qualitative data followed standard protocols, comprising of four phases:

- Data review: Given the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis, Alpha team conducted multiple reviews of collected data, including individual reviews after each collection of in-depth interviews and a collective, comprehensive, review of all data collected following the completion of field work. These successive phases of analysis enabled Alpha team to establish a preliminary framework for interpretation.
- Data organization: Through the data collection and review phase, Alpha team designed a responsive system for organizing the data, using themes such as collection type, component, or evaluation question.
- Data coding: Once data was reviewed and organized, the team was able to code the data, building upon the themes identified both in the previous phases and according to the framework established during the preliminary stages of the evaluation.
- Data interpretation: In this ultimate phase, the team finalized the analysis of the data by surfacing the meaning and significance of the data themes and prepare for the drafting of the evaluation report after clarifying key findings and programmatic lessons.

b. Quantitative methods

Statistical software (SPSS, STATA) were used for the data analysis, which included:

- Frequency tables of all indicators under study
- Cross-tabulations of the main variables in the study, including tabulating the data by gender, place of residence, age groups, income, and other variables deemed appropriate.

VI. STUDY FINDINGS

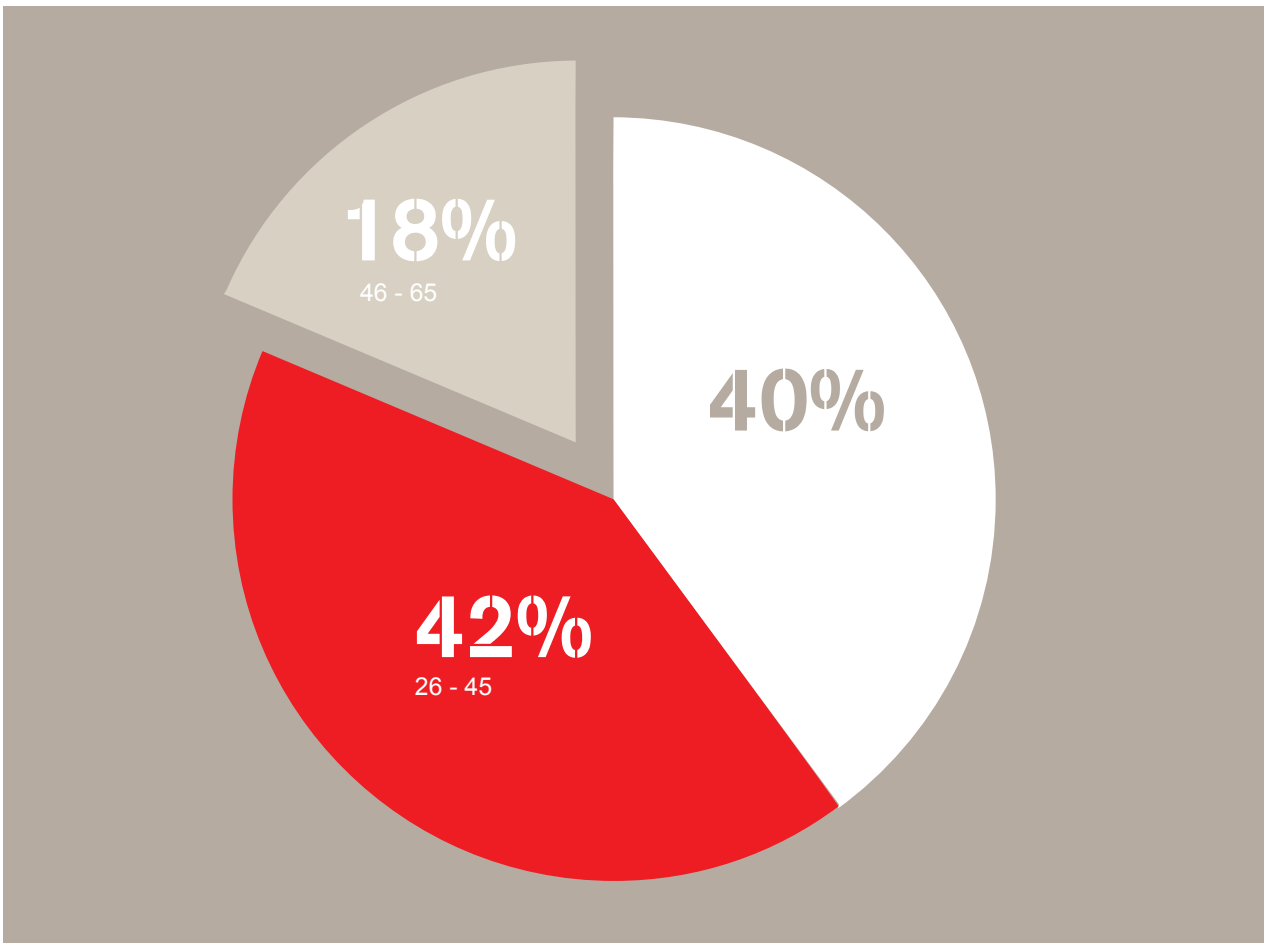
VI.1 Characteristics of survey’s respondents

a. Geographic location and age

Among the 513 surveyed women, 56.9% were from the Salfit area and 43.1% from the Qalqilia area.

40.2% were aged between 16 and 25 years old, 41.8% between 26 and 45, and 18% between 46 and 65 years old.

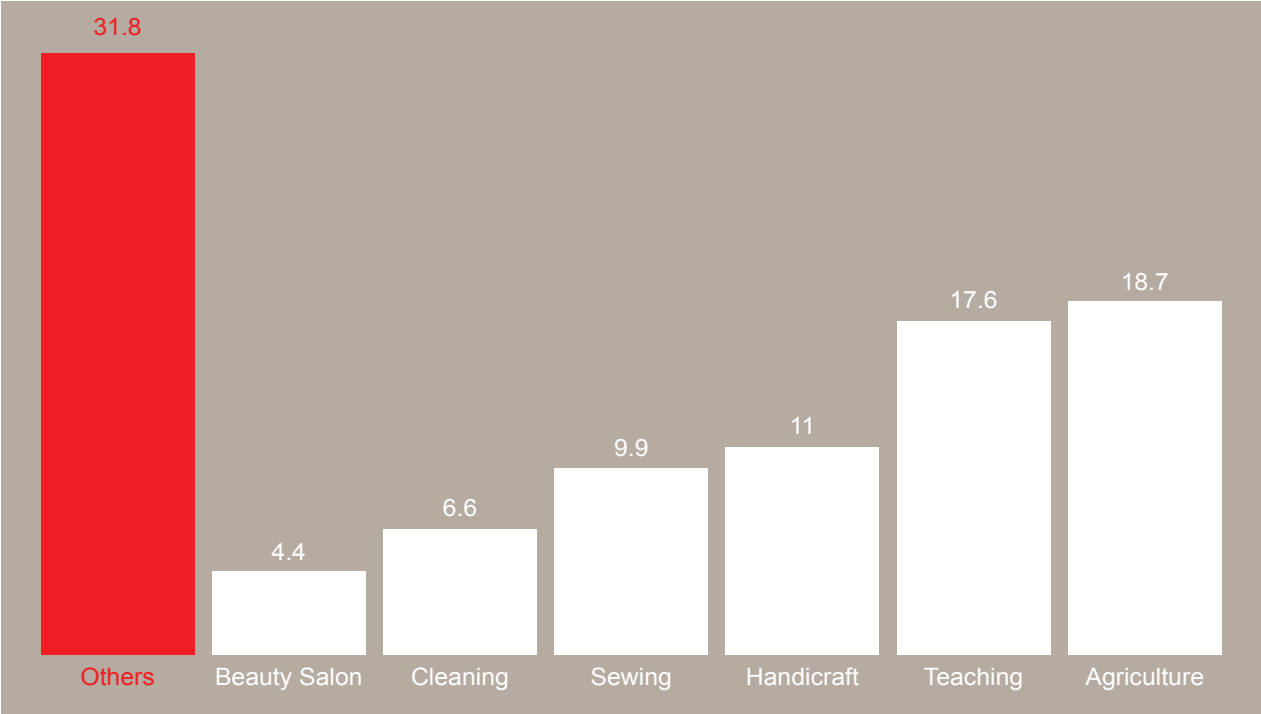
Figure 1: Distribution of women respondents by age



b. Employment status:

17.7% of the surveyed women work. The following occupational fields were mentioned: agriculture (18.7%), teaching (17.6%), handcraft (11%), sewing (9.9%), cleaning (6.6%), and beauty salons (4.4%). Among the “Other” jobs category, indicated by 31.8% of the respondents, were included sweets making, website development, accounting, nursing, photography, and news editing.

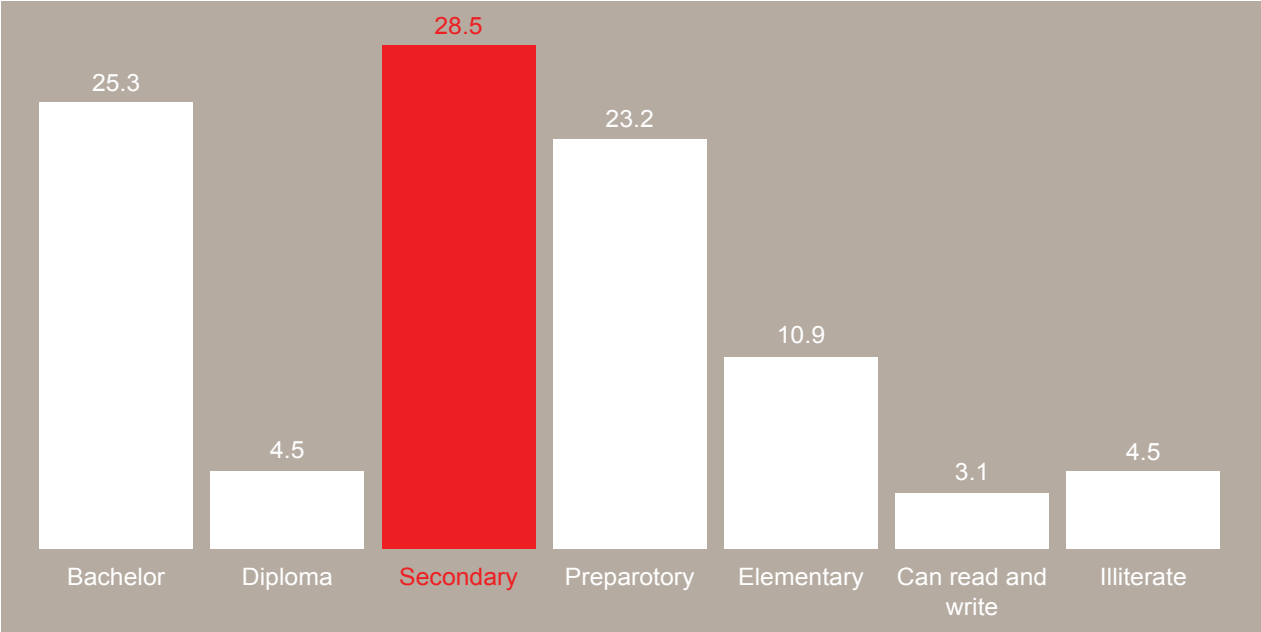
Figure 2: Distribution of working women respondents by typology of job (%)



c. Level of education:

25.3% difference chart of the respondents completed their Bachelor’s degree, 4.5% completed their Diploma degree, 28.5% completed secondary education, 23.2% completed preparatory education, 10.9% completed elementary education, 3.1% could only read and write, and 4.5% were illiterate.

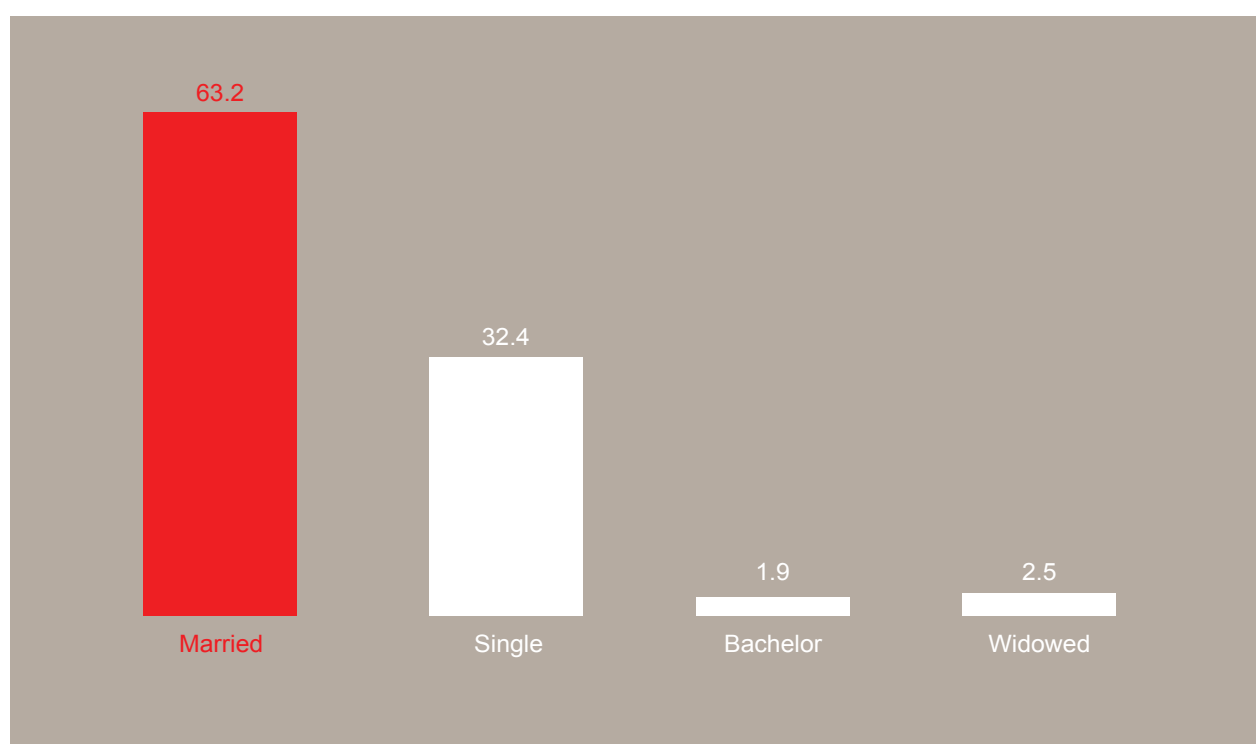
Figure 3: Distribution of women respondents by level of education (%)



d. Marital status

63.2% of the respondents declared that they were married, 32.4% that they were single, 1.9% that they were divorced, and 2.5% that they were widowed.

Figure 4: Distribution of women respondents by marital status (%)



e. Family composition

13.1% of respondents said their family was made up of 4 members, 34.9% of 3 members, 34.3% of 2 members, and 17.7% of 1 member.

VI.2 The concept of women economic empowerment as understood by the community

It is important to understand how the communities themselves define the concept of women economic empowerment for two reasons: First, to identify their awareness and understanding of the concept, which will help later in designing adapted trainings and awareness-raising campaigns on the subject. Secondly, to formulate a contextualized definition of women economic empowerment, so as to devise and implement adapted interventions.

It is possible to summarize the understanding of the concept of women economic empowerment as expressed by the various participants of the focus groups discussions and in-depth interviews, either men or women, in the following terms:

“Enhancing women’s integration in the labor market, whether in the formal or informal sectors, so that they can develop their capacities and skills in the economic and social spheres and reach a high degree of financial independence.”

This definition matches in purpose and principles the internationally agreed-on definition as outlined in the literature review. This said, it is necessary to move from theory to practice and focus on the implementation level. In other words, and based on Longwe’s analysis framework, it is essential to work on women’s practical needs (implementation level) to reach a change in strategic needs, namely “equality in the economic sphere”.

VI.3 Factors hindering women economic empowerment

The survey reveals that 61.8% of women respondents consider the Palestinian environment as encouraging and conducive to women economic empowerment.

The figure could indicate two things: First that much work is done by different international or local actors to promote women's participation in the economic sphere. However, the 37.6% of women who think contrarily indicates that these efforts are not sufficient. This begs the following question: "What are the factors hindering women in the studied areas from being more integrated into the public, and particularly economic, spheres?"

Despite the efforts of local and international organizations, both at the governmental and non-governmental levels, to integrate women in the public sphere, many obstacles still impede their access to decision-making in key social, economic and political areas. As indicated in the literature review, socio-cultural, political and economic factors have a negative impact on women economic empowerment and contribute to their marginalization.

One specific objective of the present study was to collect the perceptions of the communities themselves on the obstacles which prevent women economic empowerment. Indeed, as emphasized by feminist analytical frameworks, mainly those developed by Naila Kabeer and Sara Longwe, realizing real women's empowerment needs first and foremost to identify women's practical and strategic needs. Only on this basis can external actions design and implement effective programs for women economic empowerment.

The responses given by the survey's participants can be classified into four main areas: socio-cultural, legislative, and access to resources.

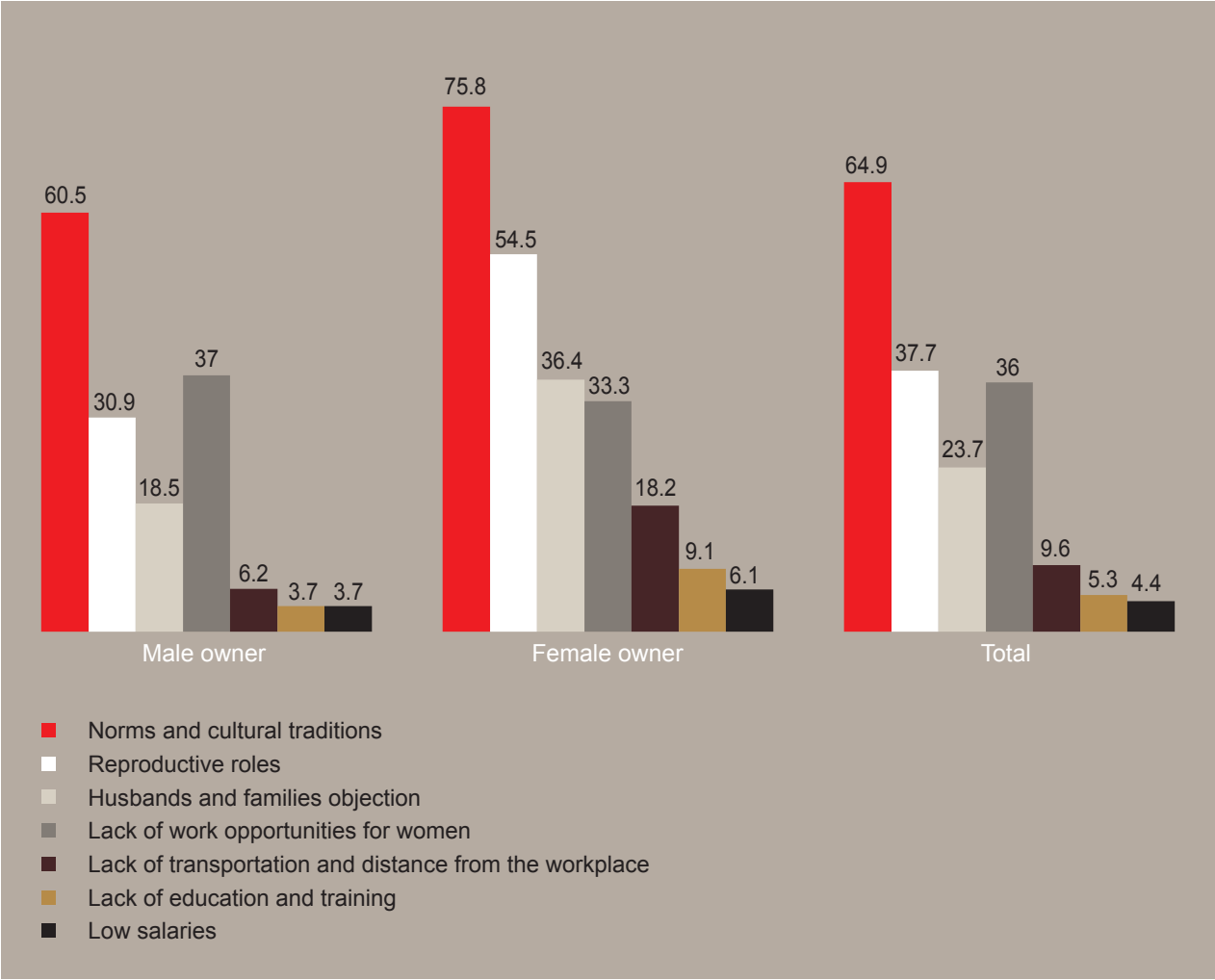
a. Social-cultural factors

Different social issues have been raised by women interviewees as hindering their participation in the economy. The majority confirmed that the main obstacle facing working women is their family responsibilities and reproductive role. This was asserted by 64.1% of women interviewees.

In general, the majority of focus groups participants and individual interviewees agreed that cultural factors were a key constraint for women's advancement. They stated stereotypes against women working outside their homes, the social stigma associated with working with strangers and especially outside the villages and in the formal private sector. They stressed that women are traditionally seen as housewives and that their roles are limited to their specific gender.

37.7% of the surveyed business owners declared that women's reproductive roles hinder their participation in the economic sphere, and 23.7% of them asserted that the objection to women's work by husbands and families represented an obstacle. In addition, 64.9% of them believed that social norms and cultural traditions were a major obstruction to women's employment.

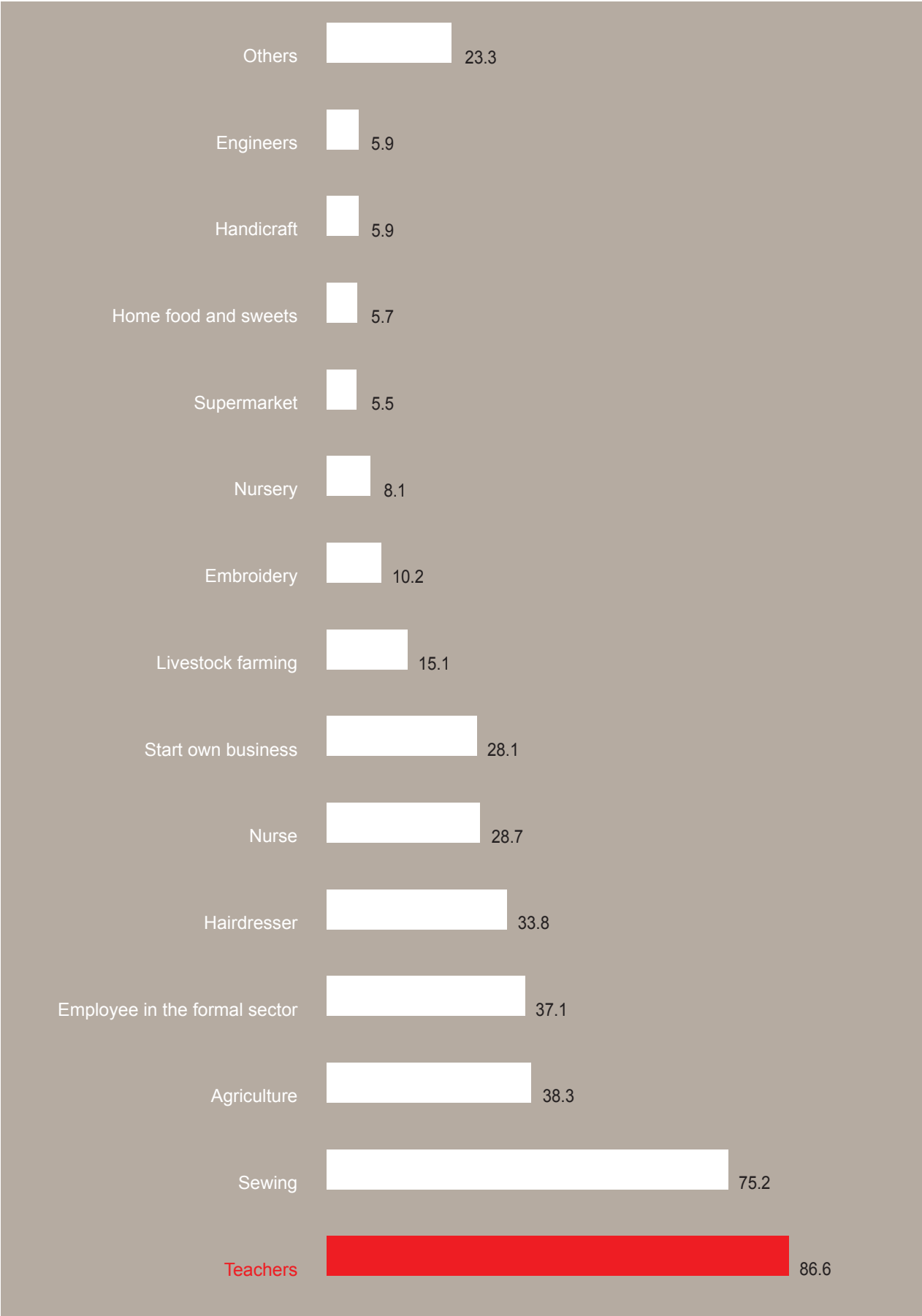
Figure 5: Distribution of business owners (disaggregated by gender) by perceived obstacles to women's work



Focus groups participants and interviewed individuals declared that a further barrier was the fact that some professions (such as shopkeeper, employee in international organizations, in internet cafés or restaurants) were not socially acceptable for women.

This gender segregation seems to be internalized by women, as shown by a question of the survey asking women to indicate which professional occupations they deemed socially acceptable for women. Traditional “female” jobs such as teaching (mentioned by 86.6% of the respondents) and sewing (mentioned by 75.2%) came overwhelmingly first. These were followed at some distance by agriculture (38.3%), employment in the formal sector (37.1%), hair dressing (33.8%), and starting their own business (28.1%). Less than 6% mentioned working in a supermarket or as an engineer.

Figure 6: Distribution of women respondents by typology of jobs they believe are acceptable for women (%)



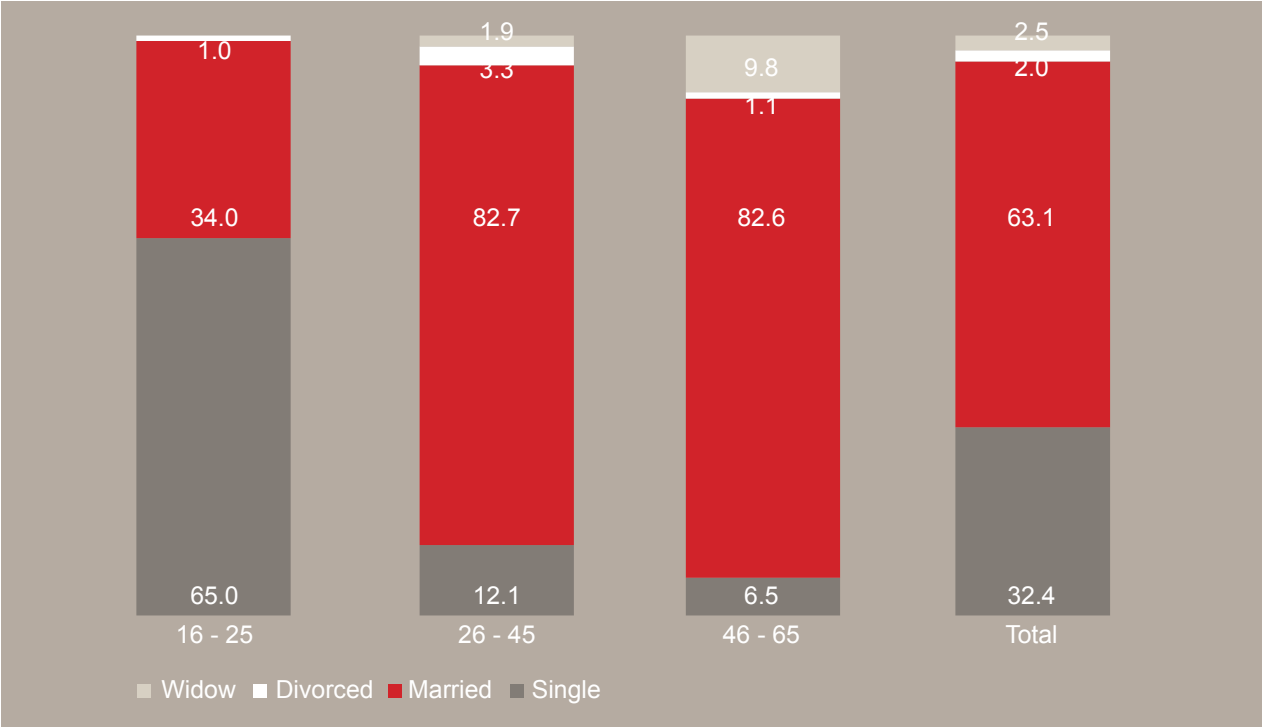
This socially approved typology of women employment was confirmed by other stakeholders such as members of Village Councils who stated in the focus group discussions that they approved of women working as long as it was in accepted, respectable and appropriate jobs such as teachers, nurses, farmers, owners of small shops located next to their houses, or any other activity carried out from home.

We see here again that societal acceptance criteria are based on elements of a patriarchal culture which end up conditioning women's access to employment. These traditional viewpoints, which emanate from men, hold that women's professional activities should be complementary to their reproductive role (e.g. teaching and nursing).

This social marginalization of women, derived from traditional mindsets and values, confirm the need to work at changing communities' perceptions. More than half of women respondents (51.5%) thought indeed that women's work is generally valued as less important than men's work. In focus group and individual interviews, women interviewees also stated that the community gives more value to working men. They added that it was easier for men to find employment as they enjoyed more freedom of movement, can spend longer hours at work, and that it is more accepted by business owners to employ men rather than women. This was confirmed by business owners in an open question, with around one third (36%) saying that job opportunities for women are very limited in comparison with men since most of the jobs cannot be filled by women because of social restrictions.

Only 16.4% of the questionnaires' respondents stated that husbands represent an obstacle to women's enrollment in the labor market. However the issue was mentioned repeatedly during the focus group discussions and interviews, by both men and women. One of the reasons put forward was the fear of stigmatization derived from the fact that in the Palestinian patriarchal culture, men – and not women – are traditionally considered the breadwinners of the family as well as the main decision-makers. This said, female participants in the focus groups hypothesized that husbands' rejection of their wife working would be lesser if they realized that this would generate further income for the family. Early marriage was another factor mentioned as hindering women's work. In addition to burdening them with chores associated with their reproductive role, early marriage results in low level of educational attainment and consequent lack of skills. The survey's results show that around 34% of women respondents aged between 16 and 25 years old were already married. It appeared from the discussions that women are aware that their human rights are interrelated and that a change in their reproductive role will enhance their productive role and their integration in the public sphere.

Figure 7: Distribution of women respondents by marital status and age



As seen in the case of husbands' opposition to women's employment, an important hindrance to women economic empowerment is social stigma. Some women mentioned that their participation in the public sphere would stigmatize them as being outside the local norms. They added that being involved in paid jobs is not socially accepted and would trigger critics and disapproval from the community.

Interestingly, members of women CBOs pointed out that the media plays a negative role in women economic development since they reproduce and enhance the socio-cultural stereotype confining women to traditional and reproductive roles and favoring the contribution of men to the public sphere. They considered this as one of the main obstacles to women's participation in the economic sphere.

As will be further investigated below, education scored the highest percentage (54.6%) among possible remedies to mitigate the effects of social obstacles to women economic empowerment.

b. Legal and legislative factors

Participants in the field research tended to consider that the present legal framework – and particularly Labor Law – discriminates against women, and that this constitutes a main constraint to their employment. For instance, they stated unequal remuneration as one of the elements needing re-examination. 56.5% of women respondents declared that they were paid less than their male counterparts in similar positions (39.1% declared they received the same salary).

Women associations and other stakeholders mentioned also that high tax fees are a further impediment for women wanting to register small enterprises and businesses in formal institutions such as the chambers of commerce.¹⁵

Women organizations also indicated that the absence of legal aid support, including for cases of rights violations in the workplace, is another important factor hindering women's involvement in the labor market. Women working in those organizations also mentioned that women felt insecure as a result of the absence of security in the workplace. In their opinion, legal aid is therefore much needed for working women in both formal and informal sectors.

In general, interviewees believed that it was important to work on the amendment of the Labor Law to address all issues related to women economic empowerment, including social issues such as violence against women and security in the workplace.

c. Access to resources

Access to resources is a basic ingredient in women empowerment. Here we adopt a wide conception of resources, encompassing property, funds, transportation means, support services, security, education, etc.

In the surveyed areas, access to resources was highlighted as one of the major factors affecting people's access to employment. Although both men and women are concerned, the impact on the latter is significantly higher for two main reasons: First because, according to the traditional gender-oriented role division, women are isolated in the private sphere (family); Second because the inheritance law tend to favor men, with lands and houses registered in their name as a strategy to protect the family property in case of divorce. This is particularly important in the areas targeted by the Project since there the economy is prevalently based on agriculture and land is the principal economic resource of the household.

15 The Asala organization, which was interviewed, explained that it was currently working with the Palestinian Chamber of Commerce on resolving the problem of tax fees in order to increase the enrollment of women in the formal sector.

The field research (quantitative survey and qualitative focus-groups/interviews¹⁶) revealed the following main obstacles to women's employment in terms of access to resources:

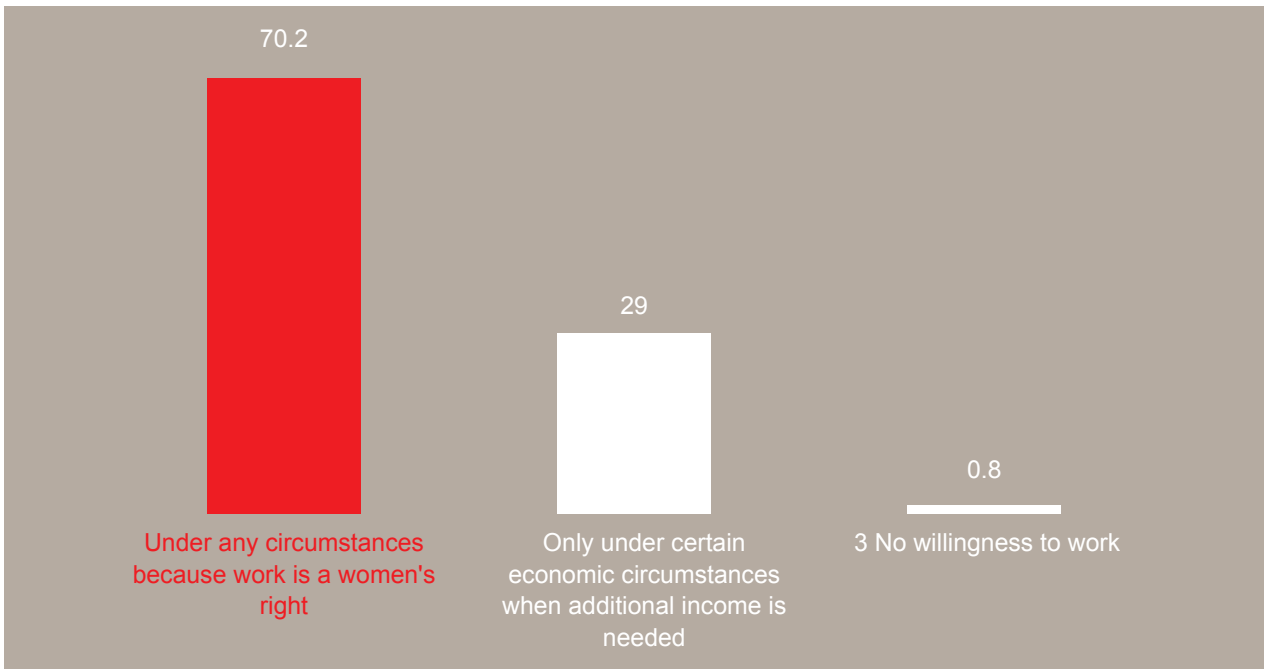
- Access to funders/donors: e.g. lack of knowledge about the existence of funding opportunities; lack of access to information regarding different donors' activities, support and services; lack of knowledge about how to ask for support; language barrier; feeling that donors are inapproachable.
- Access to transportation: 21.8% of respondents mentioned insufficient transportation as a hindrance to women's enrollment in the labor market due to the long distance separating their villages and the main cities, where job opportunities are concentrated. Although transportation issues affect both men and women, women are more impacted since men can use private transportations or come home late, which is socially unacceptable for women in these localities. The lack of sufficient transportation was confirmed by interviewed business owners.
- Lack of security and freedom of movement: The security threats posed on women by Israeli settlements, closures, checkpoints and consequent time-consuming detours push the communities to further limit women's movements as a way to protect them.
- Availability of child care services: 5.3% of women declared that a shortage of kindergartens or nurseries was an obstacle to their enrolment in the labor market.
- Access to vocational training.
- Access to bank lending.
- Scarcity of financial resources and properties: Women participating in the focus groups discussions emphasized the lack of financial resources to open their own business as another major obstacle in their attempts to empower themselves economically.
- Career counseling: 87.1% of women respondents answered that they never received any assistance to develop their career.
- Insufficient marketing support (advertising and access to markets): women associations highlighted the difficulties that women face in selling and advertising their products (mainly handicraft, embroidery, food, textiles, and agricultural products). The lack of tourists in the surveyed areas was mentioned as a factor limiting sales, especially handicraft products which are produced in amounts larger than the actual demand.

VI.4 Women's motivation to participate in the labor market

When women were asked about their willingness to work, the majority (70.2%) confirmed their willingness to do so under any circumstances as they saw it as a manifestation of their rights, while 29% replied that women should only work when additional income is needed to assist the household financially.

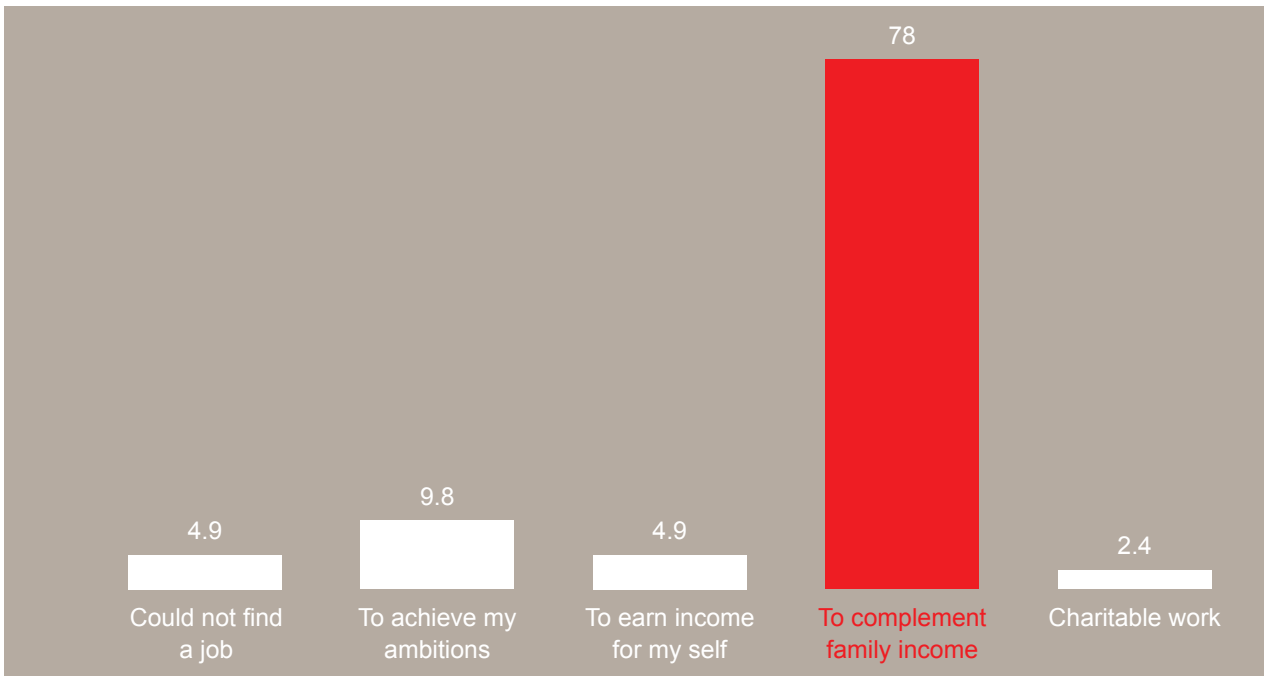
16 % are available only for quantitative survey responses.

Figure 8: Distribution of women respondents by willingness to work (and related reason)(%)



This finding was somewhat contradicted by the answers given when asked about the main motivation to start a business, with an overwhelming 78% stating it was to complement the income of the family. 4.9% declared it was to generate revenue for themselves, 2.4% to compensate financially in case of illness of the breadwinner, and a mere 9.8% replied that it was to achieve personal ambitions. 4.9% asserted that the main reason for opening their own business would be that they could not find a job. 48.1% strongly agreed and 51.3% agreed that the work of women contributes to uplifting the economic level of their families.

Figure 9: Distribution of women respondents by main motivation to start own business (%)



It appears from the field research that women give the priority to their families and that their rights as human beings come in second position. The surveyed women tend predominantly to link their right to work to their role as care giver and supporter of the family.

VI.5 Access of disabled women to employment

74% of the survey respondents stated that disabled women did not enjoy equal work opportunities.

45.2% agreed that this situation was mainly due a shortage of services adapted to their handicap and limited mobility, in addition to a lack of access to information about donors' projects and funding opportunities. 44.2% believed that the main obstacle to disabled women's employment was social stigma and negative perceptions towards the capabilities of people with disabilities. 67.6% stated that the Palestinian labor market did not provide enough job opportunities for disabled women.

The perception of communities and Village Councils members towards the types of jobs that disabled women could assume remains traditional and narrow, with the main sectors being sewing, knitting and services.

When asked about measures to increase disabled women's access to employment, about 38% of respondents indicated providing job opportunities adapted to their disability, 24.6% recommended the provision of embroidery training, and 9.2% recommended the provision of handicrafts training. Only 22.1% proposed the provision of training to start own businesses and to develop specialized projects adapted to disabled women.

In addition, 10.7% of respondents said that the enrollment of disabled women in the labor market was a community responsibility. Accordingly, a key recommendation raised by the informants was to build the capacity of civil society organizations and individuals on methods to integrate disabled women into the labor market and to organize campaigns about disabled women's rights to respectable employment.

VI.6 Needs and corrective measures identified by the communities to enhance women economic empowerment

Participants in the qualitative and quantitative field study¹⁷ identified that the following measures were needed to enhance women economic empowerment opportunities:

- ▶ Provision of support services to help women assuming their family responsibilities (54.6% of survey's respondents)
- ▶ Provision of job opportunities inside and outside the village (51.9% of survey's respondents)
- ▶ Improved provision of transportation
- ▶ Legal framework guaranteeing equal rights to working men and women. This point was suggested by women CBOs and other stakeholders, who stressed on the importance to provide a legal environment ensuring equal remuneration, protection of women's social and economic rights, etc.
- ▶ Creation of more women's CBOs to take care of women's interests
- ▶ Capacity-building trainings (see section a. below)
- ▶ Networking, developing partnership at the local/national and international levels (see section b. below)
- ▶ Raising the awareness of husbands and the community in general on the importance of women's participation in the labor market (see section c)
- ▶ Access to other resources (see section d. below)

a. Needs in capacity-building trainings

Almost the whole surveyed population (99.4%) stated that education and training were the most powerful tools to achieve women economic empowerment. The following training needs and institutions were identified:

¹⁷ % is available only for quantitative survey responses.

Training needs:

The main capacity-building needs identified by women were International Computer Driving License (ICDL) (34.1%), sewing (26.9%), embroidery (15.6%), English language (12.7%), beautician (12.1%), cooking and food preparation (9.2%). It is worth noting that these identified needs correspond to occupational activities socially accepted in these communities.

The main women training needs identified by business owners were handcrafts, sewing and embroidery (mentioned by 50%), computer skills (mentioned by 34%), hair dressing and beauty salon (mentioned by 16%), English language (mentioned by 10%), TVET (mentioned by 8%), project cycle management (mentioned by 7%), time management and finance (mentioned by 7%).

Other stakeholders identified three capacity-building training priorities for women and women CBOs:

- ▶ Advocacy: e.g. lobbying, communication, networking, campaigns organizing
- ▶ Administration: e.g. proposal writing, English language, strategic planning and monitoring, financial management
- ▶ Production-related skills: e.g. food manufacturing, marketing and advertisement, upgrading women productions such as embroidery and other handicrafts, repairing cell phones

Trainers and training institution:

Women respondents of the survey indicated that TVET trainings and job placements could increase their job opportunities.

The data show that only 31% of the interviewed women agreed that existing trainers and training institutions were able to provide the needed training topics. This could indicate that many women are not aware about the existence of such organizations or trainers.

Women organizations lamented the poor quality of trainings provided by different organizations working in the field of women empowerment and vocational training. In their opinion, some trainers are not qualified enough or well-equipped with gender concepts and gender mainstreaming.

b. Needs in networking and partnership building Networking and developing partnership are important elements to facilitate women economic empowerment. The interviews and focus groups discussions pointed to the needs to develop networking and partnership at two levels: local/national and international.

Local/national level:

Five types of partnership were identified at this level:

- Governmental bodies:

Interviewees asserted the importance to strengthen relations with three main Ministries: Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Labor, and Ministry of Women's Affairs.

The specific activities and support needed were as follows:

- Strengthening the relations between the three ministries by developing a national strategic plan on women employment
- Amending the Labor Law to protect women's rights and emphasize women economic empowerment
- Supporting women's Bazaars (i.e. permanent places for showcasing women's productions) to increase sales of women products, in addition to encouraging women's investments

- Women CBOs:

Interviewees, especially women, showed some distrust of the role of women organizations on the basis of their personal experience. They demanded and expected that the different women CBOs organize and unify their efforts among themselves since they aim at achieving a common goal.

- Educational institutions:

Interviewees highlighted the need that formal educational institutions provide specialized and advanced educational and vocational programs to enhance professional skills and that training be available in different, even remote, geographical areas.

- Private sector:

Interviewees asserted that women CBOs need to strengthen partnerships with different private sector companies and employers so as to support women economic integration and create more job opportunities.

- Banking institutions:

Women mentioned the importance of building and strengthening partnership with lending institutions so as to facilitate women's access to credit, loans and other financial products.

International level:

According to the Study's informants, the role of donors is to financially support local efforts and to facilitate human development through awareness-raising campaigns. Most donors-funded projects focus on handicrafts, food, agricultural activities, livestock farming, and training, and some activities are implemented through partnerships between the international organizations, local organizations and PA line ministries.

The evaluation of donors' activities by the various stakeholders was globally very positive, especially when trainings are provided, remote areas are targeted, project duration is equivalent to 3 years, and women's needs are taken into consideration.

That said, they stressed on the necessity of helping to sell local products and to increase the duration and scale of projects.

c. Awareness-raising campaigns

The surveyed and interviewed persons agreed on the necessity to raise the awareness of the community at large on the importance of fostering women economic empowerment. They were asked to express their opinions and needs on three specific aspects of awareness campaigning: beneficiaries; methods and tools; and topics.

Beneficiaries:

When asked who should be the main target category of awareness-raising campaigns, 71.6% of the surveyed women answered that it should be husband (and men in general); 40.6% that that it should be women's custodians, 38.2% that that it should be women. Only 9.2% said that it should be stakeholders, 6.3% women associations, 6.7% the society, and only 2.5% the youth.

Methods and tools:

When asked about their preferred awareness-raising methods, 46.6% said trainings, workshops and seminars, 36% said training local councils, municipalities and schools, and 15% preferred meetings.

As for communication tools, the women identified local TV as the most important, followed by brochures, workshops, meetings, seminars and discussion groups, and then billboards. The survey questions did not mention newspapers and new media as potential tools for such campaigns.

Topics:

All the sources emphasized the importance of awareness campaigns and trainings on topics such as importance of education (highest score with 45.8%), followed by the right to work (35.7%), building self-esteem (17%), role of women in upgrading the family's economic conditions (12.7%).

The interviewed business owners mentioned for their part the following awareness campaign topics:

- Women's work may provide support to the household's income (31.6%)
- Improve local community's attitude towards working women (27.2%)
- Workshops about the importance of women's education (22.8%)
- Promote women's social participation and self-esteem (15.8%)
- Promote gender equality in terms of working opportunities and wages (13.2%)

d. Resources needed to enhance women economic empowerment¹⁸

Women's associations mentioned the following needs for women: marketing the products of women's associations, counseling, IT training centers, public parks, fitness and sports centers including swimming pools, sewing centers, multi-purpose children halls, and other practical needs. At the employment level, they indicated the following jobs opportunities for women: accountant, sports/fitness trainer, swimming coach, internal designer, electrical appliances' maintenance, and women's cooperatives.

The surveyed women stated that the following needs should be taken into account by external agencies when working at empowering women economically, either at the local or national level:

- Great need for education (99.8%)
- Great need for continuing education (capacity building and training) (97.5%)
- Great need for awareness-raising (increasing awareness towards the importance of women's work) (98.1%)
- Great need for increasing donors' investments in women economic empowerment (94.2%)
- Great need to have access to jobs, equal wage and self-employment opportunities (93.4%)
- Great need to have decision-making power, political participation and leadership (90.1%)
- Great need for income (control over income and spending decisions) (84%)
- Great need to have equal legal status (rights, laws, and policies outlined by the government) (86.7%)
- Great need for mobility (freedom of movement) (86.9%)
- Great need for more efficient time management and more equal distribution of domestic labor (85.7%)

18 As specified earlier, we adopt here a wide conception of resources, encompassing property, funds, transportation means, support services, security, education, etc.

VII. CONCLUSIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the literature review and the results of the field research – in particular the perceptions of the communities themselves on the obstacles preventing women economic empowerment and the corrective measures they suggested – Alpha suggests the following recommendations to be taken into consideration by PU-AMI and its partners when working at improving Palestinian women economic empowerment either in the framework of the current Project or in future interventions.

a. Socio-cultural factors

Main problems identified:

- Women's family responsibilities and chores associated with their reproductive role, unbalanced division of house chores between wife and husband
- Social norms and cultural traditions, including:
 - ~ Negative stereotypes against women working outside their homes, outside their villages, with strangers
 - ~ Traditional representation of women as mere wives and mothers
 - ~ Husband's or family's objection to women's work by fear of stigmatization since men are regarded as the sole legitimate breadwinners and decision-makers
 - ~ Confinement of women in a limited set of socially approved professions
 - ~ Lesser value attributed to women's work in comparison to men's work
 - ~ Communities' disapproval of women traveling alone and getting home late
 - ~ Early marriage, with, among other, negative consequences on women's educational achievement
- Lack of education and professional skills
- Reproduction of traditional values and negative stereotypes by the media

Suggested corrective actions:

- ▶ Organize awareness-raising campaign to change communities' perceptions towards women's participation in the labor market and wider economic and public sphere:
 - ~ Campaign should aim among other to stress the important role that women could play in the public sphere (by presenting success stories for instance), combat stereotyped conceptions of occupational positions that women could assume, highlight the negative consequences of early marriage, insist on the beneficial impact of women's work on the family's income, highlight the importance of women's education, gender equality, fair distribution of house chores, etc.
 - ~ Target in priority husbands and women's male custodians, then women and community at large, including employers, political, community and religious leaders, and the media. A special focus should be given on raising the awareness of children and the youth, since it is at an early age that conceptions of the world are formed (for this reason, working with teachers is essential, as is lobbying for a gender sensitive school curricula)
 - ~ Use as main awareness-raising methods and tools: trainings, workshops, individual meetings, local TV/radio programs, school classes, conference by successful Palestinian and Arab working women, exchange programs between men and female from different villages and cities, from different countries, etc.
- ▶ Help create support services (e.g. nurseries, after-school care) for working women so as to mitigate the burden of duties associated with their productive role
- ▶ Help create new businesses and job opportunities inside or near the women's places of residency, in particular help identify non-traditional typology of works that women can assume from home or within the village (e.g. website developer, graphic designer, text editor, household service providers, people care-givers, etc.)
- ▶ Help improve access of women to education and vocational training, including by making sure that training sessions are held in proximity of women's place of residence
- ▶ Help improve family planning support (including counseling on improving distribution of house chores)

b. Political and legal factors

Main problems identified:

- Legal framework (particularly Labor Law) discriminating against women
- Unequal remuneration between males and females
- High tax fees for registration of new businesses

- Communities' poor knowledge of women's rights and economy/labor related legislation
- Lack of legal aid support, including in cases of rights violations, violence and sexual harassment in the workplace
- Women's lack of participation in the political sphere

Suggested corrective actions:

- ▶ Help draft legal framework combating legal obstacles to women economic empowerment such as salary inequity, high taxes for new business registration, insecurity in the workplace, etc.
- ▶ Raise awareness and lobby for the amendment of the current legislation in a sense favorable to women economic empowerment
- ▶ Educate women about their rights according to national and international laws, and about the current legislative framework (especially Labor Law)
- ▶ Help establish legal counseling units to provide legal aid to women
- ▶ Lobby policy-makers and political leaders on the need to enhance women's participation in the political sphere and decision-making processes and work with them to develop specific strategies
- ▶ Help enhance the enrollment of women in trade unions and ensure women's rights are guaranteed in trade unions regulations
- ▶ Conduct effective monitoring to assess the integration of women in the labor market

c. Access to resources¹⁹

Main problems identified:

- Lack of access to property, lands and financial resources necessary to open new business
- Lack of access to funders/donors, including lack of knowledge about funding opportunities, donors' activities and services, and formal requirements to obtain funding
- Shortage of sufficient and secure transportation
- Movement difficulties related to political/security situation
- Shortage of child-care and other family and personal support services
- Lack of vocational and technical skills
- Lack of access to bank lending and credit
- Absence of career counseling
- Insufficient marketing support (selling and advertising products), and discrepancy between women's productions and actual demands of the market

Suggested corrective actions:

- ▶ Provision of capacity-building trainings
 - ~ Suggested topics for women's training: specific professions women are interested in (e.g. sewing, embroidery, beautician, cooking) and other professions requested by the labor market, marketing, communication, advertising, time management, finance, English language, IT and computer skills, leadership and other soft skills.
 - ~ Suggested topics for women associations' trainings: advocacy (e.g. lobbying, communication, networking, campaigns organizing, communication), administration (e.g. proposal writing, English language, strategic planning and monitoring, financial management), strategies for identification of women's needs and provision of appropriate solutions²⁰.
 - ~ List existing trainers and training institutions (and provide list to women's associations), assess their competencies, provide further training if needed, and encourage them to approach women to inform them about the trainings and services they provide.
 - ~ Raise awareness of formal educational institutions on the necessity to provide vocational training adapted to women and available in remote and vulnerable areas.
 - ~ Develop alternative vocational training schemes such as job placements.

¹⁹ As specified earlier, we adopt a wide conception of resources, encompassing property, funds, transportation means, support services, security, education, etc.

²⁰ Cf. ASALA, Listening to Clients: Impact Assessment of Asala's Services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 2013.

- ▶ Help identify non-traditional typology of works that women can assume from home or within the village (e.g. website developer, content editor, household service providers, people care-givers, etc.), as well as typology of goods/services to be produced/provided by women in accordance to market needs.
- ▶ Provide information on existing funding opportunities from international donors, assist in fundraising activities.
- ▶ Help create support services (e.g. nurseries, food processing) to working women so as to mitigate the burden of duties associated with their productive role.
- ▶ Help establish career counseling units providing information on labor market and training opportunities, assisting in starting own businesses and developing existing businesses, providing marketing support (selling and advertizing). These could be located within the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture.
- ▶ Lobbying the Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Women's Affairs to better coordinate their work and develop a common national strategic plan for women's employment, in close cooperation with private sector employers. The plan should include a detailed marketing plan for women's products based on a preliminary investigation of market needs, suggest products ideas adapted to market demands, and provide adequate advertizing strategies (e.g. showcasing Bazaars if proved efficient, targeting hotels, restaurants and tourist sites).
- ▶ Help women CBOs cooperate among themselves and unite efforts.
- ▶ Raise awareness of private sector companies on the importance of employing female staff, work with employers to find strategies to enhance women's participation in the labor market (e.g. ensuring women's protection from sexual harassment in the workplace, opening in-site nurseries in compliance with Labor Law).
- ▶ Raise awareness of banking institutions on the importance of facilitating women's access to credit, loans and other financial products.

d. Disabled women economic empowerment

In addition to the above, the following problems were identified for women with disabilities:

- Shortage of services and amenities adapted to their handicap and limited mobility.
- Social stigma and negative perceptions towards the capabilities of people (both male and female) with disabilities.
- Shortage of job opportunities adapted to women with disabilities in the Palestinian labor market.
- Lack of national policies aimed at improving disabled women economic conditions.

Suggested corrective actions:

- ▶ Lobby concerned ministries on the necessity to integrate disabled women in the labor market and work with them to develop policies adapted to disabled women's needs
- ▶ Build the capacity of women's organizations to deal specifically with disabled women
- ▶ Organize awareness-raising campaign to change communities and employers negative perceptions about women with disabilities and to highlight their rights (including right to work) and positive contribution to the society
- ▶ Educate disabled women about their own rights
- ▶ Enhance professional skills of disabled woman based on their needs, interests and the requirements of the labor market (and make sure that training facilities have adapted services)
- ▶ Help develop the profession of care givers for persons with special needs, including to provide support to disabled women in the workplace
- ▶ Help identify alternative typology of works adapted to disabled women
- ▶ Raise awareness of private sector companies and employers on the importance of employing women with disabilities, work with them to find strategies to enhance their participation in the labor market (e.g. provide services adapted to their handicap in the workplace)
- ▶ Conduct effective monitoring to assess the integration of disabled women in the labor market

e. Other recommendations to local and international CBOs working on women economic empowerment

- ▶ Map and assess in detail interventions previously implemented in the targeted area, review other women's and disabled women economic empowerment initiatives conducted at the national, regional and international levels

- ▶ Further analyze challenges to women's and disabled women's active participation in the labor market, including difficulties in accessing resources necessary to enter the economic and political spheres
- ▶ Adopt a bottom-up approach in all women's empowerment programs to ensure women's participation at all levels of the project cycle and the integration of their strategic and practical needs
- ▶ Increase duration and scale of projects

f. Further recommendations to policy makers and governmental actors

- ▶ Amend the Labor Law, Civil Law, Personal Law, Social Security Law and Penal Code in the gender perspective, paying particular attention to the protection of women from violence in the workplace, reaching equal wages between male and female in the public and private sectors, ensuring women's rights in the Inheritance Law and preventing waiver of the right in the Penal Code
- ▶ Fully implement the Palestinian Child Law and adopt the age of 18 as childhood age in all local laws, especially the Personal Status Law, so as to prevent early marriages. This should be accompanied by activating compulsory education at the secondary level
- ▶ Implement the Palestinian Cabinet's decision on gender-mainstreamed budgets in all ministries and government institutions, especially the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of National Economy
- ▶ Review and amend the Disabilities Act in a way guaranteeing the fulfillment of women's rights
- ▶ Ensure that the Palestinian Basic Law and all local legislation comply with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- ▶ Make sure that the respect of CEDAW and the progress of women's involvement in the labor market are monitored and evaluated by the Ministry of Women's Affairs
- ▶ Improve the infrastructure of schools and vocational training institutes in rural and remote areas
- ▶ Improve the provision of transportation between cities and remote localities
- ▶ Provide support to divorced women, widows and their children through the Palestinian Alimony Fund
- ▶ Modify the Palestinian curriculum to reflect the importance of women's participation in various fields of society and combat gender stereotypes

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