

Meaningful participation of women and youth in local governance is essential in light of good governance, accountability and gender equality

For the EU funded project



المجتمع المدني من أجل الكرامة
Civil Society for Dignity

NEAR-TS 2020/420-965

Hana Kirreh and Yara Hadweh

Submission date

August 2022

هذا المشروع بدعم من



EUROPEAN UNION
الاتحاد الأوروبي



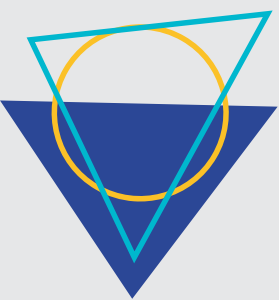
www.paxforpeace.nl



المركز الفلسطيني
للتقارب بين
الشعوب



Church of Sweden



Contents

List of Acronyms	4
Glossary	4
Chapter One: Introduction	5
Background	5
Aim of Research	5
Research Questions	6
Scope of Research	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review	7
Women's Position	7
Youth's Position	7
Women and youth in local governance	8
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology	9
Research Design and Methodology	9
A Qualitative Study: Interviews and Focus Groups	9
Ethical Considerations	10
Chapter Four: Findings	11
Interviews	11
Focus Group - Youth	14
Focus Group - Women CSOs	17
Chapter Five: Limitaitons, Recommendations and Conclusion	20
Limitations	20
Recommendations	20
Conclusion	21
Bibliography	22
Appendices	23
Section One: Interview Questions (English and Arabic Versions)	23
Section Two: Focus Groups	26

List of Acronyms

CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LC	Local Council
LG	Local Governance
TOR	Terms of Reference

Glossary

- Local (public) goods are tangible objects in the built environment (e.g. libraries, school buildings, parks, roads) that can be enjoyed by community residents.
- Social accountability is an approach by which communities can act individually or collectively to create and participate in organizational and institutional arrangements to understand and control their government(s) – that is, hold government accountable.
- Local governance (LG) refers to the way local decisions are made and implemented. This includes decisions regarding the prioritization, availability and delivery of local goods and services and ultimately – whether explicit or implicit – beneficiaries. LG is shaped by formal national, regional and local government policies and by informal interactions and relationships among various levels of government and local actors (e.g. local government, private sector, civil society, communities, traditional or religious leaders).
- Gender-Based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts committed against an individual based on their gender. GBV is rooted in gender inequality and the majority of victims are women. It includes, inter alia, rape, sexual and physical abuse and deprivation of resources, services and opportunities. (UNHCR., 2022)
- Youth Parliament is the youth organization structure consisting of 132 members. The number of members of parliament is divided by 12 to a special committee to examine the needs of young people and work with Palestinian Legislative Council side by side.

Chapter One: Introduction

I Background

Meaningful participation of women and youth is a prerequisite that paves a direct path towards gender equality and inclusive accountability. Ensuring equal participation of women and men in LG, and providing women and youth with equal opportunities to active participation in the society, would bring about an equal and democratic society and result in the empowerment of women and youth to become actors of change and key contributors to the local development processes.

The Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between people (PCR), Peace Movement PAX the Netherlands, Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND), and the Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy (PCPD), have joined their forces to implement a project under the title "Civil Society for Dignity." The project aims to enable Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to play their legitimate role as advocates and watchdogs in Palestine. The project emphasizes the role of CSOs in policy development and monitoring the implementation of laws and policies in collaboration with local authorities and citizens. In particular, the project aims to address the constraints and needs faced by these CSOs to bridge the gap between citizens and local authorities.

Moreover, the project aims at boosting youth and women participation in LG in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The need for such participation is huge and potentially it serves as a base for future local government advocacy and monitoring. With the help of CSOs and LG in selected locations, community needs will be identified and approaches whereby youth and women can engage effectively in the decision-making processes will be explored. The project's underlying approach is to assist youth and women to become resources for their local government and create positive relationships.

Partner organizations are the parties responsible for raising awareness to ensure development and advocate positive participation of women and youth. This research discusses the relationship between CSOs and LG in the field of youth and women effective participation. Research discussion, results, and recommendations have been extracted from focus group discussions with youth and women, as well as interviews conducted with participants, local council (LC) members, mayors and CSOs directors. The research is unique in its kind because it focuses on the participants' needs and vision. The next chapters provide an overview of the focus groups input and the interviewees points of view on how to enhance good governance in Palestine in the field of services provided to the community, in particular those supportive to women and youth.

I Aim of Research

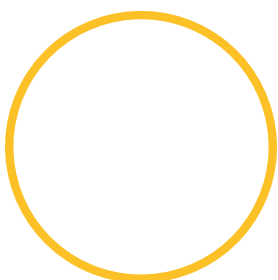
In this research, the researchers will shed light on the importance of the participation of women and youth in decision making and planning in social governance. It will address the obstacles impeding increased representation and participation of women and youth in LG. In addition, the research aims to provide feedback to project partners on the responses of beneficiaries and stakeholders to the implemented activities of the project.

| Research Questions

- This study will answer the research questions that were highlighted in the TOR. The questions are:
- What approaches can be used to facilitate meaningful participation?
- What are the important fora within the governance of local authorities to focus on?
- What are best practices established and lessons learned regarding women and youth participation in LG?
- What specific recommendations can be delivered to relevant stakeholders?

| Scope of Research

The research covers the targeted project locations known for their religious and cultural diversity. They include cities, villages and refugee camps. This research emphasizes the great importance of women and youth participation to the field of good governance in general and gender equality in particular. This research is rare in its kind in the Palestinian context and therefore it is anticipated that it will grab the attention and pique the interest of concerned parties, and encourage further research on the subject. In addition, the results will be applicable to both running and future LGs and stakeholders. The research and its results can be a teaching tool for organizations and institutions and a method of raising public awareness about the important role women and youth can have in society.



Chapter Two: Literature Review

Nowadays women and youth are central to achieving sustainable and equitable development, given the fact that their meaningful participation in LG requires not only providing them with opportunities, but also providing them with proper education, positive attitudes, and inculcating them with a strong understanding of the importance of their participation in the local development processes.

Participation is a basic right. It is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reaffirmed in many other Conventions and Declarations. Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities. Therefore, it is essential that they acquire vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship, and promote positive civic action. To participate effectively, women and young people must be given the proper tools, including information, education about civil rights and access to them (UNHABITAT and UNDESA,. 2013)

| Women's Position

Within countries, women's representation in local government varies according to local social norms and power dynamics (UN Women, 2021). Women tend to be more under-represented in less urbanized regions with more traditional gender norms, and in political positions with more power, like in higher tiers of local government or executive positions (Sundström and Stockemer, 2015). Local power dynamics, less influenced by the local political parties, and more shaped by local client politics and social networks, can particularly disadvantage those women without support structures and skills building opportunities (UN Women, 2021).

Women in Palestine face gender inequality and marginalization in LG. Many changes are needed in the areas of education, workforce, wages and decision-making. Palestinian women usually face more discrimination than men do because they have to endure gender inequality within their society. In addition, Palestinian women have to cope with the discrimination inflicted upon them by the Israeli occupation and which has a deleterious effect on their physical and mental wellbeing (The Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, 2021). Despite the fact that the chances of women to receive education have increased, more progress is still needed to increase their participation in leadership roles as well as in higher positions at work and within the local authorities' institutions and organizations.

| Youth's Position

Youth is a group that is often defined as young women and young men between the ages of 15 and 29. The youth account for nearly one-sixth of the world's population, with the expectation for an increase over the coming decades (The Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, 2021). This percentage is very consequential not only because it constitutes a significant and growing proportion of the global population, but also because youth represent the future of the society, and can play a major role in the social, political, and economic spheres both on the national and global levels. Many youth are currently facing significant internal and external challenges and stressors often because of broader

structural factors.

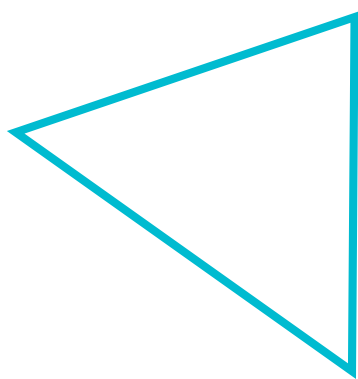
In Palestine, specifically in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, youth comprise one third of the population (Nathani et al., 2022). The lives of Palestinian youth are full of all kinds of difficulties and obstacles, which include but are not limited to, unemployment, poor living conditions, and constant threat due to the Israeli military occupation. In addition, youth face social pressure caused by social norms related to patriarchy and gender inequality and discrimination. All these factors have a negative effect on their present life and overall well-being (The Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, 2021).

Women and Youth in Local Governance

As emphasized by development specialists and academicians, youth and women are absent from the processes of decision-making, community development, and participation in building a strong relationship between community and LG (Arda and [Banerjee](#), 2022). Such a situation reflects negatively on society as a whole. Yet, they are the most affected as they are offered less education and employment opportunities.

CSOs in Palestine play a major role in governance in the absence of a Palestinian state. The role of CSOs in governance includes delivery of services and political mobilization of communities in order to attain liberation (Saeed et al., 2016). CSOs began as a voluntary body providing basic services such as health, education, agriculture and art. After the signing of Oslo Accords and the creation of the Palestinian Authority, local organizations were obliged to follow donor-driven priorities and found themselves increasingly detached from the needs and ambitions of the communities (Saeed et al., 2016).

More comprehensive data supported by new data collection tools are highly needed to monitor, promote, and support full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities for women and youth. Understanding these factors in turn will help design policy responses to support women and youth, in all their diversity, to engage and succeed in political processes and realise the ambitions of The Global Challenge for Government Transparency: The Sustainable development Goal (SDG) 2030 Agenda and the goal on gender equality (UN Women, 2021).



Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

I Research Design and Methodology

This research has been designed in two parts. The first part relied on reviews of previous literature surrounding the topic in reports and articles. These included project baseline, log frame, project summary, list of the names of participants and other details, list of CSOs that participated in "Civil Society for Dignity" activities, and list of suggested targeted locations. In addition, some articles and scholarly papers that discuss the participation of youth and women in LG were reviewed. The second part of the research relied on empirical qualitative study.

The methods used in this research were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. By employing this approach, the researchers sought to situate the perceptions and experience of women and youth in relation to their meaningful participation in light of good governance, accountability and gender equality. In this research, the sampling procedure employed a simple random sampling of male and female participants from LGs, CSOs, and stakeholders covering the overall geographical areas of the project.

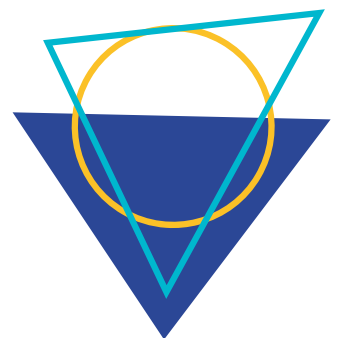
I A Qualitative Study: Interviews and Focus Groups

Tool: Data collection was used to collect information about the previous stages of the project, focusing on the meaningful participation of women and youth in LG in light of good governance, accountability and gender equality. Questions of the interview and focus groups were based on the collected data and information. Appendix 1 shows the interview questions (in both English and Arabic) used in this study. These questions were designed to answer the questions of the research, and were open-ended, easy, clear, and simple in language. The questions were addressed to explore and compare attitudes, knowledge and perceptions of the participants regarding the participation of women and youth in LG.. The questions acted as a guide to aid the interviewees to express themselves, yet were flexible enough to allow them to submit further information by a follow up, probing question.

Interviews and Focus Groups: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with the participants during June and July 2022. Participants included directors of CSOs, mayors, partners, and women and youth. The discussion in the focus groups and interview questions focused on women and youth participation in LG and bridging the gap between CSOs and LG. Participants were recruited randomly from the list provided. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in Arabic and were recorded on a portable device with consent. The researchers explained the topic, aims and processes of the project and research. The researchers wrote down notes for later review and study. Interviews and focus groups took approximately 45 minutes.

| Ethical Considerations

Since the research addresses a politically and culturally sensitive topic, close attention was given to ethical considerations and confidentiality. Ethical approval from all the participants was granted. Participation was voluntary and all concerned were given the right to ask questions or clarifications, and had the right to withdraw at any time. All participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity by removing their names and other identifying information from the dataset.



Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter discusses findings from the data collected through interviews and focus groups carried out with the participants in the targeted locations. The chapter highlights key findings on the perceptions of the participants towards meaningful participation in LG. Data analysis produced key themes described under main headings, and each section has a sub-heading related to the main theme.

I Interviews

Participants who contributed to the research were of the opinion that government bodies need to incentivize CSOs and youth to engage in the development, implementation, and monitoring of services provided, as well as to raise community voices in planning and development. The relationship between LG and CSOs underscores the importance of the governing process between citizens, groups, and NGOs.

Main purpose of LG

Participants highlighted the importance of healthy and reliable democratic LG institutions that, in their opinion, play a role in the fulfilling the social and economic requirements necessary to provide youth and women with basic services and capacity building.

Moreover, participants saw a need to improve the living conditions for youth through involving them in capacity building programs and training in order to qualify them for the labor market. It is very much needed that LG and CSOs effectively respond to community needs by promoting good democratic governance practices. Furthermore, it is very important to have a transparent process of employment and internship programs.

Participatory governance programming involves introducing and institutionalizing mechanisms of civic engagement in governance. Participatory governance programming could include civic engagement committees, enhancement of dialogue and communication between LG citizens through town hall meetings and public hearings, and raising public awareness on issues of good governance and community development. Finally, promoting youth inclusion in LG through Youth LC is a priority. Participants expressed satisfaction with the provision of services LG offers but suggested that more efforts are required in the areas of transparency and networking.

LG refers to the way local decisions, including those related to the delivery of services to the community, are made and implemented. An LG approach recognizes the community needs and priorities, which may differ from one community to another.

Participatory governance can be achieved through mutual trust, honesty, transparent agendas and respect for the needs and demands of all segments of society. One participant stated, *"It is essential to always have open channels of communications between authorities and citizens in order to receive feedback from everyone."*

Advocacy

Civic engagement mechanisms in municipalities have increased citizen involvement in LG. One mayor mentioned that citizens participate actively in local communication and awareness raising campaigns revolving around gender, persons with disabilities, the environment and water, among others. Advocacy is therefore often to be considered as another means to deliver services through communication. One LC president referred to the obstacles women face when they engage in community activities. He added that many women express desire to participate in LC and community activities. According to him, these obstacles are related to the regressive reactionary ideas and negative social customs. He added, *"Women need to be included in the policy strategy of LG and CSOs so that development and social change can occur smoothly and gradually."* One female participant joined in, *"Regressive social norms must be eliminated and changed in order to create a developed, healthy and progressive community."*

Provision of services

LC services are limited and do not always achieve public satisfaction for more than one reason, including the absence of accountability and transparency in LCs and the issue of funds. Usually most council projects are implemented in condition of fund availability. As a result, implementation of projects and provisions of services take long time to put into operation and thus causing dissatisfaction among citizens. Another note mentioned by an LC president is that in order to build up communities and societies, it is necessary for LCs and municipalities to create a structural body of advisory councils that embraces youth and women. Such advisory councils can participate in decision-making, planning and ensuring accountability and transparency. The municipality takes into consideration women quota and activities that support women representation and development. In addition, the municipality pays special attention to citizens with special needs in their activities and involvement in LC. The municipality is in the process of establishing a permanent center that takes into consideration the needs of youth and women with special needs.

As regards refugee camps, they have special status in the Palestinian society concerning the provision of services such as construction and sanitation, etc. Services are provided to refugee camps through the UNRWA in coordination with popular committees. One female interviewee asserted, *"There is a strong participation of women and youth in centers and organizations inside the camp. Usually women occupy leadership positions in the organizations and have a strong presence. Women are also leaders in the popular committees."*

The popular committees usually update and inform the camp population about their strategic planning. They establish focus groups comprising youth, women, young children, elderly and people with special needs. The focus groups later discuss the needs included in the strategic plan for the refugee camp. The popular committees hold elections every four years. They coordinate with donors in order to perform infrastructure development projects in the camps and improve the life of refugees. The popular committees are supportive of women and youth inclusion in decision-making and strategic planning in order to improve living conditions of the refugee population. A joint service committee coordinates between the popular committees in the camps and the city municipality in issues related to the refugee camps. One female participant pointed out that activities administered by the organizations in refugee camps use interactive and co-operative activities, including provision of training to young refugees with the view of educating them about LG and influencing public policy.

Accountability

Accountability and transparency are key factors for creating change and democracy. In one interview, a mayor stressed the need to work on the following topics: gender equality, human rights equality and equity, lobbying and advocacy to create progress and development in civic society. In some cities, churches [and mosques] are considered the incubators of social, religious and political reference for the citizens. The mayor stated, *"The churches play a significant role in the life of Christian youth, providing them with different activities and training. This goes on side-by-side with activities presented by other non-religious CSOs."*

Challenges

An LC member brought up the issue of the absence of a women coalition and a youth coalition in the town. There are numerous challenges and disputes on who takes over and who has the power and authority over such coalition.

However, there are many relatively successful individual initiatives proposed by some youth or women. One LC member affirmed, *"The media and interactive TV make a very strong impact on the community."* A female mayor who was the first woman in the governance in 2020/2021 said, *"I believe that women are capable to take over leadership and managerial positions. This is one of the major challenges for their abilities and qualifications."* She added that as a female mayor she encountered many challenges during her one-year position as a mayor. She said society still thinks that being a mayor is an exclusive province of men and thus does not take women seriously because of the patriarchal society and social norms. Nevertheless, she was very successful in her job and was able to run the municipality effectively. The projects she managed to work on include solar energy and other projects of benefit to the community.

Media

One female interviewee called for a stronger role for the media. She added that social media become stronger only during the implementation of a certain project activity and then they disappear. What is more, educational and social media are absent. LC and CSOs need to work side by side and utilize the media in order to raise awareness about the important role youth and women can play in social development. She added, *"Video clips and spots addressing the roles, challenges and needs of women and youth are instrumental for social change and development. LCs and municipalities need to depend more on youth in particular."*

Inclusion and participation

The interviewees emphasized the need for workshops that allow for the inclusion of youth and women in strategic planning, including tackling issues that have to do with the needs of youth and women in the Palestinian society. According to one of the interviewees, *"I once attended a hearing session at the municipality in order to find ways to overcome traffic problems in the city. I and other youth were able to suggest creative solutions on how to*

tackle this issue. However, we were not taken seriously. That was just a bygone activity." The interviewees unanimously agreed that the ideas and suggestions of the youth should be appreciated and taken seriously. In addition, and because of the high rate of unemployment, women and youth do not hesitate to accept jobs offered to them by the Israeli operator in the 1948 territory, and this keeps them disconnected from their families and society. The issue of unemployment is of a very serious concern for youth in general. According to PCBS, the percentage of unemployment of youth in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is estimated at 64% among females and 33% among males (PCBS, 2021). Most youth look for a stable job and salary. Youth participants feel that there is no job security and this causes them worry about their future.

I FOCUS GROUP-YOUTH

The youth are the future of any country and their participation in policy dialogue and change is essential. Therefore, CSOs, universities, political parties, and government institutions should provide the youth with opportunities to participate and contribute actively to their work. The following topics were pointed out by the target group.

Capacity building

Participants underscored the importance of individual capacity and skill building in order to whet their appetite to do voluntary work, build up their communities and seek opportunities for further employment. One female participant said: *"When I first started attending sessions offered by different NGOs, I was always silent and I did not usually say anything. However, taking the training in the project, I learnt a lot and I started speaking up with confidence."* According to the participants, youth organizations involved in advocacy need to recognize youth as a productive and efficient actor in Palestinian society. Moreover, participants affirmed that the youth should be empowered to participate in the decision-making process on political, economic, social, and cultural matters, especially those that have a direct effect on their lives. They should be consulted and invited to suggest solutions and interventions for their communities.

Media

Participants said that social media are a very important platform where youth can voice their concerns, demands and problems. Unfortunately, however, sometimes youth feel restricted to speak up because those in higher positions dictate to them what to say and as a result, they get discouraged to share their views anymore. One participant said, *"We feel restrained, frustrated and unable to express our thoughts freely."* Another participant said, *"When I wanted to talk to the media or share my thoughts, I was asked not to mention names or criticize local authorities or individuals."* He added, *"We need free media and freedom of speech."*



Budgeting and funds

The results of the discussion within the focus group revealed that the youth believe that municipal councils should have a clear strategic plan for a better future for the youth and citizens, and should be enabled to pass laws and policies regarding democratic voting and elections. In addition, some participants stressed the fact that the programs for youth entrepreneurship are insufficient due to lack of funds allocated to youth programs. Consequently, LC needs to take into consideration allocating a considerable amount of the budget for youth development. Due to lack of funds by the government, youth organizations tend to have little financial resources provided to them. Thus, oftentimes they end up relying on foreign funding and donations and this reliance affects the sustainability of their projects. Most programs are donor oriented and do not take into consideration youth needs and demands. Participants indicated that they are unmotivated to take part in empowerment projects due to a lack of material or financial incentives.

Networking and advertising

Some participants said that the youth are not aware of the opportunities available to them. Some mentioned that sometimes they do not understand the impact their participation in youth programs and activities could have on themselves and their communities.

Other participants complained that LG, CSOs, and other potential donors fail to reach the majority of youth to inform them about programs and activities related to youth interests and topics. Many of the participants pointed out that they are not aware of opportunities such as participating in committees, entrepreneurship and public meetings due to poor networking and access to resources.

Youth and Volunteerism

Some youth seem to have a misconception about volunteerism. Some participants believed that there is a limited understanding of the concept of volunteerism among youth and youth organizations. Voluntary work is often restricted to waste collection, painting pavements, or other community service efforts. The youth do expect to be given more important roles.

On the other hand, some youth articulated the positive side of doing voluntary work. One young participant argued, *"I believe in voluntary work and I think through participating in voluntary work and social campaigns, the youth could boost their identity and self-confidence and have the opportunity to meet with peers."* Participants unanimously agreed that volunteerism is a pillar for a healthy society. Through engagement in voluntary work, one can also volunteer to transfer information that has been learned or acquired to other individuals or groups, and can help organizations, municipalities, and local institutions. At the same time, through voluntary work and participation, the youth will gain experience and widen their knowledge. Participants shared the notion that it is also important for CSOs and LG to incentivize youth to do voluntary work. For example, CSOs and the LG can offer prizes and financial rewards to encourage community participation.

Transparency and accountability

The focus group discussion revealed that the main concerns of the youth are to create social change, promote transparency in the services, and enable the community or citizens

to hold LG institutions accountable. For example, one youth indicated that the youth parliament plays a vital role in monitoring municipalities and LCs, as well as in investigating their policy and provision of services to citizens in villages, refugee camps and cities. Some youths complained about the lack of space where they can freely express their opinions and use their energy and creativity. Some participants believed youth organizations do not apply a fair and transparent selection process when selecting participants to take part in their programs. Certain organizations tend to offer new opportunities to the same youth who already attended previous activities thus limiting the number of beneficiaries. Other organizations lack fair and transparent selection criteria, or have an unclear selection process that does not take equal participation of men and women or of youth from different governorates into consideration.

Youth involvement with CSOs pros and cons

Youth mentioned that participation in CSOs activities has increased, but still there is a perceivable need for genuine partnerships with youth. In addition, youth are often the beneficiaries of government and civil society programs. One participant stated, *"We are rarely engaged as partners in producing activities for the youth."* Even when youth are engaged, their role is often limited to logistical support. This gives the impression that many youth engagement programs carried out by government institutions, private organizations, international organizations, and CSOs are only nominally trying to empower youth to obtain funding, but do not include them as real partners in development.

Participants also noted that CSOs and government agencies working with youth tend to repeat the same activities, which demotivates youth and causes them to abstain from participating in empowerment and participation programs.

Training and opportunities

One female participant highlighted the efforts of CSOs in organizing programs for the youth on topics that have a direct effect on their life. Such topics include early marriage, child marriage, GBV, advocacy, capacity building and lobbying. Some organizations focus on the importance of dialogue and negotiations with the local authorities and participating in LC meetings.

Some youth are already involved in youth LCs. Many of the participants think highly of opportunities given to them by municipalities to participate in planning for the future and decisions. One participant proclaimed, *"Throughout the project, we took training on advocacy and lobbying and we decided to work on the issue of marriage and divorce in our town. Together we managed to gather people, both men and women, to talk about this issue and what can be done to reduce the rate of divorce. The first session we gave, there was only 10 people, but in the second session 25 people of both sexes joined. We had an environment of trust and cooperation."*

A male participant shed light on the issue of domestic violence against women and girls. He emphasized that it is important to start with changing oneself before creating change in the community. He said, *"Failure does not stop us from trying."*

Participants said training and activities implemented under the project "Civil Society for Dignity" enhanced youth self-esteem and confidence. One participant stated, *"Taking part*

in different trainings changed my life and provided me with more opportunities."

Another participant shared a success story of negotiating the municipality council in creating a child friendly space, which enables divorced or separated couples to see their children. She mentioned that usually such couples go to police stations to meet with their children. Police stations are not usually equipped well for such meetings and are not well prepared in case of cold or hot weather. There was good cooperation between the governance and the police and municipality to approve the demand. The room is in process of preparation.

I FOCUS GROUP-WOMEN CSOs

CSOs are considered acting agencies in society in the field of raising awareness in the community and a bridge to local authorities. It is very important for CSOs to build strong relationships with communities and gain public trust. Most CSO women groups mentioned the importance of developing the skills of women, fund-raising activities and networking in order to widen the space of project development and boost women independence as project generators. In order to achieve this, it is important to create communication channels between CSOs and LG. Equally important is the development of a mutual strategic plan that aims to create a stronger community that is willing to recognize and support CSOs. In addition, the strategic plan should include the following components: communication and transparency functions; participation in LC; monitoring of public policies and services; negotiation and management of partnerships and relations with public authorities.

CSOs needs and challenges

Women mentioned the need for activities such as advocacy of women's rights, education and empowerment of women, women's CSOs, legal defence and protection of women.

Women need a safe space in order to be able to participate in LG institutions and have the courage to hold those institutions accountable. Women's experience in local governing bodies reflects the challenges as well as the opportunities to develop solutions that lead to equality and equity. Here are some barriers that women discussed through the focus group: social and cultural barriers, and the patriarchal treatment of women.

Women mentioned that one of the barriers they face in attending council meetings in villages and camps is that meetings are usually and purposely scheduled to be held at a late time during the day. Moreover, the needs of women organizations have been marginalized by LC. One female LC member shared her thought, *"The role of women institutions is limited to awareness and education."*

Enhancing relationship between LG and CSOs

All individuals and groups whom we met and interviewed agreed that strengthening the civil society is one of the most desired objectives that need to be realized. To do so, it is very important to raise public awareness and engage in civic processes, and teach women how to strengthen networks and coalitions for collective impact. It is also important to promote public government transparency and accountability, and integrate governance programming across development sectors. It is concluded that the role of CSOs is to give voice

to the marginalized and voiceless groups of society. CSOs are trusted to raise awareness on social issues and advocate for change and empower local communities to develop new programs to meet their own needs. In this aspect, the issue of good governance is enhanced.

What is a civil society?

The discourse of governance enhances cooperation between the civil society and the political society, and between the state and citizens (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Civil society consists of organizations that are not associated with the government, including schools and universities, advocacy groups, professional associations, churches, mosques, religious and cultural institutions. CSOs play multiple roles. They are an important source of information for both citizens and government. They monitor government policies and actions and hold government accountable. They engage in advocacy and offer alternative policies for the government, the private sector, and other institutions. They deliver services, especially to the poor and underserved. They defend citizen rights and work to change and uphold social norms and behaviors.

Civil society action is thought to be a prerequisite for good governance, as well as an indicator for it. The assumption of a positive correlation has guided many development interventions.

Participants, both women and youth believe that CSOs do facilitate participation by supporting local governments to involve citizens of all segments in local decision-making. One woman said, *"CSOs can partner with LG and build the capacity of communities to participate in local decision making."*

Both women and youth participants stressed that CSOs have a crucial role in supporting LG and communities in the monitoring and oversight of local service delivery through social accountability mechanisms. Local (public) goods are tangible objects in the built environment (e.g. libraries, school buildings, parks, roads) that can be enjoyed by community residents.

Civil society concerns

Both women and youth groups are of the opinion that civil society strengthens democracy and contributes to development through the areas it focuses on and target groups. It is important to consider basic services such as education, health, water and sanitation and providing shelters to battered women and support to disadvantaged groups.

One young woman stated, *"We need relative authorities to promote political participation and involve the youth."* Another added, *"I would like to raise my voice to emphasize the need for authentic monitoring of the performance of the government and stakeholders in the provision of services and hold them accountable for the work they do."*

In general, participants agreed that the community needs to be part of the local planning and budgeting process. One woman mentioned the hardships, challenges and difficulties that youth, women and the citizens in general live under. She pointed out, *"We are in great need to advocate human rights in means of needs and priorities of each city, camp and village. As youth, we have the responsibility to advocate against government deficiencies."*

Gender

There is still a widespread belief that opportunities for women are not equal to those of men. Many still believe that women do not have enough freedom to join LCs. The social attitude towards women's political participation still devalues their role and ability to hold LC positions. Sometimes even women themselves agree with this widespread notion towards women's social role.

Discrimination against women is not limited to preferring or favoring men over equally qualified women; rather, discrimination against women is a multidimensional social, cultural, economic and political phenomenon that has tremendous impact on women's participation in LG. One participant remarked, *"I think that the status of women has been recently changing and women are holding more important positions such as mayors, LC members, ministers, etc. However, still much needs to be done in that direction."*

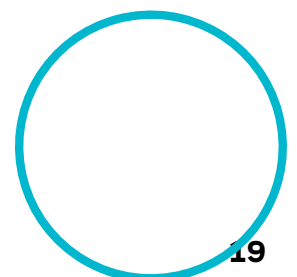
GBV

GBV was and continues to be a global phenomenon that affects the overall well-being of women and their families. It is considered one of the most pervasive human rights violations in which women are denied equality, dignity, security and self-worth. GBV is a complex problem especially within homes,

Palestinian women living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem undergo political and civic rights challenges linked to both Israeli occupation, social norms and patriarchal society. Women in general play a crucial role in the Palestinian context but still they are underrepresented in public office especially at higher positions. It worth mentioning that women organizations have lobbied for a quota system that would set aside a specific number of seats in the legislative council for women.

Women participated in the focus group mentioned the issue of early marriage which is still a problem in many Palestinian areas. A participant stated, *"Some families get their daughters married in order to reduce household expenses due to financial problems and lack of job opportunities."* Poverty within families is the main cause of domestic violence against wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. Another participant said, *"Many women have been beaten harshly by men in the family because of deteriorated economic situation and the pressures of the occupation."* A third participant mentioned that the widespread of GBV is not acceptable by the public. She added, *"There is an urgent need to change this and women who are subject to violence must be courageous to report to competent authorities."*

GBV hinders women from active participation in LG and becoming ambassadors of change and development. Much work is still to be done by NGOs and LG to address a range of social, political and economic issues through advocacy, training and awareness-raising campaigns, and lobbying for political, legal and socio-economic change.



Chapter Five: Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusion

I Limitations:

- One of the most significant limitations was the unavailability and scarcity of literature and research sources for the topic, especially in Palestine.
- Another limitation is the sensitive nature of youth and women empowerment in the Palestinian context, which is still considered patriarchal.

I Recommendations:

1. Women and youth meaningful participation in LG should be put on the national agenda for the country. Governments should demonstrate commitment to prioritizing the initiatives of this topic. This topic should be incorporated throughout the different activities and awareness raising programs and services of other actors including private and non-governmental entities.
2. To ensure sustainability of efforts, the Ministry of Education should take systematic steps in including this topic in school curricula and university syllabi.
3. To ensure effective women and youth participation, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the social structures and power relations that frame not only laws and politics but also the economy, social dynamics and family and community life.
4. Establish finance policies and build partnerships with local and international financial services and funds; improve the economic livelihood and empowerment of both women and youth, and create economic opportunities and socio-cultural empowerment for women in Palestine would build women's resilience.
5. Encourage youth to participate in youth and students parliaments and youth councils and forums. The same applies to women who can participate in women forums and participatory parliaments.
6. LG has to take into consideration youth and women representatives in order to listen to them and respond to their needs by designing services and facilities that relate to their needs. Free space needs to be provided where youth and women can express their thoughts, opinions and suggestions freely and without pressure.
7. Form accountability committees responsible for monitoring and ensuring good management of services and programs by the LG and deliver the outcomes.
8. More accurate and representative surveys on this topic to be distributed and collected. Also, ensure analysis, dissemination and use of reliable and timely information.
9. Diversity in society and community differences must be taken into consideration in order to perform the best and take the right decisions accordingly. For example, in Palestine (West Bank and East Jerusalem) there are common factors, but the geographical diversity and mental thinking may differ from one place to another in relevance to customs, social norms and social needs when dealing with villages, refugee camps and cities.
10. Raise awareness about the stigma and cultural beliefs regarding the topic, by encompassing a wide range of activities directed at community and individual levels by identifying human resources in the local community, such as community and religious leaders, and

faith organizations. It is a valuable strategy to map local resources by asking community members about the people they turn to for support.

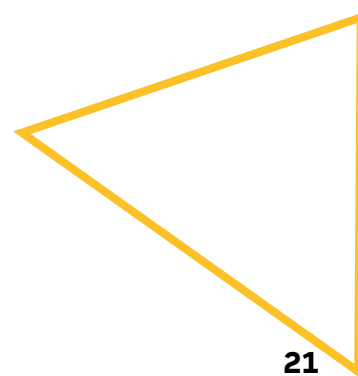
11. Local media and the internet are considered a major part of the daily life, and can be used to increase awareness and knowledge about such related topics. Needed information shall be shared on local media, youth and women organizations and centers, clubs, and sort clubs.

| Conclusion:

This paper analyses the extent LG is influenced by the CSOs and their involvement in decision-making with the view of strengthening LG responsiveness to the needs and priorities of citizens. In development discourse, CSOs hold a special significance, as they constitute a major link between civil society and LC toward ensuring participatory governance. This paper aims to fill the gap between CSOs, community and LG. Using qualitative research methods, the research addresses the role of CSOs in mobilizing public involvement in the decision-making process of LC institutions in Palestine, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The fieldwork of the research interviews and focus groups comprised of youth and women that were randomly selected from different locations where several training programs of the project were implemented. The locations of intervention included Tubas, Tamoon, Zababdeh, Ya'bad, Ateel, Jericho, Abu Dis, Beit Sahour and Hebron.

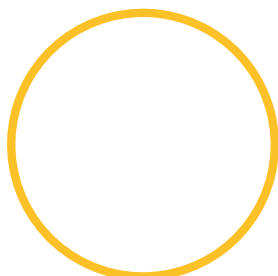
Participants in the research shared interesting thoughts regarding the current ongoing project "Civil Society for Dignity," which is implemented by PCR, PAX, MEND and PCPD. The EU-funded project started on January 1, 2021 and will end on December 31, 2023.

In the focus group discussions and interviews, participants talked about citizen satisfaction and expectations from municipal services and other local civil institutions. In addition, they exchanged thoughts on how citizens react towards good governance practices and how they can be improved. The discussion with the youth focus groups and CSOs representatives focused on community participation and involvement in LC, institutional development, community planning, and participatory governance.



Bibliography

1. ARDA, L. & BANERJEE, S.B., 2021. Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood: The NGOization of Palestine. *Business & Society*. September, vol. 60, no. 7, pp. 1675–1707.
2. NATHANI, K., LEE, W. C., TAHA, S., HORINO, M., SEITA, A., and SERAG, H., 2022. The Association between Mental Well-Being and School Attendance among Palestinian Adolescent Refugees in UNRWA Schools. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*. May, vol. 28, pp. 1–12.
3. PALESTINIAN CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS., 2021. *The Situation of the Youth in the Palestinian Society*. [online]. [viewed 25 Jul. 2022]. Available from: https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_11-8-2021-youth-en.pdf
4. SAEED, N., SHUAIBI, M., GHATTAS, R., 2016. *Palestinian Women's Participation in Local Government, Evaluating Experiences and Future Implications*. [online]. [viewed 22 Jul. 2022]. Available from: <http://www.awrad.org/files/server/2-20170115163818.pdf>
5. SUNDSTROM, A., and STOCKEMER, D., 2015. What Determines Women's Political Representation at the Local Level? A Fine-grained Analysis of the European Regions. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. August, vol. 56, no. 3-4, pp. 254–274.
6. The Institute of Community and Public Health-Birzeit University., 2021. *Youth Wellbeing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: An In-Depth, Multi-Level, and Interdisciplinary Study into Wellbeing and Gender Equality among Palestinian Youth*. Oxfam International. [online]. [viewed 31 Jul. 2022]. Available from: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/youth-wellbeing-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-an-in-depth-multi-level-a-621182/>
7. UNHABITAT and UNDESA., 2013. *Youth Participation*. [online]. [viewed 1 Aug. 2022]. Available from: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-participation.pdf>
8. UNHCR., 2022. *Gender Based Violence* [online]. [viewed 23 Aug. 2022]. Available from: <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html>
9. UNWOMEN., December 2021. *Women's representation in local government: A global analysis*. [online]. [viewed 20 Jul. 2022]. Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Womens-representation-in-local-government-en.pdf>



Appendices

SECTION 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This section contains interview questions for each of the stakeholders.

Question 1:

What methods can be used to facilitate meaningful participation?

Stakeholders: All

Questions:

No.	English	Arabic
1	What is meaningful participation for you?	ما هي المشاركة الفعالة في نظرك؟
2	How do you increase community participation?	كيف يمكنك زيادة المشاركة المجتمعية؟
3	How can you ensure a stronger participation of women?	كيف نعمل على تأكيد مشاركة فعالة للمرأة؟
4	Do you know instances (situations) in the past where you witnessed meaningful participation? Can you tell us the story?	هل لديك أي تجربة مع المشاركة الفعالة؟ اذكر مثالاً على ذلك أو قصة؟
5	How can CSOs play an active role in the decision-making process in LG?	كيف يمكن لمؤسسات المجتمع المحلي أن تؤدي دوراً فعالاً في عملية صنع القرار بالنسبة للمشاركة الفعالة للنساء والشباب والشابات في الحكم المحلي؟
6	What are/were enabling factors? What are the obstacles?	ما هي عوامل التمكين؟ وما هي المعوقات؟
7	How can we help youth and women overcome obstacles?	كيف لنا ان نساعد النساء والشباب والشابات في نخطي هذه المعوقات؟
8	What are the best ways to ensure equal participation without discrimination?	ما هي أفضل الطرق لتأكيد المساواة (المشاركة في صنع القرار دون تمييز)؟
9	In your opinion, what are the convenient approaches for individuals and groups especially women and youth to achieve a meaningful participation?	ما هي من وجهة نظرك أفضل الوسائل للنساء والشباب والشابات لتحقيق المشاركة الفعالة؟

Question 2:

What is important to focus on within the governance of local authorities?

Stakeholders: CSOs, youth, LG officials

No.	English	Arabic	Stakeholder
1	How do you perceive your role in changing the life of women and youth through the municipality work and activities?	كيف ترى دورك في تغيير حياة النساء والشباب والشابات من خلال أنشطة البلدية وبرامجها؟	Municipality/ Mayor
2	How do you respond to the needs of women and youth in job creation?	كيف تستجيب لاحتياجات النساء والشباب والشابات من أجل الحصول على عمل؟	
3	How do you encourage women and youth to participate in municipality planning and decision-making in related topics?	كيف تشجع النساء والشباب والشابات من أجل المشاركة في التخطيط وضع القرار بشأن المواضيع التي تخصهم؟	
4	How do you see your role in building the capacity of women/youth and in bringing social change in the stereotype about women?	كيف ترى دورك في بناء قدرات النساء والشباب والشابات، والعمل على إحداث تغيير في المجتمع فيما يخص المسائل المتعلقة بالصورة النمطية لدور المرأة في المجتمع؟	NGOs, Institutions
5	What are the challenges and difficulties you face in your work?	ما هي المعوقات والتحديات التي تواجهها في عملك؟	
6	How do you describe your relationship with the LG in your city?	كيف تصف علاقتك مع الحكم المحلي في بلدتك؟	
7	What recommendations would you suggest to improve the relationship and activate your participation within the LG institutions?	ما هي التوصيات التي تقترحها من أجل تفعيل المشاركة داخل مؤسسات المجتمع المحلي؟	
8	In order to make participation a reality, what do you think to be important to focus on?	باعتقادك ما القضايا التي ينبغي التركيز عليها كي تصبح المشاركة حقيقة واقعة؟	
9	How do you encourage more participation in local government in terms of decision-making and responding to women and youth needs?	كيف يمكنك تشجيع المزيد من المشاركة في عملية صنع القرار والاستجابة لاحتياجات النساء والشباب والشابات؟	
10	Who do you think should work for increased participation?	من برأيك يجب أن يعمل من أجل زيادة المشاركة؟	
11	Do you have examples from the past where participation was successfully reinforced in an LG?	هل لديك أمثلة من الماضي حيث تم تعزيز المشاركة بنجاح في الحكم المحلي؟	
12	What do you recommend for LG to focus on? How can they build on past success and how can they avoid any future shortcoming?	ما الذي تنصح به الحكم المحلي للتركيز عليه؟ كيف يمكن للحكم المحلي البناء على النجاحات السابقة وكيف يمكنه تجنب أي قصور في المستقبل؟	
13	What is the framework that ensures good governance?	ما هي رؤيتك لضمان تحقيق الحكم الرشيد؟	
14	In your opinion, what are the requirements of the rule of law and good governance?	من وجهة نظرك، ما هي متطلبات سيادة القانون والحكم الرشيد؟	

Question 3:

What are the best practices?

Stakeholders: CSOs, Youth Coordinators

No.	English	Arabic
1	We have already asked you to give success examples, but we would like to hear more about some behaviors and practices that you found helpful during your involvement with the LCs, especially ones that led to more participation.	من خلال خبرتك في المشاركة في المجالس المحلي، ما هي الممارسات والسلوكيات التي تضمن مشاركة أكبر في المجالس المحلية؟
2	Why do you think these behaviors/practices have worked? Why do they think they have not worked? What can you do differently in the future?	من وجهة نظرك، ما هي الممارسات والسلوكيات التي نجحت أو لم تنجح، وماذا يمكن فعله في المستقبل؟
3	What policies should be in place to promote women and youth participation?	ما هي السياسات التي يجب وضعها لتعزيز مشاركة المرأة والشباب والشابات؟
4	What kind of programs and awareness raising activities do we need to implement to increase the understanding of women and youth roles and duties?	ما نوع البرامج وأنشطة التوعية التي نحتاج إلى تنفيذها لزيادة فهم أدوار وواجبات النساء والشباب والشابات؟

Question 4:

What are your recommendations?

Stakeholders: CSOs, Youth Coordinators, LG officials

No.	English	Arabic
1	What are your recommendations to the following parties? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donors• NGOs (partners of the “Civil Society for Dignity”)• CSOs• Youth and women• LG officials and the Palestinian government in general• Palestinian society	ما هي توصياتكم للجهات التالية؟ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• الجهات المانحة• المؤسسات غير الحكومية• مؤسسات المجتمع المدني• النساء والشباب والشابات• المسؤولين في الحكم المحلي والحكومة الفلسطينية عامة• المجتمع الفلسطيني
2	What can be done to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• strengthen the relationship among stakeholders, CSOs and target communities?• develop a participatory approach to meet community needs?	ما الذي يمكن عمله من أجل <ul style="list-style-type: none">• تقوية العلاقة بين أصحاب المصلحة ومؤسسات المجتمع المدني والمجتمعات المستهدفة؟• تطوير النهج التشاركي لتلبية احتياجات المجتمع؟

SECTION 2: FOCUS GROUPS

Group size ranged between 8 and 10 participants

Time allotted: 1.5 hours

No.	English	Arabic
1	Describe a story or anecdote that you witnessed in the LC. Why was it significant to you and to other people?	صف قصة أو حكاية شاهدتها في الحكم المحلي؟ لماذا كانت مهمة لك وللآخرين؟
2	What was the impact?	ما أثر ذلك؟
3	What did you learn?	ماذا تعلمت؟

Recommendations

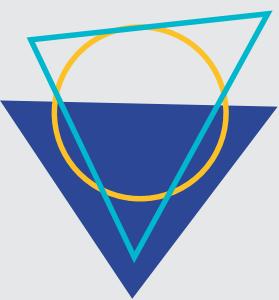
Participants were asked to put what they would like to see more of (successes, good practices, good examples), and what they would like to see less of (it's not successful, it doesn't work, I don't want to see this practice).

Finally, participants were asked to answer this question:

No.	English	Arabic
1	In your opinion, what more can be done by the following parties? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors • NGOs • CSOs • Youth • Women • LG • Society 	في رأيك ، ما الذي يمكن أن تقوم به الأطراف التالية؟ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • الجهات المانحة • المؤسسات غير الحكومية • منظمات المجتمع المدني • الشباب والشابات • النساء • الحكم المحلي • المجتمع
2	What methods do you recommend for achieving the above?	ما هي الطرق أو الأساليب التي توصي بها لتحقيق ما ورد أعلاه؟

Additional questions for the women focus group:

No.	English	Arabic
1	Do you think women in your community know about the rights they have regarding meaningful participation?	هل تعتقد أن النساء في مجتمعك يعرفن عن الحقوق التي يتمتعن بها فيما يتعلق بالمشاركة الهادفة؟
2	What relevant international conventions did the government sign?	ما هي الاتفاقيات الدولية ذات الصلة التي وقعتها الحكومة؟
3	Do women have access to information about the above-mentioned topics?	هل يمكن للنساء الوصول إلى المعلومات حول الموضوعات المذكورة أعلاه؟



هذا المشروع بدعم من



EUROPEAN UNION
الاتحاد الأوروبي



www.paxforpeace.nl

