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Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio
Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura

CEMOFPSC SEMINAR Women's participation in water access and management: "The case of Palestine"

Conclusions

Today's contributions have enriched the debate on the Human Right to water and on the participation of rural Palestinian women in the management of this resource. The presentations, statements and good practices will definitely help us understand what the situation is like in Palestine when it comes to the implementation of the Human Right to water and the Sustainable Development Objective 6.

The opening remarks from Mr. Javier Parrondo, Head of the Department of Cooperation for the Arab World and Asia at the Spanish Agency of International Development Cooperation (AECID) made it clear that water access and sanitation and women rights are both areas of interest for AECID in the Palestinian Territories. He stressed the role of FPSC as a relevant actor for the Spanish Cooperation in the Middle East. AECID is aware of the critical situation of the region and the stress it is under regarding water needs. Moreover, AECID has a Country Association Framework with Palestine for 2014-2017, an instrument where all cooperation issues are regulated, and also a Programme called Mazar, a governance project for the Arab World that aims to support good governance and facilitate reforms and, why not a climatic or environmental governance, too.

Ms. Jumana Trad, President of FPSC, described the work of the Foundation in the Middle East and especially in the Palestinian Territories and Jordan, where 11 water-related projects have been implemented since 1995. Among them three pluriannual Projects or Convenios with AECID. Altogether over 15 million EUR implemented in the region. She highlighted the Convenio with AECID this Seminar is framed within "Sustainable and equitable rural development in the West Bank,



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implementation and responsible management of land and water resources for small and medium-sized farmers". This Seminar is also part of the activities of the FPSC Middle East Studies Centre (CEMOFPSC), founded in 2006 and set to provide information, ideas, and advice.

She thanked Mr. Javier Parrondo, Head of Cooperation Department with the Arab World and Asia, and Ms. Isabel Casado, Technical Adviser of Middle East and Asia, both from the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) for their presence and support. This Seminar, she said, would not have been possible without the support of the Spanish Agency they represent. She also thanked Mr. Francisco Javier Bertolín, Director of the Area of Commercial and Educational Action of La Caixa Banking Foundation and all his team.

The inaugural conference was delivered by Ms. **Elena López-Gunn, Founder and Manager of ICATALIST**. As an expert in water management she shares the opinion of former Secretary General Kofi Annan who used to say that "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women". She described that gender issues in the water sector count with a good human rights based approach legal framework at international level (Human Right to Water and Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 6). She also stressed that investing in the water sector would improve hygiene and health, food security, gender empowerment and, ultimately, social well being and prosperity.

Ms. López Gunn showed two videos by two experts in water and gender issues:

- Ms. Francesca Greco from UN-WWAP Italy, considers that every water project should mainstream gender in every component and indicators should follow track of it by using sex disaggregated statistics.
- Ms. Eiman Karar from UNEP Sudan emphasised the role of women in conflict negotiations on water issues. It should take into account the leadership value and conflict resolution power of women.

Ms. López Gunn also stressed the case of Palestine as even more difficult to approach because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and recommended special attention to the humanitarian crisis the Palestinian population is going through.

First session

Right to water in Palestine: current situation and implementation challenges

The first presentation by **Mr. Amin Nawahda from Civil and Environmental Engineering Agricultural Development Association (PARC), Palestine**, discussed water resources in Palestine. He stressed that the State of Palestine has one of the scarcest water availability (per capita supply) in the world. The water



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scarcity is due to both natural and man-made constraints mainly resulting from Israeli occupation. He also explained there are serious problems with management of transboundary aquifers and river basins. More than 60% of the current utilisation of the Jordan River water is consumed by Israel. Israeli settlements are consuming more than the sustainable recharge volume of aquifers.

Mr. Nawahda also spoke about the four-year project FPSC and PARC are implementing in the West Bank thanks to AECID's funds. The project develops a gender component by targeting women farmers in cooperatives who get trainings and workshops on how to generate more income from their home gardens. Mr Nawahda concluded that Palestinians would rather change the old Chinese saying "Do not give me a fish to eat but teach me how to fish", into "Give me the fish and teach me how to fish".

The second presentation by **Mr. Fuad Bateh, Adviser on Environment & Water, Palestine** focused on "Water for a viable independent Palestinian State". He stated that the water situation is "first and foremost a political issue". Since water is existential for a viable state, Palestine should be able to control water resources in the area. However, after the Oslo Agreement in 1985, it is Israel who controls the shared water resources -water current allocation is 89% for Israel and only 11% for Palestine-. Both parties by consensus must decide about water management as it was considered by the Joint Water Committee during 2010 discussions. Mr Bateh believes that policy, advocacy and communication can lead to impact so he urges the Palestinian official representatives from the Embassy to invite the UN Special Rapporteur to the HR of Water. Finally, he recommended AECID and all donors to demand changes and hold accountable the donor's money. Women represent 70% of the end water users in Palestine, so they have an important role in decision-making positions and their voices should be heard in the international community in order "to change the political dynamics which means compelling Israel to change its practices".

The third intervention by **Ms. Amira Hass, Journalist at Haaretz**, decried Israel's water policy in Palestine. She stressed the multiple lies Israeli authorities spread when it comes to water issues. Under several pretexts such as Palestinian inability to manage water resources, safety and security, Israelis deliberately allow water scarcity in Palestinian communities. The policy of artificial scarcity, which creates ever increasing Palestinian dependency on donors and water purchase from Israeli Water Company, exposes Israel's denial of Palestinian collective rights in their homeland. They are seen as Israel's business clients, not as people who are entitled to their sovereignty and freedom of choices. In the end Israel's ultimate objective is to further fragment the Palestinian space and society so they cannot plan nor develop.



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Second session

Water access and management in Palestine: examples of good practices

The first speaker, **Mr. Leo Heller, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner**, focused on the Office of the High Commissioner's recently delivered report "Ending Inequalities: A priority for accomplishing Sustainable Development Goal 6, and many others".

The Report focuses on gender equality in the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation. Gender equality is a fundamental human rights principle, yet inequalities between men and women are observed in all countries, including on the basis of gender identity. Cultural, social, economic and biological differences between women and men consistently lead to unequal opportunities for women in the enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation.

The Report stresses the importance of fair legislations and policies according to the gender approach. The legislation should ensure women participation, decision making and accountability. If women rights are attacked, other human rights such as health, education and, for sure, access to safe drinking water and sanitation are challenged. Mr Heller encouraged the audience to read the Report carefully and showed interest in working in Palestine in the near future.

The second speaker was **Ms. Randa Siniora, General Director at Women Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), Palestine**. During her presentation she elaborated about women's traditional role in a patriarchal society like the Palestinian one and the negative implications water collection has in terms of education, health, etc. The reality of Palestine is water resources are limited, infrastructure and sanitation systems are poor, there is discrimination and forced purchase of water on the part of the Israelis. As a result of all this, extensive time and effort are consumed to securing WASH needs of the family.

Nevertheless, women as caretakers have devised methods and strategies to overcome water shortages. Examples of small-scale solutions to alleviate the problems of water scarcity and food insecurity: rainwater harvesting, treatment of grey water, rooftop agriculture and hydroponic and aquaponic agriculture are numerous and successful.

As for recommendations Ms. Siniora called the attention of the Palestinian Authority as State party to several International Treaties (ICESCR, CEDAW, etc.) to stand up to their legal obligations under international law despite the fact we are under occupation, e.g. mainstreaming gender equality in sector and national development plans; to the donors she encouraged them to abandon the practice of



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conditioning funding for water infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to further support projects and initiatives at local communities level, to adopt a rights based approach in the implementation of these projects and to hold Israel accountable for demolition of water infrastructure projects and demand appropriate compensations.

In the third presentation **Ms. Yara Zayed, Director at Deem Company for Collective Development, Palestine** gave us her insights into the predicament Palestinian women are in when it comes to access and management of water resources. Palestinian population suffers the socio-economic problems of a developing country but also the Israeli Occupation. The situation is getting worse due to population growth and the effects of climate change. She highlighted the following issues: water resources in Palestine are declining due to occupation, water resources confiscation and control by the Israeli side; women are the most affected group regarding water access and management despite the international Human Rights and Treaties the Palestinian Authority has already signed; there is a big difference between access and management or control due to socio-cultural and political reasons; there must be reforms related to law enforcement, policies and practices and public awareness to ensure equal distribution, access and management and gender mainstreaming; finally, all players and institutions including the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and universities have to work on national reporting standards incorporating gender indicators that would later help in laying out all public policies .

In the last presentation **Ms. Miriam Ramos Méndez, Gender Focal Point WASH Cluster (GVC - Italia), Palestine**, has described the Toolkit for gender mainstreaming in WASH projects they are developing in Gaza thanks to the support of UN Women, the Italian Cooperation and the Italian NGO GVC. She has highlighted the lack of gender analysis in the implementation of WASH projects. The Toolkit intends to be coherent with the Gender Strategy of the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) by trying to mainstream gender issues and women involvement in the WASH sector and, by extension, in the Palestinian civil society. She concluded by saying that the Toolkit will be under revision according to the context and the different traditions so that all actions and projects have greater impact in terms of sustainability, human rights and protection.

Madrid, December 2016