

Women in agriculture in palestine sociology essay



The project has as its principal question, What are the characteristics of women and men working in agriculture in Palestine and the impact on? different agricultural patterns and effect on roles, opportunities and gender relations? Having received financial support, the project has now embarked on its next stage and the development of a research methodology to identify this data from which policy recommendations will be made.

To assist the development of this project, this literature review provides an overview of the material that is available on the subject. The approach taken has been both specific and comparative, by identifying previous material written about women in agriculture in Palestine as well as in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond more generally. A broader perspective to the question is valuable in highlighting what work has already been done, including the main features associated with women working in agriculture, the methods taken to examine the issue and the policy recommendations that have been introduced to date.

Of particular note across the literature is a seeming paradox regarding women in agriculture. On one hand there is recognition of the previously ignored position of female agricultural labour. As a result there has been growing awareness both in scholarly literature and policy interventions to ensure that women are less marginalised in the sector. On the other hand the greater attention to women in agriculture, both in terms of research and policy recommendations, has largely failed to reduce their marginalisation. This raises key questions about the nature of those policies (such as gender mainstreaming and female participation in their formation, development and

implementation) and how the same mistakes are not repeated in the current project.

This literature review is divided as follows:

General overview of women in agriculture

Social dimension of women in agriculture

Economic dimension of women in agriculture

Technical dimension of women in agriculture

Political (and policy) dimension of women in agriculture

Suggestions and next steps

General overview of women in agriculture globally and in MENA

As noted above, there is an underlying paradox at the heart of the literature and analyses of women in agriculture and which appears to hold across the world. On the one hand there is a growing recognition of women and their role in the sector. Among scholars feminist attention to gender issues had tended to focus on urban women during the 1970s. It was not until the mid-1980s that increasing attention was placed on rural women and their involvement in agriculture (Maman and Tate 1996). Among policymakers there was an increasing awareness of the 'feminisation of agriculture', given the rise of visible female agricultural labour and the disappearance of men, through migration and AIDS for example (Sweetman 1999).

On the other hand though, there has been a concurrent oversight, awareness and development of effective strategies to enhance the role of women in agriculture. In practical terms and across the globe, many women have struggled for autonomy in the agricultural sector, facing restriction on land ownership and use, access to inputs and credit and other resources like education and training (Sweetman 1999). Even in locations where women appear to have more access to ownership and control of the land, the denial of that right is arguably the greatest contributor to a gender gap and women's weaker social, economic and political status (Arun 1999, Badr 2010).

The use of the term 'gender' has meant that the issue of women in agriculture has become largely subsumed into a broader debate about gender and gender relations. Gender constitutes the socially constructed roles surrounding men and women. In other words, it is not the biological differences between men and women that affect their involvement in human activities, such as agriculture, but rather the way that societies around them shape them. Moreover, gender is seen as increasingly important in development terms. The World Bank (2009) bases it on four main grounds: economic (in terms of enhancing efficiency); equity and distributional; food security and household welfare; and as a basic human right. Globally gender differences are apparent in various ways including access to assets and services, such as land, labour, finance, water, rural infrastructure, technology and other inputs.

In MENA, there appear to be two main texts which are especially relevant to the project's focus: Lamia El-Fattel's 1996 *Women in Agriculture in West Asia*
<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

and North Africa, and the regional study, *Women in Agriculture in the Middle East*, edited by Pnina Mozafi-Haller and published nearly a decade later in 2005. To these publications may also be considered the gender-related studies conducted by the PCBS over the same period.

El-Fattel provided conducted a broad survey of the subject, ranging across several decades and noting several key points. First, she observed that agriculture in different West Asia and North Africa (WANA) countries shared some common themes. This included the fact that agriculture was primarily rain-fed and more technically advanced compared to other developing countries. While there is a greater use of mechanisation and fertilizers, weeding is still done by hand. Farms tend to be run in a patriarchal fashion and are small; the latter which make it hard to absorb labour outside the family.

Second, in reviewing the literature El-Fattal commented noted that there had been relatively little systematic or comparative work done to date (12-14). What material was available tended to focus on single cases, usually at the level of the village or a region within the country rather than at country or regional level. Much of this was reflected in the anthropological or general social science studies nature of the literature. Women in agriculture were generally not the focal point of such studies, but rather as aspect of more specific studies into social dynamics within a community.

Third, she summarised the literature as follows: '(1) women play important roles in food production in WANA and their involvement is increasing, and (2) the extent of their participation, over space and time, is a function of

numerous forces at play.' (16) Those factors are both diverse yet inter-related and include land holding size and tenancy (as well as landlessness), the type of farming, the degree of mechanisation, available male labour and a woman's social and economic status on both farms and in the community more generally (El Fattel 1996, UN 2001: 10).

One of the important aspects of Mozafi-Haller's edited volume was its country and region-based focus. It was the only notable result of a decision in the late 1990s by the Danish government's Regional Agricultural Program to improve agricultural planning and technical assistance between Egypt, Jordan, the PA and Israel. The difficulty of achieving much more with the project was undermined by the second Intifada which reduced the scope for collaboration. Meanwhile, gender had not been initially central to the project, but grew in importance throughout the course of the work (Mozafi-Haller 2005). Of particular relevance to the project is the chapter on Palestinian women in agriculture, which was written by Rema Hammami. It is arguably the most comprehensive study on the subject to date.

Given the date of publication, Hammami makes use of data from the 1990s and early 2000s. She cites a 2000 survey on time use, in which agriculture is not disaggregated from 'primary production'). In addition to this report are two others that make passing reference to women and agriculture: a 1999 survey on female ownership and access to resources (specifically through attitudes regarding female ownership and inheritance) and more recent publications on men and women; the latest of which was published earlier this year and notes that 20.5% of women were employed in agriculture and fishing compared to 9.9% of men (PCBS 1999, 2000, 2010). Beyond these <https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

publications the PCBS does publish agricultural statistics on a yearly basis, although the questionnaire is primarily concerned with agricultural products, such as livestock, crops and materials rather than any breakdown of farm labour and women. The only agricultural report that it has produced that has a breakdown by sex is in its 2004/05 Farm Structure Survey, where the issue was raised in its questions concerning land holders (PCBS 2006).

Social dimension of women in agriculture

Women tend to be marginal actors in agriculture. While women suffer discrimination from a wide range of sources, much of this can be traced back to social and cultural attitudes. In the case of Palestinian and Arab women this is apparent in the public role of women, which has been broadly limited to those of mothers, sisters or wives, or 'childbearers and childrearsers'. This is reflected in part by the emphasis towards early and universal marriage and high levels of fertility throughout the region (Salman 1987: 8; Zurayk and Saadeh 1995: 37-38). Such attitudes have persisted, even as Arab women have entered the public sphere (UNDP 2006: 91). Indeed, today Arab women generally have three choices of identity: as a housewife and mother; as a housewife and mother with home-based work; or as a housewife and mother with outside employment.

Why females may be subject to such attitudes have been explained in MENA in several ways. This begins early, both within the family home and at school. The use of text books, teachers' attitudes and methods, early marriage and high fertility, male dominance in the public sphere and - arguably - the role of Islam have all been cited in this regard (Rubenburg 2001, UNDP 2006, Posusney and Doumato 2003; El-Mikawy 1999). At the <https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

same time, Islam as a constraint does not suffice; Moghadam (1993: 8) claims that it is neither monolithic nor intrinsically patriarchal; at times its adherents have sought to bring women into the public sphere, during times of conflict or national hardship when their participation on the front or in the labour force may be seen as an asset (e. g. Sudan and Saudi Arabia). El-Fattal (1996: 15) notes that Islam has proved an unsatisfying framework to account for the position of women: opposing conclusions have been reached as to whether Islam suppresses or liberates women. At the same time there have been changes within Islam, such as Islamic feminism has emerged and which rejects the traditional position of women and promotes their empowerment, including the right to religious education and the use of conservative dress as a means of entering the public sphere - even as their attempts to reform family law have largely failed (Posusney and Doumato 2003: 9-11).

In the case of Palestine these social attitudes are especially entrenched, with women noting particular political/economic limits, social pressure and familial expectations. This may contribute to some of the rights that women have failed to take up, including to education, work, inheritance, freedom of movement, choice of marriage partner and domestic abuse (Rubenberg 2001: 122-3). The effect is also felt in the generally patriarchal nature of the household and the three main family types that exist: the nuclear (father, mother and unmarried children), the extended or hamula (an economic unit based on several related males and their families headed by the eldest) and a transitional type (which combines elements of the nuclear and extended

families) (Manasra 1993: 7), which reflect differences between Palestine's modern and traditional sectors and urban, rural and camp settings.

Economic dimension of women in agriculture

This section considers the experience of women in the formal labour market generally and in the agricultural sector. It begins with a broader perspective on the nature of development in the region and the distinction between the traditional and modern economies. Female labour is largely associated with a 'modernised' economy and the shift from the traditional to the modern economy has posed several obstacles to the inclusion of women in the labour market. The second part outlines those limitations this section provides an overview of the current figures and state of female labour in the Palestinian agricultural sector. However, this section ends with a rider, noting the uncertainty surrounding official figures on female agricultural labour and the steps taken to resolve this, both globally and in Palestine.

First, according to Motzafi-Haller (2005), in much of the literature on development there is a strong binary tension between the 'traditional' and the 'modern', whereby women are discriminated against in the former and included in the latter. In addition, this perception implies a 'non-efficient' traditional economic model versus an efficient, sustainable, just and modern version (Motzafi-Haller 2005). Sweetman (1999) notes the emphasis on 'efficiency' in most rural development interventions, with the result that it largely overlooks notions of justice and equality between the sexes. The focus on efficiency (and modernisation) has meant that the prevailing form of female labour (i. e. informal, domestic) has been undervalued, especially in relation to that done by men. At the same time pressure for women to

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

work both inside and outside the home has risen, especially over the past few decades as structural adjustment has reduced income for the poor and weakened household structures. The result has been a diversification of labour and activities as a means of coping. As a result, agricultural labour is but one form of gaining income (Sweetman 1999).

Second, within MENA both the proportion and absolute numbers of women in formal employment have tended to be low. In the literature, various explanations have been put forward, including historic, economic and structural. Historically, the emergence of 'exploitative labour regimes' in the colonial period weakened the role and status of women, especially as the demands of the international economy and wage labour in agricultural and industrial sectors grew. The result was female exclusion from the formal labour force and their unpaid or low-paid work in the informal sector (Shukri 1996: xii). Economically, both globalisation and growth rates have been held to account for poorer female participation. Although MENA is classified as middle-income, it has been subject to slow growth, thereby limiting demand for jobs (which affects women more than men) (UNDP 2006: 91).

Structurally, the limited nature of female participation may be attributed to various reasons. First, states' ideology and development strategies may affect women's opportunity for employment with more capital-intensive measures benefiting male workers while women have found increased opportunities through subcontracting and home-based work (Moghadam 1995: 18-19, 28). Second, women may experience employment disadvantage as a result of economic failures. This may include the U-shaped nature of economic development, whereby at the initial stage female labour

participation decreases as that of men increases, followed by a growing demand for jobs in the sector that are filled by women. At the same time women suffer from externality and common access problems, whereby their labour (especially within the household) is unpaid, freely available and largely misallocated (Vecchio and Roy 1998: 10-13).

In the case of the agricultural sector, Razavi (2007) highlights several specific factors that have limited female agricultural labour in MENA. Despite noting the advances in the political and legal rights of women to land, she observes that liberalisation policies (which make it harder for low-income women to access land through the market), the predominant form of 'small scale' farming and its restrictions on achieving access to land mean that agricultural labour can only provide a complementary role in livelihoods alongside other income-generating measures. She also notes the use of 'customary' and decentralised systems of land tenure which can be used by strong interest groups to work against women's rights.

In Palestine, women face several social pressures that have economic consequences, both generally and in terms of their full participation in the agricultural sector. Women face greater social restrictions than men, including social stigma following divorce and a weaker right of inheritance (Manasra 1993) - although differences do exist between women who pursue their inheritance, with brotherless daughters, widowed mothers and daughters of wealthy households those who most actively advance their claims (Moors 1996: 82). Generally though, Palestinian women (and female heads) face many of the challenges that others in the developing world experience, including restricted property rights and family law constraints on

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

women that persist (Vardhan 1999; Vecchio & Roy 1998). In the case of Palestine, access to land is mainly through inheritance and traditionally women tend to waive their rights in favour of their brothers who were expected to reciprocate by looking after their sisters (Hammami 2005: 69).

The rarity of women's ownership of land is apparent in the Palestinian Farm Structure Survey 2004/05, which distinguishes between male and female holders. Female holders vary between 3% in Gaza and the southern West Bank to 5.7% in the northern West Bank (PCBS 2006), although the survey does not provide any data that suggests to what extent female holders exercise control of their land in terms of key decisions. This is reflected in the three main types of female agricultural worker. The first type, male members of the household work off the farm while the women work part of the family land. The second type is women who are full-time farmers. In many cases they are entirely responsible for the farm following the death or abandonment of their husbands. The third type is agricultural labourers who work for others, including both Palestinians and Israelis (Hammami 2005: 61).

In terms of figures available on Palestinian female agricultural labour, in 1996 29.1% of women in the labour force worked in agriculture compared to 9.9% of men (although in absolute terms men outnumbered women), highlighting that in terms of employment opportunities, agriculture is much more important for women than men and less connected with pressures from poverty than rising productivity - even though the characteristics of such women tended to be older, less educated and lower paid than men in the same sector. The bulk of women in agriculture were based in the West

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

Bank, opportunities being less in Gaza as a result of intensive and irrigated farming and the lack of cultivable land (Hammami 2005). However, by 2009 the same number of men worked in agriculture but the number of women employed in the sector had fallen to 20.5% (PCBS 2010).

Third, these official figures need to be taken with a pinch of salt. At the global, regional and national level, numbers regarding women's involvement in the agriculture has been largely underreported. This reflects both women's greater participation at working on their family farms and assumptions by both men and women that their participation is not work (UN 2001: 8). The impact of this underreporting is not only a persistent theme in material related to women in agriculture, but is increasingly being addressed by practitioners. For example, in 2003 the FAO held an international workshop on the subject, recommending that the collection of such data would be best served through the national census in different countries. This meant that greater awareness was needed regarding the concepts associated with agriculture, including: holdings, holders (who makes the primary decisions), legal status of holdings (i. e. public, private and the variations of each), holder's household (and the differentiated activities that exist within it) and economic activity as a permanent or occasional worker (FAO 2003). In Palestine efforts to get around the problem of underreporting including recognition of the informal nature of agricultural labour and the use of time use surveys as an alternative way of yielding data. This was last done in 1999 and 2000 in which agricultural labour was included under a heading of ' primary production'. According to Hammimi (2005) though, this data was

insufficiently disaggregated to provide sufficient data on the issue of agricultural work.

Technical dimension of women in agriculture

Technical advances in agriculture have created their own challenges. The 'green revolutions' of the 1960s and 1970s involved the modernization of land cultivation and more intensive use of pesticides to increase production and since the 1990s the use of GMOs. The relationship of this development to gender has been notable in two ways.

On one hand, it has been the well-off who have largely benefited rather than everyone (Sweetman 1999). Among those who have benefited are men, who largely control technical knowledge. However, such knowledge is imperfect which can lead to adverse results and the mismanagement of various resources in terms of land, water and female labour (Morvaridi 1992).

On the other hand, the various factors that have marginalised women in agriculture, including a lack of access to resources, lower educational levels and lower rates of productivity are felt in their inability to manipulate more productive, technically advanced agricultural methods. This keeps them 'ghettoized' in less capital intensive and more labour intensive activities (Hammami 2005: 70-71). At the same time it has placed women at greater risk to their health. While the ILO notes that agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations in health terms, women's lack of technical knowledge is bound to work against them, through the potentially incorrect use of pesticides that can lead to poisoning (Cole 2006).

Specifically in the case of Palestine, greater use of technology in agriculture has reduced the burden of work on women but rather increased it while maintaining inequalities in terms of power and income. In many respects it is men that have taken up the more mechanised and productive techniques, with female labour being largely focused at the more time-consuming, labour-intensive end (e. g. planting, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and packaging) (Hammimi 2005: 67). On the other hand, while women generally have been visible in environmental and consumer actions against the 'green revolutions' globally, it is not evident that this is a gender issue rather than a politically-oriented one (Sweetman 1999, Pedersen and Kjærgård 2004).

Political (and policy) dimension of women in agriculture

The literature review began with a tension at the heart of the topic: that there is growing attention given to women in agriculture but that measures to rectify the gender gap have not worked to date. However, this is not solely limited to the agricultural sector: across MENA there have been general advances in the political and legal rights for women. At the same time, social and economic pressures have worked against women's rights and been institutionalised through the creation of instruments such as personal status laws and officially sanctioned gender discrimination (Badr 2010).

In Palestine, a range of political pressures have worked against women in agriculture. First - and uniquely - there are challenges presented by the occupation, which challenge men as much as women. These include land confiscations, movement restrictions, a lack of an external market and the administrative division and control of the land, all of which was exacerbated even further by the second Intifada, resulting in sieges, invasions, curfews

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

and internal closures. For women, the responses to these processes have involved the search for coping strategies to help support the household (Hammami 2005: 49, 53).

Second, compared to women in other MENA countries, those in Palestine appear to be in a more advantageous position relatively. Women are well represented in the education system and in the public sphere, especially through women's organisations and lobby groups. However, at the same time, female involvement in formal institutions is low. This includes both the formal (as opposed to informal) labour force and representation in formal political institutions, such as the legislature and agricultural unions (Hammami 2005: 54-55).

The problems faced by Palestinian women (and women more generally) is reflected in the largely failed policy interventions that have resulted in the agricultural sector, which owe much to practitioners' world view and failure to implement gender-related solutions effectively.

First, Motzafi-Haller (2005: 8-9) draws attention to the concept of 'paternal feminism' and the work of Boutheina Cheriet, an Algerian professor of comparative education. Rather than reducing gender discrimination by including women and modernising the economy, this more critical view maintains women in a submissive position. In the absence of any wider public debate concerning female roles in development, women are either 'imposed from above or from outside' rather than treated as full equals and partners.

Second, efforts that aim at gender-mainstreaming have tended to fail, largely because of what Sweetman (1999: 7) notes as a result of ‘mechanistically’ integrated gender issues in planning and implementation, ‘without [a] commitment to challenging ‘injustice.’ Moreover, this means not only being gender aware, but also being prepared to tackle all forms of discrimination, from the overt and direct to the less clear and indirect (ILO 2006: 78). In part the absence of accurate data (see above) can mean that development interventions based on them will be undermined (Sweetman 1999). Much of this may be picked up through the use of statistics, surveys, cost-benefit analyses, research and gender-impact analyses (i. e. examine specific activities and their impact on men and women) (UN 2001: 4). This last point emphasises the importance of incorporating men into gender analysis, since the opportunities and constraints facing men and women will be different. El-Fattel (1996: 47) suggests asking specific questions of men and women, such as (1) who does what, when and where? (2) who has access to or control over resources? and (3) who benefits from each enterprise? Grace (2004) argues that understanding the roles of men and women means going beyond their sex, to consider other factors such as age, wealth, marital status and stage of their life cycle.

Regionally, across MENA the UN has noted different policy measures (2001: 10, 36). In Syria the focus has been on enhancing rural women’s status through rural development programmes and reforms in the educational, legal, social, health and economic sectors. In Lebanon attention has been given to income generation and vocational training for rural women and forms of protection in the informal sector. In Jordan the primary aim has

been to increase female participation in the labour market. However, in the absence of strong government will to enforce these measures, the position of rural women will remain weak.

Globally, awareness of these failures is reflected in the World Bank's Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook (2009: 3-4), which provides tools and case studies of practical examples and best practices to incorporate gender into planning processes. The aim of this literature is to support all kinds of practitioners, from those who are aware of gender issues but do not know where to start through to others that require more training and assistance in devising such mechanisms. Specifically, it uses the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach developed by the British Department for International Development as its conceptual framework for gender-related development. Specifically this has involved drawing attention to assets, markets (for products, labour, finances, land and water), risk and vulnerability, and knowledge, information and organisation related to these issues.

For Palestine, a good starting point would be that outlined by Hammami (2005: 74), who notes a current lack of sufficiently gender-specific information. She argues that 'good intentions and development programs alone will not guarantee an improvement in women's situation in agriculture and hence increase in farm productivity.' Among the measures that would need to be addressed include: enhanced opportunities in rural areas (more resources and infrastructure), development programs to strengthen rural people's role and their participation, more gender-related data in agriculture, adaptive and appropriate research and technologies for women, qualified and professional female extension agents, women's access to land, access to <https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

credit and other agricultural inputs, better education (to understand technical information) and more incentives to encourage greater risk and productivity (an aim that is undermined by women's general lack of ownership on the land).

That Hammimi highlights these recommendations suggests the relatively unsuccessful efforts to integrate gender awareness to date, despite the formation of a ' Women's Division' within the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Agriculture in 2000. Before that date, agricultural support services were largely gender-blind and overlooked the role of women as agricultural workers in their own right. Growing awareness that this needed to be addressed took place with the formation of a Women's Extension Division inside the Directorate of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development in 1998 and a general Women's Division in 2000, even as concern persisted that a specific women's unit might ghettoize gender issues - as it appears to have done until now.

Suggestions and next steps

The review of the literature on women in agriculture generally and in Palestine specifically highlights some common themes. Politically, economically and socially, Palestinian female agricultural workers share similar experiences to those of women working in agriculture in other parts of the world. This includes their relative marginalization and lack of access to resources and inputs, such as training, credit, water, land and others. At the same time though, in contrast to previous decades, the issue of gender has become an increasingly important one in studies on agriculture; even if the status and role of women has been overlooked, there had been plenty of

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-agriculture-in-palestine-sociology-essay/>

attention given to highlighting the situation along with recommendations to implement greater gender awareness and mainstreaming in policy terms. This is apparent in global efforts to incorporate women into the research and policy design process through participation in development planning.

That the situation of women is paradoxical – overlooked in practical terms yet increasingly considered in scholarly work and policy recommendations – suggests a new path forward is necessary. The coordinators of the current project do not presumably want to produce another analysis and report that will result in additional data and policy recommendations that will fail to combat the discrimination that women in agriculture continue to face.

Consequently, as a starting point, in the case of Palestine, this might involve the following:

Develop more robust data on the state of women in agriculture

This would require both quantitative and qualitative forms of data. In addition to revision of the measures to be addressed in the national census, smaller-scale surveys could be done to include disaggregated data that took account of gender and temporary/permanent labour. In addition qualitative data would include descriptive insights by men and women in the agricultural sector, through i