

***GENDER AND VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION***

**"Gender Planning and Vocational
Education and Technical Training in
Palestine"
An Initial Framework**

Lamis Abu Nahleh



**Women's Studies Program
Birzeit University**

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page consisting of ten vertical black lines of varying lengths. The top four lines are shorter, and the bottom six are longer. A solid black circle is positioned at the top of the fourth line from the left, extending downwards to the top of the fifth line.

**GENDER
AND
SOCIETY**
Working Paper #4

Gender
And
Society
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and Technical Training in Palestine: An Initial
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Lamis Abu Nahleh

**Women's Studies Program
Birzeit University
Palestine
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**Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, PO Box 14, Birzeit, Palestine.
Telephone: 972-2-9982000. Fax: 972-2-9957656. E-mail: pjohnson@ws.birzeit.edu**

FOREWORD

Women's Studies Program

The rising educational levels of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza over the past two decades is an important indicator of social transformation. The link between increased education and the expansion of other life opportunities for Palestinian women, however, remains a vexed question. For example, despite the marked increase in education, the formal labor force participation of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza has remained quite low, with figures from the new Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics registering percentage of female participation in the total labor force in 1993 at 9.5% in the West Bank, 6.2% in East Jerusalem and 1.8% in Gaza.

As is true elsewhere in the Third World, these figures underestimate women's employment, overlooking temporary, agricultural and informal work, and certainly do not represent the multi-faceted nature of women's work and economic contribution to family livelihood and to society. In addition, these figures also reflect the structural constraints of the Palestinian economy under Israeli occupation, which has also had severe effects on male employment prospects.

Whatever the problems in statistical measurement, however, it remains the case that the link between Palestinian women's education and women's employment is weak. At a time when the educational system and economic planning are in Palestinian hands for the first time, it is crucial to identify the factors contributing to this weakness and to develop and promote educational and economic policies that expand women and men's opportunities for meaningful work and sustainable livelihoods.

Lamis Abu Nahleh's examination of vocational education and technical training policies and practices in Palestine introduces a gender-analytical perspective that sheds light on one key educational factor that contributes to the weak link between education and employment for Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza. Her "gender diagnosis" of the systems and institutions that provide vocational education and technical training (VETT) in Palestine, including their goals, programs, student enrollment, structure and curricula, identifies a fragmented and often irrelevant system that does not meet the needs of either young men or women for training and which exhibits decided gender bias. Women, for example, constitute only 13% of the students enrolled in VETT institutions. Abu Nahleh also reviews the proposed policies to improve VETT and finds that while gender inequity is sometimes recognized by experts and policy-makers, their agendas and recommendations for change do not address this inequity in substantive ways. In particular, she warns that a focus on linking vocational training and education exclusively to industry may exclude women.

This paper represents the findings of the first stage of Abu Nahleh's research on vocational education and technical training in Palestine; in the second stage, now underway, Abu Nahleh is conducting a survey of students in fourteen community

colleges and selected high schools in Ramallah, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and surrounding rural areas. The survey explores female and male students' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, vocational education, job opportunities and their own status and aspirations.

The methodology employed by Abu Nahleh in her paper is also useful for the study of other institutions in Palestinian society. Abu Nahleh has used the gender planning approach which argues that gender is an intrinsic component of all policies, programs and projects that seek to address the needs of social groups (in this case the vocational student cohort). Women are thus not viewed as isolated from the rest of society. The gender planning approach examines the "web of institutionalization" of gender within institutions, and identifies four "spheres" (political, organizational, technical and research) in which gender is an integral component. These spheres are interrelated (in a "web") and effective gender-equitable policies and programs require their orchestration.

The recognition of gender as a basis for social organization and a category of analysis has opened up important new avenues for scholarly research and for equitable and effective policy formulation. The contribution by Lamis Abu Nahleh here has been supported through a research grant from the World University Service, as part of a program to promote gender-aware policy research by Palestinian women. It was also presented at a June 1995 conference in Tunis on "Education and Vocational Education in the Arab World and Europe," convened by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and will be published with the conference proceedings. Its focus and method also complement an on-going collaborative research project on "Palestinian Women in Society (PWIS)," undertaken by the Women's Studies Program and other local researchers. The PWIS project is a gender-informed assessment of existing literature and research on post-1967 Palestinian society in four areas we consider relevant to women: economy, education, social entitlements and support, and culture and society.

The Women's Studies Program at Birzeit University is publishing the "Gender and Society working paper series in order to begin a discussion on critical issues in the study of gender relations in Palestinian and Arab society. We also are interested in contributing to the on-going debate on how to develop strategies, policies and practices to build a democratic Palestinian society of equal citizens whose political, social and economic rights are recognized and promoted.

**Gender Planning and Vocational Education
and Technical Training in Palestine: An Initial
Framework**

Lamis Abu Nahleh

I. Introduction¹

With the launching of the peace process at the Madrid Conference in 1991, Palestinians have entered a new political era. On the one hand, since the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has taken over certain sectors like health, education, and social welfare, Palestinians have set out to restructure and build their institutions; on the other, the international community is interested in promoting the peace process hoping to make headway towards a settlement in the Middle East. The efforts of the two sides, though from different perspectives, are focused on the development of human resources, a substantial and legitimate basis for the development of any Third World country. For the Palestinians, however, a real settlement is contingent on their ability to plan for and achieve the comprehensive and sustainable development of Palestinian society. As it stands, Palestinians do not have full control over their resources or their economy, which hinders planning, institutional building and policy formulation and ultimately makes it hard to define the nature of the future Palestinian state.

In light of this, the Women's Studies Program (WSP) at Birzeit University sees it as crucial to join in these efforts and participate in this process. In this respect, we see we have a dual role to play: to participate actively in the policy-making (political) sphere, and to contribute to the research sphere. Conducting gendered and policy-oriented research is essential in this phase when efforts have been exerted to formulate policies for the reconstruction and building of Palestinian institutions to ensure the integration of gender into planning and policy formulation. Research assists the Program in seizing opportunities to actively feed into planning and policy formulation and share in representing the practical and strategic interests and needs of men and women since gender integration into policy and planning is an important avenue for these needs and interests to be met equitably and provides a basis for healthy socio-economic and political development.

Basically, Palestinian society is a youthful society with about half of its population falling within the age range of 4 to 14 years old²; it is thus natural to focus on preparing youth to be actively and effectively involved in the country's economy. Due to the importance of vocational education and technical training (VETT) in providing access to employment, it is seen as a solution to the problem of youth. Almost three decades of Israeli occupation of Palestine has had serious structural implications for Palestinian society. The FAFO study on Palestinian society refers to the impact of Israeli occupation on the life of Palestinians, stating that,

Israeli political control has affected the daily life of Palestinians in several ways, most importantly, perhaps, through the restrictions on the

¹ Sincere appreciation to all my colleagues at the Women's Studies Program for their support and comments, especially Lisa Taraki, Penny Johnson, Rema Hammami and Islah Jad for their editing and feedback which helped in formulating a stronger paper.

² Hassan Abu Libdeh et. al. "Population Characteristics and Trends," *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank, and Arab Jerusalem: A Survey of Living Conditions*. Oslo: FAFO, 1994, p. 47.

movement and forcible changes in the housing situations of families...and at the community and national levels, it prevents systematic planning for the future."³

Constant weakening of the agricultural sector, lack of control over the labor market and total dependency of all productive sectors on the Israeli economy have all worked in the interest of serving the Israeli market and the Israeli economy. In addition, the absence of a national authority, and the prevailing of a traditional social structure, have contributed to the underdevelopment of Palestinian society and economy: Israeli policy, be it in education, health, or labor, has served Israeli interests while Palestinian development initiatives have been unable to promote the development of Palestinian capacities, but have been concerned with the social survival of Palestinians and their ability to resist occupation. As a result of the dispersion of decision making and the disparity of perspective and interests, Palestinian society remained underdeveloped, lacking a firm infrastructure.

This underdevelopment has manifested itself in weak institutions and structures in general and produced an acute state of gender disparity in particular. The FAFO survey identified the three components of the labour force: the "employed", the "unemployed" and those "outside the labour force". The survey shows a minimal participation of women in the labour force; however, it cautions that this should not imply that women are not productive;

On the contrary, the results of women's use of time shows that women, on average, spend 60 hours a week on housework and income generating activities. The majority of women are thus "occupied" more than full-time with productive and reproductive activities.⁴

The low participation of women in formal labor is mainly caused by Israeli control over labor markets. For instance, the construction sector, a totally male-oriented sector, was developed at the expense of other labor sectors as it was the most needed sector by the Israeli market. Thus when there was a high demand for construction labor, women were left unemployed.

The economic structure imposed on the Palestinians, especially in terms of job opportunities and in terms of defining the size and qualifications of the labor force, has indirectly affected the education of men and women. Since 1948, Palestinians have invested significantly in the education of their children to make up for the loss of their land and to give their children an avenue to social mobility. However, research shows that, for both economic and cultural reasons, the education of males is given priority over that of females in the family.⁵ Since job opportunities are defined mainly by the Israeli market and are restricted by Israeli political policies, these opportunities are more available for men. Also, since women get lower pay than

³ *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank, and Arab Jerusalem: Summary of a Survey of Living Conditions*, Oslo: FAFO, 1994, pp.5-6.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁵ Marianne Heiberg. "Education" *The Palestinian Society in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: A Survey of the Living Conditions*, Oslo: FAFO, 1994, p. 131.

men and their mobility is more constrained, families prefer to invest in the education of males to get a better output. In addition, it is widely believed that once women get married their families will no longer have access to or control over their salaries while men remain the source of family continuity and economic support. In the FAFO study, Hammami reports that women's access to and control over resources is delimited by the status of the husband or the family, and thus economically, the majority of women are considered dependent, which limits their chances to be part of decision making.⁶

As stated earlier, the fact that Palestinian society is a young society means that education and in particular VETT should be among the main concerns of development planners. The past two years have witnessed efforts on behalf of international agencies and local institutions to investigate the system of VETT. These recent studies and earlier available literature on VETT report similar findings: that the current VETT system in Palestine is inefficient, ineffective and irrelevant. A few suggest plans for reforming it and promoting its role. A review of the literature on VETT reveals that although on the whole gender discrepancies are recognized, proposals for developing VETT do not account for this gap and do not consider it a serious problem that requires an urgent solution. VETT is seen as inequitable, but the nature of inequity is not specified, nor the reasons underlying it uncovered.⁷

This paper is part of a larger research project on VETT in Palestine undertaken currently by the Women's Studies Program (WSP) at Birzeit University. It is based on a review of available literature and policy oriented reports, discussions with educators in the field, and on the outcome of a roundtable discussion organized by the WSP in which representatives of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor in charge of vocational training and education and technical training in their respective ministries, as well as experts in the field, participated. The discussion focused on Mazen Hashweh's paper "Towards an Efficient, Effective, and Relevant National Training System in Palestine", (1995) and an overview of VETT in terms of what it is offering to both men and women.⁸

The purpose of the study undertaken here is to examine VETT in Palestine from a gender planning perspective. The approach "argues that gender is an issue in all policies, programs and projects in the sense that they are formulated to

⁶ Rema Hammami, in Heiberg, *op.cit.*, p. 349.

⁷ In a recent paper (July 1995) titled "Palestinian Technical and Vocational Training: Current Situation, Problems, and Reform Proposals", M. Tull gives a comprehensive review of the most recent research done on VETT in the last 5 years, and he summarizes both national and international attempts at solving major problems of VETT. These do not include any developed plan to solve the question of the low participation of women in VETT.

⁸ It should be noted here that the data used in this study is borrowed mainly from secondary sources. For the purpose of data disaggregation undertaken here, some of the data was reorganized and recalculated into percentages. Though some of them are currently incorrect due to the political changes occurring in the past two years, they were still used at this stage of the research. For the second stage, data from primary sources will be used.

meet the needs of 'people', 'communities', 'target groups', or 'households'."⁹ From this perspective, the analysis presented involves four separate but interrelated spheres: the political, the organizational, the technical, and the research spheres in an attempt to investigate if gender is an integral part of the competence of planners, organizers and providers of VETT.¹⁰ To state it briefly, the study tries to answer two questions: first, in addition to its problems in being inefficient, ineffective and irrelevant, is VETT in Palestine sufficiently equitable to contribute to the development of Palestinian society? Second, where does the responsibility for gender equity and integration in the system of VETT lie, if it exists at all? It is suggested here that if gender is not considered a cross-cutting issue integrated in the four above-mentioned spheres and if these spheres do not operate in an "orchestrated" manner, it will be unlikely for VETT to be equitable either in social or in gender terms.

II. Analytical Approach: Gender Planning

Gender Diagnosis

The low rate of women participating in vocational education and training in Palestine cannot be overlooked even when we undertake a hasty review of the system. To arrive at an initial understanding of the reasons, a "gender diagnosis"¹¹ of VETT is needed. This approach does not focus on women as a social group or community isolated from the rest of the society. Instead, it uses gender as a main unit of analysis and carries out a disaggregation of the groups under consideration, looking at the gender roles and gender relations of both men and women within a certain context in a particular community. Carolyn Moser has identified three gender roles, the reproductive, the productive and the community managing roles, which women play in accordance with the gender division of labor in their community.¹² In many societies, most women play these three roles, while men infrequently do certain domestic chores but are mainly involved in productive work. Caren Levy added a fourth role, the "constituency-based politics"¹³ role which is normally considered paid

⁹ Caren Levy. "Critical Issues in Translating Gender Concerns Into Planning Competence In the 1990s". A paper presented at Joint ACSP and AESOP Int. Congress, Planning Transatlantic: Global Change and Local Problems, Oxford UK, (July 8-12, 1991), p.6.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 1

¹¹ This concept has been developed by researchers at the Development Planning Unit (DPU), the University College London, London, UK.

¹² Moser defines these roles as follows: The reproductive role, which although basically concerned with bearing and rearing children and organizing the household extends to include the reproduction of the labor force and the society as a whole; the productive role, which is any kind of paid work; and the community managing role, which refers to work done voluntarily to provide basic services and resources for the community which are not provided by the state. See C. Moser, pp. 27-36.

¹³ Caren Levy modified the gender analysis framework (1991) initiated by Moser in 1985 by adding a fourth gender role, the constituency-based politics role; she also introduced the "web of institutionalization" as a set of organizational tools of gender diagnosis and gender planning (DPU Gender Planning Team, "Training materials developed for training in gender planning," 1990-1993).

work associated with prestige or status, and which, traditionally, has been performed by men.

Applying gender diagnosis, a few questions are relevant: What roles do men and women involved in VETT have? Do they have similar or different roles? Who has access to and control over the resources, such as property, income, training, jobs, etc.? If they have different roles and different access to and control over resources, then they must have different basic and strategic gender needs.¹⁴ What are these needs? Are they being met? What policy approaches and development policies are adopted in the planning and implementation of VETT policies or programs? Do they target men and women on a welfare basis or do they aim at contributing to the development of society and its human resources? With these questions in mind, the current VETT system in Palestine is examined in relation to the interaction of the four spheres: the political sphere, the organizational sphere, the technical sphere and the research sphere as defined below.

Institutionalization of Gender

Caren Levy proposes the four spheres as the major components of the "web" of institutionalization of gender, with gender being a cross-cutting issue. These four spheres can be the components of one institution or of several linked institutions. In this paper, they form the components of the institution of education and of VETT in particular. At the heart of the political sphere lie men and women who through their experience interpret their own reality and identify their needs. They form political pressure groups and elect their representatives who commit themselves to represent their needs in the organizational sphere. Major actors in the organizational sphere are policy makers who are in charge of designing policies and allocating adequate resources and setting up proper procedures in order to implement these policies. Allocation of resources allows political constituencies and representatives of political structures to represent men's and women's interests and needs and thus fulfill their own political commitments. In addition, men's and women's roles and experiences are closely linked to the technical sphere which is mainly responsible for program and project delivery. Project and program providers plan to implement the policy designed at the political level and are under the direct control of the political sphere. They may be supported by the staff if the policy designed ensures staff development and well-developed methodology. Finally, men's and women's experiences and their interpretation of their own reality form a basic core for the research sphere which can uncover their needs and interests; its findings can be used to improve program and project delivery. The reverse may also be true; research on program and project delivery can be informative to men and women and raise their awareness. Research also contributes to building a solid theory which feeds into methodology, which in turn helps improve staff development and delivery of services.

¹⁴ The Gender Diagnosis approach identifies two kinds of gender needs: practical gender needs, which when met, improve men's and women's living conditions and eases their daily tasks related to their reproductive, productive and community managing roles; these needs are usually concrete and visible. On the other hand, strategic gender needs are more abstract and invisible; when met, these needs bring about a change in the social and gender roles of both men and women, thus leading to gender equity. See C. Moser, 1985, pp. 37-41.