

## Educating Girls: Reality and Hopes

**Right to Education:** The General Education Law which was promulgated by the Ministry of Education in the year 2017, guarantees free and compulsory education for all children (males and females) in Palestine.

Article (5) of this law states that:

1. Education shall be compulsory until the end of the tenth grade.
2. Education shall be free in all the public educational institutions.

Article (6) also states that the general education system shall consist of the following stages:

1. Kindergarten, for a period that does not exceed two years before the basic education stage.
2. Basic education, for nine years.
3. Secondary Education, which lasts three years. All this is reflected in ensuring the provision of education for girls.

It is noticed that the rate of enrollment of girls in the public education sector and even in marginalized areas in Palestine is still high, but the dropout rates for girls still exist despite the small percentage compared to the neighboring countries.

This is due to the following reasons: Early marriage, lack of secondary schools in the same community like the Bedouin communities (Al-Khan Al-Ahmar, Al-Ka'abna Bedouins), their need to reach schools in other areas that may be a burden in the availability of transportation and safe access, in addition to the ongoing violations by the Israeli occupation and the fear of being kidnapped by the settlers (The Bedouin Gathering in Froosh Beit Dajan). Moreover, there is a lack of the practical needs for the females in the Palestinian schools such as the playing areas.

However, despite the high rate of girls' enrollment in education in Palestine, this rate might be deceptive. The percentage of girls enrolling in higher education does not mean that the Palestinian girls are enrolled in higher education more than boys, because the available opportunities to study abroad for males is higher. Here we find a fundamental imbalance regarding gender, which is equal opportunities, and this is basically what girls suffer in the higher education sector in general. This is reflected positively on the enrollment ratios. It is also noticeable that there is an increase in the enrollment of girls in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences, but a decrease in their enrollment in the medical and the vocational ones. That's why we find it necessary to work on

inclusive policies that promote the feminization of education (based on statistics provided by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research).

### **Mixing in schools (co-education):**

There are some coeducational schools, starting from the primary to the secondary grades, especially in the marginalized and the sparsely populated communities, due the availability of a single school in that community. In most areas, however, mixing is still limited to kindergarten and primary schools.

All this affects the enrollment rate of girls, as a result of the intellectual and the cultural differences. This is evident in the public schools in Gaza Strip as an example.

### **The Curriculum:**

The ministry introduced the new curriculum in 2015, which relied on active learning. But with regard to strengthening the curriculum to change the stereotype of the role of women and being equal in rights with men, it was found that the new content of the textbooks for the first to the ninth grades is not sensitive to gender<sup>1</sup>. This reflects the weakness in the methodology of building the content in line with the gender system, which considers equality between the two genders, inevitable in various aspects, most notably in the textbooks because the curriculum has a great impact in building the mentality of the learner and tomorrow's generation.

In addition to the lack of balance in the reference to distinguished men and women in society where the proportion of men was more than the proportion of women in the content. In some locations in the curriculum the woman was attributed to her husband and was referred to as (the wife of ...), and not by her name). Most occupations attributed to women were often limited to a certain group of occupations (nurse, worker, teacher, director, farmer)

As well, the weak social initiatives in education that promote and contribute to change the culture of society towards women - school is not sufficient to change the bad practices in society. They need to be intensified through a curriculum that supports change.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to rehabilitation programs of female and male teachers, they do not focus on promoting social aspects and changing attitudes of teachers to promote gender equality. There is a weakness within the education system in the implementation of some policies that support orientation and the directions of the Ministry of Education, where an effort has been done to feminize the education of

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<sup>1</sup> Study on reviewing student books from gender respective, Assali, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Workshop Report on Education Sector 2019, Umbrellas' Networks Project

the elementary basic stage, but without a clear understanding among female and male teachers of the need to implement that policy.

Rehabilitation programs in Palestinian colleges and universities lack definitively the existence of courses that ensure teaching methods to be gender sensitive that can graduate teachers who understand how practically they can practice these concepts in schools.

### **Spending on education:**

Spending on education is one of the interventions that will reduce the gap inequality. Overall, the education sector is still under-resourced and underfunded. Many governments have increased spending but few have prioritized education in national budgets, most of which fall short of the 20% recommended for bridging the educational funding gaps. Some improvements has seen occurred on public spending on education that reach 20.7% of total public expenditures in 2017. Thus, the budget of education and higher education has achieved a remarkable improvement in its percentage compared with the rates of public spending during the last three years. It reached 17.7% in 2014, where it was 17.0% in 2015, and mounted to 19.96% in 2016. Compared with the rates of spending in the neighboring countries such as Jordan, for example, we notice a good percentage. The percentage of public expenditure on education in Jordan does not exceed 5% of GDP; and from the state budget of 2016, the percentage of spending on the education sector was 20.9%. However, any increase in spending usually goes for the construction of buildings, wage increases, or new recruitments, and that means that the increase in spending dose not aim at developing the educational process itself. The share of development expenditure in the budget allocated to the ministry of education is low, where it constitutes 18%, while 66% is spent on salaries and wages. This is a low item in the general budget of the Palestinian government in compared generally with other sectors. Development item is usually left to the availability of external funding. As the percentage of development expenditures in the budget items of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in 2017 reached 18.46%, of which 51.38% are funded from external sources and 6.46% are based on domestic funding<sup>3</sup>.

The ministry notes that the education budget has increased over the past two years and yet there is a need for a higher budget in order to attain qualitative outputs in education. However, the increase in many items has been allocated a large part of it,

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<sup>3</sup> Shadow report "Equity and Quality in Education", Marsad and TCC, 2018

approximately \$ 30 million, to Jerusalem and the other part as wages for workers and teachers. Even this amount is not enough to support the steadfastness of the people of Jerusalem.

In the last two budgets of the Ministry of Education, up to NIS 3 million has been earmarked to support the access of persons with disabilities to qualitative education, including girls with disabilities.

### **Outputs of the education system in the labor market:**

Statistics indicate that there is a large gap in the labor force participation between males and females reaching 70.3% for males compared to 19.9% for females. The number of unemployed according to the definition of the International Labor Organization (ILO) reached 404,800 (255,000 in the Gaza Strip compared to 149,800 in the West Bank). The unemployment gap between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is still high, with 49.1% in the Gaza Strip and 18.3% in the West Bank. At the gender level it was 25.0% for males compared to 48.9% for females. The highest unemployment rate for the age group 20-24 years was 49.6% in the first quarter of 2018, while at the level of school years, females who finished 13 years and above recorded the highest unemployment rates, reaching 52.2% of the total female labor force participation in this category. In the light of the increasing unemployment rates there is, in return, an increase in the number of students passing the high school exam.

**Wage Equality:** Although women have almost more jobs than males in some private sector organizations, their wages are still lower than their male colleagues<sup>4</sup>.

### **Gender Unit:**

Gender units have been formed as a contribution to gender equality in various sectors, but these units are still somewhat formal in nature and reflect an institutionalized approach in the work but have no real implications for both curriculum and teacher orientation as an example.

### **Recommendations:**

- Raising compulsory education to grade twelve in a way to decrease dropout rate of girls especially in marginalized areas.

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<sup>4</sup> Study "Quality Outcomes of Education- the Most fortunate in Labor Market", Riyahi and Jaber, 2018/2019

- Increase percentage allocated for education budget and mainly in the development budget to ensure quality education
- Developing educational policies to meet needs for vulnerable groups including women and ensuring in engaging civil society and stakeholder in the developing process.
- A need to develop rehabilitation programs for teachers especially in pre-service program to be built on gender responsive approach and methodology, to influence change in teachers attitude and behaviors positively toward equality and social justice.

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