

Women's Economic Empowerment



By May Amireh

Palestinian women and men have traditionally looked at work as a blessed art of love, laboring the land and cultivating whatever treasures it offered them. Working their land has not only sustained Palestinians and their families but has also been a source of joy. This attitude towards work has never changed, though it has taken on different content and meaning. Women, nevertheless, have always been the torchbearers.

Within today's circumstances, work has necessarily assumed a different shape. Labor falls under a set of rules that are regulated by the market and by political and economic influences. Work must also be paid for, respected, protected, and preceded by training in order for it to be competitive.

If we take the case of Palestinian women, who form nearly half the Palestinian population and half the students in the education system, we find that their share in employment is much less than a third of the share occupied by men, even though there has been a slight increase in women's participation in the workforce. Currently, although women's participation is low compared to men, Palestinian women work in sectors such as family-owned businesses where they are most likely unpaid. Women work in the textile industry, they are teachers and clerical workers, and some are engineers, doctors, lawyers, and judges. We also find a slight inclination towards technical and vocational training (TVET), which can sometimes lead women away from the traditional jobs. Some major impediments to women's participation in the workforce include the lack of equal pay, the heavy burden of domestic work, and the lack of a support system that helps to care for the family and children during working hours. Women have less access to social protection and financial



Ahlam, a trainee in multimedia, explaining the history of cinema.

resources. In Jerusalem in particular, the market and institutions are not able to create enough job opportunities for men or women.

Women gain power from work – both mainstream and TVET – because work helps to create and sustain a sense of achievement and self-esteem, equality, positivity, participation, value, dignity, respect, and the power to participate in the economy and in the control of revenues.

Women's economic empowerment leads to their having an income and the liberty to use this income to make independent decisions pertaining to health or social and economic status for themselves and their families. It is about investing in the future, which will definitely have a positive effect on the education and well-being of the whole family. It is about creating powerful role models.

Creating and increasing job opportunities for women requires much planning and a strong

economy that encourages development and new ventures. Moreover, there must be regulations that protect them, ensure equality, open up access to financial opportunities, and encourage entrepreneurship.

In the TVET sector, women and men are offered the chance to learn skills that are demanded in the market, thus facilitating access to employment, a true leverage for TVET. Here, women are introduced to new skill sets that can lead to unconventional careers, and this too is empowering. Women have ventured into areas that have previously been restricted to men, for example, operating machines, photography, ICT, engineering, electronics, driving buses, etc. TVET merges technical skills with work-based training. Apprenticeships, on-the-job training, work-based training, and dual-system training offer men and women many opportunities to study in TVET centers and train in local institutions at the same time. This in itself is empowering to both

men and women, but particularly important for women who have been raised in a patriarchal society that, to say the least, does not encourage their independence and creativity. Dual training offers women multiple experiences while they study; it not only opens up employment opportunities but also enhances their lives and career skills, paving the way for real economic empowerment.

between specializations. It would also be helpful to strengthen partnerships between TVET institutions and the functionally related entities such as the labor market institutes, employers, the chambers of commerce, and other bodies.

In this context, it is very important to highlight entrepreneurship, self-employment, and start-ups. Small

has generated the need for training on initiating, running, and sustaining start-ups. For this reason, a new TVET stream training program was created that focuses on marketing, branding, financing, and using the growing power and effect of social media in order to sustain and enhance these start-ups.

This area of entrepreneurship, self-employment, and start-ups has been

TVET as a means to help women thrive and survive, avoiding the need to duplicate each other in order to compete and flourish, especially when introduced to the financial systems and to sophisticated ICT or suitable digital methods. Palestinian women have proven to be creative, addressing every possible aspect of economic life while surviving, flourishing, and continuing to grow.



Registering for a career day at the YWCA of Jerusalem.



Volunteers during an awareness session held at the YWCA of Jerusalem on gender-based violence.

TVET also creates an opportunity for upskilling, which is highly needed given the rapid growth and development in so many sectors. TVET graduates and workers can always come back for an upgrade in the specific skills needed for their work advancement. In order to invite more people to acquire TVET specializations, it is important to introduce TVET in an appealing and competitive manner, with better career guidance and mobility

and micro businesses have been established by women for some time now and have been growing and flourishing, using individual funds and being encouraged by financial institutions such as banks and other institutions that offered loans as well as training. During the COVID pandemic, as people were forced to work from home, there was an increase in start-ups. Some of these start-ups succeeded and lingered on while others failed. This in itself

suitable for women who are able to perform these tasks from their homes where they manufactured homemade items or advertised their imported goods and sold them online while at the same time taking care of the household and their families. This activity has impacted scores of women who were creative in their choice of products and who entered the field of business and income-generating circles from their homes. It has shone new light on

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