



Report

Women and power

How women leaders negotiate Gaza's political reality

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February 2016



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ISSN: 2052-7209

Cover photo: James Oatway / Panos

About the Research

This case study is an output from the Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making [hyperlink] project. This two-year (2014-2016) evidence and learning project, funded by the UK Department for International Development, asks: (i) What enables women's substantive voice and influence in decision-making processes? (ii) Does women's presence and influence in decision-making improve outcomes for other women and advance gender equality? (iii) How can international actors better support women's leadership and decision-making? In answering these questions, the research has examined the relationship between women's political, social and economic power and resources, both individual and collective.

Project activities and outputs include:

- A global review of the evidence on women's voice and leadership, with thematic chapters on women's political participation, social activism and economic empowerment,
- A rapid review on women and girls' leadership programmes,
- A rapid review on women and girls' use of digital information and communication technologies,
- Five empirical case studies on women's leadership and decision-making power, in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Gaza, Kenya and Malawi,
- A synthesis report and policy briefings.

More information can be found at:
odi.org/women-and-power

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Mariz Tadros and Tam O’Neil for their insightful peer review comments. Indeed, the authors received excellent and very useful feedback. Most importantly, the authors are very grateful to research participants who gave their valuable time and insightful

ideas so generously to us. In addition, we would like to thank Roo Griffiths and Claire Bracegirdle for editorial and production support. Responsibility for all errors or omissions rests with the authors.

Acronyms

CFTA	Culture and Free Thought Association
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWLRC	Centre for Women's Legal Research and Consultancy
DCAF	Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDI	In-depth Interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OPTs	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PCHR	Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
SCPPR	Saudi Committee for the Palestinian People Relief's
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women
UN OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US	United States
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WAC	Women's Affairs Centre
WCLAC	Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling

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Executive summary

Case study focus and research questions: This case study focuses on Gazan women's experience of exercising voice and leadership in a complex, rapidly evolving, conflict-affected context. Historically, Palestinian women have enjoyed comparatively high levels of education and been relatively active in social and political movements, especially in the context of broader nationalist struggles against the Israeli occupation. However, since 2007, the occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) have become politically divided between the West Bank, governed by the Fatah-controlled secular Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Gaza Strip governed by the socially conservative Islamist Hamas government. Accordingly, this case study seeks to explore how and how much opportunities for women's voice and leadership have shifted in Gaza during this period, and the role of international actors in supporting women leaders within this tumultuous context. We are particularly interested in exploring the strategies women employ in a conservative patriarchal context exacerbated by a general narrowing of the political space to maintain opportunities for voice and influence.

This case study is part of a broader multi-country research project on women's voice and leadership in developing country contexts, which is exploring two key questions: (i) What are the enabling factors for women and girls' voice, leadership and access to decision-making? (ii) Do – and if so how – women and girls' voice, leadership and presence in decision-making roles result in greater gender equality?

Methodology: In order to explore these questions, the case study combined a literature review of published and grey literature sources with primary qualitative research. A senior researcher undertook 17 interviews with women leaders in the Gaza Strip broadly defined – including women from parties across the political spectrum, senior civil servants and women's movement leaders – as well as three interviews with male experts selected for their insights into the gender and politics space in Palestine. In addition, three focus group discussions with politically active young people from diverse political backgrounds were held to explore emerging trends in gender roles in party politics. Interview summaries were translated from Arabic into English and then jointly analysed thematically by the Gazan research partner and an Overseas Development Institute (ODI) research fellow.

Key findings: Despite the diversity of party affiliations and activist trajectories among the women interviewed, a number of **common individual and family characteristics**

emerged as essential to women's exercise of voice and leadership in the Gazan context. These include access to higher education; supportive male family members; economic security that enabled women to participate in politics while also balancing family responsibilities; and exceptional personal courage in defying dominant gender norms. Increasing access in recent years to the internet and social media has also helped women overcome their sense of social isolation and forge linkages with other Palestinian women and internationally.

Women's personal and collective capabilities have emerged in the context of **broader social and institutional changes** in Palestinian society and polity. Palestinian women have a high level of literacy and higher education compared with other conflict-affected and low-income countries. The Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation has constituted a powerful source of motivation for women of diverse political affiliations, and engagement in broader nationalist struggles and student activism have often served as a political apprenticeship of sorts. And for women involved in party politics, the gender quota introduced in the mid-2000s, which ensures greater inclusion of women on party lists, has helped increase women's representation in formal politics at national and local levels, albeit not in party decision-making positions.

Key constraints respondents identified as hampering women's effective exercise of voice and leadership were limited support by male political party colleagues; a highly fragmented women's movement; limited, time-bound and highly politicised donor funding; and a narrowing of the political space, even before the start of the Hamas administration of the Gaza Strip in 2007. For many respondents, the 'NGO-isation' of civil society following the 1991 Oslo Accords and the exit of many women from movement roles to become PA employees had also weakened collective action. Moreover, over time, the women's movement has become divided and increasingly distant from grassroots women, with its focus on international conventions and goals rather than more practical gender needs – especially concerns around economic empowerment. Perhaps most problematic, however, is a growing sense of disillusionment in the possibility of change, given the ongoing violence and destructiveness wrought by the Israeli occupation and the economic decline exacerbated by the international blockade.

In terms of **achievements realised by women leaders**, overall there was consensus that, considerable activism notwithstanding, results had been quite limited. The party

quota was hard won, but has not resulted in a significant increase in the number of gender equality champions; in fact, women voters were a critical part of the Hamas victory. In terms of gender-based violence (GBV), while a number of women's movement organisations have been supported to engage around UN Security Council Resolution 1325, in reality women have been highly marginalised in peace process negotiations – both with Israel and between Fatah and Hamas following the split between the West Bank and Gaza. Especially given the suspension of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) since this political division, efforts to bring about gender-related legislative reforms have been unsuccessful. Indeed, initiatives have been needed to minimise a scaling-back of women's rights under Hamas.

To navigate this complex and tumultuous political space, **women leaders have adopted a range of strategies, with varying success.** Even though they have not been well supported within party structures, a significant number of women respondents have strategically opted to align with political parties so as to be afforded some opportunities for voice. This relationship has often been fraught with compromise and frustration, across the party spectrum, as parties have frequently adopted gender-related causes only for instrumental reasons. Another key strategy, especially by women on the left, has been to link with international donors and agendas, to raise issues related to GBV, women's rights within the family and access to gender justice. This has often been complemented by the strategic use of social media, to which Gazan women increasingly have access. Some women have also deliberately sought

cross-party cooperation, but such concrete efforts remain relatively limited, especially as Western funders, as a result of the no-contact policy with Hamas, explicitly exclude funding organisations linked to Hamas.

Recommendations for donor engagement: Given the highly fragmented nature of the women's movement and the high level of personal courage it currently takes for women to exercise voice and leadership in Gaza, there is an urgent need for donors to review their approaches to support if women are to be supported not only to mitigate against the narrowing of the political and social space for women's public engagement but also to continue to advocate for gender-related reforms. While some women's human development indicators, such as on education, literacy and health, are relatively high in Gaza given the economic development level, restrictions on women's access to gender justice and equal citizenship rights are of major concern, as is the need to promote women's economic empowerment and address women's exceedingly low labour force participation. Key potential entry-points include funding modalities that encourage consortia with women's organisations across the political spectrum; increased support for initiatives that include a focus on women's practical gender needs, so as to better reach grassroots women; a mapping of and engagement with Arab/Islamic funders to help identify common interests; experience-sharing opportunities for women across the region and other conflict-affected contexts in order to promote learning and support; and funding for peer-to-peer and inter-generational mentoring of emerging women leaders.

1. Introduction

As it becomes increasingly clear globally that there is no straightforward trajectory from authoritarian to consolidated democratic governance, and in the wake of what is internationally known as the Arab Spring (see Rocha Menocal, 2013), understanding women's opportunities and experience *vis-à-vis* voice and leadership is of critical importance. To date, however, scholarly attention to this issue in the Middle East and North Africa region has been patchy and scattered, as Domingo et al. (2015) highlight.

In order to contribute to this evidence base, this case study focuses on the experience of Gazan women. Historically, Palestinian women have enjoyed comparatively high levels of education and have been relatively active in social and political movements, especially in the context of nationalist struggles against the Israeli occupation. However, since 2007, the occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) have become politically divided between the West Bank, governed by the Fatah-controlled secular Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Gaza Strip, governed by the socially conservative Islamist Hamas government. In 2007, following five days of heavy factional fighting between Fatah and Hamas, the latter gained control of Gaza and established its own *de facto* government structures, including ministries, courts and police force. This case study thus seeks to explore how and how much opportunities for women's voice and leadership have shifted in Gaza during this period, and the role of international actors in supporting women leaders within this tumultuous context.

Given that the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has not been functional during this time period,¹ rather than looking at a specific policy or legislative change process the case study focuses on the enabling and constraining factors shaping the opportunities to influence decision-making of women who are active in leadership roles in the formal political sphere as well as within civil society. We are particularly interested in the strategies women employ in a conservative patriarchal context exacerbated by a general narrowing of the political space – as

a result of increasingly conservative gendered sociocultural norms and their promotion by Hamas – to maintain opportunities for voice and influence.

This case study is part of a broader research project on women's voice and leadership in developing country contexts. We draw on the definitions of voice, leadership and decision-making used in the project (see Box 1), and also explore women's own definitions of these concepts in our analysis of our primary research findings.

This case study combined a review of available peer-reviewed and grey literature on women's voice and leadership in Palestine and in Gaza in particular, so as to contextualise our findings, and 17 key informant interviews with women leaders active in formal politics and in civil society from across the diverse political spectrum that characterises Gazan politics (see Annex 2). These interviews were complemented by a small number of interviews with male sector experts and three focus group discussions with young people from different political parties so as to triangulate some of the findings, within the resource constraints of the case study. Annex 1 presents a full list of interviews but we have anonymised the identities of the interviewees in light of the sensitive political dynamics in Palestine.

The interviews were carried out by a senior Gazan researcher on the basis of research instruments adapted to the specificities of the context, from which detailed notes were written up for analysis. While we were fortunate to have exceptionally good access to a diverse group of women leaders, and many were willing to share their stories in considerable detail, given the political context we are cognisant that varying degrees of self-censorship were at play within the interview setting. Thus, we have sought to interpret our findings with this caveat in mind.

The analysis method involved an initial reading of all the interview notes (which included verbatim quotes related to key points) in order to identify key themes and then a more detailed second reading of the interview notes during which the findings were entered into a thematic excel matrix.

1 Because of the division, and conflicts about the legitimacy of each party – Fatah and Hamas – the PLC has been non-functional since 2007. Israel has also arrested many of the Hamas-affiliated members.



Women of Budrus protest against war on Gaza. Photo: Tal King photographer.

Box 1: Voice, leadership and decision-making power

Voice refers both to the act of making known one's preferences, demands, views and interests and to the capabilities this requires (O'Neil et al., 2007). These capabilities include confidence and belief in the worth of one's opinions and the legitimacy of expressing them. They also include the ability to make informed choices based on critical awareness, education and information.

Leadership means the individual and collective capabilities to mobilise 'people and resources (economic, political and other) in pursuit of particular ends' (Lynne de Ver, 2009). This includes the political aspect of mobilisation – that is, the ability to navigate power relations to secure desired outcomes through contestation and negotiation, the co-option and persuasion of allies and the outmanoeuvring of opponents. Leadership therefore involves the ability to influence the ideas and behaviour of others and is effective when it translates into outcomes, whatever the content of those might be. Leadership may or may not coincide with public positions of authority.

Decision-making power is the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life – both private and public. Formal access to positions of authority and to decision-making processes is an important, if insufficient, condition for women to have decision-making power in the public domain. In fact, decision-making power is a composite of access, capabilities and actions that shape whether women have influence over the polity or decisions about their private life. Having influence with, over and through people and processes is therefore central to both leadership and decision-making power.

Source: Domingo et al. (2015); O'Neil and Domingo (2015).

2. Context and political economy conditions

We now turn to a discussion of the broader Palestinian and Gazan context, and in particular the evolving political economy conditions, so as to better situate our discussion of our primary research findings in Section 3.

2.1 Key structural and institutional features

The Palestinian people have been exposed to a wide range of vulnerabilities since the 1948 Arab Israeli war, when several hundred thousand Palestinians expelled from their homes, took refuge in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and surrounding Arab countries.² Since then, the Palestinian Territories and diaspora have experienced numerous internal and external clashes with Israel, including the 1967 war, the Arab–Israeli war in 1973, the Lebanon–Israeli war in 1982, the First (1987–1993) and Second (2000–2005) Intifadas, the Lebanon–Israeli war of 2006 and multiple confrontations between Israeli security forces, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Hamas and other political organisations (World Bank, 2011).

These conflicts have all contributed to loss of life, land and livelihoods for Palestinians living in these territories, contributing to increased numbers of refugees and internally displaced people, weakened social networks, psychological and emotional difficulties, poor housing and sanitation and high poverty rates. Internecine violence between Hamas and Fatah has put additional stress on Palestinian society, culminating in direct armed conflict between both groups in 2006–2007 – although in 2011 a tenuous political reconciliation began. These cycles of political instability have combined with continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank; control of its borders and the building of the separation wall, which drastically restricts freedom of movement and trade; and cycles of international

sanctions against Palestinian militancy (particularly the Gaza blockade instituted after the Second Intifada).

Hamas took over government of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, following conflict with Fatah that arose after the former's decisive victory in the 2006 elections.³ After the election, President Mahmoud Abbas, a Fatah⁴ affiliate, remained in charge and in March 2006 Hamas⁵ leader Ismail Haniyeh formed a new government. This further complicated the political situation, with a power struggle between the president (Fatah) and the prime minister (Hamas). In the aftermath of the elections, the international community, led by the US, sought to isolate and remove Hamas (which it deems a terrorist organisation) while supporting Fatah moderates. Fatah and Hamas repeatedly failed to agree on a power-sharing arrangement. This resulted in violent conflict and, eventually, the latter taking over government of Gaza.

Hamas has inherited the governing apparatus formerly operated by the PA (established in 1994) and largely preserved the structure of these institutions rather than creating new, parallel bodies, except in the security forces, where it has established its own police apparatus. In the wake of Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, and as a result of the ongoing internal conflict between Palestinian political parties, PA employees across government institutions stayed home while continuing to receive their salaries from the PA in Ramallah. The sudden and large-scale evacuation of staff from their positions negatively affected the work of ministries and governmental bodies in all fields throughout Gaza. Over time, Hamas has had to replace these staff with new staff, many of whom are Hamas loyalists.

The first cabinet of Hamas' Premier Ismail Haniyeh in 2007 was formed of 11 ministers, all Hamas members from Gaza (of these, five had held positions in the preceding

2 The political entities of the West Bank and Gaza first arose in the wake of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Although both areas originally operated under the leadership of the PA, Hamas has asserted independent political control of the Gaza Strip, whereas Fatah remains the dominant political force in the West Bank.

3 Hamas won 74 of 132 seats. However, following the elections, there was a power struggle between Fatah, which lost the election, and Hamas, which won. The Palestinian democracy is modest and, in the context of complex geopolitical dynamics, the handling of the situation was not smooth and resulted in a military conflict between the two parties.

4 Fatah, formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, is a leading secular Palestinian political party and the largest faction of the confederated multiparty PLO.

5 Hamas is a Palestinian Islamic organisation, with an associated military wing, in the Palestinian territories. Hamas was founded in 1988 soon after the First Intifada broke out as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. It currently governs in the Gaza Strip.

National Unity Government and six were new additions). Continuing low ministerial numbers mean most ministers are responsible for two or three portfolios. Re-staffing of the ministries themselves followed prolonged Fatah-organised strikes in the public sector protesting the Hamas military takeover, with the result that large-scale recruitment was at least as much about safeguarding public services as it was about securing staff sympathetic to Hamas' agenda.

Nevertheless, managers and other key personnel were systematically removed from their positions. Civil servants can be divided into three broad categories: those employed directly by the Hamas government; those still receiving their salaries from the government in Ramallah and carrying out their duties (primarily those employed in the health, education and social affairs ministries); and those still on the payroll of the Ramallah government but asked not to work at the behest of the latter and replaced by Hamas-appointed personnel (most other ministries) (Hovdenak, 2010). Although the Hamas government has been able to raise funds for these extensive replacements — its sources of funding are unclear but include taxes and former tunnel levies,⁶ as well as funds from international sponsors including Qatar, Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood (Brown, 2012). Staff are also paid only around 40% of their salaries monthly, given these funding constraints.

The PLC, the legislature of the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories, has been unable to meet officially since 2007 owing to the detention of a significant proportion of its membership (including 45 Hamas legislators) by Israeli forces, the consequent lack of quorum and the Fatah–Hamas schism (following which it ceased operations in Gaza altogether). Elections scheduled for 2014 have been delayed indefinitely because of the absence of meaningful progress towards the reunification of the pan-OPTs government.

Hamas has responded to the paralysis of the legislature by reviving the Gaza part of the PLC as an exclusively Hamas body, joined by an additional 26 members of the movement and a single independent lawmaker. Each member of the 'Gaza PLC' may represent one or two PLC delegates detained in Israeli prisons. Members unable to be physically present, usually because they live in the West Bank, may participate and vote by phone. The body has passed several pieces of legislation and votes on the annual budgets of the Gaza government. The judiciary — also subject to the complete evacuation of its previous staff between 2007 and 2008 — accepts these legislative

amendments, while also sentencing in accordance with earlier Palestinian law. Although Hamas has generally refrained from creating parallel institutions of government, it did create a new institution alongside the existing High Judiciary Council to oversee the re-establishment of court functions after the 2007 takeover (having been unable to compel the existing, and independent, judiciary to do so) (Hovdenak, 2010).

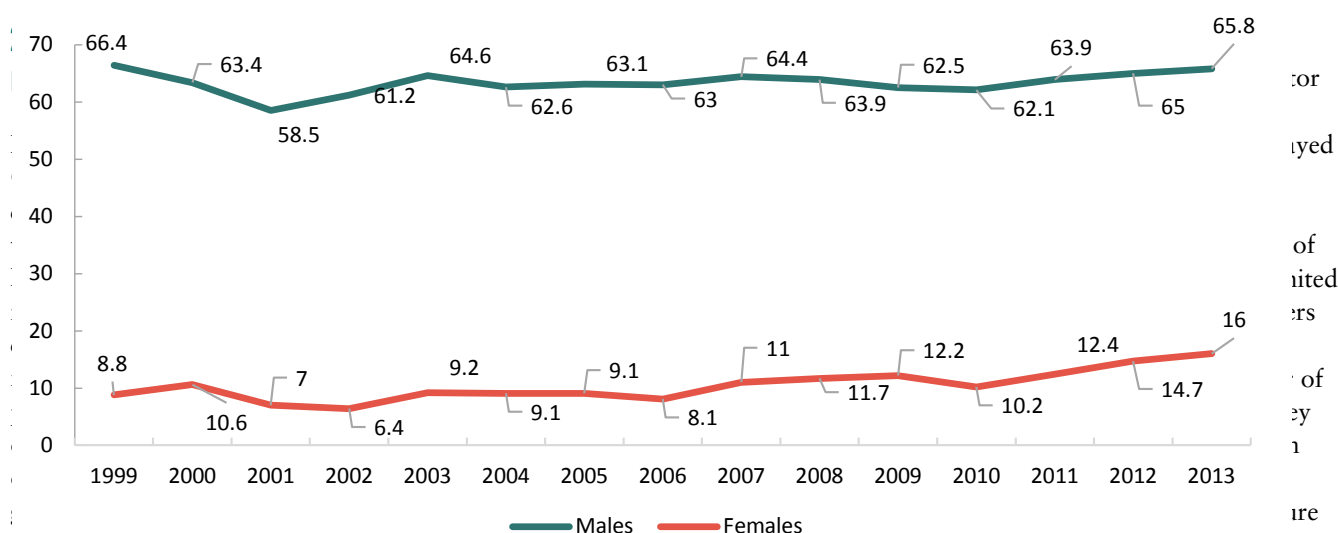
As regards law enforcement, the refusal of the PA's security forces to cooperate with the Interior Ministry under Hamas rule (ICG, 2007a) led Hamas to establish a parallel Executive Force. Following violent clashes between the two, this latter was integrated into, and effectively replaced, existing structures. Although members of other political factions were permitted to sign up, the majority of police are affiliated with Hamas or its armed wing, Izzedin al-Qassam Brigades (Hovdenak, 2010).

Although Hamas was able to quickly secure law and order, human rights organisations have reported some violations — including arbitrary arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings — against political opponents including Fatah loyalists and suspected Israeli collaborators (HRW, 2009, 2015). The police force has also sometimes engaged in 'moral policing' — for example demanding that couples travelling together provide proof of marriage in order to prevent what the movement perceives to be immoral practices (Milton-Edwards, 2008) — but this is not systematic and is more dependent on individual practices, with limited public support for such initiatives.

Gaza's municipalities are relatively decentralised and almost entirely financially self-sufficient, collecting property taxes directly and transferring only 10% of their income to the central government (Signoles, 2010). Hamas' strong showing in the 2005 local elections meant it already controlled many local councils of small and medium-sized towns and villages on its takeover. In 2009, when the electoral term came to an end, Fatah-controlled municipal councils were dissolved and replaced by Hamas members. New *mukhtars* (clan headmen and representatives) were appointed to reduce the influence of families loyal to Fatah (ICG, 2007b). Hamas' reach has been further entrenched by its control of the Rabita't al-Alam al-Islami (the Muslim Scholars' League), which oversees a network of local civil dispute resolution committees or *sulha*, as well as of *zakat* committees, responsible for distributing alms (Hovdenak, 2010).

6 Since the imposition of the blockade in 2006, tunnels built under the Gaza–Egypt border in the Rafah area have stimulated demand, supplied the population with a wide range of otherwise unavailable goods, including fuel, construction materials and consumables, and become a lifeline for local people. In 2009, the bulk of Gaza's imports (up to 80%) were estimated to come through the tunnels (ILO, 2011). In 2013 and 2014, the Egyptian regime destroyed thousands of these tunnels.

Figure 1: Workforce contribution by gender in Gaza, 1995-2013



sphere. Indeed, the imposition of more conservative moral codes that directly affect women’s day-to-day lives has been a visible manifestation of Hamas’ rule in addition to the depreciation of livelihood resources.

Public space as a whole is perceived as a male arena, into which women enter only in order to accomplish particular tasks (UNIFEM, 2010). Accordingly, the Western media has pointed to a gradual ‘talibanisation’ of Gaza and to systematic violations of rights and freedoms, particularly those of women (Pestana, 2013), although the extent to which this is a good depiction of reality is questionable.

With the socio-political environment significantly narrowing women and girls’ access to the public sphere, it has become more difficult for women to secure incomes, services and their rights. The protracted crisis has had a severe impact on the Gazan economy, with women (and youth) particularly affected — 53% of women were unemployed in 2013 compared with 28% of men (PCBS, 2015) (see also Figure 1). The unemployment figure for youth had reached more than 60% by the end of 2014. Women’s involvement in the formal economy is marked by highly segmented labour markets, with more than 80% of women employed in only two sectors — services (primarily education, health and social work) and agriculture — mostly as wage employees. By contrast, men’s employment shows little sign of being confined to a select number of sectors.

The wage gap between male and female public sector employees is relatively small, with men earning an average of \$21 a day and women under \$20 a day (Hammami and Syam, 2011). However, gender rigidities — exacerbated by the insecurity engendered by the Israeli offensives of 2008/09 and 2014 — have undermined women’s ability to engage in business and trade. Unsurprisingly, men outnumber women both as employers and in

movement and transportation costs create access problems for women. School segregation has actually enhanced girls’ access to education; with gender disparities in enrolment usually in their favour,⁸ this can be a source of agency and empowerment (although it should be noted that dropout rates remain higher for girls than boys at secondary level and that men still outrank women in enrolment in higher education). Conversely, there is a near total absence of access to recreational and sporting activities for girls. As women are assumed to be under the protection and guardianship of men, divorced and widowed women are particularly vulnerable here. They may also lose access to income and housing and experience difficulties accessing rights to child custody and guardianship, as well as control over inheritance. Women may also fare poorly in cases taken to Shari’a courts, whose judges tend to leave the final settlement of complex family cases to the families themselves (UNIFEM, 2010).

Women’s political participation at the national level improved in the years directly preceding the Fatah–Hamas split, thanks to a 20% party list quota introduced in 2005 which increased the proportion of women members of the PLC from 5.6% to 12.9% between 1996 and 2006 (see Box 2).⁹ Likewise, the proportion of women members of local councils across the OPTs rose from 1.8% in 2000 to 18% in December 2005. However, the efforts of leaders of the women’s movement to bring about legislative change and electoral reform were subsequently derailed by the paralysis of the PLC. Women, including Gazan women, have largely been absent from the Fatah–Hamas reconciliation process and have reported feeling unable to represent women’s interests, owing to the agendas of — as well as the difficulty of gaining positions of influence within — the parties themselves (Zayyan, 2012).

7 See also key indicators in Appendix 1.

Box 2: Women's quota in Palestinian legislative bodies

In 2005 women's quotas were established for the local and national legislative elections. For the PLC elections, political parties must have at least one woman among the first three; one woman among the first four; and then one woman in five for the remainder of the list. This guarantees approximately 20% women among the candidates (through the party-based part of the elections). In the 2006 elections, women won 13.6% of the PLC seats. In local council elections, women are guaranteed at least two seats per local council. In the 2004/05 local elections, this led to a significant increase in women's participation, to approximately 17%. However, while informal political participation in the different political parties (particularly the left) continues to be significant, women's involvement in party executive committees and party councils remains much lower than men's. In the 2009 party elections, for example, no woman was elected to Fatah's Central Council, and only 11 women were elected to its 120-member Revolutionary Council, as internal party positions are not subject to a quota.

Sources: Azzoumi (2010); Richter-Devroe (2011).

Nevertheless, some Hamas leaders have actively supported women's participation in public affairs. It is worth mentioning that the influence of the Palestinian women's movement on public decision- and policy-making was limited at the time of the Hamas takeover, many of the vocal grassroots organisations that had flourished from the time of the 1964 founding of the PLO having been transformed, in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, into Western-funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs), both less inclined to lobby the domestic authorities and unable to orchestrate mass mobilisation (Jad, 2004). In spite of its conservative practices, Hamas has recognised women's potential as political activists and a mobilising force (indeed, it was, in part, women's mobilisation that enabled Hamas' electoral victory). As Hovdenak (2010) observes 'Hamas is a grassroots organisation with a broad popular following, running a network of popular [including women's] organisations.' The party has elected two ministers of women's affairs since 2006, and in 2013 Isra Al-Modallal, a young UK-educated journalist, was appointed Hamas' first spokeswoman. Around 20% of civil servants in Gaza are women (Pestana, 2013). Bottom-up activism is closely monitored and controlled;¹⁰ youth-led campaigns that responded to Israeli aggression on Gaza in 2008/09 succeeded in attracting large numbers of young women but were quashed by domestic security forces, via arrests and violent attacks on protestors, as a potential source of opposition (Institute of Women's Studies, 2013).

Women have also challenged norms on gender roles by demanding greater responsibility in the armed struggle against the Israeli occupation, some participating in military training and embracing violent methods. However, the extent to which these cases should be understood

in terms of an instrumental engagement with women or as empowerment remains unclear (Pestana, 2013). Moreover, while women played very active roles in the student movement focused on Palestinian nationalism and liberation from Israel, since the Oslo Accords many women have tended to become either part of what is often termed the 'NGO-isation' of Palestinian civil society or employees of the Palestinian authority. In other words, since the peace process, the momentum of resistance has been lost and people have become engaged in a professional capacity with more discrete social change issues, further facilitated by donor funding of NGOs.

2.3 Key organisations/actors contributing to agency and power of women and girls

Historically — that is, before the establishment of the PA — the Palestinian women's movement focused primarily on women's agency within the context of the perceived responsibility of all citizens to resist the Israeli occupation and attain their rights through the development of a democratic society. By contrast, the concept of women's 'empowerment', introduced through the surge of international interest and funding that followed the Oslo Accords, has, in practice, tended to focus on individuals rather than collectivities and resulted in limited changes to gender roles and relations (Kuttab, 2010). Nevertheless, since the early 1990s, civil society organisations (CSOs) have played a pivotal role in the provision of education and health services; literacy and vocational training; and care centres for women and children. In Gaza, specifically, women's organisations have also worked to combat a range of harmful practices, including domestic violence,

8 This is because in very poor households boys are more likely to take on paid work, as there are fewer opportunities for girls (Perezniето et al., 2014).

9 More recent data are not available as there have been no elections since 2006.

10 It should be noted, however, that increased women's voice and influence in public affairs remains largely circumscribed to the educated classes (in 2013 only 1% of women and girls aged 10+ were a member of a political party compared with 6% of men and boys the same age) and that small gains in representation do not necessarily translate into improved policy outcomes for women in general (Institute of Women's Studies, 2013). Other characteristics of women who express allegiance to political parties include those who are from refugee communities, working women, especially within NGOs and divorced and economically disadvantaged women (Abu-Hamad, 2014).

personal status laws,¹¹ honour killings and forced marriage (Zayyan, 2012), and to promote human rights.

The programmes of Palestinian women's organisations address three types of empowerment — political, economic and legal (Kuttab, 2010) — and have tended to target their activities directly at women themselves. Prominent organisations operating in Gaza include the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), an organisation that provides education on women's rights under family law and responds to instances of gender-based violence (GBV) by offering counselling and legal aid; the Aisha Association for Women and Child Protection, which provides psychosocial support and supports women to become economically self-sufficient; and the Women's Affairs Centre (WAC), which works with local women's organisations to run training programmes that build women's capacity to resist harmful practices including child marriage and to secure their rights.

It should be noted that the Ministry of Women's Affairs established a network — Al-Amal — for implementing its strategy on combatting violence against women, but, with the ministry itself inadequately resourced, this forum tends to be perceived by women's organisation more as a means of competing for international funding than as an arena for coordination and policy dialogue (Sida, 2013). The general orientation of women's organisations has been elite-focused, especially since Oslo, which saw an NGOisation of civil society at the expense of strong connections with the grassroots. This is also part of the reason why Hamas has gained significant mass support, as it proactively reached out to the grassroots and sought to tackle livelihood issues about which ordinary people were most concerned.

Unsurprisingly, the socio-political environment, the war with Israel and deterioration of the Gazan economy have adversely affected the work of women's organisations. Since 2007, programmes focusing on the promotion of women's agency and empowerment have taken a backseat to pressing humanitarian needs, with women generally expected to act as 'care-takers' who support their families to manage the crisis (Zayyan, 2012). While women are playing an extended role, time poverty and high care burdens mean more transformative empowerment has remained elusive.

In this context, individual social reformers have begun to work within established public institutions to encourage the development of more favourable environments for women service users. Most notably, female mediators have recently emerged within male-headed *sulha* and actively worked to secure more beneficial outcomes for women, most often in family cases relating to inheritance, marital disputes and domestic violence (Al-Monitor, 2015). While

some critics are concerned such a move may come at the price of institutionalised legal approaches, it nevertheless represents an important attempt to mitigate informal patriarchal power.

2.4 The aid environment and the role of international actors in women's empowerment

Aid to Gaza has been dominated by the humanitarian relief effort, particularly in the wake of escalating hostilities in 2014. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (UN OCHA's) 2015 Strategic Response Plan for the Occupied Palestinian Territories has requested \$705 million, an increase of \$224 million from the previous year, and is targeting a total of 1.6 million people, the majority of them in Gaza (Global Humanitarian Assistance, 2015). In this context, international humanitarian actors — UN OCHA, UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) — have worked to identify the gender-differentiated impacts of the crisis, as well as to improve consultation of affected women and to enhance the participation and leadership of grassroots women's organisations in the relief effort (Displaced Women's Rights, 2015; NRC, 2014; UNRWA, n.d.a; UN Women, n.d.). However, the donor community has also continued to fund programming to strengthen women's voice and empowerment more generally, including in Gaza — focusing most often on political participation, economic empowerment and tackling violence against women and girls.

It is worth noting at the outset that it is not only the insecurity engendered by the 2008/09 and 2014 crises but also the 'no-contact policy' with Hamas that has hampered the impact and sustainability of these programming efforts. The latter has affected many donors, including the European Union (EU), the UK and the US, and has inhibited the development of downward accountability on the part of both Gaza's government (with funding from these donors used neither to foster the accountability of Gaza's *de facto* government towards its citizens nor to enhance women's influence over decision-making within Hamas institutions) and international organisations themselves (prevented from consulting grassroots members on programme design and implementation) (DARA, 2011; Kurt, 2013). In addition, programme evaluations often fail to disaggregate results achieved in different geographical areas across the OPTs — sometimes owing to the difficulties of collecting data in Gaza (Roseveare, 2014).

11 Personal status laws apply principles of Shari'a law to various social issues, including marriage, parental consent, polygamy, divorce, alimony and child custody. The law sets sex-specific rights and duties for spouses, which reflect traditional gendered relations and patriarchal family structures (WCLAC and DCAF, 2012).

This makes it hard to draw conclusions on the particular opportunities and challenges the Gazan context presents.

Support to women's political participation in Gaza has grown during the past five years, tending to focus on the local level and to comprise part of larger programmes that span the OPTs. Key international players in democratic governance include the EU, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the World Bank, whose work on gender focuses largely on strengthening municipal responsiveness and service delivery and empowering women to hold local government accountable, most often via social accountability mechanisms.

In the aftermath of the 2014 crisis, the World Bank has provided grants to Gazan municipalities for capital investment, with public disclosure of project information intended to enhance social accountability between municipalities and citizens. The Swiss have attempted to connect municipalities in the West Bank and Gaza to combat the latter's isolation (SDC, 2013), whereas the EU has provided training to enhance the ability of women elected to local council positions to exert influence over decision-making (UN Women, 2015). Through the Swedish NGO Kvinna till Kvinna, Sida has targeted grassroots women's organisations, building their capacity to advocate for women's rights (Sida, 2013), whereas the

UN Development Programme (UNDP) has funded WAC to provide training programmes that enable women to better understand and claim their rights to justice services (WAC, 2015). In recognition of the critical role CSOs play in delivering essential public services in the Palestinian context, GIZ is implementing a five-year programme to improve their effectiveness and professionalism, including that of CSOs providing psychosocial services to marginalised women (GIZ, 2015). The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Achievement Fund has similarly attempted to build the capacity of local authorities and grassroots organisations to deliver gender-sensitive services (MDG Achievement Fund, 2013).

In the aftermath of the 2014 Israeli offensive, several large international donors and multilateral agencies have begun to implement programmes for women's socioeconomic empowerment, with a particular focus on facilitating the development of micro and small women-run enterprises – in agriculture, school catering and creative industries, for instance – most frequently via the provision of vocational training and access to microfinance (UNRWA, n.d. b; UN Women, 2010a, 2015). There is an underlying recognition that, without a degree of economic independence, women's involvement in the political sphere is likely to be undermined, although, as we argue further below, work done in this regard is limited. SDC (2012) has addressed market dynamics by implementing a programme to improve market functions



Sabah's flooded home after thunderstorm Alexa in Gaza. Photo: Karl Schembri / Oxfam International

in urban agricultural systems and thereby improve access for Gazan smallholders. By contrast, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (2014) has focused on formal employment, promoting the entrance of women into male-dominated sectors including engineering and construction. MercyCorps has adopted an innovative approach by founding an accelerator for technology start-ups and introducing a mentoring system to encourage women leaders and increase their participation to 49% (Empower Women, 2015).

Fewer programmes have focused on combatting violence against women and girls, perhaps owing to the challenges the socio-political environment poses. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) supports programmes on violence against women and girls across the OPTs, primarily through supply-side interventions such as supporting Palestinian policing services, prosecutors and judges to develop the skills necessary to provide quality services to women victims of violence and detainees and equipping specialist units in police stations and hospitals to record instances and monitor referrals (Roseveare, 2014). UN Women and UNDP have worked with the Centre for Women's Legal Research and Consultancy (CWLRC)

to mitigate the effects of GBV by providing counselling, rehabilitation and legal services to victims of violence (MDG Achievement Fund, n.d.).

A number of non-Western — mostly Gulf — countries have emerged as key donors during the past six years, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Japan. However, the majority of this assistance has been directed towards humanitarian relief. A notable exception was the Saudi Committee for the Palestinian People Relief's (SCPPR's) funding of eight women's community centres (three of which are in Gaza) to provide safe and accessible women-only spaces for important services including legal aid, psychosocial support, educational services and vocational training (UN Women, 2012). More recently, the Qatar Charity has initiated a project to build secondary school for Gazan girls — an interesting development given that interventions that specifically target girls' empowerment are currently very limited in number (Gulf Times, 2015). Indeed, programming to improve socioeconomic opportunities for girls specifically has been limited to a few interventions to provide girls with educational and recreational activities outside of the home (UNRWA, n.d. b).

3. Understanding women leaders' efforts to maintain voice and influence in a fragile political context

As Section 2 has highlighted, the political economy context in which Gazan women act has been highly challenging and complex over the past eight years. This section explores the perceptions and experiences of diverse women leaders within this environment and the strategies they have employed to maintain voice and influence within political and civil society and at different levels. We begin by providing an overview of what women have achieved, then explore the factors that have enhanced their ability to preserve some degree of voice and influence, before turning to a discussion of the key barriers.

3.1 What has been achieved?

In contrast with other contexts with a functioning legislature and effective national sovereignty, conceptualising 'achievements' by women leaders in the Gazan context requires a more relativist perspective, which is as much about resisting new gender-unfriendly initiatives as it is about new gains.

One of the key areas women leaders consistently noted as an achievement related to resisting new conservative gendered norms and regulations proposed by Hamas when it first came to power. In response to attempts by the Hamas leadership to introduce conservative new dress codes, especially for women, women within political and civil society resisted vocally:

Hamas has tried to impose some restrictions but really it didn't work because we challenged them and they had ultimately to cancel these restrictions. So, for example, Hamas tried to impose a strict Islamic uniform on female lawyers – but we managed to cancel that; to ban women smoking in public places and to outlaw tight clothes for boys and girls (IDI #1).

Women organisations supported by international donors monitor the government and reversed some decision such as not allowing women to smoke arjela in public places and imposing hejab on female lawyers at courts. One feminist activist visited the chief judge at his office, he asked her to cover her head but she refused saying his office was not a mosque – only at mosques we have to cover the head (IDI #4).

Even among women within the Hamas movement, there is recognition that, while Hamas brought a sex-segregated society into Gaza, women are striving to ensure there are clear limits to the new conservative socio-religious agenda. 'We are not extremists who put pressure on women such as Taliban. We are educated, and civilised' (IDI #4).

In the case of the family and personal affairs laws,¹² changes under Hamas have been mixed but do highlight that Hamas is increasingly aware of women as a key support bloc. As one female politician noted, 'Hamas' perspectives about women's participation is improving after the elections and the quota. In Hamas, the women's movement is more politically/nationally oriented, but not feminist/gender-oriented' (IDI #4). Accordingly, there have been reforms in terms of child custody legal provisions in favour of women, although increasingly conservative social norms often preclude the realisation of these. 'Hamas has changed the custody of children for widows (the woman can keep her children with her forever if she does not marry again). However, norms and traditions and families don't allow that [...] Indeed, many women don't know their rights; they don't enjoy these rights because of norms and traditions (IDI #1).

12 These laws regulate marriage, divorce and inheritance and are based on religious interpretation.

Women leaders outside of Hamas also emphasised that, for all the challenges, there is still a vision and a strategy for working towards key feminist issues. *'Away from the Islamic women's movement, yes, we have vision – altogether – and we have a national strategic plan. We work on changing the personal affairs law, advocating for Resolution 1325, combating violence, holding Israel accountable to committed crimes'* (IDI #). In this regard, women leaders have struggled to ensure equity in the labour law (securing changes in 32 articles relating to women), have spearheaded a national coalition for the realisation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, are continuing to advocate for a law against GBV and have succeeded in pressuring Hamas to open a house to protect women subject to honour killing. As one activist noted, far from being silenced, women leaders *'meet with Hamas officials and fight for women rights assertively'* (IDI #1).

3.2 What has enabled women's leadership and voice?

Personal courage and conviction

One of the most striking elements underpinning the testimonies of the diverse women leaders in our sample was the importance of personal courage in overcoming familial and community norms and pressures not to participate in the public sphere (see also Box 3). Because *'There are no clear structures that encourage women'* (IDI #18), Gazan women with public voices tend to be *'emotionally intelligent'* and *'regard themselves as equal to others'* (IDI #1) and, most importantly, *'have very strong will and high motivation'* (IDI #18). This is true across generations and regardless of whether women are working within or outside of Hamas.

They also – unlike men, who are allowed to be 'stupid and accepted, with no one questioning their authority' – know they 'are under the microscope' (IDI #4) and must be 'highly skilful and professional' (IDI #6) at all times because their 'mistakes are not easily tolerable' (IDI #1) and 'the mistake of one woman affects all women' (IDI #7). In this regard, one woman, with Hamas, explained she didn't 'care about community norms and traditions too much' (IDI #3). The community sees her as 'an exceptional case' who is 'more advanced than them' (see also Box 4). A woman from Fatah explained her daring as follows: 'It is a challenge that I walk in the streets as I am for all my life, not covered, not wearing hejab – I meet leaders from Hamas and they accept me as I am' (IDI #15).

Another woman, also from Hamas, explained that, 'Inside of me, there is a leader, even when I was so young' (IDI#7). She reported that she had faced 'a big challenge to change

the stigma associated with women's participation', from both men, who resisted her participation, and women, who tried to 'culturally suppress' her. She ultimately attributed her success to the fact that she had 'gone to war with the stick of a man and the heart of a woman' – necessary, she added, because 'Hamas is not only a political party' but also has 'militants' who expose women 'to real risks'.

An older woman, not associated with Hamas, also reported that her life trajectory had been affected by her confidence and willingness to break the rules. She said that when she was a child she was 'astonished that people from outside are interfering in our lives' (IDI #13). At the age of 14, she was arrested for burning the Israeli flag and jailed for being a 'criminal child'. Rather than slowing her down, jail made her 'personality become stronger' and she left 'more and more politically engaged'. She is frustrated that today parties are using 'weak women' – because it 'disfigures women's image'.

Another woman, also from outside of Hamas, reiterated that Gazan women must be especially dogged because they 'have to fight on two fronts: cultural norms (including fundamentalists) and the Israeli occupation' (IDI #1). She said her own participation in politics had begun at the age of 12, when she engaged in 'street demonstrations, marches, distributing posters and articles' against the 1978 Camp David peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. Later, when she – but not her male peers – was dismissed from university as an 'infidel' for her 'activities to advocate national interest', she had a 'severe reaction' – and also began challenging 'the fundamental Islamic groups'.

Key informants also argued that women's courage also translates into heightened political capacities. As one male politician explained, for example,

Women are very capable. Women are better at work – they are less liable for corruption and can make better use of public money – the report released by Aman [The Palestinian branch of Transparency International] indicates that women are less liable for corruption and more transparent in senior managerial positions. Women can take more brave decisions if they are provided with the resources and have more freedom in decision-making. Despite what is being said, when a woman participates in politics, she is well respected by people (IDI #6).

In the same vein, a woman politician noted, 'By doing much more work, she tries to work more and take more load to show evidence that she is capable [...] We are under the microscope [...] If you skipped a meeting or didn't deliver the work, as a woman, you would be heavily criticised' (IDI #4).

Box 3: Resistance as a life-long mission

At that time [1970s], I was writing politically related articles in a local journal, and also writing poems [I got it from my mother, a school head teacher]. When I joined university, I tried to do some cultural activities, non-curricular activities, especially activities to advocate the national interest, but the restriction imposed on me by the Islamic university was severe. My reaction was severe, more than what usual women have. At school, I was the only girl that covered her head but because of the things they did to me at the university I took off the cover from that time till now. I wasn't leftist at that time, but the pressure practised on me made me crazy. I personally formed the student union frame in 1982 – as part of a leftist party – for all universities in Gaza and coordinated that with the West Bank. I wanted to resist the occupation and also to challenge the fundamental Islamic groups. Finally, they dismissed me from the Islamic university; I was regarded as an unbeliever. They dismissed seven girls because we participated in activities to protest against the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon and to support the PLO. They dismissed only girls; males were participating but less subjected to violence. The community showed great sympathy with us and the political leadership of the PLO (IDI #1).

We used to read more than now the literature about independence, freedom fighters, such as Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Simón Bolívar [...] Conflict with the Israelis encouraged more young women to engage in politics for a good cause [...] With the establishment of the PLO in 1965, I joined fata (as one of 'the flowers' of the party) and I participated with the children's groups in celebration. The radical turning point took place in 1967, the Israeli occupation, then I changed 180 degrees – suddenly I become an adult (I was around 12 years). I used to participate in demonstrations – men carried me over their shoulders – the community was more open at that time – girls used to wear mini-skirts. At that time people were less conservative than now. I used to have male friends visiting me at home – people in the community accepted that as normal. In 1969, I was arrested – I burnt the Israeli flag at that time – the Israeli used to describe us as the criminal children. We were six ladies in jail – some of us were arrested because of engaging in military action (throwing a hand grenade). The experience of jail was exciting – all people in Gaza visited us to see me and what happened to me. My personality become stronger – and I was more and more politically engaged [...] In Egypt, during my university study, I was a very active member in the students' union – I was the first woman to join the union ever [...] I was jailed again by Israel for two years when I was in the second year of university – we were around 60 females at that time from Gaza in one single jail. I was jailed because I was distributing the newspapers of a leftist party (IDI #13).

I felt there were real challenges facing us in Palestine resulting from the Israeli occupation and social norms as well. I noticed the suffering of my people. Every day someone is killed, arrested by the Israeli occupation. I wanted to participate in liberating my country. I felt strongly that I needed to participate. IDI #2.

Box 4: A female trailblazer within Hamas

I feel I pushed myself to something that is difficult – but I don't want to quit. I feel responsible like my father, who is a public person [...] I don't care about the community norms and traditions too much, I was engaged in community work without caring too much about what people say and as such the community regarded me as an exceptional case – that is not traditional. I am allowed to do things others can't.

At the household level, I don't waste my time cooking and washing dishes, we share (the four of us, husband and two children) responsibilities. We collaborate together. I go outside even at one o'clock in the very early morning. I don't get my husband's permission, I just tell them so they do not worry about me. Sometimes I don't tell them and forget then he phones to make sure that I am okay. In other words, I have no problems in meeting men at any time – I am highly confident.

You know, there are wrong assumptions by the media about Hamas. They think we are retarded, covered in black, like a moving black tent – kissing the feet of our husbands, cooking and washing all the day. The media visited me many times at home and they found I don't waste my time cooking, I drive my own car, I go to meetings, I move alone and behave like any other person. I realised how much they don't know about us and how much we are weak in communication and marketing. When I present articles and papers in workshops, they think this is my personal opinion, not Hamas' official perspectives. And it is partially true; I am not a typical woman from Hamas – I think I am more advanced than them. I use Facebook to discuss some sensitive issues [e.g. polygamy]. I am treated differently (IDI #3).

Familial support

While for most Gazan women family responsibilities work to keep them out of the public sphere, for a handful of women family support has been instrumental to their emergence as leaders. These women, who are almost exclusively from ‘aristocratic’, well-educated, ‘economically elite’ families (IDI #5), have stories that are markedly similar – not surprising given that ‘*In this part of the world, it is usually about who you know, not what you know*’ (IDI #14). One woman, for example, said she entered politics because ‘*I feel responsible, like my father, who is a public person.*’ Another, an older woman from a family of eight girls and only one boy, explained, ‘*My father was a teacher and my grandfather was the Imam of the mosque.*’ They ‘*taught us [the girls] how to do things that are usually related more to men because we had no boys*’ (IDI #13). A third, from the left wing, credited the support of her husband for her involvement in party politics:

When I was very young, I was participating in political activities – born to it – at that time, most people were participating. My husband is also a politician – from the communist party – this is also a contributing factor. My husband was teaching in Sinai in Egypt – and I had a lot of unutilised time. I was reading some of his books and some articles related to politics and to the party. Many of the party meetings took place inside our house and I initially wasn’t aware that these were related to the party. Then we talked about my participation and then I joined the party. Later on I become more engaged and actively participating in women activities (IDI #2).

While it is most typical for women leaders to emerge from well-educated families, there are exceptions to this rule. One of our female respondents, for instance, explained that, even though her natal family was large and her father was uneducated, ‘*He supported me and my four sisters to complete our education and refused to marry us before we graduated*’ (IDI #8).

The active support of husbands, who are often also politicians who ‘*understand the work*’ (IDI #16) and ‘*always push me to participate more and more*’ (IDI #13), has also been critical to the development of women’s voice and leadership. One woman with Hamas, for example, explained that, ‘*At the household level, I don’t waste my time cooking and washing dishes, we share responsibilities. We collaborate together*’ (IDI #3). She continued that, while most women have to ask permission to leave the home, she refuses to do so, only ‘*telling them not to worry about me*’ (IDI #3). Another, a gender specialist, said she had ‘*gendered my husband*’, which, along with educating her children to help around the house, had helped her ‘*a lot*’ (IDI #8).

High levels of women’s education

Another important factor in women’s leadership that is not to be overlooked is the high level of education among

women in Palestine, including Gaza, in general – both in terms of the level of economic development and *vis-à-vis* their regional peers. The literacy rate is 94.8% and women now make up almost 54% of students at universities (PCBS, 2014). As a male key informant noted, ‘*Women need to be highly skilful, professional. Especially when they are young. Mukhatara [tribal elder] men are stupid and accepted – no one questions their authority – when it comes to women, usually people ask, is she technically competent or not?*’ (IDI #6).

Declining tribal influence under Hamas government

In contrast with the situation in the West Bank, where the influence of tribal leaders remains deeply entrenched, Hamas, in a bid to cement its own political influence, has taken concerted actions with some degree of effectiveness to reduce tribal influence in Gaza. This has had a positive influence on women’s voice within the family and community. As one female activist noted, ‘*Tribal authorities or mukhatara suppress women through norms and traditions, they try to compromise women’s issues during conflicts. So Hamas’ efforts to reduce this influence has been positive*’ (IDI #4).

Party affiliation

While there were mixed views about the extent to which political parties genuinely support women’s voice and leadership (see discussion below) among the key informants who were leaders in political society, there was – at times grudging – admission that belonging to a political party was critical if women’s voices were to be heard.

Politics are created by organised people – not the independent people – unless women are organised they can’t effectively participate [...] Support from the party is vital – no woman can do that alone –no single woman was elected outside the party lists (IDI #6).

3.3 What factors hindered women’s voice and influence?

Familial responsibilities and resistance

Our primary research findings highlighted that family responsibilities work to thwart most Gazan women from developing public voice or becoming leaders. Strong cultural norms, which ‘*respect the reproductive role of the woman and not the political role*’ (IDI #8), work to keep most women tethered to the home – especially since even more equitable men tend to be ‘*democratic outside their houses and not to their wives and daughters*’ (IDI #18). While in some cases men ‘*refuse their wives to participate*’ because of the culture which ‘*sees wives must prepare food and clothes*’ (IDI #5), in other cases women themselves ‘*think that the first priority is for their houses*’ and that

political work *'is only for men'* (IDI #3). Younger women, who are the most likely to have small children at home, are especially dissuaded from entering the public sphere. An older woman, herself involved in politics, noted she told the party to *'engage ladies who are older'*, as for younger women *'the natural role [...] is taking care of her house/ children'* (ID #4). Another agreed that *'the first 10 years after marriage should be always dedicated to the children'*, even if that *'takes the woman away from politics'* (IDI #15). Other respondents stressed time poverty was not the only constraint facing women in terms of combining their private and public roles. One young woman, for example, said her parents had discouraged her from participating because they were afraid for her life (FGD #10). Others added that they were afraid for their families – who can be forced to bear both the social and the physical costs of their (women's) cultural disobedience. For instance, a man told us, *'Women's participation in politics negatively affects her household'* because the community sees she is disregarding her *'home responsibilities'* (IDI #5). A woman from a political family added that she had been forced to *'turn less active'* because of threats of *'harm to my family'* from Hamas (IDI #16). Another explained that threats come from all directions; she said, *'The Israeli retaliation is not against the woman herself, rather the entire family'* (IDI #1).

Economic constraints

Another cross-cutting theme in our interviews was the way a variety of economic factors work to silence Gazan women and keep them from assuming leadership roles. As nearly all of our respondents noted, *'People listen to the person who controls resources'* (IDI #2) – and in Gaza that person is rarely a woman, given that women's participation in the workforce *'doesn't exceed 12%'* (IDI #5). Indeed, one woman observed that, in Gaza, *'The percentage of women-controlled resources is less than 1%'* (IDI #8), which *'makes their voice weaker and not heard'* (IDI #1). Another added that the *'social system doesn't allow women to accumulate and control resources'*, rather it is their job to *'spend resources'* – which largely precludes their political participation, as *'money is important for entering the party'* (IDI #11). In addition to needing money for party politics, other respondents noted that, if women are to participate in public life, they need *'to pay for a babysitter, a housekeeper and transportation'*, which can be challenging given that women are far more likely than men to be unemployed and *'most political party work in Gaza is voluntary – not paid'* (IDI #7).

Recent events in Gaza have proven a doubled-edged sword for women's participation in public life. On the one hand, while they continue to face *'huge discrimination concerning the salary and the type of position'* they are allowed to hold (IDI #12), the financial crisis has opened considerable space for women's paid employment, because *'the family needs her money'* (IDI #18) to *'adapt to the economic problems'* (IDI #8). On the other hand, the 2014

conflict with Israel – and the subsequent retrenchment of the blockade – have *'distorted priorities'* and focused attention not on gender but on *'survival strategies'* (IDI #7). The blockade has *'exhausted and overwhelmed women'* (IDI #12), who lost both assets and providers in the war (IDI #2) and shifted their priorities to *'daily basic needs rather than politics'* (IDI #5). As a male respondent noted, *'The dream of a hungry person is having a bread, not politics'* (IDI #6). Given that the economic crisis has also resulted in NGO funding streams shifting away from gender and towards humanitarian aid (IDI #1), recapturing women's political interest is likely to take time.

A divided women's movement

The bifurcation of the Gazan 'women's movement' has had significant impacts on women's voice and leadership. As women's post-Intifada goals have diverged – with some supporting Hamas and its more Islamist goals and others working with international NGOs and focusing on gender itself – *'There is a decline in activities'* (IDI #2), as *'There seems to be no prospect for anything'* (IDI #14) because *'We are not united'* (IDI #7). Indeed, while both sides claim to best represent Gazan women's interests, one of our respondents flatly stated that today there *'no real women's movement in Gaza because they are too fragmented'* (IDI #3) and another concluded that *'Women are lost'* (IDI #2).

On the one hand, women affiliated with Hamas are *'angry because the international community does not support them'* (IDI #3) – and instead supports *'elite groups'* who do not understand the *'daily issues of mothers'* (IDI #1). Some believe international donors *'manipulate agendas'* and donor-supported women's groups focus on negative issues such as *'GBV and honour killing'* (IDI #4) rather than *'going down to earth and helping people'* (IDI #3). Others believe *'Women's organisations hate men [...] have bitterness and don't fit women's nature'* (IDI #15).

On the other hand, women working with Hamas admit they have *'no agenda for women'* and do *'little in terms of legislation'* (IDI #3), and they see the *'national cause'* as *'larger than women's cause'* (IDI #4). Indeed, party affiliation for most women working with Hamas is so strong that one non-affiliated woman explained that the recent quota for women's participation had largely backfired. She said, *'We encouraged ladies to enter into the playing field but we didn't manage to get them to play in a women's team – they played according to the agenda of their political parties'* (IDI #1).

Those sympathetic to the international women's movement agreed the differences between women's groups had grown large but largely rejected claims of elitism. One explained that *'International organisations [...] pay attention to social norms and try to stay within the limits of what is expected'* while helping *'in creating demand, awareness and advocacy'* (IDI #14). Others added that *'The agenda of donors match with the needs of women'* (IDI #8) and *'80% of donations have had a positive effect'*

Box 5: Best practice addressing divisions in the women's movement

The Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) was founded in 1991, after the first Intifada, by five Gazan women who decided to put away their marked political differences and focus on their similarities. Believing in democratic thinking, women's leadership and a society in which children and women had an active role, these women grew their organisation from a small community-based affair providing a handful of school-aged children with health, education, legal aid and psychosocial services as well as educational and recreational opportunities into a large NGO that directly reaches over 20,000 Gazans a year.

CFTA's success is built on inclusivity. While its work is inspired by human rights, it avoids the divisive issue of gender inequality, even when providing women's health care. Furthermore, it is community- rather than donor-driven. By providing quality services in a participatory, holistic manner and avoiding political factionalism, CFTA has positioned itself as a 'fiercely independent' organisation that has proved to nay-sayers that women are effective leaders. Twenty-five years later, the five women who started CFTA are still running the organisation together.

Source: Maritano et al. (2015).

(IDI #2), although they admitted 'The outcomes are not sufficient because the donated projects don't have strategic directions' (IDI #8) and because 'They implemented programmes without adaptation to the local context' (IDI #1). In addition, most felt strongly that it is Hamas – not international donors – that is manipulating Gazan women and using them purely as 'decorations' (IDI #2). One, for example, said Hamas had 'exploited religion to exploit women according to their agenda' and forced them 'to act against the best interests of women' (IDI #9). Indeed, added others, 'The Islamic women's movement doesn't defend the rights of women' (IDI #1). Instead, 'Sometimes women will be more oppressive to women than men' (IDI #5).

Despite current rancour, leaders from both camps agreed that, 'At a deep level, we have the same objectives, same mission' (IDI #2) and 'We will be great if we work together' (IDI #3) (see also Box 5).

Limited support from political parties

Overall, there was a sense that parties were interested in women's participation primarily as a means to votes during election periods but were not committed to supporting them as part of a broader commitment to a rights-based approach and community development. As such, as one female politician pointed out, 'Parties become more interested in us after having the quota (20%) in the PLC [...] Men inside the party don't object when we ask for something related to women, but they don't take the initiative and support us' (IDI #4). In a similar vein, another respondent noted, 'Political parties try to make the most of women – they abuse them/utilise their energy. Parties don't create leaders, they find good people and utilise them' (IDI #7).

There were also concerns that parties are not promoting capable women with the potential to play a greater leadership role. As one asked rhetorically, 'Hamas says 42% of its security forces are women – but what do they work as? Guards, cooking?' (IDI #1). Another lamented that women in parties increasingly have low capacity:

Parties are restricting women's roles – what they do is not real (decoration) – however, it disfigures the women's image – when they put a weak woman they harm us – they harm the party but harm women more [...] There is focus on women – usually women are under scrutiny – females are more blamed when they commit mistakes [...] Parties include weak women – as they are ready to make compromises (IDI #13).

A number of women also complained that the general internal culture within political parties was male-dominant and there was little if any effort to make parties more inclusive of women.

People are rigid at the party – they used to meet late at night – not showing any respect to women. In demonstrations and marches, men from the party they want us as women to participate, in celebrations and parties they sit at the first line and give speeches – their wives even don't participate except in celebration. There is obvious undermining of the women's role even in leftists political parties [...] Powerful groups are not interested in supporting women according to a rights-based approach – rather it is seen as benevolent or decorative issue [...] It seems the cultural norms are more influential than the party's ideological value system (IDI #2).

In a similar vein, another interviewee exposed the problem of double standards among the male political elite: 'Male-dominant groups in political parties – some men in committee said we don't need women, we need to meet at night, we need to make jokes. This is what they said officially, but the reality is they don't believe in women and their ability to participate' (IDI #3).

In the case of Hamas, this male-dominated culture has been further reinforced by the relative dominance of the militant faction within the movement. This is also reflected in women's very limited role in the reconciliation discussions.

Women didn't participate actively in the reconciliation talks in Cairo in 2010; five committees were formed – they contained only one woman – some women were there as a support group. In Shata'a agreement [on the national unity government] in May 2014 none participated (IDI #6).

And at a local level, women tend to be assigned 'roles without teeth' (IDI #12). This owes in part to women having to shoulder family responsibilities and having less time than their male counterparts, but equally to a dearth of support and mentoring when women finally do get elected. As one key informant explained, 'Most of the ladies who won the council elections resigned as they are not able to attend the meetings or not able to technically participate – such as discussing budgets, participating in planning [...] Women themselves said this work is only for men' (IDI #3). This tendency has been further institutionalised insofar as the councils/municipality offices have created departments for women in which elected women disproportionately congregate.

Women in politics are not prioritising women's issues

A related concern that emerged repeatedly in our primary research findings was the concern that women in politics are not representing women and their priorities, but rather party and patriarchal agendas, especially given that the overwhelming majority owe their office to party quotas. As a women's and human rights activist lamented, 'Repression of women by women is a very dangerous trend – women represented in the legislative council but believe in masculine domination and inferiority of women. The number of women in the PLC is not necessarily good sign – what they think and how they behave is more important. The same applies to ministries as well: this is more related to the quality of women who occupy these positions. I think women defend their parties' agenda more than the women's agenda [...] There is a clear line between women known as politicians and women known as feminists – you don't have the two in the same person' (IDI #5).

In the case of the Islamic women's movement, activists from the left emphasised that, 'The Islamic women's movement doesn't defend the rights of women [...] they work on relief work, supporting women with financial problems, and teaching religion/Quaran. They never participated in a march, for increasing participation or to have quota for ladies. Instead, they attacked us when we called for unifying the penalties law (to be equal for male and female)' (IDI #1).

This problem of the precedence of party loyalties over women's needs cut across the political spectrum. As an international agency observer highlighted, for example, 'Rabeha Diab, the first Minister of Women's Affairs – 90% of her speeches are related to support and compliment President Arafat not to advocate the women's agenda – most senior positions are occupied by men. There is a

problem not only with the quantity of women but also the quality. The quality is also overshadowed by stereotyped masculine policies; women's issues are prioritised out of social decorum only (IDI #11).

Interestingly, several respondents explained that the resounding level of support women enjoyed in the decisive 2007 election stemmed in part from the fact that, 'Women from Fatah and other parties voted for Hamas to get revenge on their husbands!! Who used to treat them badly' (IDI #2). Moreover, some key informants opined that the women's movement was also at fault. While the movement managed to secure a quota for the elections, it encouraged women to participate without providing them with information about how parties could better serve women's needs and rights.

We didn't direct women to the best of their interests. We encouraged ladies to enter the playing field but we didn't manage to get them to play in a women's team – they played according to the agenda of their political parties. But in hindsight we should not have stayed neutral – we should have actively encouraged them to be biased towards a women's agenda (IDI #1).

People's disillusionment in the possibility of change

A final factor that is closely intertwined with the chronic and overlapping political and economic crises Gaza is confronted with in terms of the Israeli occupation, the international blockade and the division between Gaza and the West Bank is the growing political apathy and sense of hopelessness and frustration among the broader populace. As one key informant eloquently phrased it,

It seems people are lost, anesthetised. They are oppressed and feel injustice. It seems the fear from Hamas is huge. People cope and accept unacceptable things. Hamas will abort any attempt to change the situation. People listen more to leaders from Hamas. There was hope, inspiration, role models – now these are not available. After the division and siege people lost hope. You need a permit from the Authority before you organise any event. When we had women gathering every Tuesday standing against the division, Hamas attacked us (IDI #2).

Another young woman noted,

The main characteristic of the society nowadays is that it is fragmented, not only politically but also on many other fronts. So we see many small groups trying to emerge at some point, and then they fade away. We have seen youth initiatives, women's initiatives, etc., but nothing has survived. There is no driving power as there seems to be no prospect for anything (#IDI 21).

3.4 What role do international actors play in supporting women's voice and leadership in the Gazan context?

Overall, our key informants had mixed views on the role of international actors to date in supporting women's voice and leadership in Gaza. On the one hand, there was strong appreciation among some civil society activists for ongoing support that had facilitated their ability to speak out against the rise of conservative gendered norms and practices as well as to maintain a focus on GBV despite local sensitivities and taboos around this issue.

We feel now less isolated than before, this gives us a comfortable feeling; advocacy is more now; resources are still provided, we take according to our needs (IDI #2).

On the other hand, there were strong critics among the interviewees in terms of international agencies' focus on 'elite secular intellectual-led' women's NGOs, which tend to attract only a small following and to have very limited connection with grassroots women and their realities. In this regard, there were particular concerns among some key informants that international support focuses on sociocultural issues, including GBV, honour killing and reproductive health rights, but ignores issues related to women's economic empowerment, which is critical to the majority of ordinary Gazan women.

Donors can have a negative influence – there is a tendency to donate not according to our agendas [...] The liberal women's group didn't reach women at the grassroots while Islamic groups did. The focus of the liberal groups is on things that are not regarded as priority by ordinary women such as 1325, political participation, rights. The liberal groups didn't reach women and also are regarded as donor-driven; therefore they focus on small-scale interventions as this is safer for them [...] The women's movement needs to reform its programmes in order to reach people. They should stop focusing on the elite – they need to focus on the real issue facing women. Why should they care about 1325 if they lose everything? (IDI #5).

In this regard, multiple interviewees highlighted that too often NGOs receive funding from the international community and implement programmes without sufficient adaptation to the local context. As one interviewee noted, 'We focused on awareness/empowerment and advocacy but not on organising women [...] the Islamic movement touches more the suffering of people and gives them support

and relief – they are actively organising women' (IDI #10). Another lamented that, 'As the women's movement, we have invested a lot but the achievements are limited. Millions have been spent without good return' (IDI #1).

There were also concerns that NGO staff supported by international agencies were not always meritocratic in nature:

People working in women's organisations or international projects are just good at English but not expert technically. They have been selected only because they are good at English. I trained seven people from an international organisation – they were hired to work on gender, most of them are supportive of GBV, polygamy and know nothing about gender – they were hired only because they are good at English (IDI #6).

Donors were also criticised heavily for not playing a proactive enough role on the international stage in terms of speaking out against the Israeli occupation and holding Israel to account for the resulting humanitarian crisis and rights violations in Gaza.

You supported me at the local level to defend my rights – I also expect that at the international level you support me – at least in the basic right – right to live? If you support me at the local level I also expect that at international forums. Donors need to support justice (IDI #1).

This has been exacerbated by the no-contact policy *vis-à-vis* the Hamas government as part of the international blockade, which renders evidence-informed engagement in Gaza especially challenging.

Finally, there was also a strongly voiced concern that donors' investment in short-term project-based funding was inadequate to bring about the broader based sociocultural change needed to support women's voice and leadership so it is no longer reliant on the exceptional courage and conviction of a very small number of women. In this regard, there was a sense that donors need to broaden the type of women's organisations they fund, especially given the limited grassroots reach of the liberal CSOs that sit more comfortably with donor sympathies. As one interviewee bluntly explained, 'Women at Hamas are angry because the international community doesn't support them – money goes to non-Hamas-affiliated women's movements' (IDI #3). In addition there is a strongly felt need for investment in more specialised training, including on international criminal law and how to operationalise laws, especially bylaws that are broadly supportive of women in principle, gender and justice and women's leadership.

4. Conclusions

This case study has sought to highlight the politics of negotiating the terms of women's political engagement within a conservative political order – that is, the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip since 2007. It sheds light on women's political participation in a highly polarised political context where other struggles (against the Israeli occupation and between Fatah and Hamas) overshadow gender-related concerns for most people. Even so, women's struggles for greater voice and leadership intersect with the broader Palestinian political landscape in complex and often surprising ways.

Despite the diversity of party affiliations and activist trajectories among the women interviewed, a number of **common individual and family characteristics** emerged as essential to women's exercise of voice and leadership in the Gazan context. These include access to higher education; supportive male family members; economic security that enabled women to participate in politics while also balancing family responsibilities; and exceptional personal courage in defying dominant gender norms. Increasing

access in recent years to the internet and social media has also helped women overcome their sense of social isolation and forge linkages with other Palestinian women and internationally.

Women's personal and collective capabilities have emerged in the context of **broader social and institutional changes** in Palestinian society and polity. Palestinian women have a high level of literacy and higher education compared with other conflict-affected and low-income countries. The Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation has constituted a powerful source of motivation for women of diverse political affiliations, and engagement in broader nationalist struggles and student activism have often served as a political apprenticeship of sorts. And for women involved in party politics, the gender quota introduced in the mid-2000s, which ensures greater inclusion of women on party lists, has helped expand women's representation at national and local levels, albeit not in party decision-making positions.



Two women walking in Gaza. Photo: stichting kifaia, Flickr.

Key **constraints** identified by respondents as hampering women's effective exercise of voice and leadership were limited support by male political party colleagues; a highly fragmented women's movement; limited, time-bound and highly politicised donor funding (from both Arab/Islamic and Western funders); and an increasing narrowing of the political space in general and for gender equality concerns in particular, even before the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip. For many respondents, the NGO-isation of civil society and the exit of many women from movement roles to become PA employees following the 1991 Oslo Accords also weakened collective action; over time, the women's movement has become not only very divided but also increasingly distant from grassroots women. This stems from movement organisations' focus on international conventions and goals rather than more the practical gender needs that preoccupy many Gazan women in the context of a protracted and increasingly severe economic and labour market crisis stemming from the international blockade of the Hamas government. Perhaps most problematic, however, is a growing sense of disillusionment in the possibility of change, given the ongoing violence and destructiveness wrought by the Israeli occupation and the economic decline exacerbated by the international blockade on the Gaza strip.

In terms of **achievements realised by women leaders**, overall respondents were very sober about the limited results that their years of struggle had realised. As one respondent highlighted, *'Previously, the situation was less conservative than now. Some positive changes have taken place in awareness, having legal clinics for women, providing support to victims of violence. Maybe without them, the situation could be much worse than now'* (IDI #14). The party gender quota was hard won, but has not resulted in a significant growth in the number of gender equality champions in formal politics. Indeed, women who were actively encouraged to vote in the last election were a critical part of the Hamas victory, which has resulted in an intensification of an already increasingly conservative social agenda in Gaza.

In terms of GBV, while a number of women's movement organisations have been supported to engage around UN Security Council Resolution 1325, in reality women have been highly marginalised in peace process negotiations – both with Israel and between Fatah and Hamas following the split between the West Bank and Gaza. And, especially

given the suspension of the PLC since this political division, efforts to bring about gender-related legislative reforms have been unsuccessful. Instead, concerted efforts have been needed to minimise a scaling-back of women's rights under Hamas – including those related to freedom of movement, dress and family inheritance rights.

In order to navigate this complex and tumultuous political space, **women leaders have adopted a range of strategies, with varying success**. A significant number of women respondents have strategically opted to align with political parties so as at least to be afforded some opportunities for voice. This has often been a relationship fraught with compromise and frustration, across the party spectrum, especially as parties have often adopted gender-related causes only for instrumental reasons.

Another key strategy, especially by women on the left, has been to link with international donors and agendas, in order to keep issues related to GBV, women's rights within the family and access to gender justice on the public agenda. This has often been complemented by the strategic use of social media, to which Gazan women increasingly have access – and time for (especially as many are outside of the workforce and often home-bound because of cultural restrictions on mobility). Some women – most notably CFTA – have also deliberately sought cross-party cooperation, but such concrete efforts remain relatively limited, especially as Western funders explicitly exclude funding of organisations linked to Hamas. While respondents in our research sample expressed a common commitment and common interests and concerns, in practice efforts for greater collaboration are hampered by political parties, which actively discourage cooperation. This is especially the case for women linked to Fatah, who face considerable restrictions in Hamas-controlled Gaza, and to a lesser extent women from left-wing parties.

There is also considerable politicisation of aid – both from Arab/Islamic donors and Western donors – which further complicates the possibility of a broader alliance among women activists. Part of this is no doubt because of uncoordinated actions of the type common to many aid-dependent contexts, but it is also because of divergent interests. Western donors often promote a rights-based agenda and religious donors a conservative agenda towards women, including practices that allow for early marriage and polygamy in the name of facilitating marriage and family values.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for gender advocates and frontline women's organisations

In order to improve their support to women and girls' effective voice, leadership and collective action and so as to better advance women's interests and gender equity, the evidence from this case study suggests gender advocates and frontline women's organisations consider the following:

1. **Develop a strategic vision based on consensus among stakeholders across the political spectrum and among secular and religious organisations in order to reduce fragmentation, support a plurality of feminist viewpoints and, where possible, identify some common causes** – for example in the context of broader national reconciliation negotiation efforts focused on both political and social dimensions; around engaging more strategically with grassroots women for whom income generation and economic empowerment are a priority; and with young women who face barriers to participation as a result of a dearth of affordable child care. Such a development should be underpinned by support for awareness-raising efforts *vis-à-vis* the historical roots of the Palestinian women's movement through community education, curriculum reforms in schools and universities and the creative use of social media.
2. **Given that legislative quotas for women have increased women's representation but have yet to achieve a critical mass of women, advocate for quotas and their enforcement for women in senior positions** – within government and party decision-making bodies – and then support and monitor their active participation in such posts. This would need to be twinned with support training/sensitisation of male decision-makers about gender inequalities in Palestine and the importance of improving women's voice and leadership to enhance Gaza's development.

5.2 Recommendations for international donor

The evidence emerging from this case study suggests international donors could play a more effective role in supporting efforts to strengthen women's voice and leadership and collective action if they were to prioritise the following:

1. **Invest in a stronger cross-sector gender strategy among donor partners so as to reduce fragmentation of efforts and joint funding of initiatives**, including reaching out to emerging Arab and Islamic donors to identify areas of investment and possible opportunities for collaboration and co-funding.¹³
2. **Redesign funding modalities**, especially moving away from a project-based short-term model and investing in longer-term initiatives, given that the political and social changes needed (in terms of ending the Israeli occupation, national political reconciliation and tackling conservative gender norms) will inevitably be lengthy, complex and likely non-linear change processes. Funding women's NGO consortia to reduce competition for funding in an environment of scarce resources, including efforts to bridge conflictual relationships across existing organisations, and motivate cross-organisation coordination, is also a priority area to explore.
3. **Support experience-sharing with women in other contexts** (especially the Arab world and possibly Latin America, given significant Arab populations as well as support for the Palestinian cause by left-wing parties) to document and share promising practices so as to reduce the sense of international isolation and pessimism about the possibility for transformational change.
4. **Prioritise engagement with grassroots women** – they are involved in relief and community activities, so providing more support and legal rights awareness could be a promising strategy. In this regard, given the chronic economic crisis facing Gaza, consider investing in economic empowerment/income-generating initiatives, given a huge need in this area as well as women's particular responsibilities for household survival and very high levels of unemployment.

13 These include Qatar Foundation, the Islamic Development Bank, Islamic Relief, Emirates Red Crescent, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

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5. **Support initiatives that involve men and boys in gender awareness initiatives**, especially given the importance of supportive husbands and brothers in facilitating women's activism and political engagement in the Gazan context.
 6. **Ensure the protection of women and girls in access-restricted areas in Gaza benefiting from UN Security Council Resolution 1325.** Increase support for women affected by the repeated conflicts with Israel and the blockade. Also, increase women's organisations' participation in managing the current reconstruction process and relief and humanitarian assistance and in the reconciliation talks.
 7. **Support further gender mainstreaming in political parties**, especially a cross-party women's coalition to advocate for common issues (e.g. around party by-laws, gender budgeting, support to enforce GBV measures), learning potentially from Nepal's cross-party women's coalition experience.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Jones et al., 2015.

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Annex 1: List of interviewees

#	Gender	Title /organisation	Interest	Date	Orientation
	Female	Women's Affairs Technical Committee	Women rights, feminist	9 July 2015	Left
	Female	WAC	Women rights, feminist	7 July 2015	Independent – liberal
	Female	CWLRC	Politician, feminist	9 July 2015	Left
	Female	Women Works Committee	Politician- women activist	7 July 2015	Left
	Female	Bader Organisation for Youth	Women, human rights activist	9 July 2015	Independent – liberal
	Male	Head of Gaza branch in political party	Politician	6 July 2015	Left
	Male	Legal advisor	Trainer in gender and human rights	9 July 2015	Left
	Female	Member of parliament	Trainer in gender, human rights activist	11 July 2015	Hamas
	Female	CFTA	Ex-politician, human rights activist	12 July 2015	Independent – liberal
	Male	Palestinian NGO	Civil society activist	12 July 2015	Independent – liberal
	Female	UN Women in Gaza	Gender analyst	12 July 2015	Independent – liberal
	Female	Member of Municipality Council	Politician	13 July 2015	Fatah
	Female	Director general at MOSA	Politician, women's activist	13 July 2015	Hamas
	Female	Director general at Ministry of Women Affairs	Politician	14 July 2015	Hamas
	Female	Director general at Ministry of Economy	Politician	15 July 2015	Fatah
	Female	Director general at Ministry of Religious Affairs	Politician	15 July 2015	Hamas
	Female	Member of political committee of political party	Politician	22 July 2015	Left-
	Female	General Union of Palestinian Women	Economist, -politician	22 July 2015	Fatah
	Female	Member of PLC	Independent	30 July 2015	Independent
	Female	NGO activists	Journalist	29 July 2015	Independent
	Females FGD	Youth affiliated to a political party: graduates, students and volunteers		13 July 2015	Left
	Females FGD	Youth affiliated to a political party: graduates, employees students and volunteers		14 July 2015	Hamas
	Mixed FGD	Youth affiliated to a political party: graduates, employees students and volunteers		30 July 2015	Independent

Annex 2: Indicators highlighting women and men's differential economic and political sphere participation and representation in Gaza

Indicator	% or number
Workers affiliated to unions/syndicates – men	66.8
Workers affiliated to unions/syndicates – women	48.9
Women reporting that they will participate in the coming election	68%
Men reporting that they will participate in the coming election	74%
Women declaring support for a certain political party	25%
Men declaring support for a certain political party	45%
Percentage of Palestinian women who work in Gaza, in legislation, in senior positions and management – among working women	3.8%
Percentage of Palestinian women who work in Gaza, in professional work and social services – among working women	64.9%
Percentage of local council membership occupied by women in Gaza seats (only conducted once)	24 out of 83 (24%)
Percentage of women participating in local elections – council elections – Gaza	47%
Women representation in the LC in 1995 (5 out of 88) – Palestine	5.7%
Women representation in the LC in 2005 (17 out of 132) – Palestine	12.8%
Percentage of women who won from the party lists (not as independents) – Palestine	25.7% –17 members out of 66
Women's participation in election in 2006	43%
Men's participation in election in 2006	54%
Women's contribution to the public service – Gaza	30.1%
Percentage of women in high senior positions in public service (director generals, deputy) –Gaza	Less than 14%
Percentage of women at mid-level (director of department) in public service – Gaza	Around 25%
Percentage of women in low-level non-managerial roles – Gaza	Around 50%
Working women with BA degree in government sector – Gaza	60%-
Working men with BA degree in government sector – Gaza	40%
The only person who competed in the presidential election against Arafat was a woman (Sameyha Khalil)	10% of the votes
Women's participation in Ministry of External affairs – Gaza	23% – none of them is an ambassador
Number of women who work as judges – Gaza	Only five – less than 5%
Number of female lawyers – Gaza	56 ones – less than 17%
Representation in the last general conference for Fatah movement – Palestine	25%
Female members in the revolutionary council – Palestine	33%
Members in the central leadership committee – Fatah	Only one appointed – not elected – and she is from Gaza
Number of political parties headed by women	Only one – Feda

Annex 3: Overview of political parties in Palestine

Name of party	Relative Influence	Established	Ideology	Engagement in military action	Notes
PLO members					
Fatah	Largest faction	1959	Secular, left-wing nationalist	Used to be militant In WB not militant In Gaza questionable	Palestinian nationalist ideology- Some of founders are Muslim Brotherhood 46 seats in the parliament
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	Second largest	1967	Secular Palestinian Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary leftist	Militant Used to be stronger in the past	Founder, Dr George Habash- Christian, physician, three members in the parliament
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine	Third largest	1969	Palestinian Marxist–Leninist, secular political and military organisation	Militant	Maoist tendency, led by Naief Hawatma, Christian-Jordanian
Palestinian People's Party	Moderate influence	Palestinian Communist Party (1922), reformed in 1982	Ex-communist social democratic	Non-militant	The renaming also reflected a move by the party to distance itself from the image of communism, an ideology perceived as antagonistic to religion in the Muslim world; but party members still identify with Marxism
Palestine Liberation Front	Minor faction	1961	Minor left-wing faction, Palestinian nationalism, Marxism- Leninism	Non-militant	Headquarters in Ramallah
Arab Liberation Front	Minor faction	1969	Aligned to the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, nationalist socialist	Non-militant	Gained some significance during the al-Aqsa Intifada, which started in 2000, as a distributor of financial contributions from the Iraqi government to families of 'martyrs' with extra grants for the families of suicide bombers
As-Sa'iqa	Minor	1966	Syrian-controlled Ba'athist faction	Militant Outside WB and GS	Active in Lebanon and Syria
Palestinian Democratic Union (Fedai)	Small but active	1990	Democratic socialist, supports two- state solution	Non-militant	Split in the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine Presents itself as progressive, secular and democratic socialist party and espouses Marxist vocabulary of 'scientific socialism' Only party currently headed by a woman
Palestinian Popular Struggle Front	Small	1967	Minor socialist faction Ba'athists –Syria	Now non-militant	Minister of LaboUr
Palestinian Arab Front	Minor nationalist faction	1968	Minor pro-Fatah former Iraqi Ba'athists faction	Non-militant	Iraqi-based Ba'ath Party
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command	Moderate	1968	Small Palestinian nationalist militant organisation based in Syria	Militant	Since the late 1980s has been largely inactive, but during Syrian Civil War it has been fighting on the side of the Syrian government

(continued)

Name of party	Relative Influence	Established	Ideology	Engagement in military action	Notes
Palestinian National Initiative	Moderate/strong	2002	Democratic, leftist	Non-militant	Views itself as a 'democratic third force' and opposes dichotomy between Fatah (which it views as corrupt and undemocratic) and Hamas (which it views as extremist and fundamentalist) Dominated by secular intellectuals, some of them former members of left-wing Palestinian People's Party
Not PLO members					
Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas	Very strong	1988 Associated with Muslim Brotherhood movement Sunni Established in 1927	Palestinian Islamic movement with associated military wing	Militant	When first Intifada broke out, as offshoot of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, won decisive majority (55) defeating the PLO-affiliated Fatah Following the elections, the Quartet (the US, Russia, UN and EU) made future foreign assistance to PA conditional on the future government's commitment to non-violence, recognition of the state of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements
Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine	Strong	1981	Palestinian Islamic movement with associated military wing	Militant	Affiliated more with Iran and Syria Didn't participate in election Focus on militant struggle



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ISSN: 2052-7209

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Cover photo: James Oatway / Panos

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This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.