



WOMEN'S ROLE IN WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

GENDER ANALYTICAL STUDY IN AREA
"C" OF THE WEST BANK

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Gender and *WASH* Analysis at Community Level in Area "C" of the West Bank

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About The Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG)

PHG, established in 1987 as a non-governmental organization, is dedicated to the development and protection of water and environmental resources. Our mission is to enhance public accessibility to adequate water supply sources, improve sanitary conditions, and implement proper information systems and technologies.

PHG is committed to achieving water and environmental justice, promoting the rights to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) for all Palestinians. We strive to maintain a leading role in delivering quality and innovative actions that contribute to the sustainability of local water and environmental resources, along with related ecosystems. Our efforts aim to build resilience and adaptation capacity among target communities facing climate change, uphold a rights-based approach to adequate water and sanitation, and improve water, food, and energy security for both Palestinian men and women.

Furthermore, PHG seeks to empower local and vulnerable groups, including women, to actively participate in promoting good water governance. Our interventions span across WASH, Solid Waste Management, WASH in Institutions, Floods Mitigation and Prevention, and WASH sector governance.

PHG's WASH program encompasses a range of activities, such as rehabilitating and installing drinking water supply systems (including pipes, pumping stations, and reservoirs), installing wastewater collection systems, implementing decentralized wastewater treatment systems, establishing greywater treatment systems, promoting treated wastewater reuse, constructing latrines for marginalized communities, incorporating solar energy in water pumping, developing water resources (springs and wells), practicing water harvesting, conducting climate change adaptation initiatives, engaging in water and environmental research, promoting hygiene best practices within target communities, and providing capacity building for WASH technicians in these communities.

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ACRONYMS

PHG	Palestinian Hydrology Group
ACPP	Asamblea de Cooperación Por la Paz
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
FGDs	Focus Group Discussion
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
HH	Household
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
IDI	In-Depth-Interview
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
ICA	Israeli Civil Administration
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
GDP	Gross domestic product
MCM	Million Cubic Meters
m³	Cubic Meters
EQA	Environment Quality Authority
PWA	Palestinian Water Authority
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
PENGON	Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
GBC	Green Buildings Council
RWDS	Rural Women's Development Society
oPt	occupied Palestinian territory
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PEL	the Palestinian Environment Law
NDC	National Determined Contributions
ESDC	Economic and Social Development Centre of Palestine

Executive Summary

This study is designed to address the significant challenges confronting communities residing in Area "C" in the West Bank, particularly issues related to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). The persistent "slow violence" stemming from settler-colonialism and military occupation poses environmental and existential threats that have a substantial impact on WASH conditions. At the core of this study is the acknowledgment of the profound consequences resulting from land fragmentation and authoritative control over natural resources, directly influencing access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

An essential facet highlighted in the study is the unequal impact of environmental changes on Palestinian women and men, shaped by distinct responsibilities and opportunities related to water and land management and household duties. Furthermore, the study underscores the influence of social and cultural stereotypes on gender disparities within WASH-related discussions and the environmental degradation catalysed by global climate change.

The primary goal of this study is to uncover and address the root causes of gender inequality in decision-making processes concerning WASH. It provides analyses of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in WASH services through a gender-inclusive lens, focusing on Area "C" in the West Bank. Specific objectives include exploring gender-related disparities in WASH services, assessing the capabilities of duty-bearers in responding to gender-specific needs, and identifying and addressing gender-based barriers and violence in the specified area.

The study's methodology encompasses a comprehensive desk review, followed by primary data collection through various methods such as focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, and FGDs with civil society organizations. Twenty-one¹ FGDs were conducted across diverse communities and governorates, while 10 in-depth interviews were held with decision-makers in the WASH sector, representing significant organizations. Additionally, two FGDs were conducted with civil society organizations and members of the WASH Cluster. The study design focused on three main themes: gender-specific needs and challenges, decision-making, roles and access to WASH facilities, and gender-based violence (GBV). The qualitative study spanned 11 communities in Area "C" in the West Bank, selected based on the WASH Vulnerability Map 2022 (Vulnerability Index), offering insights into gender relations and dynamics within rural and Bedouin communities. The study key findings focus on WASH challenges, women's decision-making involvement, and the pervasive issue of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

WASH Challenges in West Bank Communities

The study underscores the complex challenges of accessing water, specifically in Area "C" in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, revealing gender dynamics as pivotal. Women, often managing household tasks, face heightened workloads due to inadequate water, waste, and sanitation infrastructure. High water-related expenses disproportionately affect women, limiting resources for necessities. Political and

¹ The researcher encountered a social constraint that prevented the conduct of an additional Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with women in Furush Beit Dajan, a circumstance that is further detailed in the study.

legal barriers, including restrictions on groundwater well construction under Israeli occupation, further hinder women's access. Environmental changes affecting water sources impact women engaged in agriculture and livelihood activities. Solid waste management challenges also reveal intricate gender dynamics and the risks associated with improper waste disposal.

Women's Involvement in Decision-Making

The exploration of decision-making dynamics within the WASH domain uncovers nuanced gender influences on service access. While very few communities showcase women participating in decision-making, others position men as primary decision-makers, reflecting persistent traditional gender expectations. The research identifies varied perspectives on gender roles in water-related tasks, with women often limited by societal norms. Women's responsibilities in waste disposal and water transportation are compounded by inadequate infrastructure, posing challenges to health, hygiene, and well-being. Initiatives should address gender roles, practical and strategic needs, and power dynamics perpetuating disparities for sustainable and equitable community development and steadfastness. A comprehensive strategy is necessary, including capacity building and leadership training for women, focusing on leadership, decision-making, and technical skills related to WASH. The formation of women-led WASH committees can provide a platform for women to express their concerns and participate actively in decision-making processes. Advocacy for gender-sensitive policies at both local and national levels is crucial to supporting women's roles in WASH governance. Additionally, community awareness campaigns can help shift societal norms and underscore the importance of women's contributions, alongside men, to WASH decision-making. Ensuring that planning and consultation processes are inclusive allows for the integration of women's perspectives and needs into WASH projects. Collaborating with NGOs and international organizations can offer additional support and resources, while monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can assess the effectiveness of these initiatives. Lastly, facilitating women's access to resources, including financing, information, and technology, is vital for their effective engagement in WASH decision-making.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Overview

Distinct patterns and nuances emerge in exploring GBV across various Palestinian communities, reflecting the interplay of socio-political dynamics, community perceptions, and individual experiences. Commonalities include fear extending to external forces, such as the military occupation and settler violence, impacting daily lives. Instances of underreporting or normalization of violence are apparent, raising questions about the visibility and understanding of subtle forms of violence. Variances in perspectives between men and women highlight the need for comprehensive, gender-sensitive viewpoints. Risk factors include the impact of the Israeli occupation and settlements, the absence of water and safe sanitation facilities, and routine activities becoming potential risks when fear restricts women's access to essential services.

Consequences on Communities

The consequences for communities are severe, disrupting traditional livelihoods, causing economic distress, exacerbating food insecurity, and contributing to water scarcity. Settler attacks and the burning of waste engender a public health crisis. For women, heightened risks from settler attacks create constant fear and insecurity. The burden of burning waste falls disproportionately on women, amplifying their workload, impacting their health and hygiene, and limiting access to essential resources. Restricted engagement in WASH-related discussions perpetuates gender inequalities, limiting women's agency in decision-making processes. Furthermore, women are disproportionately affected by environmental consequences, with limited avenues for active participation.

In summary, the study calls for comprehensive interventions in WASH practices, recognizing gender disparities, and addressing the multifaceted risks faced by Palestinian communities, particularly women and girls. The urgent need for holistic strategies is evident in the intersectionality of WASH services, environmental challenges, gender dynamics, and community well-being.

Scope and Methodology of the Study

Access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services plays a pivotal role in the well-being and empowerment of individuals and communities. Gender relations and roles have historically exerted a significant influence on access to WASH knowledge, attitudes, and practices. In Area "C" of the West Bank, limited access to WASH facilities has a profound impact on household spending, health, hygiene, and school attendance in certain hard-to-reach areas, mostly for Bedouin communities. It is particularly evident that women and girls face unique threats and burdens associated with meeting their hygiene needs and managing household water, waste, and sanitation requirements to live with dignity.

In response to these gender-specific challenges within WASH services, PHG undertook a comprehensive gender-based analytical study. The study sought to inform PHG's programming, advocacy efforts, and broader humanitarian response. It aims to dissect the impact of social, economic, and political norms on gender equality, delve into the gendered dimensions of WASH-related services and environmental burdens, and uncover the root causes of gender inequality within the area of WASH service provision.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

This study holds paramount importance as it sheds light on the pressing challenges faced by Palestine, particularly in the context of WASH. The environmental and existential threats emanating from the prolonged "slow violence" associated with settler-colonialism and the military occupation have severe repercussions for WASH conditions. The fragmentation of land, coupled with authoritative control over natural resources, directly affects access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

The study underscores the unequal impact of environmental changes on Palestinian women and men, influenced by distinct responsibilities and opportunities related to land management and household duties. Importantly, it highlights how social and cultural stereotypes contribute to gender disparities in engaging with WASH-related discussions and environmental degradation caused by global climate change.

The study's primary goal was to uncover and address the root causes of gender inequality in decision-making processes related to WASH. It aimed to provide recommendations to dismantle normative barriers hindering women's participation in this domain. Additionally, the study sought to analyse the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in WASH services through a gender-inclusive lens, with a focus on Area "C" of the West Bank. The study had specific objectives, including exploring gender-related disparities in WASH services, assessing the capabilities of duty-bearers in responding to gender-specific needs, and identifying and addressing gender-based barriers and violence in the specified area.

Methodology

The study methodology employed for this study involved a combination of desk review and primary data collection methods, including focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, and FGDs with civil society organizations and members of the WASH Cluster. This section outlines the key components of the study methodology:

1. Desk Review

The study commenced with a comprehensive desk review that involved examining documents from the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG) and relevant literature, publications, reports, studies, research, and policy documents. The purpose was to establish a broad and interdisciplinary understanding of the gender profile in Area “C” in the West Bank. This included gathering information on demographic data, poverty and development indices, gender-specific cultural practices, and national policies related to gender equality. The desk review served as a foundational step, providing essential background information to inform subsequent data collection and analysis in the study.

2. Primary Data Collection

- a. Twenty-two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted across diverse communities and governorates, involving men, women, young people, and individuals with disabilities. The FGDs aimed to explore gender-specific aspects within the WASH sector, including needs, interests, capacities, roles, relations, risks, vulnerabilities, coping mechanisms, and power dynamics. Specific WASH needs for each group were examined, covering water access, sanitation facilities, and hygiene practices. The discussions also delved into the roles and responsibilities assigned to each gender in community management and decision-making regarding WASH services. Addressing power dynamics and their impact on gender equality in accessing WASH resources was a key focus. The FGDs aimed to identify existing mechanisms or strategies used by communities to cope with WASH-related challenges and vulnerabilities. The separate FGDs with distinct groups provided a comprehensive understanding of gender-specific dynamics within the WASH sector, capturing diverse perspectives and experiences. The selection of communities was based on the vulnerability index adopted by PHG. (FGD questions are available in Annex 1.)

Governorate	Community Name	Total number of population	No. of HH
Bethlehem	Za'tara	8500	1804
Jenin	Ad Damayra	600	127
Jericho	Fasayil al Fauqa	600	123
Jerusalem	Jaba'	301	59
Nablus	Furush Beit Dajan	723	154
Qalqilya	Arab al Khouli/ Wadi Qana	70	15
Ramallah	Ein Qiniya Bedouins - Wadi ad Dulum	72	16
Salfit	Wadi Qana	50	11
Tubas	Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a)	64	13
Hebron	Fuqeiqis	278	53
Tulkarm	Khirbet Jubara	313	67
	TOTAL	11571	2442

- b. A series of 10 in-depth interviews with decision-makers in the WASH sector, representing significant organizations like the Water Authority, Environment Quality Authority, Land Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, and other relevant entities involved in WASH service provision, have been conducted. The primary objectives of these interviews were to gain insights into the capacities of duty bearers in responding effectively to the needs of affected individuals regarding WASH services. They aimed to understand decision-makers' roles and responsibilities, their contributions to addressing gender-related issues, and their perspectives on gender-specific challenges and barriers in WASH services. Additionally, the interviews sought to assess decision-makers' awareness of gender dimensions in WASH, their understanding of root causes of gender inequality in this context, and their views on the effectiveness of current approaches with an exploration of potential areas for improvement. The questions used in these key informant interviews (KIIs) are detailed in Annex 3.
- c. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with civil society organizations (CSOs) and members of the WASH Cluster, complementing interviews with decision-makers. The primary objectives were to understand gender-specific aspects such as needs, capacities, roles, risks, and coping mechanisms identified by these stakeholders. The FGDs also aimed to explore their perspectives on the gender dimensions of WASH services, gather insights into existing practices and initiatives, and discuss potential gaps and challenges hindering gender-responsive interventions in the sector. The questions posed during the FGDs are detailed in Annex 2.

Study Design

During the study design phase, the following themes were identified as the focus of this study:

Theme 1: Gender-specific Needs and Challenges

Theme 2: Decision making, roles, and access to WASH facilities

Theme 3: Gender-based Violence (GBV)

This qualitative study was carried out in 11 communities situated across 11 governorates in Area "C" in the West Bank. Open-ended questions were employed during the interviews. The selection of these communities was a collaborative effort between the study team and the PHG team, with a focus on utilizing the WASH Vulnerability Map 2022 (Vulnerability Index) to illuminate gender relations and dynamics within rural and Bedouin communities.

Ethical Consideration

- a) The study design focused on establishing comfortable and safe spaces for participants. Careful attention was given to the provision of privacy within the discussion settings.
- b) Participants, both women and men, were empowered to decide the extent of information shared during mixed focus group discussions (FGDs). This approach respected participants' autonomy in controlling the disclosure of personal information.
- c) Stringent measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality of individual views expressed in FGDs. Reporting on mixed groups was conducted in a manner that shielded the identities of participants, safeguarding their perspectives with the utmost care.
- d) Prior to commencing fieldwork, comprehensive discussions addressed the ethical conduct of the study. Special emphasis was placed on handling domestic violence disclosures during discussions.

These sessions aimed to raise awareness, foster sensitivity, and establish ethical protocols for managing such disclosures.

- e) The study team thoroughly deliberated on the ethical implications and determined that there were no inherent risks associated with identifying study sites. This decision was made with a commitment to transparency and ethical responsibility.

Informed Consent

Before engaging in study discussions, meetings, or interviews, each participant was respectfully approached and sought explicit consent. The emphasis was on ensuring that participants willingly chose to be part of the analytical study activities.

Furthermore, participants were provided with detailed information about the confidentiality measures in place for the data collected from them. This transparent communication aimed to foster trust by assuring participants that their information would be handled with the utmost confidentiality.

Study Limitations and Challenges

The exploration of gender-specific challenges within the WASH sector in the most marginalized communities in Area "C" of the West Bank has revealed a number of complexities that shaped the study's framework. A significant challenge appeared with diverse cultural norms and expectations regarding gender roles across communities. While men in a community willingly participated in a focus group session, there was a collective refusal to permit the same researcher, a woman, to engage with the women in the same community. This scenario underscored the paramount importance of cultural sensitivity in conducting gender-related research, and the researcher ensured the study maintained a holistic perspective on gender-related issues while respecting community preferences.

Adding to this complexity, the study coped with limitations due to the community's unfamiliarity with discussions around women's roles in decision-making processes related to WASH access and use. This unfamiliarity is seemingly rooted in limited awareness, deeply ingrained traditional practices, or a historical absence of community dialogues on gender-related matters.

Moreover, the study encountered community members expressing discomfort when discussing less commonly addressed topics, introducing the potential for social desirability bias. Specifically, in the context of WASH access, discussions about gender-based violence might be unfamiliar due to cultural taboos or restraints. Recognizing this challenge, the researcher acknowledged the need for additional efforts to sensitize the community about the importance of the topic. As a strategic approach, the researcher selected a woman from a specific community and conducted an Individual In-Depth Interview (IDI) in a secure and confidential environment, noting that individuals were more reluctant to mention sensitive topics in individual settings.

In the midst of these challenges, a noteworthy disclosure unfolded: participants in some communities expressed that this was the first time they engaged in discussions related to WASH within their community. The study became a catalyst, motivating participants to delve into such conversations within their communities and beyond. This transformative impact highlights the potential of research not only to uncover challenges but also to spark crucial dialogues and catalyze change within communities. Fostering social acceptance, the study navigated these complexities with cultural insight and methodological care, recognizing that engaging participants in meaningful discussions contributes to untying the complicated dimensions of gender-specific challenges in the WASH sector.

Chapter One: Contextual background

Palestinian context: A brief

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form an integrated framework, with SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation being crucial for human health, dignity, and environmental sustainability. Achieving SDG 6 requires improvements in planning, capacity, and governance at national and local levels. Human rights to water and sanitation are interconnected with the environment and call for holistic, people-centered approaches, embodied in 'integrated water resources management' (IWRM). Empowering individuals through a human rights-based approach (HRBA) is essential to address disparities and ensure inclusive decision-making, aligning with the principle of 'leave no one behind' and contributing to sustainable water resource management².

In Palestine, an ongoing water crisis is being aggravated by a complex combination of factors, including prolonged conflict, water scarcity, climate change, and rapid population growth. These issues collectively contribute to the severe shortage of sustainable, clean, and safe water, as well as adequate sanitation facilities. The availability of safely managed water resources remains very low, with less than 40 percent of households having access to such services.³ This access varies significantly between regions, dropping to as little as 4 percent in the Gaza Strip and reaching 66.2 percent in the West Bank.

Compounding this situation, a statistic reveals that nearly one in every five households in Palestine relies on water sources contaminated with E. coli bacteria. The repercussions of this contamination extend beyond water-related health problems, affecting the overall well-being and quality of life of countless families. Moreover, 33 percent of children within Palestine lack access to safely managed sanitation services, a circumstance that further compounds the health risks posed by inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure.

CHALLENGES IN AREA "C"

The planning regime in Area "C" of the West Bank has been marked by a series of decisions that significantly shape the situation of Palestinian communities. Following the occupation of the West Bank by Israel in 1967, a distinct planning framework was established that has had far-reaching consequences for land use, development, and the overall well-being of Palestinian inhabitants.⁴ Israel assumed planning powers previously governed by the Jordanian Planning Law. These powers were restructured through

² The United Nations World Water Development (2019). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367650> (Accessed September 2023)

³ "Vulnerable Children and Communities in the State of Palestine Access." UNICEF State of Palestine, March 21, 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/sop/stories/vulnerable-children-and-communities-state-palestine-access>.

⁴ "Most Palestinian Plans to Build in Area C Not Approved." United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory, 2021. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/most-palestinian-plans-build-area-c-not-approved>.

military orders, which dissolved local and district planning committees representing the Palestinian population. Instead, the Higher Planning Council, comprising exclusively of Israeli officers, took charge. This shift in planning authority led to a concentration of power that undermined Palestinian input and influence in decisions impacting their communities.

The Israeli-imposed planning regime renders it nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits in Area “C”. This has dire consequences for housing, infrastructure, and overall development. Public or state land, crucial for community growth and public services, is disproportionately allocated to Israeli settlements or military purposes. At the same time, private Palestinian land is predominantly zoned as agricultural, where stringent construction restrictions are enforced.⁵ This systematic limitation on construction permits perpetuates a cycle of inadequate housing and infrastructure development.

During the early 1990s, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) approved a multitude of 'partial special outline plans' for various localities across the West Bank. These plans, however, were created with minimal or no consultation with Palestinian communities, perpetuating an exclusionary approach to planning. A striking instance is the coverage of only around 1% of Area “C” by a planning scheme approved by the ICA for Palestinian communities. As a result, many structures fall outside these plans' boundaries, leaving them vulnerable to demolition.

A stark contrast emerges between planning for Israeli settlements and Palestinian communities. Local outline plans approved for settlements encompass at least 8.5% of Area “C”, according to 2015 estimates by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).⁶

The approval rates for building permits in Area “C” for Palestinians are alarmingly low, standing at less than 3% between 2009 and 2016. This pattern underscores the discriminatory nature of the planning regime, disproportionately affecting Palestinian communities. Over 60% of the West Bank falls within Area “C”, an area largely under Israeli control, encompassing law enforcement, access, movement, and planning. The extent of control allows Israel to shape the spatial landscape and resources, which significantly impacts the lives of Palestinian residents.

The restrictive regime also involves the prohibition of Palestinian entry to nearly 30% of Area “C”, designated as 'firing zones' for military training. Inhabitants of these areas, approximately 6,200 Palestinians in 38 communities, face the grave risk of forcible transfer. This underscores the systematic displacement faced by Palestinian communities due to the imposition of military activities and limitations on their presence.

⁵ “West Bank Area C: Key Humanitarian Concerns - United Nations Office For ...” OCHA oPt, 2017. https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/area_c_key_humanitarian_concerns.pdf.

⁶ “Most Palestinian Plans to Build in Area C Not Approved.” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory, 2021. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/most-palestinian-plans-build-area-c-not-approved>.

In addition to housing and land constraints, water access and economic opportunities are severely impacted. Over 70% of communities located entirely or mostly in Area “C” lack connection to the water network, compelling them to rely on costly trucked water. This further exacerbates their vulnerability and financial burdens. The restriction of development opportunities in Area “C” has a profound impact on Palestinian GDP, which could potentially increase by 35% if restrictions were lifted .

Palestinian communities have encountered a great number of challenges when attempting to obtain building permits within the planning framework. Although theoretically, Israel allows limited construction in agricultural areas, the ICA more than often rejects Palestinian applications, citing non-compliance with conditions specified in the regional outline plans. This creates a cycle of restrictions on Palestinian development and growth.

Amid these challenges, Palestinian communities in Area “C” have embarked on drafting their own local outline plans since 2011. These plans aim to develop essential infrastructure and housing in alignment with community needs, as officially approved by the ICA. With support from the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Local Government and international donors, these plans involve extensive consultation with residents. However, despite high technical standards, only a small number have gained approval, leaving many in a state of limbo .

PALESTINE’S RELIANCE ON GROUNDWATER

Groundwater plays a crucial role as the primary source of fresh water supply in Palestine, with a significant focus on the West Bank. In this region, groundwater is derived from three major aquifers: the Western Aquifer, the North-eastern Aquifer, and the Eastern Aquifer⁷:

1. The Western Aquifer Basin is the largest among these aquifers. It has a sustainable annual yield estimated to be between 362-400 million cubic meters (MCM). However, a large portion of this aquifer's water is utilized by Israel, which extracts around 340-430 MCM per year, and occasionally exceeds 520 MCM per year. In contrast, Palestinians in 2012 consumed only 28 MCM from groundwater wells. The main aquifer system within this basin is comprised of the upper and lower Cenomanian aquifers.⁸
2. This aquifer has an estimated sustainable yield ranging from 100-145 MCM annually. However, Israel's usage surpasses this sustainable rate, with an extraction rate of about 103 MCM per year. Palestinians, on the other hand, used around 23 MCM from groundwater wells and springs in 2012.

⁷ “Water Scarcity and Health in Palestine Final - the Palestinian National ...” PNIPH , 2015.
https://www.pniph.org/images/research/pniph-who-water_report_final.pdf.

⁸ “Water Scarcity and Health in Palestine Final - the Palestinian National ...” PNIPH , 2015.
https://www.pniph.org/images/research/pniph-who-water_report_final.pdf.

3. All recharge areas for the Eastern Aquifer Basin are located within the West Bank, giving Palestinians the legal right to control the water resources without sharing them with Israel. Despite this right, Israel continues to extract around 50 MCM of water annually from this aquifer. Additionally, Israel draws 100 MCM per year from the Dead Sea springs. In contrast, Palestinian utilization in 2012 from groundwater wells and springs only amounted to approximately 53 MCM. The estimated sustainable yield from this basin ranges from 145 to 185 MCM.
4. The Gaza Strip solely relies on the Coastal Aquifer as its water source. This aquifer's recharge is severely limited, with an estimated yearly volume of 55-60 MCM. In 2012, Palestinians in Gaza used approximately 185 MCM from this aquifer.

The unsustainable rate of water extraction has led to significant challenges. For instance, over-pumping has caused the groundwater table to drop below sea level, resulting in the intrusion of saline water into many areas. This intrusion deteriorates the quality of available groundwater.

Even after the implementation of the Oslo Agreements, there remains a disparity in groundwater utilization between Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel. Palestinians are utilizing less than 14% of the groundwater resources, while Israel utilizes 86%. This discrepancy highlights the complex and contentious nature of water resource management in the region.

NATURAL RESOURCE CHALLENGES

The occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) faces a web of challenges in managing their natural resources, a situation exacerbated by a combination of factors including limited financial assets, water scarcity, deteriorating water quality, land and soil contamination, desertification, and air pollution.⁹ These challenges not only pose immediate threats to the environment but also intertwine with socioeconomic factors, making the effects of climate change more pronounced and critical.

The oPt grapples with a multitude of challenges when it comes to managing their natural resources sustainably. Financial constraints hinder the implementation of comprehensive resource management strategies, limiting investments in critical infrastructure and technologies. Water scarcity, a persistent issue in the region, is exacerbated by over-extraction from water sources and the contamination of the coastal aquifer, a vital water source for the Gaza Strip. Air pollution also negatively impacts both human health and the environment, compounding the challenges faced by Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The inability to access and manage natural resources sustainably and enforce environmental laws intensifies the threats posed by climate change. The high population growth rate, along with poverty and food insecurity, further intensify these challenges. The lack of proper resource management mechanisms

⁹ "Programme Cycle Needs Overview - United Nations Office for The..." OCHA oPt, 2023. https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/HNO_2023.pdf.

prevents effective climate change mitigation strategies, leaving vulnerable communities more exposed to its impacts.

The implications of these challenges are particularly severe in areas like Area “C” and regions near settlements, where Palestinians are denied access. Farmers are greatly impacted by this, as they face disruptions in their livelihoods and the consequent impacts on their families and communities.

The grim situation in the oPt has led to significant challenges in providing essential services to the population, especially children. Approximately 1.3 million children face constrained access to these services, straining the capacities of health and child protection service providers. Insufficient water supply to households, coupled with poor sanitation and limited public water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, puts around 1.36 million Palestinians at risk of waterborne diseases.

GENDER AND WASH

Gender disparities in accessing WASH services persist worldwide. There is a gender division challenge that cannot be ignored regarding WASH. Historically and culturally, women have been assigned responsibility for water collection, sanitation management, and hygiene maintenance within households and communities. This continuation of traditional gender roles creates barriers that restrict women's mobility, education, and participation in economic activities.

In Palestine, WASH facilities and water access are linked to gender-specific responsibilities undertaken by women. The availability of essential services, including WASH, is deeply limited for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These limitations exacerbate socio-economic challenges and elevate the risk of gender-based violence¹⁰. Women often endure a disproportionate responsibility for WASH-related activities due to their roles as primary caregivers within families. In many societies, women are expected to collect water and manage community-based sanitation facilities.¹¹ This allocation of tasks limits their educational and productive opportunities, particularly in underdeveloped regions. For example, a study shows that women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa walk up to 5 kilometers daily to collect water, resulting in not only socio-economic ramifications, as they limit their opportunities to further education and to participate in productive and leisure activities, but they also contribute to severe health problems such as back issues and water-borne diseases¹².

During emergencies, well-planned WASH programs can mitigate violence risks for affected populations. However, poorly designed programs that overlook gender dynamics can exacerbate gender-based violence (GBV), disproportionately affecting women and girls. For instance, young girls spending

¹⁰ “Gender & Wash Toolkit for Palestine - Global Shelter Cluster Report - Question of Palestine.” United Nations, 2018. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/gender-wash-toolkit-for-palestine-global-shelter-cluster-report/>.

¹¹ “Wash and Gender.” WASH and Gender | IWRM Action Hub, 2023. <https://iwrmactionhub.org/learn/iwrm-tools/wash-and-gender>.

¹² “Wash and Gender.” WASH and Gender | IWRM Action Hub, 2023. <https://iwrmactionhub.org/learn/iwrm-tools/wash-and-gender>.

significant time collecting water are at risk of missing school, limiting their educational prospects, and increasing their susceptibility to future GBV¹³.

The water crisis in Gaza exemplifies the socio-economic ramifications of inequitable WASH access. Israel's control over freshwater resources has left Palestinian communities with limited water access. Contaminated water, privatized supply, and inadequate infrastructure have resulted in health risks and financial burdens for Gazans. For example, many Gazans spend 33% of their annual income on water.¹⁴ Moreover, they are at increased risk for water borne diseases such as hepatitis and diarrhea. Their only supply of freshwater is the underground coastal aquifer, which has been badly damaged due to raw sewage seeping into the water supply, high levels of nitrates, and rising sea levels.

Stereotypical gender roles permeate Palestinian society, with these biases evident in the agricultural and water sectors. The assessment indicates that women are primarily responsible for domestic water management and small-scale agriculture, while men take on roles involving irrigation and large-scale livestock rearing. Legal frameworks such as the Personal Status Law reinforce these divisions, maintaining the subordination of women, even within the agriculture and water sectors¹⁵.

Gender sensitivity in water governance is insufficient. There is an absence of women's representation at higher water management levels, decreasing their participation in decision-making and resource management. The Palestinian Water Authority, for example, lacks a gender department. This said, discrepancies between policies and execution are existent, and gender-based indicators are lacking in the water sector. Furthermore, awareness of gender issues varies between governmental and non-governmental entities, with the latter being more aware of their significance.

Women's empowerment within the water sector is constrained. Differential quality training is provided to women and men in local communities, perpetuating traditional gender roles. While men are equipped with technical skills, women's training remains focused on small-scale agriculture and household water management, in alignment with their domestic roles.

The disparity in access to water sources between men and women is conspicuous, with men enjoying greater access. Inequity in water distribution occurs at two levels: between small-scale family plots and productive farms with groundwater wells, and through gender discrimination by water suppliers. Land ownership intensifies gender inequities, with most surveyed women lacking registered land. Inheritance often leads to women receiving unproductive and distant land, exacerbating obstacles to their access to water resources and perpetuating their poverty.

¹³ *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. GBV Guidelines*, 2015. https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/TAG-wash-08_26_2015.pdf.

¹⁴ "Is Israel Weaponizing Water in Palestine? | People & Power Documentary." YouTube, July 27, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSbnniboAXo>.

¹⁵ FAO. "Gender, Water, and Agriculture: Assessing the Nexus in Palestine." FAO, 2023. <https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/es/c/1644330/>.

Chapter Two: Unveiling Gender Dynamics in Palestine's WASH Sector through Organizations Perspectives

This chapter undertakes a comprehensive exploration grounded in a rapid review, policy and strategy analysis, and examination of reports concerning water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in Palestine. Specifically concentrating on the needs, services, and challenges prevalent in communities within Area "C", the chapter integrates insights obtained through interviews with key officials from governmental, public, and civil society organizations. Employing a methodology that combines document analysis with first-hand perspectives from stakeholders, the researcher endeavors to present an informed understanding of gender dynamics within the WASH sector. The aim is to illuminate critical aspects influencing the well-being of communities in Area "C" of the West Bank, Palestine.

A Glimpse: Who does what in the sector?

Since its establishment in 1994, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has encountered significant challenges in addressing environmental concerns, notably pollution resulting from the disposal of electronic waste by the military occupier in proximity to Palestinian communities. The PA confronts a formidable task due to the military occupier's utilization of the occupied territory as a dumping site, as outlined in a report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The report underscores the disposal of electronic waste from within the occupier's borders and illegal settlements, affecting areas near Palestinian communities in the West Bank¹⁶.

The Environmental Quality Authority (EQA)

To manage environmental affairs, the Environmental Quality Authority (EQA) plays a pivotal role, guided by legislation such as the Palestinian Environment Law (PEL), designed to safeguard the environment, public health, and biodiversity. The primary focal points of the PEL include the protection of public health and social welfare, alongside the conservation of ecologically sensitive areas, biodiversity, and the rehabilitation of environmentally compromised zones. The legislation also outlines penalties for any infringement of its provisions. The Ministry possesses the authority to halt activities violating the law for a maximum of two weeks, with the possibility of extension subject to a judicial order from the courts.

Adaptation needs in Palestine are increasingly pronounced as extreme events and gradual changes in climate contribute to a decline in water resource availability and a simultaneous surge in demand, driven by escalating temperatures. Balancing this demand poses challenges, potentially leading to reduced groundwater quantity with detrimental effects on ecosystems and soil health. The failure to meet rising demand could result in significant health impacts, including dehydration and heat stress among the population. In Palestine, the current scenario underscores the urgency of addressing water scarcity, with 97% of available water deemed undrinkable due to contamination of the over-pumped coastal aquifer.

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24349&LangID=E>

Furthermore, the quality of water resources in Palestine faces risks from runoffs following heavy rain events and floods. These events have the potential to contaminate water and food resources, posing health risks to the population. Additionally, floods can wreak havoc on various sectors of the economy, causing infrastructure damage and increasing the risk of landslides.

To address these pressing challenges, Palestine formulated its initial National Determined Contributions (NDC) in 2017, followed by an updated version in 2021, accompanied by detailed implementation action plans. These plans primarily target water treatment and conservation, improvements to water network infrastructure, and the enhancement of water source infrastructure. The specified targets serve as the foundation for five conditional actions. A key priority initiative centers around the construction and funding of a desalination plant, underscoring the imperative to secure international funding for a holistic approach to water resource management, extending beyond the identified sources detailed in the NDC Partnership Plan.

Nevertheless, while the NDC acknowledges the health impacts of waste management practices on local communities, including the direct impact on local communities' health and hygiene due to odors, pests, and diseases associated with waste. If waste is currently left close to residential areas, women, who often bear the primary responsibility for waste disposal through burning, especially in Area "C", might be disproportionately affected. In the water sector, while the NDC mentions health impacts like dehydration and heat stress, it misses an opportunity to explore gender-specific challenges. A gender-sensitive NDC would need to incorporate women's perspectives in decision-making processes and address their unique roles in water resource management at the community and household level. The health sector highlights potential impacts on disease vectors without considering women's roles in preventing and managing diseases. To this end, recognizing and addressing women's specific roles in disease prevention, ensuring that training programs reach most marginalized and WASH vulnerable communities, more specifically in Area "C".

The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA)

Established by Presidential Decree No. 90 of 1995 and further defined by the Water Act (2) of 1996, the Palestinian Water Authority operates with independent legal status and a dedicated budget, overseen by the President of the Palestinian National Authority. The authority's primary goal is to ensure the comprehensive and sustainable management of water resources, emphasizing the balance between quantity and quality to meet the needs of the Palestinian people for sustainable development.

Subsequently, Water Law (3) of 2002 delineates the framework and levels of the water sector in Palestine, aiming to regulate service provision, protect water sources, and allocate responsibilities across organizational, operational, and political levels. Empowered by Water Act No. 3 of 2002, the Palestinian Water Authority manages and regulates the water sector, defining its relationships with official bodies, private enterprises, and local government authorities.

With the enactment of Law No. 14 of 2014, the authority's powers were clarified, reducing overlaps and reinforcing its role in managing, developing, and protecting water resources. The law emphasizes

principles of integrated and sustainable resource management to enhance capacity, improve water quality, and safeguard against pollution, thereby advancing water services.

The mission of the Palestinian Water Authority is to act as a public institution dedicated to managing, developing, and protecting water sources. Its vision centers on ensuring sustainable water sources that meet the development and essential needs of the Palestinian people while prioritizing environmental protection and contributing to societal development goals.

In a pivotal individual interview with the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA)¹⁷, the representative delineated the authority's extensive responsibilities, underscoring their pivotal role in strategic planning for all regions in the West Bank and Gaza. The PWA is entrusted with developing master plans, formulating legislative frameworks, and overseeing comprehensive regulation of the water sector. Collaborative ventures with organizations such as We World and GIZ were emphasized, involving the implementation of master plans tailored to address specific water-related needs in distinct regions.

Ongoing projects were discussed, including partnerships with Action Against Hunger in the South of the West Bank, where project recommendations are meticulously aligned with regional priorities. The challenges encountered in designing projects for Area "C" were underscored, considering the implementation complexities in these areas, including potential demolitions by the Israeli Authority. Flexibility in adhering to project specifications, especially during unconventional working hours, was highlighted as crucial for ensuring project success.

“Our water distribution is extended to various communities, either through the PWA network, municipal systems, or micro-networks. The provision of water through tanker trucks to geographically challenging areas. However, we acknowledge the financial burden on communities relying on tanker deliveries due to varying pricing and the necessity of alternative water access methods”.

The interview shed light on the diverse methods employed for water distribution, encompassing the PWA network, municipal systems, and micro-networks. The provision of water through tanker trucks to geographically challenging areas was acknowledged, yet concerns were raised about the financial burden on communities relying on tanker deliveries due to varying pricing and the imperative need for alternative water access methods.

Israeli restrictions, such as limitations on drilling groundwater wells and the reduction of available water from shared aquifers, were identified as significant challenges. The Oslo Accords were cited as an impediment, constraining Palestinian access to a substantial portion of water resources. This underscores the critical role of water in daily life and the impediments created by Israeli policies, impacting women's daily activities and emphasizing the importance of addressing water-related gender issues.

PWA expressed concerns about water supply issues from Mekorot, Israel's national water company, highlighting how Israel's control over water quantity serves as a tool to exert pressure on Palestinians.

¹⁷ Interview with Majeda Alwanah, Palestinian Water Authority, 4 October 2023, Ramallah

Despite Israel's advanced desalination capabilities, there is a reduction in water allocation to Palestinian areas, reflecting intricate political complexities.

Regarding sanitation policies in Palestine, PWA emphasized the rarity of open defecation, which exists only in some Bedouin communities. Communal bathrooms were highlighted as prevalent, ensuring widespread access to sanitation facilities across the country. Drawing a positive comparison with India's efforts to eradicate open defecation, PWA asserted that Palestine has made commendable progress in sanitation infrastructure.

Nevertheless, PWA underscored the need for wastewater treatment, citing initiatives such as the construction of wastewater treatment plants in various locations. Collaborations with European Union-funded projects, exemplified by the initiative in Ramallah, demonstrated PWA's commitment to enhancing wastewater treatment capabilities. The interviewee discussed the challenges faced in wastewater treatment in Area "C" due to Israeli restrictions and the necessity for permits. The interview concluded with insights into ongoing efforts to build a wastewater treatment plant in Jericho, pending Israeli approval.

The discussion also encompassed water supply challenges, emphasizing the role of Mekorot and its control over water quantities supplied to Palestinians. The need for strategic planning, the construction of new facilities, and the initiative to build a wastewater treatment plant in Jericho were highlighted. Challenges such as potential financial penalties and difficulties in transporting treated water across borders were acknowledged.

The PWA representative provided an overview of organizations involved in WASH services, highlighting collaborations with German, European Union, Japanese, and Australian funders. Impactful organizations such as Oxfam, ECDC, and We Effect were specifically mentioned. The interview emphasized the importance of gender inclusion in decision-making processes and community engagement, citing examples of initiatives involving women in community projects.

The conversation extended to societal norms and acceptance, particularly regarding the involvement of women in decision-making processes. The representative of PWA highlighted the importance of ongoing efforts to integrate women into local councils and the significance of addressing cultural norms to ensure greater gender inclusivity in the water sector.

The Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON)

PENGON assumes a pivotal role in addressing environmental and climate change issues, actively advocating for environmental justice, documenting violations, and compiling fact sheets on Israeli transgressions related to water, land, and natural resources. Recognizing the intersectionality of environmental and gender issues, PENGON places emphasis on both aspects in its initiatives.

Dedicated to studying the impacts of climate and environmental changes, PENGON conducts targeted studies and gathers environmental complaints from the West Bank. The gathered information is utilized for tailored advocacy campaigns. Women play an integral role in the network's initiatives, with their voices

prioritized in designing campaigns and community-level activities addressing issues such as waste disposal, water scarcity, and energy.

Tailoring projects to address women's needs, PENGON engages directly with affected women, such as those impacted by landfills or water shortages. In the realm of renewable energy, the network ensures a gender-inclusive perspective, exploring the impact of solar cells on women's lives. Notably, PENGON actively promotes women's leadership in clean energy, earning recognition in international competitions.

A discussion with the PENGON representative¹⁸ delved into existing policies and legal frameworks related to gender equality in the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector. The interviewee highlighted a critical issue, expressing that gender considerations in national policies and plans are often challenging to implement effectively due to the varied and pressing needs of many communities, particularly those in need of more attention.

The representative noted that the social gender dimension within national policies and plans faces obstacles in terms of practical application, particularly in areas related to environmental policies and water management. The discrepancy arises from the diverse nature of communities, where the unique needs and challenges of each locality may not be fully addressed by overarching policies. For instance, in the context of environmental policies and water management, the interviewee emphasized that the one-size-fits-all approach often falls short of addressing the specific gender-related challenges faced by communities, especially those in more vulnerable or marginalized circumstances. The representative expressed the need for a more nuanced and localized approach to policy implementation, considering the unique socio-cultural, economic, and environmental contexts of different communities.

The conversation shifted towards decision-making processes and gender mainstreaming within the WASH services arena. PENGON acknowledged that community participation is often weak or absent, and civil society organizations play a crucial role in representing the community's interests. Environmental NGOs, such as the Palestinian Hydrologists Group, the Rural Women's Development Society (RWDS), and the Palestinian Green Buildings Council (GBC), were highlighted for their direct involvement in advocating for women's rights and addressing gender-related aspects of WASH services.

Moreover, legal institutions focusing on human rights, such as Al-Haq, were deemed essential stakeholders. The strong legal protection of water rights, coupled with a human rights perspective, is crucial, especially in the context of Palestine, where the discourse on WASH rights often involves legal and human rights considerations.

Additionally, specialized women's organizations and legal institutions are usually invited to training sessions, although they may not always be active participants. The interviewee explained that sometimes these organizations may not fully benefit from alliances or networks due to a lack of interest or prioritization in participating in this specific field. Furthermore, the presence of multiple alliances covering

¹⁸ Interview with Abeer Butmeh, PENGON, 17.10.2023, Ramallah

similar purposes might lead to organizations choosing based on priority and alignment with their objectives.

When questioned about whether the issue is a priority for women's organizations, the interviewee highlighted the increasing global priority of environmental issues. The growing global focus on the environment has led to increased funding and projects targeting women and environmental and WASH-related initiatives. Consequently, women's organizations would need to be more actively working on WASH-related initiatives, aligning with the evolving priorities and opportunities.

PENGON emphasized the importance of reflecting women's demands in policy matters, underlining that true reflection can only be achieved through active participation. In the development of water policies, there is often a lack of genuine involvement from civil society organizations. Additionally, when policies and strategies are implemented in programs or projects, the execution mechanisms may not align with the needs of women. For instance, mobile bathrooms were cited as a solution that did not adequately address the needs of women.

To overcome these challenges, participatory methodologies must be utilized to ensure that the demands and insights of women are reflected in policies, strategies, and the execution of projects. In relation to gender-specific challenges and barriers in the provision of WASH services, PENGON identified the Israeli occupation as the primary and overarching challenge. The lack of sovereignty over resources and land due to the occupation significantly impedes proposed solutions, rendering them difficult to implement effectively. Other challenges included financial constraints and the absence of certain technical aspects in the proposed solutions. PENGON highlighted the social dimension and societal acceptance of women's participation as a significant barrier. The prevailing lack of trust in women's abilities and their exclusion from decision-making processes contribute to the perpetuation of gender-specific challenges.

Collaboration and partnership

PENGON operates as a collaborative network comprising 15 environmental organizations. Each organization contributes its expertise and resources to address various regional issues. PENGON actively communicates with adversely affected communities in Palestine, fostering strong connections with grassroots organizations over the years. The network collaborates with legal entities concerning environmental violations and Palestinian rights. Internationally, PENGON is a member of the Habitat International Coalition, focusing on housing rights and climate justice, incorporating social and gender justice into their work.

Successful Collaborations

A notable example involves the Iron Gate community in the northern Jordan Valley. Facing water access challenges due to a cut-off by the Israeli authorities, PENGON successfully filed a case against the occupation, resulting in the restoration of water supply through a new pipeline.

Another successful collaboration is exemplified by the Women's Union in Beit Sahour. This comprehensive centre integrates environmental issues into its agenda, with organic farming, aquaponics, and solar energy initiatives. The network supported their solar energy project, showcasing

the success of women leading an environmentally conscious centre with multiple initiatives, including water conservation practices.

The WASH Cluster in the State of Palestine, initiated in January 2009, serves as the central coordinating body for WASH humanitarian planning and response in the West Bank and Gaza. Comprising national NGOs, international NGOs, UN agencies, international organizations, and educational institutions collaborating with local authorities, the WASH Cluster boasts a partnership network that has grown to include 51 organizations as full members, associates, and observers by 2021. This collaborative effort ensures streamlined coordination of WASH plans and interventions, preventing duplication of efforts and maximizing program integration. In our analytical study, we conducted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with representatives from the WASH Cluster to gather valuable feedback and insights concerning their role in advancing WASH services in marginalized areas in Area "C" of the West Bank, with a particular focus on women's involvement in WASH services. The aim was to comprehensively understand their contributions, challenges faced, and strategies employed in promoting WASH initiatives in these specific contexts.

The conversation delved into the intricate web of policies, regulations, and procedures governing WASH provisions in communities within Area "C" of the West Bank. Reflecting on existing laws, a male participant expressed, *"We don't have policies in Palestine; we have regulations for gender and WASH."* A female participant highlighted a critical gap in the water law guidelines, stating, **"The existing guidelines don't consider gender specifically or children either."**

The discussion escalated to the challenges imposed by the occupation, governmental limitations, and decreased funding affecting the WASH sector in Area "C". A male participant emphasized, *"The government has created a multi-sectoral approach not only from the combination of other sectors. The control from the Israeli side is not helping us achieve the planned project. The limitation of funds creates even more restrictions."*

The FGD touched upon the multi-sectoral approach outlined in governmental policies, acknowledging ambitious goals yet hindered by Israeli control and financial constraints. Despite the presence of strategies and policies, practical implementation faces significant restrictions. A participant explained, *"If we want to talk about water, you need to talk about the Israeli side having new groundwater wells and connections. As your ambitions for the project are restricted by the occupation."*

As the discussion unfolded, participants shared insights into their advocacy efforts, urging donors to support interventions in demolished areas and raising awareness at international forums. A female participant stated, *"We advocate with the donors to allow us to help those areas that are demolished so that they don't stop funding."*

Gender-specific interventions were a focal point, with examples cited from projects targeting schools and communities. A male participant highlighted, *"We work on many levels; we work on the school level as well as the community level. That's because we try to provide WASH facilities, for example, we try to provide water, sanitation, and the use of toilets for both sexes."*

The FGD concluded with reflections on success factors, including the necessity of building trust, motivating inclusion of both males and females, and creating community awareness. Participants highlighted the evolving nature of mentalities over time and the importance of aligning interventions with the community's needs. Despite the challenges, the dialogue showcased collaborative efforts to address WASH issues, with a commitment to gender equality and community-driven solutions.

Gender specific challenges

The gender-specific challenges within the WASH sector in Palestine reveal a significant lack of awareness among decision-makers. This deficiency is evident in the policies that are formulated, reflecting the inadequate understanding of decision-makers. The need for targeted awareness programs aimed at decision-makers is emphasized to enhance their understanding of the gender dimensions of WASH. Drawing parallels with environmental sector issues, the participants highlighted the substantial weaknesses in the judiciary, legal systems, and environmental concerns. The legal frameworks surrounding environmental matters are often lacking, with minimal attention given to the pivotal role of women in this sector.

The participants in key individual interviews further expressed concerns about the significant gaps in the judiciary's focus on environmental issues and the neglect of recognizing the specific needs of women. There is an urgent national priority to address these issues and fulfil the needs of decision-makers in this sector. The parallel drawn with environmental challenges and legal frameworks underscores the need for increased attention to the environmental sector as a whole, emphasizing the importance of women's roles and their neglected needs.

In efforts to address these challenges, an environmental justice program has been initiated by PENGON. The program aims to raise governmental awareness about the environmental sector's importance, given the limitations of the government budget and the weak and inadequate environmental laws. The initiative advocates for an increase in government attention, recognizing the deficiencies in the legal framework and emphasizing the need for stricter enforcement and a dedicated environmental police force. This program seeks to reduce environmental crimes and elevate the significance of environmental concerns in decision-making processes.

Chapter Three: Unveiling Gender Dynamics in Palestine's WASH Sector through the Communities Perspectives

This analytical study delves into the intricate relationship between gender dynamics and access to WASH services in Area "C" of the West Bank, occupied Palestine. Adopting a qualitative approach and amplifying the voices of women, the study transcends mere insights, providing a comprehensive view of disparities. The narratives of women and men, contextualized by their socio-economic and demographic profiles, elucidate the challenges and opportunities within the WASH sector.

A thorough analysis categorizes the challenges—political, legal, social, cultural, and economic—that impede women's participation in decision-making related to WASH services. The study not only highlights these encounters but also transforms them into a source of hope by presenting opportunities and enabling factors that hold the potential for transformative change. The final section furnishes recommendations dignified to guide policy and programming, with the overarching goal of fostering gender equality within the WASH sector.

Integrating qualitative narratives, this human-centric exploration traverses various governorates and communities, encompassing Bethlehem (Za'tara), Jenin (Ad Damayra), Jericho (Fasayil al Fauqa), Jerusalem (Jaba'), Nablus (Furush Beit Dajan), Qalqilya (Arab al Khouli/ Wadi Qana), Ramallah (Ein Qiniya Bedouins - Wadi ad Dulum), Salfit (Wadi Qana), Tubas (Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a)), Hebron (Fuqeiqis), and Tulkarm (Khirbet Jubara).

Chapter three of the research delves into the gendered dimensions of WASH in Palestinian communities, through three main themes. The first theme examines gender-specific needs and challenges, highlighting how societal norms and traditional roles influence WASH responsibilities, with women primarily managing household tasks and men focusing on external infrastructure. This section also discusses the disproportionate impact of water scarcity and inadequate sanitation on women.

The second theme explores decision-making and access to WASH facilities, revealing varied dynamics across communities. In some areas, women participate in WASH decisions, while in others, their involvement is limited, pointing to the need for gender-sensitive approaches in WASH planning.

The third theme addresses gender-based violence (GBV) and its intersection with WASH, underscoring the vulnerability of women and girls due to inadequate and unsafe access to WASH services. The study emphasizes the importance of considering GBV in WASH programs to ensure safety and dignity for all, particularly women and girls, and advocates for integrated gender considerations in WASH policies to promote equity and gender equality.

Theme 1: Gender-specific Needs and Challenges in the WASH domain

1.1. WADI QANA | SALFIT

The insightful discussions in Wadi Qana, situated in the northern part of the West Bank, explore gender-specific needs and challenges related to (WASH). A group of resilient women and men shared narratives, reflecting a profound connection to their ancestral land and heritage, providing a rich backdrop for understanding their experiences.

In terms of gender-specific roles, societal perceptions and social practices were revealed. While women confirmed that their role is to clean and men do not clean, men describe their multi-layered roles, emphasizing household needs, jobs, livestock, agriculture, and land preservation. One man noted, *"Our role revolves around meeting household needs. Some of us engage in jobs, and upon return, we tend to livestock and agriculture"*. This traditional division of labour emphasises the persistence of gender norms within the community.

As for gender-based challenges, women emphasize their connection to spring water, which they brought through water pumps with their own funds and set up improvised water tanks for daily use, illustrating the community's reliance on shared resources. One woman said, *"We rely on spring water, which is pumped to tanks above the houses for drinking and daily use. Meanwhile, for irrigating trees and plants, men isolate and create canals for the water from the spring to reach the land"*. Men actively participate in water channelling by creating canals for irrigation, demonstrating a collaborative effort to sustain vital agricultural practices.

The political landscape influences waste management, with occupation authorities seizing waste containers, therefore disrupting sanitation practices. *"Although the municipality provided waste containers, the occupation authorities seized them, asserting control over the valley"*, as stated by one woman. In 1982, Wadi Qana was designated as a natural reserve by the Israeli occupation. This area has designated legal restrictions, including regulations that limit construction and development within the area. As a result, development projects, such as building infrastructure for water management, face significant obstacles. One man said, *"The occupation has considered Wadi Qana a natural reserve since 1982, and therefore, according to the occupation law, it is forbidden to place a stone on a stone [an Arabic saying that means any construction]"*. For example, during the years 2013 and 2014, the community constructed a water canal for irrigation purposes. However, the occupation demolished this canal, indicating that any development or alteration of the landscape, even for essential purposes like water management, can be met with opposition and enforcement by the occupation.

Life in Wadi Qana is also challenged by the introduction of wild animals by Israeli military forces and settlers, causing damage to crops and posing physical harm to the community's livelihood, food sovereignty, and economic conditions. One of the women participants confirmed, *"Political restrictions*

label Wadi Qana as a natural reserve, limiting any form of development, and wild animals like pigs and rabbits damage our crops and pose physical harm."

Moreover, in the absence of formal water services, the community has been forced to rely on alternative sources, specifically the water from springs in Wadi Qana. However, these sources prove to be inadequate to meet the diverse needs of the community, their animals, and their agricultural lands. This underscores the profound limitations of relying on natural sources alone. Reliance on such sources can lead to water scarcity, hinder agricultural productivity, and exacerbate the challenges faced by the community.

Economic hardships surface due to restrictions on marketing agricultural products, impacting the community's income and economic stability. Restricted access forces women to acquire necessities from distant areas, illustrating the far-reaching effects of economic constraints. *"Who would walk three kilometers to buy a kilogram of lemons or oranges?"* asked one woman.

Respectively, women bear a disproportionate burden, expending more effort due to water access challenges, impacting daily routines. Economic constraints compel some underprivileged families to sleep on relatives' rooftops due to building limitations, symbolizing the limitations on their land. One woman stated, *"I'm willing to walk a kilometer to burn waste rather than place it in the containers of the occupation authority"*. Another man confirmed, *"There are not enough sanitary facilities in Wadi Qana, and some women have to go to Deir Istiya to fulfill their needs or use communal units. Additionally, the drainage to the ground is inadequate, aside from the settlements' sewage that overflows onto us from time to time."*


The insights made by men and women imply that women shoulder a disproportionate burden in waste management, expending additional effort due to challenges in water access. This increased effort likely involves tasks such as waste disposal, emphasizing the gendered nature of these responsibilities.

With regards to sanitation facilities, all participants confirmed that both men and women are affected by the lack of proper bathroom facilities; an acknowledgment of the shared challenges faced by the community. However, the observation that women are slightly more affected, particularly when it comes to bathroom facilities, highlights the nuanced and gender-specific impacts of inadequate sanitation infrastructure, as confirmed by one man, *"Sanitation and use of the bathroom are more embarrassing for women."* It was further asserted by women participants that bathroom facilities can be especially challenging for women during menstruation. Without access to clean and private restrooms, managing menstrual hygiene becomes difficult and embarrassing, especially for girls and young women. This can lead to feelings of shame and discomfort, potentially affecting women's confidence and participation in daily activities. Additionally, a lack of proper sanitation facilities can pose health risks for women. Insufficient hygiene facilities can lead to urinary tract infections, discomfort, and other health issues, further contributing to their embarrassment and distress.

In the face of adversity, the community showcases resilience through ingenuity. Initiatives include creating primitive water reservoirs, purchasing pumps, and discreetly establishing sanitation units. Strategies to

improve infrastructure face challenges, such as uprooting planted trees and the destruction of shelters. One man said, *"I planted trees despite uprooting. Another time, I built a shelter, only to see it destroyed by settlers and Israeli military forces"*.

Within the context of menstrual hygiene management, women in the community articulated challenges related to menstrual hygiene, with women emphasising the contemporary use of sanitary pads and the importance of proper waste disposal practices, which are lacking in the community. The potential hazards associated with burning menstrual waste, especially disposable pads, are due to the emission of toxic substances such as dioxins and unpleasant odors¹⁹. In the context of Wadi Qana's community, where there is a practice of burning menstrual pads, careful consideration is needed since the act of burning pads containing chlorine bleach may lead to the release of carcinogenic dioxins, further emphasizing the potential health concerns.



"Today, everyone uses sanitary pads, and they are disposed of through waste that is burned by the community, mostly by women themselves".

(One Woman, Wadi Qana)

Climate change has emerged as a significant factor with profound implications for various aspects of community life, particularly in agriculture, water resources, and sheep farming. The impact of climate change is discerned through the perspectives of both women and men in Wadi Qana. For example, women underscore the adverse effects of climate change on crops and trees, emphasizing the vulnerability of the community. Their concerns extend to rising prices and altered consumption habits, signalling the broader socio-economic repercussions of environmental shifts. Conversely, men provide insights into the detrimental effects of increasing temperatures on critical components such as water sources, agriculture, and animal productivity. Additionally, the inadequacy of solar energy units in the area, despite being funded by supporting institutions, presents challenges. This insufficiency is exacerbated by the lack of electricity connections resulting from policies imposed by the Israeli occupation authority, further complicating the community's efforts to address the impacts of climate change.

1.2. HUMSA AL-FAWQA (AL BQAI'A) | TUBAS, NORTHERN JORDAN VALLEY

In the arid region of Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a) in the northern Jordan Valley, the residents face significant challenges in accessing a reliable water supply. The absence of basic water infrastructure forces them to rely on water trucking, which becomes more complicated due to their remote location and poor road infrastructure. The residents of Humsa are facing significant challenges in obtaining a reliable water supply. Their situation highlights a lack of basic water networks, which can have serious implications for their daily lives and well-being. Women mentioned the lack of a water network, high trucked water prices compared to piped water prices, and the distance water has to travel. A female sociology graduate

¹⁹ Sanitation for Millions' Approach towards Menstrual Waste Management : chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/Sanitation%20for%20Millions%E2%80%99%20Approach%20towards%20Menstrual%20Waster%20Management.pdf (accessed November 2023)

described the water situation, stating, *"We only get water through tanker trucks, and the sanitation has improved with the installation of bathrooms, but in the past, the absence of water had a negative impact on cleanliness"*.

Relying on water trucking becomes a necessity, but this approach is hindered by several factors, including the community's remote location and poor road infrastructure. Without a proper water system, the residents are forced to endure challenges that impact their daily lives and overall well-being. Access to clean water for drinking, sanitation, and livelihood activities becomes a distant aspiration. The already precarious situation in Humsa is exacerbated by the Israeli occupation and the restrictions it imposes on movement. The closure of the Atouf gate, a vital Israeli access point to the area, severely limits the delivery of essential supplies, including water trucks. One man confirmed: *"Sometimes the water tankers can't be delivered because the Israeli occupation closes the gate of Atouf, a necessary gate to enter the area."*

This imposed barrier further isolates the community, making their struggle for water resources even more arduous. The geopolitical dynamics of the occupation compound the humanitarian crisis, entwining water scarcity with broader issues of justice and self-determination. Moreover, the presence of settlers adds another layer of complexity to the situation. The confiscation of water trucks by settlers illustrates how external forces can directly impact the community's access to resources. One man said: *"The settlers confiscated the water trucks and kept them for several days. We had to buy water trucks because the owners of the trucks refused to deliver them to the area for fear of the settlers"*.

The fear instilled by these actions leads to water truck owners refusing to deliver to the area, further restricting the residents' access to water. This dependence on external services makes the community susceptible to manipulation and intimidation, robbing them of their agency, dignity, and basic human rights. These challenges intertwine with broader geopolitical dynamics, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and infringing upon the community's right to access clean water.

The absence of adequate wastewater management infrastructure constitutes a significant challenge for the residents of Humsa. The lack of a sewage network and proper sanitation facilities contributes to an unsanitary living environment. As one resident pointed out, *"Of course, there is no sewage network."* While certain organizations have sought to address this issue by installing bathrooms and cesspits near the tents, the constraints on cesspit size and the potential threat of equipment confiscation by settlers create persistent challenges. The residents' reliance on hand-digging, necessitated by these limitations, not only compromises their dignity but also exposes them to unsanitary conditions.

The absence of a solid waste system, coupled with partial bathroom facilities provided by certain organizations, further compounds their living conditions and has wide-ranging implications for their overall well-being. The provision of bathrooms and a sinkhole by an external organization has brought some relief to the residents of Humsa, addressing a critical aspect of their sanitation needs. One man noted: *"An institution whose name I do not remember provided bathrooms and a cesspit for all the tents, and it was close to the tent because we did not have bathrooms and we were suffering, especially women,*

during the harvest season or the planting season, the lands were full of people, the women had to leave fetching for bathrooms, there was no cleanliness, and the children were getting sick."

The placement of these facilities near the tents has mitigated the challenges faced, particularly by women, during busy agricultural seasons. The close proximity of these facilities to the tents has alleviated the difficulties faced by women during busy agricultural seasons. The presence of adequate sanitation facilities allows women to continue their daily activities without having to leave the fields, thus reducing disruptions and ensuring their comfort.

The cesspits are inadequate, however, according to the residents. This reflects a dire situation that affects sanitation and hygiene. One woman confirmed: *"The problem of the waste pit is that it is small, it gets worn-out every once in a while, and it is forbidden to dig. If the settlers see a drilling machine, they confiscate it. We have to dig with our hands"*.

Moreover, the limited size of the cesspits exacerbates the sanitation challenges, as they fill up quickly and require constant emptying. This inadequacy not only disrupts daily life but also poses health risks due to potential overflows and improper waste disposal. Additionally, the settlers' threat of confiscating equipment and the prohibition on digging further exacerbate the difficulties faced by the community, causing more physical, mental, health, and economic challenges. This situation leaves the residents in a vulnerable position, unable to address their sanitation needs and maintain their dignity. Finally, the necessity to resort to hand-digging due to constraints imposed by settlers strips residents of their dignity and exposes them to unsanitary conditions. This not only affects individual well-being but also undermines the sense of community pride and cultural identity.

Concerns extend to solid waste disposal. The practice of burning waste is a prevalent disposal option in Humsa due to the absence of proper solid waste services. While it provides a temporary solution, burning waste has negative environmental and health consequences. The pollutants released during incineration can impact hygiene, especially for women, girls, children and animals, with one woman sharing, *"We dispose of solid waste by burning, which affects my health as a cancer patient."* Another woman added, *"Burning is criticized by the Israeli environmental authority as it pollutes the environment."* A third woman expressed concerns about burning, saying, *"Not all materials are burnable, and it dirties the house and affects children."*

These challenges had profound effects on daily life and well-being. One woman emphasized, *"We talk about everything but well-being. What well-being are we talking about when basic human needs are not met? We live in constant fear of settlers"*. Another woman highlighted the lack of basic services, saying; *"No basic services with no water. Solar energy is insufficient, and dust from the sun burns our faces. What well-being are we talking about?"*.

"WE TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING BUT WELL-BEING. WHAT WELL-BEING ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN BASIC HUMAN NEEDS ARE NOT MET?"

(WOMAN PARTICIPANT, HUMSA)

The community's experience of burning trash as a disposal method, followed by the occupation's intervention under the guise of environmental preservation, presents a complex and multifaceted challenge. One man stated: *"We burn it [trash] but sometimes the occupation raids the area under the pretext of preserving the environment"*. Occupation-led raids or interventions disrupt the community's already limited solid waste management strategies. Such disruptions can lead to immediate challenges in waste disposal and, in turn, impact the daily lives of the residents, causing frustration and hardship. These pollutants can settle on surfaces, including food sources, water sources, and living spaces, impacting hygiene. Breathing in polluted air and coming into contact with residue can lead to various health problems, particularly respiratory issues and allergies. One man confirmed: *"Incineration residues with an effect on animals, especially in materials that do not deviate"*.

Children are particularly susceptible to the negative health effects of burning solid waste. Their developing respiratory systems and immune systems make them more vulnerable to the pollutants released during incineration. Exposure to these pollutants during their formative years can have long-term health implications. Also, animals, both domestic and wild, are affected by the pollutants released from burning waste. Airborne pollutants can impact the health of animals, disrupting the ecosystem and further straining the relationship between humans and their environment.

Regarding strategies to overcome challenges, efforts have been made to communicate with local authorities and institutions to address the basic needs of the community in Humsa. Such attempts represent a proactive step towards finding solutions and improving the living conditions of the residents. One woman affirmed: *"There are attempts to communicate with the authorities and with local institutions to provide at least basic needs. There was a delegation that visited the area. We asked for the provision of a caravan to improve living conditions and ensure access to water and we're waiting."*

The lack of response from authorities and local institutions presents a significant challenge for the community. The absence of timely communication can be disheartening and cause frustration. This situation highlights the power imbalance between marginalized communities and the institutions responsible for addressing their needs. The inability to secure essential resources such as access to water impacts the community's overall well-being, especially in terms of health, sanitation, and quality of life.

1.3. KHIRBET JBARA | TULKARM, NORTHERN WEST BANK

In the village of Khirbet Jubara, the community's access to water and sanitation services presents a mix of experiences and challenges. The village of Khirbet Jubara is experiencing expansion, resulting in new houses being built over a wider area. While some residents have 24-hour water access through groundwater wells and water trucking, the local council faces challenges in extending water networks to the new houses due to their remote locations. One man said, *"We have a groundwater well, a water trucking for distributing water to the area, the water is 24 hours a day, it reaches the houses, and the*

village sells water to the neighbouring villages". The well grants an uninterrupted supply that nurtures lives and livelihoods alike.

However, there are also segments of the community that grapple with insufficient water services. While some women express satisfaction with their water access, others highlight the lack of proper water network connections for certain households. One woman highlighted, *"I have no problem, personally, however, there are some homes that have not been connected to a water network, and so it is a problem for them."* This disparity underscores the complexity of residents' perceptions and experiences regarding water availability and quality.

Furthermore, the close proximity of an Israeli settlement and the consistent presence of the Israeli army near the community water reservoir present a distinctive context for water and sanitation services. A woman from Khirbet Jubara community underlined, *"Sometimes the problem is that the Israeli army is near the water reservoir because it is a high area. I am afraid that they will put something like poison or any substance that harms people"*. The apprehension of potential water contamination, stemming from the military presence, underscores the intersection of geopolitical factors and fundamental infrastructure considerations. This convergence creates a physical sense of vulnerability among the residents, emphasizing the intricate interplay between security considerations and essential public services in the area. The community's worries about water security underscore the broader challenges of living in a politically charged environment.

In terms of wastewater management, the community faces significant challenges due to the absence of a reliable sewage system. Residents rely on cesspits as a makeshift solution. This situation leads to multiple issues, including the financial burden of emptying cesspits, unpleasant odors, safety hazards (especially for children), and conflicts between families and neighbors, as endorsed by men, *"Sewage is a big problem. We depend on cesspits, and these are all problems"*. The use of cesspits generates environmental and health concerns, as well as social conflicts that can strain community relationships.

The participants' feedback on waste-bins accessibility and regular waste collection reflects an efficiently managed waste disposal system within the community. One man, expressing satisfaction, noted, *"There are no problems. We have waste-bin in front of the houses and they are collected regularly."* This convenient placement should minimize residents' efforts in garbage disposal. Nevertheless, women voiced a different experience. A participant highlighted, *"There are waste-bins, but they are not always collected on time."* The observation that waste-bins were occasionally collected late, as noted by the female group, suggests potential inconsistencies in waste management practices within the community. This disparity raises concerns about inadvertently reinforcing gender roles, burdening women with additional household responsibilities and potentially contributing to health issues and an increased presence of pests.

The challenges associated with cesspits in the community are diverse, encompassing various dimensions that significantly impact both the well-being of the residents and the environmental conditions. The interviews conducted with both men and women shed light on the multifaceted issues stemming from

the utilization of cesspits. Firstly, financial strain emerges as a predominant concern, with the cost of emptying cesspits being a substantial burden, exacerbating the existing economic challenges faced by the community. One woman succinctly encapsulated the financial aspect, stating, "The problem of cesspits is many, including the high cost of emptying the cesspit." The regular maintenance required for these cesspits adds to the economic challenges faced by the residents, reflecting a financial strain that permeates the community.

Beyond the financial implications, the noxious odors emanating from the cesspits create a second layer of challenges. The discomfort caused by these unpleasant smells not only diminishes the quality of life for community members but also poses potential health risks, especially for children who are more susceptible to environmental factors. As one respondent pointed out, "the bad smell during the cesspit emptying impacts on homes." The intrusion of these odors into living spaces further exacerbates the challenges faced by residents in maintaining a healthy and comfortable home environment.

Moreover, safety concerns, particularly regarding children, emerge as a critical issue associated with cesspits. A woman expressed her fear, stating, "the cesspit is not safe, I am afraid that my kids might fall in it." The inadequate securing of cesspits poses a genuine hazard, especially for curious and unaware children, raising the risk of accidental falls that can lead to severe injuries. This concern underscores the urgency of addressing safety concerns related to waste disposal methods within the community.

The challenges go beyond individual households, manifesting as internal social conflicts between families and neighbours. A participant highlighted the interpersonal issues, noting, "Sometimes it leaks to the neighbours and leads to family problems." The leakage of waste from cesspits, impacting neighbouring households, not only has health and environmental implications but also introduces a potential source of tension among families. Disputes arising from unpleasant odors, contamination, and potential damage may strain relationships, disrupting the cohesion of the community.

Notably, gender-specific challenges emerge from the community's reliance on cesspits. Female residents underscore that the issues extend beyond waste management, pointing out the specific health risks posed during emptying, particularly for children and women spending more time indoors. The danger of children falling into uncovered cesspits disproportionately affects women, who are often primary caregivers. Additionally, the seepage of waste into neighboring households creates internal social conflicts, potentially placing additional burdens on women and affecting the overall harmony within the community.

To tackle this issue, participants note that they utilize a proactive approach of engaging with decision makers to address sewage problems. One woman said, "*We contact those responsible and ask them to solve our sewage problems*". This departure from traditional gender roles has broader implications for marginalized communities, challenging stereotypes and empowering women to contribute significantly to community decision-making processes and the resolution of communal challenges. This active involvement signifies a transformative shift in gender dynamics, emphasizing women's agency beyond traditional household roles.

1.4. ZA'TARA | BETHLEHEM, SOUTHERN WEST BANK

In separate focus group sessions held in Za'tara, Bethlehem governorate, women and men shared insights into the WASH services in their community. Despite some variations, commonalities in challenges emerged. Women described inadequate water services in certain areas, with intermittent supply for 15 days, leaving them without water. Although there are small water cisterns, they are insufficient for large households, and a community project aimed at extending water access faced challenges. One man noted, *“Water is cut off often, especially in outer areas, it does not even reach there so they have to carry it in an unregistered car. There are times where even this is not an option”*. The statement, which was echoed by all men and women, underscores the regularity of disruptions in the water supply, the unequal distribution of water resources within the community, the lengths to which community members are forced to go in order to secure water, and points to broader systemic issues related to infrastructure, water management, and distribution within the community. One woman affirmed, *“The water services are poor, there are some areas with no water at all. There are water cisterns, but they are not large, they are about 3 meters deep and are not sufficient for larger families.”*

The overall quality and reliability of the water supply in the community are subpar. This could encompass issues such as interruptions, low water pressure, and inconsistent availability, all of which collectively contribute to a less-than-adequate water situation. Furthermore, there is a disproportionate impact of the water scarcity on households with more members. Larger families inherently require more water for their daily needs, and when the available water sources are inadequate, it intensifies the challenges they face.

Moreover, the absence of proper sewage systems and reliance on improvised methods, such as cesspits, was a shared concern among both sexes. The practices by the community to burn their waste as there is a delay in collecting up waste-bins. One woman highlighted that "most of the existing waste is burned on the streets and next to the houses", underscoring the prevalence of this method, driven by the absence of accessible and efficient disposal options. Furthermore, the men acknowledged that women are often responsible for burning waste speaks to gender dynamics within waste management practices. One man affirmed, *“Most of the time women burn waste every week”*. Regular engagement in such activities can pose health risks to women, potentially affecting their respiratory health and overall well-being. A woman said, *“Sometimes there are weddings and afterwards we burn the trash but some things like aluminum and cola cans disintegrate and so the women pick it up and throw it away but then the garbage cans are rarely ever cleaned out so it stays there”*.

The mention of aluminum and cola cans not disintegrating suggests that certain materials do not burn completely during the disposal process. This observation points to the limitations of burning waste as a disposal method and raises concerns about environmental pollution and the potential health hazards associated with incomplete combustion.

The inadequacy of water and sanitation services in the Za'tara area is a significant concern, as highlighted by both male and female participants. Their shared experiences emphasize the serious challenges faced by the community in accessing reliable and sufficient water resources. The frequent interruptions and weak water supply not only disrupt daily life but also underscore the pressing need for improved infrastructure and services. One woman highlighted, *"The infrastructure is poor, the road is not all paved, there are no cisterns in the country, and the existing cisterns are for people who do not allow them to be used, and most of the cisterns were destroyed due to lack of use and abandoned by the owners of the cisterns, and the water inside them turns green."*

Furthermore, the community's lack of an adequate solid waste system is a significant issue highlighted by both men and women. Their shared experiences emphasize the challenges they face in managing waste and the ensuing consequences for both their environment and their finances. One woman affirmed, *"There are no sewage networks. We have waste cesspit that we dig up for inside the house. Then a truck comes and empties out the waste and liquids from it. They plant a tree next to it to absorb the liquid. We put unusable water tanks in the ground for solid waste"*. The statements made by men and women reveal the multifaceted implications of this deficiency and the urgent need for improved waste management infrastructure.

Also, the absence of a proper sewage system and the need to resort to digging cesspits underscore a major gap in the community's waste management infrastructure. The use of makeshift solutions, such as digging waste cesspits for waste disposal, is indicative of a lack of comprehensive waste management systems and facilities. The financial burden associated with emptying cesspits is a notable concern expressed by participants. One man noted, *"Something we struggle with is the cost of emptying cesspits, not to mention the strong and foul smell it creates in the town. It can cost up to \$80 per family each time it is emptied"*, underscoring the economic strain that managing waste places on residents. This financial burden is particularly concerning when considering the broader socio-economic context of the community. The participants also mentioned the foul smell created by improper waste disposal which further has implications for the community's overall quality of life. The unpleasant odor not only affects the physical environment but also contributes to discomfort and potential health hazards for residents.

Both men and women indicated that they had no strategic way of tackling the issues at hand. One man noted, *"There are no strategies at all, but there is a large scope for improvement in the town's situation."* The statement reflects a sense of skepticism and acknowledgment of existing shortcomings. The assertion of the lack of strategies resonates with a perception of an absence of concrete plans or initiatives in place to address the challenges faced by the community. This sentiment suggests a degree of frustration, given that the community's immediate needs are not being effectively met.

Also noted along the discussions was an absence of strategic attempts discussed by female participants and the prevailing sentiment of relying on external intervention. One woman affirmed, *"Improvement will happen, God willing, when someone who has heard our voices and knows about the problems that we are facing"*. The absence of strategic attempts discussed by female participants confirms the community's

reliance on external intervention to address their challenges and reveals the lack of accountability measures by the Palestinian Authority and humanitarian support.

1.5. FASAYIL AL-FAUQA, NORTHERN JORDAN VALLEY

Men and women from Fasayil Al-Fauqa community shared their challenges, revealing a complex reality of struggles against gender norms and the pursuit of fundamental WASH services. A woman actively involved in women's rights organizations emerged as a symbol of hope, declaring, *"The Palestinian Authority does not have control over Area "C", where we live. The Israeli Authority does not allow any renovations. So we have to resist this on our own."*

Reflecting on the transformation in Fasayil Al-Fauqa, where **agriculture** once thrived, the community now grapples with challenges compounded by settler and military opposition, hindering agricultural activities. To this end, **economic endeavours**, including a woman's butchery supported by MA'AN Development Center, continue to face disruptions, as the small business temporarily closes due to the COVID19 pandemic in 2021. Others, primarily engaged in household chores and tending to sheep, emphasize the restrictive roles assigned to them. These roles pose burden on their daily lives and health since they are the ones who do the household chores, raising children and care for sheep and chickens which they raise for living. They also perform cheese processing and milking responsibility. Transportation issues persist, with no buses serving the area, and educational barriers, including school absences due to rain and limitations on academic streams, further exacerbate the challenges.

Importantly, an exclusionary political landscape perpetuates gender-based inequalities, resonating in every aspect of the women's lives. To this end, internal **political obstacles** that result within the village council of Fasayil communities, comprising Fasayil Al-Tihta and Fasayil Al-Fauqa [two communities], come to the forefront. While some members from Fasayil Al-Fauqa are part of the local council in Fasayil Al-Tahta - including one woman, however, the council's failure to convene since December 2021 due to electoral lists political differences underscores exclusionary practices. Strong men and women from Fasayil Al-Fauqa find themselves side-lined, with one woman expressing, *"Abu Fouad, our community leader, manages affairs in Fasayil Al-Fauqa and keeps tabs on the village council in Fasayiel Al-Tahta. However, he is unable to advocate for equal services for us. Additionally, he resides in Bethlehem, and is disengaged from the pressing needs of our community"*. This reality further illustrates the disconnection between community leaders and the communities they represent, particularly when leaders reside outside the community, as in the case of Abu Fouad. His inability to advocate for equal services for Fasayil Al-Fauqa, despite being a community leader and a member of the village council in Fasayil Al-Fauqa, highlights the challenges in representing and addressing the needs of the community effectively. This disengagement from the community's pressing needs, especially when combined with the broader political challenges faced by the council, exacerbates the gender-based inequalities and limits the potential for inclusive and equitable decision-making.

The inclusion of a woman in the local council of Fasayil Al-Tahta from Fasayil Al-Fauqa initially suggests progress toward gender inclusivity in decision-making. However, the council's inactivity due to political disagreements negates this progress, effectively sidelining not only the female member but also other members from Fasayil Al-Fauqa, preventing them from advocating for their community's needs. This scenario underscores the broader issue of exclusionary practices within political and decision-making processes that marginalize certain groups, including women, thereby perpetuating gender-based inequalities. Such dynamics detrimentally affect the community's holistic development and well-being, underscoring the urgent need for governance structures that are more inclusive, transparent, and accountable. These structures must be capable of effectively representing and addressing the diverse needs of all community members, including women, to foster equitable progress.

Navigating daily life challenges, women and men **highlight water scarcity**, receiving water only once every four days, receiving water only 1-2 times a week, with inadequate distribution causing disparities. A single hose shared among all exacerbates the issue, disproportionately impacting women. Quality concerns arise, describing the water as "weak" further undermining its usability. Water scarcity leads to reduced personal hygiene practices, affecting comfort and cleanliness. The dangerous journey to the main groundwater well source, infested with pests, and attempts at economic exploitation by installing pipes compound their challenges. One man said, *"The water comes once every 5 days, and even when available, there's such a huge demand that it's barely sufficient. So we have to go to the groundwater well source far away from our house, near Israeli settlements, to fill in some water for immediate and basic needs. But this cause danger for us"*. The residents referred to a Palestinian individual, known as Al-Agha [a term with Turkish origins describing a wealthy landowner who exploits land, resources, and people for personal gain, often with practices misaligned with public interests]. Al-Agha owns extensive lands and has laid pipes along the underground water source for irrigation and drinking on his property. The community requested him to install a water pipe for the benefit of the entire community. A man reported, *"He declined and insisted on charging us. However, we rejected the idea of payment, as the water originates from groundwater, and we believe we shouldn't have to pay for it"*. Another man confirmed, *"Our community was supported by MA'AN Development Center and the Palestinian Water Authority where they installed water pipes. Nevertheless, the pipe that should serve our community is still not connected to water resource since years"*. Despite external assistance in installing water pipes, the community continues to face water deprivation, emphasizing the failure to connect the installed infrastructure to a water source. This discrepancy exemplifies the community's struggles, as external support has not translated into tangible improvements in their water access.



Figure 1 A water pipe and water network installed for Fasayil Al-Fauqa by MA'AN Development Center and the Palestinian Water Authority, but the pipe remains disconnected

Moreover, the community lacks proper **waste management**. For example, Fasayil Al-Tahta provide waste-bins to its community, but declined to extend the service to Fasayil Al-Fauqa. A man emphasized, *"Even if we purchase the waste-bins, we lack a garbage truck to transport them outside the community. Despite communicating this concern to the village council and the Ministry of Local Government, they did not assist us, and we continue to suffer."* To this end, both women and men highlighted that women dispose of their garbage in nearby areas and burn it on the spot. This practice is concerning for several reasons.

Firstly, it is explicitly forbidden by the Israeli environmental authorities to set fires in the area. The community confirmed that this is the only resolution to get rid of waste. One man mentioned, *"We pay fines if they catch the women setting fires but we are left with this solution otherwise we will have to suffer more if our land turns into a dumpsite, what do you want us to do?"* Secondly, burning garbage poses health risks for women and girls, as well as the community as a whole, especially considering that some tissues are made of plastic, and the fire does not eliminate them. Instead, the wind carries them back into the community. Additionally, there is a sense of shame among women, particularly because some of the items burned are pads used by women. Furthermore, women expressed fear of nearby settlers who often pursue them with the intent to cause harm.

Moreover, the community grapples with the lack of **sewage systems**, leading residents to dig large cesspits for disposal, contributing to environmental pollution. Both men and women voiced concerns about the absence of a sewage system, leading to sewage going underground, necessitating unhygienic waste disposal and posing heightened health risks, particularly for women. The dearth of sanitation facilities and a sewage system disproportionately impacts women, girls, and children, exposing them to elevated health risks. Reliance on unsanitary practices perpetuates gender-based environmental contamination. A woman shared, *"We dig a big cesspit underground for each family."*

Efforts to address challenges involve engaging local authorities and leaders. Despite proactive steps, including meetings and involving the head of the local council, residents express frustration at the lack of assistance. The neglect of these essential services not only infringes upon the human rights of the community but exacerbates existing gender disparities, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions to ensure equal access to WASH services for all. *"We brought the Head of Fasayil's Village Council, and the residents from both communities, and conducted meetings to solve the issue of the settlers control of natural water resources, and we got the mukhtar from Bethlehem, but no one helped us"*, emphasized a young man.

1.6. ARAB AL KHOULI COMMUNITY, QALQUILIA

Located within Wadi Qana nature reserve, the herding community of Arab Al-Khouli, home to approximately 85 people, faces persistent challenges from Israeli authorities and settlements, posing risks of displacement. Armed settler harassment obstructs residents, impacting their livestock provision. Diminished water access, resulting from Ma'ale Shomron settlement extraction, exacerbates their hardships.

Despite having historical roots dating back to 1905, Arab Al-Khouli has witnessed a recent exodus. Over the past three to four years, five families, along with approximately 600 sheep, have left the community in pursuit of sustainable herding livelihoods in nearby towns. Palestinian farmers in neighbouring areas also report increased restrictions on land cultivation, exemplified by the uprooting of olive trees in 2014 by the Israeli Civil Administration.

Within the heart of Al-Khouli community, **women** navigate the harsh realities imposed by gender norms, the political system, and challenges related to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Their daily lives involve a continuous cycle of demanding tasks, from cooking and tending to livestock to milking and cleaning, persisting from dawn until late at night. The acknowledgment that women themselves perceive these tasks as their unchangeable duties sheds light on the internalization of gender norms. This perception not only reflects the social and cultural expectations placed upon women but also underscores a resignation to these roles due to the lack of perceived alternatives or opportunities for change. The acceptance of these tasks as inherently 'women's work' perpetuates a cycle where women's potential in other areas—such as community leadership, education, or other economic activities—is overlooked or undervalued.

The harsh realities imposed by gender norms, the political system, and challenges related to WASH suggests that these gendered responsibilities are further complicated by external pressures. These include inadequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities, which exacerbates the workload and health risks for women. The intersectionality of gender with political and infrastructural challenges highlights how systemic inequalities can compound the difficulties faced by women in performing their assigned tasks. Moreover, the framing of these tasks as a "continuous cycle of demanding tasks, from dawn until late at night", emphasizes the time-consuming and labor-intensive nature of women's work, leaving little room for rest, personal development, or participation in public and political life. This continuous cycle can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion and limit women's opportunities to engage in activities outside their traditional roles, thereby reinforcing gender inequalities.

Water springs and cisterns in Wadi Qana sustain the community, but insufficient water contaminated by settler interference renders it unusable. Municipal efforts falter, leaving parts of the community disconnected. Electricity absence is worsened by settler damage to solar panels. Rationalizing water consumption becomes essential, but promises for assistance often remain unfulfilled.

The lack of proper solid waste services forces residents to burn trash in distant areas. This reflects inadequate waste management services, illustrating environmental, health, and social challenges. A woman notes, "The women and men collect all the waste in barrels and burn them in areas a little far from the tents."

Sanitation remains challenging, with internal bathrooms introduced two years ago but insufficient in number. Residents previously resorted to open defecation and improvised solutions, compromising dignity, posing health risks, and causing environmental contamination. Both men and women acknowledge shared challenges, but women bear slightly heavier burdens, especially during menstruation. Lack of clean and private restrooms hampers menstrual hygiene, impacting confidence and daily activities.

Waste disposal involves burning or burying trash, releasing pollutants that contribute to air pollution and respiratory issues. Climate change exacerbates challenges, impacting water scarcity, reduced rainfall, and increased temperatures. Economic hurdles arise from the high cost of transporting water, hindered by political restrictions citing Wadi Qana as a nature reserve.

These burdens disproportionately affect women, who face increased effort and time demands. Customary tasks, such as cooking and bathing, become arduous endeavours. Amidst these challenges, luxury becomes a distant concept, sacrificed for survival.

1.7. ARAB AL-DAMAYRA COMMUNITY, JENIN

In Al-Damayra, diverse voices resonate with the countless impacts of inadequate access to WASH services. One participant emphasizes, *"There is no water tankers for the council distributed to the area,"* illustrating the struggle caused by the absence of designated water infrastructure. Political constraints imposed by the Israeli occupation compound the issue, hindering the establishment of a local water network. To this end, residents share similar insights into the challenges they face due to these constraints. The lack of **water resources** and a designated **community water reservoir** leads to irregular water availability, forcing residents into alternative, costly solutions. A woman confirms the political hindrance, stating, *"The occupation prevents the extension of a water network in the area because it is considered Area 'C.'"*

Moreover, the absence of a **sewage system** amplifies challenges, impacting health and finances. A woman describes the interconnected problems, stating, *"Sewage is a problem equal to the problem of water, and it creates mental non-wellness and health problems. The whole area smells bad"*. The lack of a sewage system poses health risks, causing lung problems and financial burdens. A man adds, *"There is no sanitation as well. The cost of digging a sewage cesspit is expensive for homes, especially since the area we have is mountainous"*. These challenges lead to internal conflicts, with a woman expressing how family members may dispute over sewage cleaning costs.

Without proper **sewage management**, a persistent foul smell permeates the area. One woman emphasizes the consequences, stating, *"Sewage is a problem equal to the problem of water... It affects people's health, they have to have lung problems, and it costs money creating a financial burden"*. A man confirms the financial challenges, stating, *"It also needs experience and skill for those who dig the cesspit, and this is also financially costly"*.

The reliance on cesspits due to the absence of a sewage network affects the entire region. A man explains, *"There is no network, even in the neighbouring villages, and so we all depend on cesspits"*. This reliance leads to foul smells, environmental contamination, and health risks, affecting both the residents and neighbouring villages.

Solid waste management, facilitated by waste-bins, faces challenges. A woman highlights the issue, saying, *"We have waste-bins from Zahrat Al Fanjan, but it takes a long time for them to be collected or emptied"*. This results in trash accumulation, infested with insects and animals, exacerbating waste management challenges and impacting the environment.

The challenges described - lack of water access, sewage system, and solid waste management - directly impact hygiene. A woman emphasizes the link between water access and hygiene, stating, *"The absence of water definitely has a negative impact on hygiene"*. Inadequate access to water, a functional sewage system, and efficient solid waste management lead to increased health risks and difficulties in maintaining personal hygiene.

Despite proactive efforts and communication with local authorities, the community's expectations for improved waste management services remain unmet. A man laments, *"We sent letters to the Palestinian authorities, and they promised to help. But unfortunately, they did not"*. This highlights the disconnect between promises made and the tangible progress needed to alleviate the community's struggles.

1.8. FUQEIQIS COMMUNITY | HEBRON

Fuqeiqis, a village entrenched in history since Roman times, with roots tracing back to Canaanite habitation, struggles with challenges shaped by its historical past and geopolitical realities. The impact of the Israeli occupation, compounded by the aftermath of the Nakba, has significantly shaped the trajectory of Fuqeiqis.

Water and sanitation services in Fuqeiqis, though vital, exist in a state of extreme limitation, shaping the daily struggles of its residents. According to a resident, *"We receive water only once a month, forcing us to buy trucked water at exorbitant prices."* The challenges to accessing water, with small rooftop tanks and distant cisterns. A distressing revelation emerges as a resident describes an individual in Dura storing and selling the village's water, creating uncertainties about its cleanliness and quality. Financial constraints and legal restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation further hinder the community's ability to explore sustainable solutions like digging water cisterns for rainwater collection.

Additionally, the absence of a **sewage network** forces the disposal of wastewater through small, inadequate, and exposed suction cesspits, exacerbating environmental pollution. Another participant emphasizes, *"We cannot expand or dig due to Israeli occupation restrictions, leaving us under constant supervision."*

In the absence of a municipality, **solid waste disposal** becomes a localized challenge. A male resident from a neighborhood without waste-bin underscores the need for waste-bins to collect waste and transfer it to designated landfills. He states, *"Waste being collected in bags is uncivilized. Therefore, we need some sort of waste-bins."*

From an economic perspective, the community grapples with the exorbitant cost of water, particularly for families, requiring multiple water tankers each month. Economic restrictions intertwine with political challenges, exemplified by the Israeli occupation's confiscation of a cistern, repurposed into a swimming pool inaccessible to Palestinians. The distribution program from an Israeli settlement provides water for a mere two hours once a month, insufficient to fill rooftop tanks. Infrastructure challenges are rife, with residents facing restrictions on building water cisterns, subject to Israeli occupation conditions. The control over water resources is starkly evident, as voiced by a male participant: *"Israel is the one who opens the tap on us and the one who closes it."* This distressing statement captures the community's dependence on external forces for basic necessities.

Wastewater management presents a host of challenges, with prohibitions on the creation of cesspits leading to small, insufficient excavations. Political hurdles emerge as villagers risk confiscation of tools if caught digging, leaving existing cesspits exposed and unable to accommodate the growing population. The consequences of these challenges manifest in pollution, the spread of insects, and resultant diseases, further burdening a community with limited financial resources.

Hygiene challenges, particularly for women, stem from the scarcity of water. Existing waste-bins are limited and only available on the main street, necessitating strenuous efforts for waste disposal, with past practices like burning waste proving inadequate and embarrassing. The lack of water poses a significant hurdle for menstrual hygiene, forcing women to ration water and adopt coping mechanisms.

A personal account shared by a female participant illustrated the adverse consequences of climate change on agriculture and animal husbandry. The participant narrated,

"My husband's mother had a chicken farm for her and all of her children, which she took care of in the past. It was successful and sufficient in meeting our needs, but recently, with the problem of water and its constant lack of availability, and with the rise in temperatures due to climate change, most chickens die, and therefore we lose and gain nothing, which forced her and all of us to stop raising chickens."

Given that agriculture and animal husbandry were primary income sources in Fuqeiqis, this environmental shift led to a substantial economic decline, intensifying challenges for men seeking income to support their families.

In a comparative reflection on his life, a male participant emphasized the historical reliance on agriculture for diverse crops and grains, contributing to a healthier lifestyle. However, he lamented the present limitations imposed by insufficient water harvesting cisterns designated by the Israeli occupation, hindering effective rainwater collection and irrigation for crops. The participant noted,

"We depended on agriculture to provide many types of crops and grains, and we used grains to make different types of food, such as corn and wheat, and we were healthier, and the Agriculture directorate carried out land reclamation projects, but there is no sufficient water cisterns to collect water from rain or store it from meters to irrigate crops, as the groundwater well we are allowed to use designated to us by the Israeli occupation is small and insufficient."

In response to these multifaceted challenges, the community has attempted various strategies to amplify their concerns. Appeals for increased waste-bins and a comprehensive sewage network have, unfortunately, yielded no response from the municipality of Dura. The residents persist in demanding essential services, particularly the construction of a sewage network with large cesspits, highlighting the urgent need for support in the face of daunting challenges.

1.9. EIN QINIYA BEDOUIN COMMUNITY, RAMALLAH

In Ein Qiniya, around 60 Bedouin herders, residing in tents and tin houses for over 50 years due to their lack of property, have traditionally relied on grazing in the valley surrounding a water stream. In Ein Qiniya, Bedouin herders, lacking property and residing in tents, rely on grazing near a water stream due to minimal infrastructure. The upper village has better amenities but faces water scarcity challenges. Prolonged pollution of the primary water source leads to severe contamination, forcing reliance on costly water trucking. Lack of a water network and contaminated springs exacerbate the situation. The contamination originates from sewage water discharged in Ramallah, affecting the Ein Qiniya source. The community faces health and financial repercussions, emphasizing the critical need for sustainable water solutions. A resident in his sixties lamented the removal of a water pipe, leaving the community without water networks for 42 years. The resident shared, *"I have been living in the community for 42 years; there was a water pipe that served this area. The pipe was removed, and we do not know who removed it. This left our community with no water networks."*

In response, residents resort to purchasing water from water tankers at a cost of \$54 per family per month, with an average total of 12m³, imposing a substantial financial burden on the community. A female resident emphasized, *"Water costs us more than it would if we were provided it through the municipality; we have to get tanks of 3m³ capacity which cost \$13.5 each per family per week."* However, these purchased water tankers last only one week, highlighting the acute scarcity of water in the village, as

expressed by another resident: "The big water tanker does not last from one Thursday to the next." Another solution is for them to bring water from underground water springs. As a consequence of the sewage treatment units installed by the Ramallah municipality, untreated water is allowed to flow underground and through the valley. To cope with this situation, women tend to bring water from underground water springs, which is also polluted and contaminated. This scenario presents significant environmental challenges, leading to health issues and hygiene concerns for the herding community, with a particular impact on the well-being of women and girls.

Moreover, the absence of a public sewage network forces residents to resort to unhygienic cesspits and discharge wastewater underground going through the natural wadi. These practices contribute to environmental damage, health issues, and the spread of diseases in the village. The wastewater also contaminates the natural wadi, making it unsuitable for drinking. Cesspits is always lacking and allowing wastewater to seep into the ground. Despite sewage trucks collecting untreated wastewater, their disposal in open areas lacks consideration for the environmental and health consequences.

Solid waste management is another major concern in Ein Qiniya due to the absence of a proper garbage collection system. Women and men confirmed that neither Ein Qiniya municipality nor Ramallah municipality are willing to provide them with garbage containers. One man underscored, *"Both local authorities do not provide us with waste management systems because we live in Area "C" and the roads do not fit for garbage trucks to reach our community"*. To this end, women resort to burning their waste outdoors, including environmentally harmful items like menstrual pads, contributing to pollution and posing health risks. A woman explained, *"We collect the pads and place them in a bag and take them outside to be burned"*. The inefficiency of burning waste, particularly non-combustible items like pads, highlights the insufficiency of waste management practices within the community.

Solid waste management in Ein Qiniya poses a critical challenge with far-reaching impacts on the environment and clean water availability. Improper disposal practices contaminate the communal water source, rendering it undrinkable and unsuitable for domestic use. The absence of a proper sewage system intensifies the issue, as makeshift waste disposal methods contribute to pollution. The contamination of the communal water source and improper waste disposal have broader environmental implications, affecting local ecosystems, wildlife, and contributing to soil and air pollution.

Additionally, toilets in the community, whether inside or outside the tin tents, are a source of concern. Women have raised issues related to the limited durability of these toilets, citing critical incidents where a child fell into the toilet pit, prompting family members to intervene at the last moment. Such incidents create fear and insecurity within the community, particularly among mothers who serve as primary caregivers.

Ein Qiniya grapples with a significant waste disposal predicament due to the absence of an effective services and proper waste management facilities. The lack of waste-bins forces residents to adopt makeshift waste disposal methods, including burning waste in a valley. Women bear the primary responsibility for this labour-intensive task, adding to their demanding roles. Women face additional

challenges during their menstrual cycles due to water scarcity, leading to compromises such as reducing shower frequency. Women, like their counterparts in Fuqeiqis, resort to burning waste, including menstrual products, contributing to environmental, health, and social concerns.

Respondents in Ein Qiniya express a sense of dependency and limited agency in addressing water, sanitation, and waste management challenges, hinting at a need for external assistance. While some organizations have provided support, the multifaceted nature of the issues emphasizes the urgency for comprehensive, sustainable interventions. The Palestinian Hydrology Group has installed toilets and water storage tanks to alleviate the manual water-fetching burden, enhancing hygiene, increasing quality water availability, mitigating family conflicts over resources, and reducing diseases. One man stated, *“These storage tanks are filled with rainwater collected in the rainy season or from other installed storage tanks, but are not sufficient for all the families.”*

Despite these efforts, challenges persist, as the installed storage tanks are insufficient for all families, and there is a need to rehabilitate some existing toilets. Residents express openness to assistance but emphasize the importance of sustained commitment, recalling past instances where support was short-lived. Women also expressed, *“We welcome everyone here, but we don't want authorities to visit, take pictures, and then disappear, as happened ten years ago when a high-ranking official, a woman, came here, took pictures with your accompaniment, and hasn't returned since. She heard our challenges, but it seems they don't care”*.

1.10. JABA' BEDOUIN COMMUNITY | JERUSALEM

The Jaba' community grapples with profound challenges in accessing water and sanitation services, compounded by the absence of essential water networks and storage units. The complexities are further heightened by the Israeli occupation, hindering progress despite persistent appeals to the Palestinian Authority. Both women and men confirmed that they do not have water storage units and expressed needs for water networks.

Men and women in the community also emphasize the absence of water storage tanks. They point out that the expense of filling storage tanks with water is steep, and sneaking water trucking into the community is not always feasible due to the risk of confiscation and fines imposed by the Israeli military forces. Furthermore, a man stated, *“We received support from an organization for a water network, but the Israelis continually damage the network and remove pipes whenever they come across them. Each time we repair them, we incur high costs, placing an economic burden on us that we cannot afford.”*

Despite five years of appeals, the Palestinian Authority has remained unresponsive. One man expressed his frustration, stating, *“Israel won't provide assistance, and neither will the Palestinian Authority. We've been seeking their help for five years, and there has been no response. Even the Ministry of Agriculture, from whom we requested barley, as they distribute it to herders, has not fulfilled our request”*, emphasizing the unmet basic human rights needs of the community.

Most households in the community have access to bathrooms, but one woman shared her challenge of lacking a toilet, leading her to relieve herself outdoors on nearby lands. Safety and comfort perceptions vary within the community. While male respondents initially feel secure, a female respondent expresses discomfort with outdoor bathroom locations, stating, *"I'm not comfortable going to the bathroom. We're afraid. The bathrooms are outside, and anyone can come out of anywhere"*. This distinction highlights nuanced safety perceptions, particularly concerning outdoor settings, underscoring vulnerabilities felt by women.

Additionally, the community faces a lack of sanitation services, relying on cesspits where untreated water goes, but it is far from their authentic tents. Waste disposal presents a significant challenge, with the community struggling to obtain even a single waste-bin. Monitoring by Israeli military forces, coupled with the absence of paved roads, hinders their ability to transport garbage to nearby containers. As one man stated, *"This is territory C. They don't recognize us. They can't even put one waste-bin"*. Forced to resort to burning trash due to unavailability, respondents, upon learning about the environmental impacts, express a willingness to adopt better waste management practices with proper resources. One man suggested, *"We can fill and move bins with wheels"*.



Figure 2 A standard kitchen in the Jaba' community exhibiting substandard and hazardous construction.

Women, on the other hand, expressed frustration in relation to poor houses and tents structure where a woman expressed her frustration with the deteriorating condition of her kitchen, putting her at risk of danger if the wood falls on their heads and the heads of their children. The situation worsens in the winter, where water leaks from the roof, exposing the family members to chronic illnesses. Support has been requested in this regard.

1.11. FURUSH BEIT DAJAN | NABLUS

The discussion with men from Furush Beit Dajan in the Nablus district unveiled the myriad challenges confronting the community, particularly in the spheres of water scarcity, waste management, and the repercussions of environmental shifts. Unfortunately, social constraints imposed by the men prevented the inclusion of women in a separate session.

The dialogue delved into the historical context of water utilization in Beit Dajan, tracing back to 1917. The community, characterized by stone houses, faced challenges influenced by Israeli regulations and water-related permit restrictions. A participant shared, *"Our houses have stood since 1917, built with stone, some dating back to 1927. We possess wheat mills from Ottoman and Turkish rule. The Nasaria area in Beit Dajan, part of Wadi al-Fara'a, pays water taxes. Our ancestors, upon buying land, paid water taxes and received a water share for every dunam."*

Furthermore, the conversation explored the complex relationships between climate change, erratic water usage patterns, and the role of water authorities. A paramount concern highlighted was the intricacies of waste management. A participant shed light on the significant hurdles faced by local authorities, citing high costs and logistical complexities in waste collection. A community member expressed, *"Waste management is a major concern for local authorities, given the immense challenges. The primary issue they grapple with is the high cost of waste collection and the disorder in waste disposal. PHG play a crucial role in our water-related initiatives, supporting us in developmental projects"*. Discussing cleanliness and waste management, participants shared various individual approaches. One participant mentioned, *"Waste is handled on an individual basis; each person disposes of it in their unique way, either through burning or by eventually transporting it to the Jordan Valley"*.

The participants recognized the challenges associated with safely burning waste, acknowledging potential health and environmental issues. They emphasized the importance of secure areas and cautioned about the process. The burning of waste releases harmful pollutants and toxins into the air, contributing to air pollution. Inhaling these pollutants can lead to respiratory problems, skin issues, and other health issues, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly. In addition, it contributes to environmental degradation. It releases greenhouse gases, contributing to climate change, and can contaminate soil and water with hazardous substances, impacting local ecosystems.

Regarding shared services between Beit Dajan and neighbouring areas, a participant underscored the challenges posed by geographical distances, emphasizing the need for citizen awareness and fair service distribution. They explained, *"Citizens awareness is crucial. While I pay \$7 per month for solid waste services, there are households unable to access them due to geographical challenges"*. The prospect of implementing a system where every ten households share a large waste-bin was discussed, although the participant expressed doubt due to extensive destruction in the area, making it challenging to find ten houses in close proximity.

Men spoke about the impact of climate change, with the participants highlighting the global threat and its localized manifestation in water scarcity. The chaotic utilization of water resources, coupled with climate-induced alterations, created a daunting scenario. The participants drew attention to irresponsible practices by local authorities in Nablus, including contamination of water sources, raising concerns about its safety for consumption and agricultural use. One participant asserted, *"Climate change poses a global threat, but in Palestine, its influence is limited due to our minimal contribution to pollution. While climate change plays a role in that the changes in weather trends negatively impacts our agricultural practices, authorities bear responsibility for the chaos in the management and sanitation facilities where untreated water covers our agricultural lands. The Palestinian Authority allowed unchecked actions"*.

The socio-political landscape took center stage, with participants underscoring the necessity for realistic policies to address water-related challenges. One participant emphasized, *"The solution to the water problem lies in establishing policies, purchasing water, and adopting realistic policies, not imaginary ones."*

The struggle against pollution emerged as a central theme, with concerns expressed about drinking water source contamination and its adverse effects on agriculture. A participant lamented, *"Our drinking water*

has become contaminated, as indicated by the Ministry of Health, likely due to untreated waste water leakage. Surface groundwater wells in Nasaria, 20 to 25 meters deep, are susceptible to contamination. A leakage basin endangers 17,000 dunams of our land, rendering them uncultivable". Water pollution challenges extended to springs, critical for agricultural activities, jeopardizing a significant portion of cultivable land due to pollution originating from mismanaged sewage systems of Nablus Municipality and neighbouring settlements.

A significant portion of the dialogue centered on the transformation in agricultural practices. The participants highlighted the shift from diverse cultivation to limited, seasonal farming due to rain and underground water scarcity. The once-thriving production of citrus fruits and diverse crops dwindled, giving way to the cultivation of date palms, adapted to the water-scarce conditions caused by climate change. A participant provided context, stating, *"For instance, Jiftlik, once the West Bank's primary vegetable producer, has undergone a 90% transformation, now predominantly focused on palm cultivation due to water-related issues".* The conversation further delved into the adoption of plastic houses and evolving farming methods, with a notable emphasis on thermal sterilization. A participant elaborated, saying, *"People started using them; we refer to this period as the era of thermal sterilization."*

The impact extended to livestock, with the number of sheep decreasing, altering the traditional livelihood of the community. One participant clarified, *"Acknowledging responsibility doesn't mean abandonment. I concur that there is a national responsibility."* Concerns about water contamination persisted, with participants highlighting the mingling of city water with springs. A participant clarified, *"It is city water, including water from factories, hospitals, slaughterhouses, leather factories, laundries, and car washes".* The men stated that neighbouring villages felt the impact of water contamination, heightening concerns about encroachments on water rights. Another participant remarked, *"They encroached on our water rights".* Respectively, the participants discussed legal battles against the municipality of Nablus due to water pollution. The struggle, rooted in a commitment to environmental responsibility, showcased the community's determination to safeguard their resources against external threats.

Despite facing challenges, the community showcased resilience, exemplified by a charitable project from the Islamic Bank. This initiative reflects the community's determination to overcome adversity. Adaptation strategies, including the use of septic tanks for sewage management and household water cisterns, were apparent in response to infrastructure challenges imposed by Israeli authorities in Area "C," preventing the community from constructing their own water cisterns to address water scarcity issues.

In the electricity sector, one participant highlighted, *"Undoubtedly, concerning electricity, this is the best area in the Jordan Valley."* Another emphasized the potential of solar energy, stating, *"Solar energy should be sufficient, but it needs cleaning, and unfortunately, no one is taking care of that."*


Theme 2: Decision making, roles and access to WASH facilities

The exploration of decision-making dynamics within the WASH domain in the vulnerable communities of Area “C” in the West Bank reveals the nature of the roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women. This study, spanning from the serene landscapes of Wadi Qana in Northern Salfit to the dynamic energy of Fuqeiqis in Southern Hebron, delves into the particulars of gender dynamics and their influence on WASH service access.

In these vulnerable communities, the study exposes intricate power dynamics that significantly influence decision-making regarding WASH services. Persistent traditional gender expectations in certain areas have profound implications for the roles and involvement of women in broader community affairs. The communities' perceptions unveil a complex scenario where women participate in decision-making in some communities, exemplified by Arab Al-Damayra, while experiencing exclusion in most of the others. In the latter, the power dynamic frequently situates men as the primary decision-makers, thereby influencing the overall development of the community. In this respect, the recognition of women's multi-layered contributions challenges traditional norms, emphasizing the need for ongoing dialogue and awareness-building.

In Wadi Qana, a collaborative philosophy prevails, with both men and women engaged in WASH tasks. A female participant noted, *“Both men and women collaborate in WASH responsibilities. Women often assist and remind men in tasks related to water management”*. However, traditional gender norms persist, as one man asserted, *“Women do not decide on anything beyond their homes.”*

This assertion, which was not challenged by women or men in the focus group sessions, reflects deeply rooted gender expectations. The perceived constraint on women's involvement in broader community matters signals a potential power imbalance. This dichotomy between women's participation in WASH activities and their exclusion from broader decision-making roles points to a superficial level of gender inclusivity. While women may be visible participants in the execution of WASH tasks, their roles are implicitly seen as supportive or auxiliary, with actual decision-making power resting predominantly with men. This scenario indicates not just a division of labor but a division of power, where women's contributions to communal welfare through WASH tasks are undervalued in the context of governance and leadership within the community.



“Women do not decide on anything beyond their homes”

(One man from Wadi Qana)

The situation in Wadi Qana reflects a broader issue of gender inequality that extends beyond the community. Traditional gender norms continue to limit women's roles to the domestic sphere, marginalizing their potential to influence broader community or societal issues. The acceptance of such norms, by both men and women, perpetuates a status quo that hinders the achievement of true gender equality. This imbalance highlights the need for intentional strategies aimed at challenging and changing deeply rooted gender norms. Addressing this imbalance requires more than just encouraging women's

participation; it demands a shift in societal attitudes that recognizes and values women's voices and leadership in all aspects of community life.

Moreover, Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a) showcases similar perceptions of stereotypical gender roles. Women claim a lack of specific roles in the WASH sector, and men confine women's responsibility for cleaning. A woman expressed, *"The men are the ones who contact the local authorities. We do not have a part in this."* This apparent exclusion from decision-making processes raises concerns about women's empowerment. The contradiction indicates a disparity in perceptions between genders, revealing power imbalances. Women's perceived exclusion from decision-making spheres hinder the community's holistic development. The division of labor and responsibilities as described indicates a gendered framework that delineates the roles and expectations for men and women within the community, with significant implications for gender equality and empowerment. Women's claim of lacking specific roles in the WASH sector, coupled with the acknowledgment of their primary responsibility for cleaning, underscores a traditional view of gender roles where women are primarily seen as caretakers of the domestic sphere. This is further reinforced by a woman's statement indicating that men are the ones who engage with local authorities, suggesting that women are not involved in the public or decision-making aspects of community management.

This structural exclusion is problematic for several reasons. First, the apparent exclusion of women from decision-making processes directly impacts their empowerment within the community. Empowerment involves having the agency and authority to make decisions that affect one's life and community. When women are sidelined from such processes, it diminishes their ability to influence outcomes that directly impact their well-being and that of their families. Second, the disparity in perceptions between men and women regarding roles and responsibilities reveals underlying power imbalances. While men are perceived as the community's public representatives, women's roles are confined to the private domain. This division suggests that men hold more power and authority within the community, which perpetuates gender inequality. Third, women's exclusion from decision-making spheres can hinder the community's holistic development. Women bring unique perspectives and insights that are crucial for addressing the diverse needs of a community. The exclusion of these perspectives means that the community misses opportunities for more inclusive and effective solutions to challenges, particularly those related to WASH services.

Addressing these issues requires a conscious effort to challenge and change the entrenched gender norms that limit women's roles and participation in community governance and decision-making. Strategies could include:

- Providing training and support to women to build their leadership and decision-making skills.
- Implementing policies that ensure women's inclusion and participation in all aspects of community decision-making, especially in areas impacting their daily lives like WASH services.
- Conducting community-wide campaigns to raise awareness about the value of gender equality and the benefits of including women in decision-making processes.

Khirbet Jubara presents a scenario where both men and women deny gender-specific roles, but the acknowledgment of women's primary engagement in cleaning suggests underlying gendered expectations. A woman stated, *"Hygiene is the responsibility of women, not men"*. This unveils stereotypical views, emphasizing the need for ongoing dialogue within the community. While both men and women assert a lack of specific roles, the acknowledgment of women's predominant role in hygiene tasks underscores embedded gender norms. Ongoing dialogue becomes crucial for challenging and reshaping these entrenched expectations.

In Za'tara, perspectives on gender roles in water-related tasks vary. Women offer a simplified view, while men highlight a collaborative approach. A man explained, *"Women do not feel the complexity; for them, it's straightforward"*. This statement was confirmed by women as one woman explained, One woman highlighted, *"There are no responsibilities in this matter. The only thing is the man has to call the owner of the tanks and he brings a new one. That's it"*. Respectively, women acknowledge the gendered nature of financial responsibilities. The varying perspectives highlight a potential shift in gender dynamics, with women perceiving simplicity in water-related tasks. , as one woman affirmed, *"The man has the great responsibility of making money to meet the needs of the whole family"*. The response highlights the traditional division of labor where men are primarily regarded as the providers for the family. This perspective reflects the cultural norms and expectations that associate men with the role of breadwinners, unequal distribution of responsibilities, the impact on women's daily lives, and the broader implications for gender equality within the community. One man confirmed, *"Waste is burned by either women or men, but most of the time women burn the waste each week"*.

As in many other locations and most marginalized communities in Area "C", the statement emphasizes that women bear the primary responsibility for waste disposal within the community. While men do help on occasion, the burden largely falls on women. Women also serve as the primary caretakers of the household's cooking and cleaning duties. A woman's daily routine often encompasses a multitude of tasks that are pivotal to maintaining the household and supporting the family. In narrating the story of her daily life, one woman said, *"We wake up at 4 in the morning to prepare bread and breakfast for the men who head out to work—some in agriculture, some in town, and others in settlements. Following that, we tend to the sheep, chickens, and pigeons before returning home to manage household cleaning. After feeding the sheep, the men take charge of herding them, and subsequently, we take our showers"*. In the context of a clan community where traditional norms dictate that only men work outside the home, even in circumstances where the husband is sick, unable to work, or deceased, the challenges faced by women and the structure of their daily lives are significantly compounded by these deeply entrenched gender roles.

In such communities, when the male head of the family is incapacitated or absent, the responsibility often falls on women to find alternative means of support without breaching the societal norm against outside employment. This situation places an immense burden on women, who must navigate the dual pressures of adhering to community norms while ensuring the survival and well-being of their families. The reliance

on men for financial income means that women in these circumstances may have to rely more heavily on extended family networks or community support, which may not always be sufficient or forthcoming.

For women who aspire to engage in activities outside their traditional roles, such as seeking employment or education, the societal constraints and the clan's expectations present significant barriers. These women face not only the practical challenges of accessing opportunities but also the societal pressure to conform to established norms, which can limit their ability to pursue personal and professional development. Moreover, unmarried women and those without children in these clan communities might find themselves in a particularly precarious position, as their societal role is even more tightly circumscribed. Without the responsibilities and status conferred by marriage and motherhood, they may have fewer opportunities to contribute to or participate in the community, and their need to rely on male relatives for financial support can further diminish their autonomy.

Tailored approaches to addressing these challenges include, strengthening and expanding community-based support networks can offer practical assistance and social safety nets for families without a male breadwinner. Initiatives could include communal funds, food banks, or cooperative businesses that allow women to contribute economically within the accepted cultural framework. Also, implementing education and skill development programs tailored to respect cultural norms can empower women. For example, home-based businesses or crafts that women can sell within the community might be more culturally acceptable paths to economic contribution. Moreover, initiatives to foster dialogue within the community about the economic and social benefits of women's increased participation can be a step towards gradually changing norms. Highlighting successful examples of women contributing to family income in culturally sensitive ways can help shift perceptions. Finally, encouraging women's participation in decision-making at the family and community level, even within the constraints of current norms, can begin to elevate their status and influence. This can be facilitated through women's groups or councils that work within the existing social structure.

From a similar perspective, Fasayil Al-Fauqa provides critical insights, portraying women as decision-makers and active contributors. A participant emphasized, "*Women are the decision-makers... The woman is the one who works hard and gets tired*". This reflects a departure from traditional gender roles, positioning women as indispensable contributors. This assessment captures the essence of the division of labour between men and women, where men are predominantly perceived as breadwinners, and women are portrayed as actively shouldering a significant portion of domestic, reproductive, and productive responsibilities, only within the border of their own community. The roles of women are illustrated in the

following statement from the women's focus group, emphasizing their involvement in various activities crucial to the household's well-being.

Similar to most communities, this quote highlights the active contribution of women to diverse aspects of family life, showcasing their engagement in traditional domestic duties as well as specialized tasks like

"I wake up at 4:30 and help my husband get ready for work. Then I pray and milk the sheep and make food for my kids. Then my son herds the sheep. Sometimes I sell the milk, and sometimes I keep it to make daily products like cheese".

(Woman, FGD participant, Fasayil Al-Fauqa)

herding sheep and participating in income-generating activities. The portrayal emphasizes the multifaceted nature of women's roles, both within the household and in contributing to the economic aspects of community life. This portrayal not only elevates the status of women from mere participants to leaders but also highlights the exhaustive nature of their contributions across various domains. It suggests a recognition of the physical and emotional labor women invest in the well-being of their families and the broader community.

The division of labor in Fasayil Al-Fauqa reflects a gendered economy of work, with women managing a wide range of responsibilities from domestic to productive tasks. The community's acknowledgment of women's involvement in both domestic duties and economic activities challenges traditional work boundaries and highlights the indispensable role women play in sustaining the household economy and enhancing community resilience.

Women's complex blend of roles, crucial for household survival and prosperity, illustrates their significant yet often undervalued contributions to the socio-economic fabric of the community. The situation in Fasayil Al-Fauqa, while showcasing women's substantial contributions, prompts a reevaluation of gender equality implications. Recognizing women as indispensable contributors and decision-makers represents progress towards gender equity. However, this recognition also necessitates examining labor distribution and the potential for women's overburdening. Achieving true gender equality involves not only valuing women's contributions but also ensuring equitable labor and decision-making distribution, preventing the disproportionate physical and emotional strain on women.

On the contrary, the Arab Al-Khouli community stands out for its adaptability and absence of predefined gender-specific tasks. A female member stressed, *"We don't feel the need to change our roles, but the way we access water and manage waste should evolve"*. The call for evolving WASH practices highlights a women's recognition of the importance of improving basic services as a priority over changing gender roles. This focus suggests that the community values practical solutions to shared challenges, viewing improvements in water access and waste management as essential to enhancing overall living conditions. This pragmatic approach to community development, prioritizing infrastructural needs, indicates a

collective orientation towards problem-solving, which transcends conventional gendered responsibilities.. While the absence of traditions dictating roles emphasizes the community's flexibility, the specific request for enhanced water access and waste management methods underscores the community's commitment to better WASH services within the existing roles. It is essential to note that the emphasis is on service improvement rather than challenging the predefined roles, which may still be influenced by stereotypes or rigidity. Men echoed the shared responsibilities and aspirations for change. Emphasizing the absence of predefined gender roles, a male participant remarked, "*Men and women here share the same duties.*" The collective desire for change focused on evolving practices for sustainable water services and eco-friendly waste management. This perspective might offer a solid foundation for addressing broader issues of inequality, as improvements in communal services like WASH directly impact the quality of life for all community members, potentially reducing the workload disproportionately borne by women in less adaptable settings.

Consistently, men and women confirmed the absence of traditions dictating resource usage, showcasing a community where decisions were not confined by cultural norms. A young man emphasized, "*There is nothing specific. Women handle tasks in the absence of men, and there's no difference between them, except for childbirth.*" This reiterated the theme of shared responsibilities and the absence of gender-based roles in WASH service decision-making within the community. This community's approach can serve as a model for gender equality, particularly in resource management and communal decision-making. It demonstrates that dismantling traditional gender norms and promoting shared responsibilities based on capability rather than sex can lead to a more equitable society. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of community-wide commitment to equality and the potential impact of such an approach on essential services like WASH

Furthermore, responses from Arab Al-Damayra reflect a spectrum of perspectives on gender equality. A male participant highlighted, "*Women are our partners in everything. They are decision-makers like men, and we trust them.*" This positive attitude challenges traditional gender norms, emphasizing women's active participation in broader community issues. In the Al-Hfeirah Village Council, the election of two women alongside five men through a quota system marks strides toward gender inclusivity. The community's feedback presents a landscape where evolving and traditional gender roles intersect. Statements indicating that women and men share responsibilities equally in managing WASH facilities, with women often taking on a major share of the workload, reflect a shift towards a more gender-balanced division of labor within the WASH sector.

However, this shift towards shared responsibilities doesn't automatically lead to equal authority in decision-making or recognition of contributions. Cultural norms, the distribution of responsibilities, and gender dynamics within decision-making spheres critically influence the realization of gender equality. A woman participant's statement, "I am a person who believes in my role in society and undertakes all political, productive, social, and reproductive roles despite all challenges. I am also a trusted source for women in the area," highlights the significant yet often overlooked contributions women make beyond the household, advocating for broader community needs and interests. Additionally, another woman's

role as a taxi driver breaks through traditional gender barriers, showcasing the potential for women to occupy non-traditional roles within their communities.

Men's recognition of shared responsibilities regarding WASH indicates an acknowledgment of gender equality in labor division both within households and the wider community. However, the prevailing belief among men that women's roles are primarily domestic, as evidenced by one male participant's remark that "women clean the house and this is their role," indicates a superficial commitment to gender equality. This traditional viewpoint contrasts sharply with the actions of women who engage directly with policymakers to advocate for infrastructure improvements, demonstrating women's capability and interest in influencing broader societal issues beyond the household sphere. One woman noted, "To address the issues that we face as a community in relation to access to clean water and sanitation, I visited and directly engaged with Ministers and decision-makers and we have issued formal requests for infrastructure improvements but we didn't receive any support yet". . This woman's engagement with political processes demonstrates that women are capable of and interested in contributing to discussions and decisions that extend far beyond the confines of their homes. It highlights women's agency and their ability to influence change at a higher decision-making level, challenging the narrative that women's roles should be confined to the domestic sphere.

In contrast, Women's engagement with ministers and decision-makers for infrastructure improvements challenge the traditional roles. Her approach exemplifies women's capacity to operate in roles beyond the domestic sphere, actively participating in the political and public domains.

This proactive advocacy also indicates a shift towards recognizing women as stakeholders with significant contributions to make in public and political spheres. It challenges the traditional gender norms by showcasing that women's involvement in community and public affairs is not only possible but necessary for holistic and inclusive development. The woman's strategic advocacy serves as a counter-narrative to the traditional view expressed by the male participants, suggesting a path towards redefining gender roles in a way that values and utilizes the capacities of all community members, regardless of their sex.

On the other hand, Fuqeiqis reveals specific gender-assigned responsibilities within the WASH domain. A participant explained, "*Men handle electrical pump repairs and agricultural tasks, while women focus on waste management and water-related chores.*" Despite distinct roles, there's a recognition of relatively equal water access priorities between men and women. This recognition of relatively equal water access priorities points to a level of gender equality in resource distribution. The community's response to climate change showcases resilience and adaptability, suggesting a collective and shared approach to accessing WASH services. However, this does not imply that men engage in cleaning tasks.

In the central region of the West Bank, Ein Qiniya reveals deeply ingrained gender roles intertwined with daily life. Women play a pivotal role in domestic responsibilities, managing tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, significantly contributing to family well-being. Their involvement extends to vital agricultural and livestock-related activities, including the care, milking, and feeding of sheep, underscoring their integral role in sustaining the community's livelihood. The cyclical nature of women's daily routines is vividly captured in their own words:

“First, we wake up in the morning and make breakfast for our husbands, then we milk the sheep and store the milk. After waking up the kids, we feed and get them ready. Then, we cook and feed the kids lunch, clean, do the laundry, and make laban [yogurt] around 4:00. The men come home as we are still working. Then we bake bread, feed the sheep, and finally, we eat. It’s the same cyclical schedule every day.”

Only one man, in his sixties, stated that he would bring water from the spring [although contaminated by sanitation coming from the wastewater treatment plant from Ramallah municipality]. He mentioned being over sixty with no other responsibilities except bringing water and cleaning for the sheep. Other men confirmed their lack of participation in household chores or cleaning the yard for animals, citing their busy work outside the community and relying on women for these tasks.

These gender roles not only shape the division of labor but also impact access to resources and opportunities in Ein Qiniya. The study delves into the intricate interplay between traditional roles and challenges posed by issues such as waste disposal and water scarcity. For instance, the additional burden of waste disposal, coupled with inadequate infrastructure, complicates women’s responsibilities in domestic and agricultural tasks. Moreover, the water crisis disproportionately affects women, responsible for water transportation and managing household water needs. The scarcity amplifies their workload, posing challenges to health, hygiene, daily routines, and well-being.

These perceptions reveals a power dynamic where men often assume primary decision-making roles, especially in matters concerning community infrastructure and services like the placement of bathrooms. The consensus from both male and female focus groups in Ein Qiniya acknowledges the declining state of livelihoods, closely tied to water source contamination. The residents previously relied on this water for agriculture and personal consumption, sustaining their crops, livestock, and households. *“We would water the plants and eat the vegetation that grew from it. We would drink it, and people would come from around and fill water from the spring,”* one woman reaffirmed. But the situation changed due to the scarcity of water, leading the community to no longer rely on agriculture.

The contamination has significantly compromised the community's ability to access water, affecting agriculture, food security, and income generation. Furthermore, it poses potential health risks to residents who might have consumed it. The focus groups highlight the intricate connection between environmental degradation, livelihood erosion, and the urgent need for comprehensive interventions.

An illustrative scenario emerged when discussing the installation of outdoor toilets. All women unanimously attested that men held the decision-making authority in this matter, leaving them with no input. This gendered pattern not only emphasizes a power imbalance but also indicates a limited role for women in shaping the community's physical infrastructure. Intriguingly, the women expressed a preference for indoor toilets within their modest dwellings, citing concerns about the condition of existing facilities. Their desire for safer and more suitable sanitation solutions within their homes signifies a practical understanding of their needs, presenting a nuanced perspective on gender roles.

The specific instance where a child fell into a damaged toilet underscores the tangible risks associated with inadequate infrastructure. This incident serves as a distressing reminder of the potential hazards that can result from decisions made without considering the perspectives of those directly affected, especially women and children. The narrative further highlights the intersectionality of gender and socio-economic factors, as compromised infrastructure not only poses risks to residents' well-being but also introduces challenges with broader implications.

The gendered nature of decision-making in Ein Qiniya, favoring men and limiting women's influence, underscores the importance of addressing power dynamics that perpetuate such disparities. The challenges stemming from water contamination emphasize the pressing need for comprehensive solutions. Initiatives should not only tackle environmental concerns but also recognize and rectify gender-based imbalances in decision-making processes. Achieving sustainable and equitable community development requires an inclusive approach that considers the diverse needs and insights of all residents, irrespective of gender.

In the Jerusalem Governorate, situated 9.12km north-west of Jerusalem City, the women of Jaba' Bedouin community shoulder diverse responsibilities, encompassing household chores and significant contributions to livestock and essential household products. A woman provided a comprehensive overview, stating, "I make bread, do the dishes, make breakfast for the workers, work with the sheep, wash clothes, take care of the kids, make milk, laban [yogurt], all of that." This portrayal illustrates the multifaceted roles women play in the daily functioning of their households, extending from basic domestic tasks to crucial contributions to the community's sustenance.

The researcher was guided to a kitchen, exemplifying the living conditions and potential risks faced by women and children. The dilapidated state of the kitchen serves as a tangible manifestation of the challenges encountered, posing risks to the well-being of the family. The woman's commentary sheds light on the awareness within the community about these issues, emphasizing that while men may be cognizant, there is a perceived lack of prioritization of women's needs. The call for a more inclusive decision-making process, where women actively participate in determining the support required for the community, underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the distinct needs of women.

Some women in the community emphasized the necessity of empowerment through small income-generating projects. This strategic approach aims to enable women to address both immediate and long-term needs, such as fixing kitchen facilities and other essential infrastructure. The desire for economic empowerment aligns with a broader call for recognizing and valuing women's contributions beyond traditional gender roles. The proposed projects not only serve as a means to enhance women's agency but also challenge stereotypes by acknowledging their capabilities in roles extending beyond conventional expectations.

The community's reliance on women for essential tasks, such as waste disposal, emphasizes the vital role they play in maintaining the community's functionality. This reliance further underscores the need for a paradigm shift in recognizing and appreciating the diverse roles women undertake. The multifaceted

involvement of women not only challenges traditional stereotypes but also emphasizes the urgency of acknowledging and empowering women in roles that extend beyond conventional expectations. It underscores the importance of cultivating a more inclusive and equitable community environment that values and supports the contributions of all its members, irrespective of gender.

Theme 3: Gender-based Violence (GBV)

The examination of various Palestinian communities in the West Bank reveals nuanced perspectives on gender-based violence (GBV), safety, and access to water and sanitation services. While some communities, like Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a), explicitly express fears of GBV, others, such as Khirbet Jubara, deny instances of it. The impact of inadequate sanitation facilities on women is evident in Wadi Qana, emphasizing potential gender-specific vulnerabilities. Additionally, concerns about safety and security, particularly linked to external factors like settlers and soldiers, are prevalent in various communities, highlighting the complex interplay of gender dynamics, violence, and essential services.


For example, in the community of Wadi Qana, situated in Salfit, men recounted various incidents of violence linked to water and sanitation services, shedding light on challenges such as weapon testing, trespassing, harm from individuals, and disruptions caused by occupation authorities and settlers. They described the impact, including the destruction of land, interference with shepherding activities, and even the use of poisonous substances on livestock. Women, in specific, emphasized the inadequate sanitation facilities' impact on women and girls, acknowledging their cautious nature and attributing it to the lack of safe sanitation facilities. This highlighted the crucial role of such facilities in cultivating security for women and girls.

Transitioning to Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a) in Tubas, the fear of gender-based violence within the community revealed complex challenges for women and children. The presence of men in certain areas, especially around land and during night-time, contributed to a sense of vulnerability. One man noted, This fear impacts their ability to access essential services like sanitation facilities, perform religious practices, and move freely within their own community, *“Women cannot go to the land to relieve themselves because of the presence of men in the area. Sometimes they would not be able to pray because they did not have ablution. Also, the problem is at night, when women or children want to go to the bathroom. Thank god we have bathrooms today, they don't have to worry about that anymore”*. The fear associated with the presence of men in certain areas directly impacts women's ability to access sanitation facilities. This is not just a matter of physical access but also relates to the broader issues of safety, privacy, and dignity. The inability to perform religious practices due to lack of ablution facilities further illustrates how gendered power dynamics can interfere with personal and religious autonomy. The significant restriction on women's and children's freedom of movement, particularly at night, due to safety concerns, was conveyed by women. This limitation on mobility is a manifestation of the broader constraints placed on women's autonomy and their right to participate freely in community life. The pervasive fear significantly affects the overall well-being of women and children. It is not just about physical safety but also about the psychological stress and anxiety associated with potential vulnerability to gender-based violence. The

restricted access to basic facilities like bathrooms compounds this stress, impacting their health and dignity. The mention of improved facilities, such as bathrooms, as a solution to alleviate fear highlights the critical role that infrastructure plays in promoting gender equality and ensuring safety and dignity for all community members. Access to safe and private sanitation facilities is a fundamental human right and is crucial for reducing the vulnerability of women and children to gender-based violence. However, it does not necessarily imply that women and children are secure outside of these specific contexts or in all aspects of their community life. The presence of gender-based violence and the fear it instigates can pervade various facets of daily life beyond the access to and use of sanitation facilities. While the provision of bathrooms has addressed a particular concern related to privacy and safety, the broader issues of gender-based violence, freedom of movement, and overall safety in public spaces remain critical challenges.

The vulnerability of women in Humsa was further exacerbated by the lack of essential services, including water and sanitation. A participant noted that women are the most exposed to violence due to the lack of services, emphasizing the disproportionate impact on women's safety and well-being. The multifaceted challenges faced by women, including fear from settlers and broader contextual violence, underscored the complex nature of their situation.

In Khirbet Jubara, Tulkarm, a unique perspective emerged, with both men and women denying instances of gender-based violence in their community. The men asserted that there was no need for initiatives to address gender-based violence, stating, *"We do not need initiatives because there is no problem in the first place."* However, the possibility of hidden or misunderstood gender-based violence was acknowledged.



"Services are available and there is no kind of violence."

(Man from Khirbet Jubara, FGD)

In Za'tara, Bethlehem, participants asserted that there have been no recorded incidents of harassment or violence in connection to their utilization of water and sanitation services. They attribute this to the fact that their daughters tend to stay indoors, with limited outings, ensuring a sense of security. As expressed by one woman, *"We haven't heard about cases of harassment or violence because our daughters don't go out for a walk in the community and the surrounding areas. They stay at home, and if they want to go out for a walk, they just walk like a group of girls"*. While this may contribute to a reduced risk of gender-based violence, it also significantly restricts women's and girls' freedom of movement and autonomy. This restriction can have broader implications for their social, educational, and economic opportunities. Men also perceived vulnerability as more associated with external factors such as fear of strangers than the absence of safe facilities. One man confirmed, *"Women in the town are very safe, even when they walk in the streets or close to someone's house. Our girls don't go out of the house alone. They always go out in groups, ensuring safety."*

Despite this general sense of security, an incident in the Al-Obaidiya area [same district] is mentioned, where a girl was reportedly kidnapped. The reasons behind this specific occurrence remain unclear.

However, the participants highlight that the boys, engaged in activities like herding sheep and learning agricultural work with their fathers, seem less vulnerable to such incidents, thus enjoying more freedom.

Discussions imply that women's safety is perceived as reliant on minimizing interactions with unfamiliar individuals. This dynamic highlights the existence of unequal power relations and the imposition of behavioural restrictions on women based on societal expectations. Consequently, this contributes to the persistence of gender-based discrimination within the community.

Discussing the potential impact of insufficient sanitation facilities on women and girls, the participants emphasize that the perceived vulnerability is more linked to external factors like fear of strangers than the absence of safe facilities. They suggest that the close-knit nature of their community contributes to a sense of security, as expressed by one woman, *"In our town, we no longer have security because many outsiders are coming to the town. We used to have security because we knew who they were."* Similarly, men's viewpoints on gender-based violence were predominantly centered on the violence stemming from the occupation, particularly in the context of Israeli occupation raids and the destruction of nests, among other related incidents. Participants narrated instances of settler violence that specifically targeted livestock and children. One man recounted, *"They [settlers] descended upon them [boys] while herding sheep near the settlement, poisoning the sheep, breaking their legs, and assaulting the boy."* Furthermore, participants touched upon the challenges faced due to deficient sanitation facilities. One man narrated a snake encounter in a bathroom, emphasizing the urgent need for improved facilities. He noted, *"One of the boys entered the bathroom and found a large snake. He quickly exited"*.

Similarly, in Jbara and Al-Khouli, women and men in Fasayil al-Fauqa in the Northern Jordan Valley revealed concerns related to safety and security, with a notable fear of Israeli soldiers rather than gender-based violence within their community. The community's apprehension was linked to the presence and actions of Israeli settlers and soldiers, reflecting the harsh reality of living in a conflict zone. One man from Al-Khouli emphasized, *"There have been no cases of violence related specifically to access to water and sanitation services and waste. We experience violence related to our presence in the community from settlers."* This situation emphasizes the socio-political backdrop in which communities operate, indicating how it can impact feelings of safety. It underscores the interconnected nature of challenges, demonstrating that while immediate concerns may relate to water and sanitation, external factors can intensify overall vulnerability and fear.

Safety and security form the bedrock of community prosperity. The absence of violence, as affirmed by both male and female participants, fosters well-being, community cohesion, and an improved quality of life. One female participant emphasizes, *"Sanitary facilities are safe, homes are safe, and waste disposal has nothing to do with violence."* This highlights that a secure physical environment directly contributes to community well-being. Building on this, a male participant adds, *"It (Violence) doesn't happen. Bathrooms have lights and everyone has a bathroom."* This suggests that the community's emphasis on basic facilities, coupled with proper lighting, acts as a deterrent against potential threats, fostering a violence-free environment. Another female participant points out, *"Health facilities are indoors, which protects women from violence outside the house."* This underscores the importance of creating secure

spaces for women, indicating that meticulous attention to safety contributes not only to overall well-being but also to women's protection.

Expanding to the geopolitical context, a female participant astutely observes, "Violence from the occupation is what affects our children, not a lack of public facilities." This directs attention to the intersection of the community's local environment with broader geopolitical realities, emphasizing a nuanced recognition that, while challenges with public facilities may exist, the primary source of violence stems from external factors beyond immediate control.

In Fuqeiqis, the discussion revealed a divergence in perspectives between men and women regarding safety, particularly violence related to water and sanitation services. Men asserted that women and children are safe, attributing violence to shepherds targeted by settlers. Women, however, contradicted this, citing past experiences and expressing ongoing fears. One woman recalled, "In the past, we used to go to the water cisterns to fetch water repeatedly. There was no safety, either from the settlers, the Israeli army, or members of the community." Another shared a recent unsettling experience, "*Shortly ago, I was hanging my laundry outside the house after afternoon, and noticed that there were settler searchlights, so I felt great fear because I am alone with my children.*"

This disagreement indicates that, while men perceive safety, women perceive a threat from settlers and certain community members. The community lacks protective measures, as emphasized by the statement, "*There are no measures to protect the shepherds or the residents to access their lands without being subjected to violence, as the Israeli occupation is in control of everything.*"

In Ein Qiniya, there is a prevailing consensus among both genders that gender-based violence (GBV) is not perceived as a prevalent threat within the community. Both women and men share a general sense of not fearing GBV, indicating a collective perspective. A woman's emphatic response, "No, no, never," suggests a lack of personal encounters with GBV up to that point. This shared sentiment reflects the overall perception within the community regarding the prevalence of gender-based violence.

However, it is essential to note that during the focus group discussion (FGD), women exhibited a degree of reluctance to openly discuss violence within the community. The FGD comprised five families forming clans and a tribal community. Notably, three of the women present were married to the same man, and they displayed resilience and acceptance towards this arrangement. This unique family structure might have influenced the dynamics within the group, contributing to the absence of discourse on internal violence. This observation was not surprising for the researcher, considering the intricacies of the community's social fabric.

Post the FGD, as the participants were leaving, one woman approached the researcher privately and spoke out loudly, revealing a different perspective. She expressed,

"We cannot talk in front of others. We all face violence. We also face harassment. I do not let my daughters go out to the toilet, which is far from my tent, because I am afraid someone will harass her or animals like pigs will hurt her. That is why I send her with her other sisters."

This additional information underscores the complex nature of discussions around gender-based violence within Ein Qiniya. While the communal narrative may downplay the prevalence of GBV, the private disclosure after the FGD highlights that certain individuals within the community do experience violence and harassment, particularly concerning the safety of their daughters. The fear of harm to the daughters, whether from human harassment or environmental factors, contributes to the practice of sending them in groups for protection. This reveals a nuanced layer to the community's perceptions and experiences, emphasizing the need for sensitivity and a deeper exploration of the lived realities of individuals, especially concerning the safety of women and children, in particular in accessing water and sanitation services as basic human rights.

While explicit instances of gender-based violence were not mentioned by respondents in Jaba', in Jerusalem, female participants implied an underlying fear. One woman expressed discomfort, stating, *"I'm not comfortable going to the bathroom. We're afraid. The bathrooms are outside, and anyone can come out of anywhere."* This suggests an unspoken fear among women about using outdoor facilities due to potential safety risks.

In Froush Beit Dajan, men participants acknowledged the disproportionate impact of water scarcity on women. Despite challenges, the discussion revealed a relatively low level of violence, with instances being predominantly verbal rather than physical. This underscores the interconnectedness of water scarcity and its impact on women's responsibilities, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to address both resource scarcity and gender-related challenges.

Chapter Four: Key findings

This in-depth qualitative study, centered on the narratives of WASH-vulnerable communities in Area "C" in the West Bank, unfolds challenges and risk factors that significantly shape their ability to access WASH services. The comprehensive key findings are as follows:

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Challenges in West Bank Communities

Access to water, a fundamental human right crucial for well-being, health, and prosperity, is examined across various localities in the West Bank, revealing commonalities and risks, particularly with a gender perspective. Women, often managing household water tasks, bear the brunt of inadequate water infrastructure faced by the communities, intensifying their workload, as seen in Fuqeiqis. High water-related expenses disproportionately affect women, limiting resources for other necessities, as evidenced in Ein Qiniya. Political and legal barriers, such as restrictions on groundwater wells construction under Israeli occupation, hinder women's ability to ensure water access, such as in Al Damayra. Environmental changes impacting water sources further affect women engaged in agriculture and livelihood activities.

The challenges of solid waste management, a critical aspect of urban and environmental planning with direct impacts on public health and sustainability, reveal intricate gender dynamics. Shared political barriers and prohibitions create physical and economic strains on both men and women across various communities. Improper waste disposal directly contaminates water sources, emphasizing the urgency of effective waste management. Health risks and financial burdens due to inadequate sewage systems affect both men and women in Al Damayra and Za'tara. The psychological impact of a lack of proper sewage systems on mental well-being is experienced by both genders.

Differences in solid waste management challenges include unique gender-related issues, such as menstrual hygiene challenges for women in Ein Qiniya and Fasayil Al Fauqa. Women bear the primary responsibility for waste disposal, adding to their already demanding roles, and express discomfort with outdoor communal bathrooms. Risks associated with burning waste, political interference, and inequitable resource distribution by the Israeli occupation further underscore the multifaceted impacts on the health and environmental sustainability of the entire community.

In examining various villages, recurring themes of water scarcity, absence of proper waste management infrastructure, and political constraints imposed by the Israeli occupation are pervasive. Despite challenges, communities exhibit resilience and unity, showcasing diverse approaches to cope with their circumstances. Risks associated with burning waste, reliance on contaminated water sources, and the overflow of sewage pose immediate health risks and contribute to long-term environmental degradation. Proximity to settlements and the presence of the Israeli army create security risks during water source journeys, impacting the physical safety and well-being of residents. Attempts to exploit the dire need for water by individuals installing pipes for financial gain highlight the vulnerability of communities,

emphasizing the potential for exploitation in their challenging circumstances. These multifaceted risk factors underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable interventions in WASH practices to improve the overall well-being of West Bank communities.

Women's Involvement in Decision-Making

The exploration of decision-making dynamics within the WASH domain in Area “C” of the West Bank highlights the intricate power dynamics shaping roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women. From Wadi Qana in Northern Salfit to Fuqeiqis in Southern Hebron, the study uncovers nuanced gender dynamics influencing WASH service access. In certain vulnerable communities, persistent traditional gender expectations significantly impact women's involvement in broader community affairs.

In communities like Arab Al-Damayra, there's evidence of women participating in decision-making, challenging traditional roles through their agency, advocacy, and contributions, signaling a shift towards more equitable gender dynamics. However, the persistence of traditional gender norms and superficial commitments to gender equality by some highlight the need for ongoing efforts to achieve full gender inclusivity and recognize women's contributions, contrasting sharply with communities where men are predominantly seen as the primary decision-makers. This highlights the importance of continuous dialogue and awareness-building to challenge and change traditional norms.

In Wadi Qana, a collaborative approach prevails in WASH tasks, but traditional gender norms persist, limiting women's decision-making beyond their homes. Humsa Al-Fawqa (Al Bqai'a) reflects similar perceptions of stereotypical gender roles, with women excluded from decision-making processes. Khirbet Jubara presents a scenario where both men and women deny gender-specific roles, but the acknowledgment of women's primary engagement in cleaning suggests underlying gendered expectations, emphasizing the need for ongoing dialogue. Za'tara shows varying perspectives on gender roles in water-related tasks, with women perceiving simplicity while men highlight a collaborative approach. The traditional division of labor is evident, with men primarily regarded as providers, influencing gender equality in the community.

In many marginalized communities in Area “C”, women bear the primary responsibility for waste disposal, cooking, and cleaning. Fasayil Al-Fauqa, however, presents women as decision-makers and active contributors, challenging traditional gender roles. The community's adaptability emphasizes a collective yearning for sustainable water services. In the Arab Al-Khouli community, a distinctive blend of adaptability and the deliberate absence of gender-specific tasks marks a forward-thinking approach to communal development, particularly within the WASH sector. Women and men alike advocate for evolving water access and waste management practices over altering traditional gender roles, prioritizing practical improvements in infrastructure to enhance living conditions. This pragmatic stance, emphasizing shared challenges and solutions beyond conventional gendered responsibilities, underscores a collective orientation towards inclusive problem-solving. The community's flexibility, coupled with a unanimous call for better WASH services, illustrates a commitment to equality and sustainability without necessarily challenging established roles. This approach, which blurs the lines between gender-specific duties,

highlights a progressive mindset where responsibilities are shared based on capability, not gender, pointing towards a more equitable society. The Arab Al-Khouli community's emphasis on service improvement and eco-friendly practices offers a solid foundation for broader societal changes, demonstrating that prioritizing communal well-being and infrastructure can naturally foster a more inclusive environment, potentially serving as a blueprint for dismantling traditional gender norms in resource management and communal decision-making.

. Ein Qiniya reveals deeply ingrained gender roles impacting resource access. Women's responsibilities in waste disposal and water transportation are compounded by inadequate infrastructure, posing challenges to health, hygiene, and well-being.

The declining livelihoods in Ein Qiniya, tied to water source contamination, highlight the intricate connection between environmental degradation and challenges faced by the community. The gendered nature of decision-making, favoring men, underscores the need to address power dynamics perpetuating disparities. Initiatives should not only tackle environmental concerns but also rectify gender-based imbalances for sustainable and equitable community development.

In the Jerusalem Governorate's Jaba' Bedouin community, women shoulder diverse responsibilities, from household chores to significant contributions to livestock. The living conditions underscore potential risks faced by women and children, emphasizing a perceived lack of prioritization of women's needs. The call for more inclusive decision-making processes, health services and well-being, and economic empowerment aligns with recognizing and valuing women's contributions beyond traditional roles. The reliance on women for essential tasks emphasizes their vital role in maintaining community functionality, necessitating a paradigm shift towards recognizing, appreciating, and empowering women in roles that extend beyond conventional expectations.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Overview

In exploring the theme of Gender-based Violence (GBV) across various Palestinian communities, distinct patterns and nuances emerge, shedding light on the complex interplay of socio-political dynamics, community perceptions, and individual experiences. The narratives reflect the intersection of external influences, community dynamics, and individual experiences, shaping the complex reality of daily life in the Palestinian territories.

Commonalities

1. In several communities, fear is not solely confined to gender-based violence within the community but extends to external forces, particularly Israeli settlers and soldiers. The proximity of settlements and the fear of incursions impact the daily lives of community members.
2. The fear of gender-based violence, whether perceived or actual, influences the ability of women to engage in daily activities such as using outdoor facilities, going to the bathroom, or performing religious practices. The fear is not only rooted in physical harm but also in the broader context of occupation-related disruptions.

3. Instances of underreporting or normalization of violence are apparent in certain communities, where men assert the absence of gender-based violence. This raises questions about the visibility and understanding of subtle forms of violence, possibly concealed within societal norms.
4. The security perception within communities is often intertwined with internal dynamics, emphasizing the importance of familiarity and cohesion. However, the primary source of violence is external, linked to the Israeli occupation. Secure infrastructure, illuminated streets, and individual bathrooms are highlighted as deterrents against potential threats.

Variances

1. While some communities find safety in internal cohesion, familiarity, and well-lit infrastructure, others express fear due to external threats, emphasizing the delicate balance between internal stability and the challenges posed by settlers and soldiers.
2. Divergence in perspectives between men and women within a community is evident, emphasizing the need for comprehensive gender-sensitive viewpoints. Men may perceive safety, while women express concerns about external activities, settler movements, and the potential risk to their safety.

Risk Factors

1. The overarching risk factor is the impact of the Israeli occupation, manifesting in settler violence, incursions, and disruptions to daily activities. This external threat significantly contributes to the fear experienced by communities, particularly women and children.
2. The absence of safe and accessible sanitation facilities emerges as a risk factor, influencing the sense of security for women and girls. Concerns about using bathrooms, fear of external elements, and structural instability contribute to heightened vulnerability, especially in conflict zones.
3. Routine activities, such as going to the bathroom or performing religious practices, become risk factors when the fear of gender-based violence restricts women's access to these essential services. Lack of proper lighting, outdoor hazards, and the presence of strangers amplify the vulnerability experienced by women.
4. The variance in perspectives between men and women highlights potential underreporting or unspoken fears within communities. Instances where women express concerns not acknowledged by men underscore the need for a more inclusive dialogue on gender-based violence.

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusion

This section compiles a comprehensive set of recommendations originating from diverse communities, organizational participants, and the researcher's insights, illuminating the collective challenges and aspirations related to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services in Area "C" of the West Bank. The multifaceted perspectives of both men and women within these communities unveil a narrative emphasizing the pressing and interconnected needs for improved water access, enhanced sanitation infrastructure, effective waste management, and comprehensive infrastructure development. The compilation is organized into three main categories: recommendations from local communities, those proposed by organizations, and additional insights from the researcher. Together, these recommendations form a robust framework for addressing challenges and fostering sustainable WASH practices in the region.

Recommendations by Local Communities

This compilation presents a series of recommendations from diverse communities, shedding light on the shared challenges and aspirations related to WASH services. The insights are drawn from the perspectives of both men and women within these communities, reflecting a collective effort to address fundamental needs and enhance the overall quality of life. The recommendations underscore common themes such as the urgent need for improved water access, enhanced sanitation infrastructure, effective waste management, and comprehensive infrastructure development. The voices within these communities emphasize the interconnected nature of their challenges, with a focus on promoting gender equality, ensuring equal access to basic resources, and fostering sustainable living environments:

- Communities advocate for extensive infrastructure development, prioritizing the extension and improvement of sewage and water networks to ensure fair access to vital services.
- Women actively engage with men to address WASH challenges, recognizing gender-specific issues within the context of unique geopolitical circumstances.
- Shared priorities across communities encompass fundamental needs, emphasizing safe water access, sanitation, educational facilities, and healthcare services. This signifies a collective pursuit of an enhanced quality of life.
- The communities underscore the importance of organized waste management, proposing measures such as increased dumpster containers and dedicated vehicles.
- Women's recommendations reveal a nuanced understanding, suggesting solutions like larger water tanks and dedicated bathrooms to promote equal access and improved living conditions.
- Consistent emphasis on the urgent need to expand sewage and water networks highlights the necessity for infrastructure improvements.
- Communities, particularly women, express a proactive desire for increased participation in decision-making processes through workshops and inclusive governance.
- An urgent call resonates across diverse regions for improved water access, recognizing its critical importance in daily life, health, and overall well-being.

Recommendations by Organizations

In addressing gender-specific challenges within the WASH sector, the participants highlighted the critical need for capacity-building initiatives targeting both decision-makers and WASH institutions. The overall awareness among decision-makers regarding the gender dimensions of WASH was deemed significantly lacking. To bridge this gap, the participants suggested focusing on two levels of action.

1. Capacity-building for Decision-Makers

- Enhance the capacity of decision-makers in integrating gender perspectives into policies and strategies.
- Review and assess water policies, recognizing their current weaknesses and insensitivity to gender considerations. The aim is to make these policies more responsive to the actual demands and needs of women.
- Implement targeted awareness programs to emphasize the importance of gender integration in decision-making processes.

2. Capacity-building for WASH Institutions

- Develop and conduct training programs on gender integration in fundraising and project development for WASH institutions.
- Ensure that teams are not only aware of gender concepts but also capable of practically applying them in their work.
- Review and revise the existing guides on integrating gender into the work of environmental and governmental institutions. This includes planning, execution, and evaluation processes.
- Conduct specialized training through, for example Environmental Justice Programmes on advocacy mechanisms and pressure tactics.

The participants acknowledged that these initiatives need to be sustained and expanded. Specifically, the existing guide on gender integration requires further refinement, with the development of practical training exercises for both environmental and governmental institutions involved in the WASH sector.

Moving beyond theoretical training, the participants emphasized the importance of practical, hands-on exercises. This includes executive training sessions where decision-makers can engage in discussions with women, ensuring that the issues raised are adaptable and receptive to change. Practical exercises could involve role-playing scenarios, demonstrating how women can effectively raise their voices in decision-making processes.

As for community-level initiatives, the participants advised toward a shift beyond traditional awareness campaigns. Instead, exploring new and effective methods of engaging communities is essential. For instance, executive training sessions could be conducted, showcasing how women can actively participate

in decision-making processes and effectively communicate their demands. This could be complemented by media sessions featuring women from specific regions discussing their concerns and aspirations, serving as powerful advocacy tools. Other examples include,

1. Organize workshops that actively involve community members in discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving exercises related to gender equality, GBV, and inclusive decision-making. These workshops can be designed to simulate real-life scenarios, helping participants understand and appreciate the importance of women's roles in leadership and decision-making.
2. Utilize digital platforms to share stories and experiences of women who have successfully impacted their communities through leadership and decision-making roles. Digital storytelling can be a compelling way to inspire change, and showcase the benefits of gender-inclusive practices.
3. Host regular community dialogues or town hall meetings in safe spaces where women and men (jointly or seperagely) can openly discuss the challenges and opportunities related to gender roles and decision-making. These platforms can facilitate direct communication between community members and local leaders, promoting transparency and mutual understanding.
4. Establish mentorship programs that pair emerging female leaders with experienced mentors. This can help women gain the confidence, skills, and networks necessary to take on decision-making roles. Mentorship programs can also include leadership training, networking opportunities, and support in developing advocacy strategies.
5. Leverage social media platforms to highlight women's contributions to community decision-making and advocate for gender equality. These campaigns can utilize hashtags, video testimonials, and live Q&A sessions to engage a broader audience and stimulate discussion on gender issues.
6. Use art, music, and cultural events as platforms to explore and challenge gender norms. Exhibitions can feature works by local women artists or themes related to gender equality and GBV, serving as a starting point for community conversations about women's decision-making roles and rights.

More Recommendations from the Study

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

1. Implement awareness programs to educate individuals, including men and women, and focusing on specialized workshops for women, about their rights, available resources, and sustainable WASH practices. This includes workshops on proper waste management, efficient water use, and menstrual hygiene;
2. Launch awareness programs at the individual level, engaging both men and women, to enhance their understanding of the health impacts associated with burning waste. These programs should emphasize the potential risks of exposure to harmful pollutants released during the burning process and provide information on alternative, safer waste disposal methods.
3. Integrate educational modules on the health consequences of burning waste into empowerment initiatives for men and women. This includes workshops and training sessions that not only enhance their skills but also raise awareness about the importance of adopting environmentally

friendly waste management practices to safeguard both personal health and community well-being.

4. Promote economic empowerment initiatives for women, acknowledging their pivotal role in WASH-related activities, through skill development programs, vocational training, and support for income-generating activities, thereby fostering self-reliance and resilience. Concurrently, develop and implement engagement and educational programs for men, aimed at transforming gender norms, encouraging shared responsibilities in WASH tasks, and supporting women's economic endeavors. This dual approach will ensure a more holistic and effective contribution to gender equality and the sustainability of WASH initiatives.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

1. Facilitate community dialogues on gender roles and the equitable distribution of responsibilities. Encourage open discussions to challenge traditional norms, fostering inclusivity in decision-making processes related to WASH services.
2. Support community-led initiatives for sustainable WASH practices ensuring they are inclusive and feature equitable representation of women in decision-making roles. This can include establishing community-based groups/organizations, fostering local solutions for waste management, and advocating for shared responsibility in the upkeep of water sources..
3. Collaborate with relevant authorities to improve safety through the installation of adequate lighting in public spaces, secure and accessible sanitation facilities, and the development of safe, designated areas for women to perform daily activities and religious practices. This includes the construction of individual bathrooms to reduce vulnerabilities associated with shared or public facilities.
4. Initiate community-wide dialogues that include both men and women to discuss the impact of GBV, challenge normalization, and address underreporting. These dialogues should aim to create a shared understanding of safety and violence, bridging the gap between differing gender perceptions..
5. Implement gender-sensitive education programs aimed at both men and women to raise awareness about the forms, consequences, and unacceptability of GBV. Programs should also promote understanding of women's rights, legal protection mechanisms, and the importance of reporting incidents of violence.
6. Develop community-led monitoring systems to track incidents of GBV and external threats, facilitating timely and coordinated responses. These mechanisms can empower communities to take proactive steps in ensuring their safety and security.

POLICY AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

1. Develop and implement gender-responsive policies in the WASH sector. This involves incorporating a gender perspective in national and local policies, ensuring the specific needs and challenges faced by women are addressed comprehensively.

2. Advocate for legal reforms that address political and legal barriers affecting WASH services. This includes challenging restrictions on groundwater wells construction and waste disposal imposed by external forces, such as the Israeli occupation, through international legal channels.
3. Ensure equitable resource allocation for WASH services, considering the gender-specific challenges highlighted in the study. Prioritize funding for infrastructure development, waste management systems, and initiatives that empower women in WASH-related activities.
4. Encourage and enforce inclusivity in decision-making processes at all levels. This involves promoting the active participation of women in community affairs, ensuring their voices are heard, and challenging traditional gender expectations that limit their involvement.
5. Work towards improving security conditions in areas affected by the Israeli militarization and settlements. Collaborate between local and international organizations to address external threats, ensuring the safety of communities during essential activities like accessing water sources and using sanitation facilities.
6. Partner with local authorities, NGOs, and international organizations to advocate for policies that protect communities from external threats, address the root causes of GBV, and support the implementation of protective measures against settler violence and military incursions.

ANNEX 1 | FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) QUESTIONS

Consent by participants is obtained before the start of the discussions. The facilitator used simple language to ensure they are easily understood, promoting active participation and the sharing of valuable insights. A safe space was established by the facilitator to further encourage the participants to share their experiences.

Introduction

- Can you briefly introduce yourself and your role in the community?
- How would you describe the current state of water, sanitation, and hygiene services in your community?
- How are decisions regarding WASH services made in your community? Who is involved in these decision-making processes?

Gender-specific Needs and Challenges

- Can you describe the current challenges and issues you face regarding water access, sanitation facilities, and hygiene practices in your community?
- How do these challenges and issues differ for men, women, and young people in your community? How do they affect their daily lives, health, and well-being?
- How do economic constraints, infrastructure limitations, or legal and policy frameworks impact gender equality in WASH services?
- What mechanisms or strategies do you apply within the community to cope with the challenges and vulnerabilities related to WASH? How effective are these mechanisms, and are there any areas for improvement?

Decision making, roles and access to WASH facilities

For Men:

1. How do you think men in our community are involved in accessing and managing water, toilets, and hygiene practices?
2. Are there any specific tasks or responsibilities that men usually have when it comes to WASH facilities? Can you give examples?
3. Do you think men and women have equal access to water and sanitation services in our community? Why or why not?
4. How do you feel about the roles and responsibilities assigned to men regarding WASH facilities? Is there anything you think should be changed or improved?
5. Are there any rules or customs in our community that determine who gets priority or decision-making power in accessing and using water, toilets, or hygiene resources? How does it affect men's lives?

For Women:

1. How do women in our community access water, toilets, and hygiene resources? Are there any challenges they face?
2. What are the tasks or responsibilities that women usually have in relation to managing water and sanitation facilities in our community?
3. Do you think women and men have equal access to water and sanitation services in our community? Can you share any experiences or examples?

4. Are there any specific challenges related to menstrual hygiene management that women and girls face in your community?
5. How do you feel about the roles and responsibilities assigned to women regarding WASH facilities? Is there anything you think should be changed or improved?
6. Are there any rules or customs in our community that limit women's access or decision-making power when it comes to water, toilets, or hygiene? How does it affect women's lives?

Gender-based Violence (GBV)

- Have there been any instances where women and girls in your community have experienced violence related to WASH services? The facilitator will explain what gender based violence is (harassment, abuse, assaults, physical violence, among others. The use of toilets that are poorly lit or located in isolated areas (i.e. fear).
- In your opinion, how does the lack of safe and accessible WASH facilities contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls to GBV? Do you feel that in your community women and girls are mostly vulnerable to GBV due to lack of safe and accessible WASH facilities?
- Are there any existing mechanisms or initiatives in place to prevent and respond to GBV in relation to WASH services?

Recommendations

- Based on your experiences and insights, what do you think can be done to improve gender equality in WASH services in your community? What are the specific needs of the community to ensure WASH services are available and accessible by the community members on equal basis?
- How can women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to WASH be promoted?
- Are there any successful practices or initiatives in other communities that could be replicated or adapted in your context?

ANNEX 2 | KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW (KII) QUESTIONS

Background

1. Can you describe your role and responsibilities within the WASH sector and how they relate to addressing the needs of affected individuals?

Policy and Legal Framework

1. Are there any existing policies or legal frameworks that promote gender equality in the WASH sector?
2. Have these policies been effectively implemented, and what are the challenges in doing so?

Decision-making processes and gender mainstreaming

1. Who are the key stakeholders involved in decision-making processes related to WASH services in your organization?
2. How do you ensure the meaningful participation of women in these processes?
3. From your perspective, what are the key gender-specific challenges and barriers in providing WASH services in our context?
4. How would you assess the current strategies, policies, and interventions in place to address gender inequalities in the WASH sector? What gaps or limitations do you see in these approaches? How do you ensure that gender considerations are incorporated into WASH programs and projects? What strategies or approaches have been effective in promoting gender equality in WASH services?
5. In your opinion, what are the main opportunities for enhancing gender mainstreaming in decision-making processes within the WASH sector? How can women's meaningful participation in WASH-related activities be further encouraged and supported at the local and national levels?

Collaboration and Partnerships

1. How do you collaborate with civil society organizations and local communities to address gender inequalities in WASH services?
2. Are there any successful examples of collaboration or partnerships that have contributed to gender-responsive WASH programming?

Gender specific challenges

1. In your view, what are the root causes of gender inequality in the context of WASH services provision? How do these factors impact the effectiveness of interventions?
2. How would you describe the level of awareness among decision makers about the gender dimensions of WASH? What steps have been taken to integrate a gender perspective into decision-making processes and practices?
3. Can you provide examples of initiatives or interventions that have been implemented to address gender-specific challenges in the WASH sector? What have been their outcomes and impacts?
4. How would you assess the effectiveness of current approaches and initiatives in promoting gender equality and inclusiveness in WASH services provision? What evidence or indicators do you use to measure their success?

Capacity Building

1. What capacity-building initiatives are in place to enhance the knowledge and skills of WASH practitioners in integrating gender perspectives?
2. Have there been any specific training programs or workshops focusing on gender and WASH?

Recommendations:

5. What are your recommendations for strengthening the overall response to gender-specific challenges in the WASH sector? Are there any specific areas or strategies that you believe should receive more attention?
6. How can decision makers contribute to the gender-responsiveness of WASH services provision? Are there any changes or improvements that you envision in terms of policies, coordination mechanisms, or resource allocation?

ANNEX 3 | FGD QUESTIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND WASH CLUSTER MEMBERS

1. What are your perceptions of the existing laws, policies, and regulations related to WASH services and gender equality? Are they adequate in addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women, men, and marginalized groups?
2. Can you provide examples of specific strategies or interventions that have been implemented to promote gender equality and inclusive access to WASH services? What were the key components of these initiatives and how effective have they been in reducing inequalities?
3. In your opinion, what are the main barriers and challenges to gender mainstreaming in the WASH sector? How can these barriers be addressed to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all aspects of WASH programming?
4. Have you observed any successful examples of gender mainstreaming approaches within WASH interventions? What were the key factors that contributed to their success, and how did they contribute to reducing inequalities and promoting social justice?
5. How do you engage with decision-makers and stakeholders (community leaders, and other organizations) to advocate for gender-responsive WASH policies and strategies? What strategies have been effective in influencing policy change and promoting inclusivity in WASH service provision?
6. Are there any specific mechanisms or tools in place to monitor and evaluate the gender equality outcomes of WASH interventions? How do you measure the impact of these interventions in terms of reducing inequalities and promoting social justice?
7. What role do you see civil society organizations and the WASH cluster playing in promoting gender equality and inclusive access to WASH services? How can they collaborate with other stakeholders to strengthen their efforts and achieve sustainable change?
8. How do you ensure the meaningful participation of women, men, and marginalized groups in decision-making processes related to WASH services? Are there specific mechanisms or strategies in place to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are addressed?
9. In your experience, what are some key elements of a comprehensive and gender-responsive WASH program? How can these elements be integrated into policies and strategies to ensure inclusive access and reduce inequalities?
10. Based on your expertise, what recommendations would you make to enhance gender mainstreaming and promote social justice through inclusive access to WASH services? How can laws, policies, and interventions be strengthened to address the specific needs of marginalized groups and reduce gender inequalities effectively?