

# THE ROLE OF UN WOMEN IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 5 IN CONFLICT AREA: A CASE STUDY OF PALESTINE

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## Abstract

This article discusses UN Women's role in implementing gender equality under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 in Palestine, a region prone to ongoing conflict with Israel. Women in conflict zones are often victims of physical, sexual and psychological violence and experience limited access to health and education services. UN Women, as a UN agency that focuses on gender equality, has an important role in encouraging the implementation of SDG 5 in conflict areas such as Palestine. Using descriptive qualitative research methods, this article analyzes the history and role of UN Women, the relationship between SDG 5 and conflict areas, and indications of gender inequality in the Palestinian conflict, such as violence against women and limited access to health services. Based on this analysis, the research question formulated is "How is UN Women's role in implementing gender equality contained in SDG 5 as a global agenda in situations in areas that are prone to prolonged conflict such as in Palestine?" This article aims to describe and analyze the role of UN Women in promoting gender equality in Palestine and to look at the effectiveness of SDGs in advancing gender equality in the midst of conflict.

**Keywords:** UN Women, Gender Empowerment, Palestine, Conflict

## Introduction

In conflict situations, women are often become the most vulnerable and particularly affected group. They face unique challenges and often experience gender inequality, violence, and limited access to basic services such as education and health. To address these challenges and promote gender equality, the UN has adopted the 2030 Agenda with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5 which aims to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment (Semenenko et al, 2019). The case study is Palestine, a region that has long experienced a complex and protracted conflict. This conflict has had a significant negative impact on women in Palestine, both in terms of violence against women and existing gender inequalities. In this context, UN Women plays an important role in driving the implementation of SDG 5 and promoting gender equality in conflict areas such as Palestine. To understand the role of UN Women in the implementation of SDG 5 in Palestine, it is necessary to look at the history and role of UN Women in general, then look at how SDG 5 is related to conflict areas and identify indications of gender inequality in the Palestinian conflict.

UN Women was established on July 2, 2010 by the United Nations (UN) through the merger of four previously separate UN entities, namely the Division for Advocacy and Empowerment of Women (DAW), the International Institute for Research on Women (INSTRAW), the International Women's Information Center (ICW), and the Unit for the Advancement of Women (UNIFEM) (UN Women, 2014a). The purpose of UN Women is to strengthen the role and effectiveness of the UN in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment around the world. UN Women is the UN agency responsible for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment around the world. In the implementation of

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 which relates to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, UN Women has an important role. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of global targets adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015. The SDGs aim to address development challenges faced by the world, including in conflict-affected areas. Conflict can exacerbate gender inequality and violence against women. SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment (Razavi, 2016). In conflict areas, efforts are needed to protect women and girls from violence, promote women's participation in peace and development, and improve women's access to health and education services.

Palestine is a region that has long experienced complex political and territorial conflicts. The conflict involves various parties, including the Israeli government, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and armed groups in the region. The conflict stems from claims and disputes over land, resources, security, and the status of Jerusalem (Alayasa & Musa, 2021). In the Palestinian conflict area, the implementation of SDG 5 is very important in an effort to address indications of gender inequality and violence against women. What are the indications of gender inequality in the Palestinian conflict? Violence against women in Palestine is a serious problem that is directly related to the ongoing conflict in the region. Palestinian women are often victims of physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated by various parties involved in the conflict, including the Israeli military, armed groups, and even in domestic contexts. Physical violence against women includes direct attacks, arbitrary detention, and household raids by the military or armed groups. Women are also vulnerable to forced evictions from their homes, whether as a result of armed conflict or settlement policies implemented by the Israeli government. Sexual violence is also a significant problem in Palestine. Women are often victims of rape, sexual harassment and other inhumane treatment. Sexual violence can be committed by the military, armed groups,

or other individuals who take advantage of conflict situations. Psychological violence is also a frequent impact on Palestinian women. Trauma, anxiety, depression and other mental disorders are often experienced by women due to the ongoing conflict situation and the uncertainty that accompanies it. The experience of war and loss of family or household can also have a lasting psychological impact on women.

The second indication is limited access to health services. Constraints in access to safe and quality health facilities can have a negative impact on women's health, especially in terms of obstetrics, reproductive health, and psychosocial services. Many health infrastructures, including hospitals, health centers, and other health care facilities have been damaged by military attacks. Military attacks or armed conflict can cause health facilities to be destroyed, dysfunctional, or inaccessible. In addition, the restrictions on freedom of movement imposed in Palestine are a serious problem experienced by women due to the ongoing conflict in the region. These restrictions affect women's mobility in accessing various services and opportunities, including health services, education, employment, and social interaction. Women in Palestine often face heightened scrutiny and access constraints when moving between conflict-affected areas. This can occur at checkpoints, checkpoints, or borders imposed by the authorities. Strict checks and complicated procedures impede women's mobility and slow their access to adequate health services. Restrictions on freedom of movement also have a significant psychological and social impact on women in Palestine. Feelings of confinement, isolation, and limitations in interacting with the community can affect women's mental and social well-being. It can also hinder women's participation in social, political and economic activities (Goulart et al, 2021).

Based on the background that has been presented, this paper formulates the question, that is, "How is UN Women's role in implementing gender equality contained in SDG 5 as a global agenda in

situations in areas prone to prolonged conflict such as in Palestine?" This article is written to describe and analyze the role of UN Women in implementing sustainable development, especially SDG 5 relating to gender equality for women in Palestine in conflict situations with Israel and is useful for seeing the effectiveness of SDGs in advancing gender equality in Palestine.

## **Research Method**

Qualitative research is a research approach that aims to understand phenomena in depth and contextually. Qualitative research methods emphasize interpretation and subjective understanding of the participants involved in the study. This approach focuses more on qualitative aspects such as the views, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of individuals or groups under study. Qualitative research methods involve descriptive data collection, such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, document analysis, and content analysis. The main objective of qualitative research is to reveal and understand the complexity and diversity of social phenomena, as well as gain a deep understanding of the context, meaning, and subjective experiences related to the research topic.

In the research on UN Women's role in the implementation of SDG 5 in conflict areas, especially the Palestinian case study, the research method included a literature review. Literature review is one of the important research methods in studying the role of UN Women in the implementation of SDG 5 in conflict areas, including the Palestinian case study. Through the literature review, researchers can collect related information from various relevant sources, such as scientific papers, reports, books, policies, and other publications that have been published by UN Women, international agencies, governments, and related civil society organizations. In the literature review, the researcher will identify literature relevant to the research topic, read and critically analyze it, and compile a summary or

synthesis of the findings. The literature review helps researchers gain an understanding of UN Women's role in the implementation of SDG 5 in conflict areas, identify issues that have been researched previously, and find knowledge gaps that can be further explored in their research.

## **Theoretical Approach**

### **Feminist Constructivism**

Given that gender equality as SDG 5 that UN Women is trying to promote in conflict areas covers a wide range of issues such as ending discrimination and sexual violence against women, economic empowerment, adequate access to health, education, and sanitation, and many more, the author tries to analyze using feminist constructivism theory to find answers to writing questions. (Senathalia & Nurjanah, 2021) state that feminist constructivism theory is one of the theories of international relations studies that departs from constructivism theory. Both theories (feminist and constructivism) inherently is a part of post-colonial studies, which mean feminist constructivism is a form of communication between the said theories with their shared ideas about global gender inequality.

Baylis et al (2020) explain that global politics is essentially attached to the influence of gender ideas that are constructed in society. In addition, the enactment of socialization or norms and culture that have become part of people's lives are also believed to be the result of a construction process, especially in the context of differences beyond the anatomy between men and women, or what is commonly known as gender roles. Therefore, power and gender are considered an inseparable part in the eyes of feminist constructivism (Locher & Prügl, 2001). In relation to this paper, there are many factors that make women more vulnerable to being marginalized in conflict zones. One of the main factors is the idea of gender that has been constructed in Palestinian society and also the ingrained patriarchal culture.

Various assumptions such as women are weak, irrational, unable to make decisions for themselves, even to determine the fate of their lives.

Biologically speaking, of course men and women have significant differences, but the idea of gender or the construction process that is born in society is the thought that because women are 'weaker' than men, women cannot obtain the same rights as men. This is a wretched idea that seems to have stuck with global politics until the modern era. The assumption that men are the main holders of strength and power and women do not have the capabilities of men makes gender-based violence more vulnerable (Huda & Dodi, 2020). In conflict areas, women are likely to be a vulnerable group that is marginalized and specifically affected. It is undeniable that the injustice and violence experienced by women in the Palestinian conflict area also often receive inhumane treatment from the Israelis, in this case Palestinian women have experienced double oppression, the lack of safe space for women in conflict areas is also one of the concerns of the global community. Therefore, when examined using the lens of feminist constructivism, although power and gender are two things that cannot be separated, the SGD 5 agenda exists to achieve inclusive gender equality.

Through the lens of feminist constructivism, the analysis rooted around the intricate interplay between gender, power dynamics, and conflict dynamics in shaping UN Women's initiatives. As feminist constructivism posits that gender roles, identities, and norms are socially constructed, influenced by historical, cultural, and political processes, the framework allows for an exploration of how patriarchal structures and gendered power relations in Palestinian society impact UN Women's efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in conflict zones. It enables a critical examination of the cultural norms and systemic barriers that may hinder or facilitate the implementation of SDG 5. By applying feminist constructivism, the analysis aims to uncover the complexities of gender inequalities, highlight the experiences and perspectives of Palestinian

women, and identify opportunities for transformative change through UN Women's initiatives

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Gender Construction in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflicts**

This conflict began to emerge when the UN General Assembly, passed a resolution that divided the Palestinian territory into three parts, namely: Palestinian Arab territory, Israeli territory, and Jerusalem as an area managed by the international community. The Palestinians objected to the resolution, then rejected such division. This eventually led to conflict between Palestine and Israel. After that, based on the UN resolution, the Jewish people then took a bold step to proclaim the state of Israel on May 14, 1948 as an independent state, with territorial areas determined by the United Nation Partition Plan (Wibowo, 2022).

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has been the longest and most complex conflict in modern post-World War II conflict. For decades, this conflict has involved many political, social and cultural dimensions involving various parties, including women. Unfortunately, women are often the marginalized party in this conflict. Israel's militarized culture excludes the idea of women, and Palestinian women are even more so. Apart from the violent pressures of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian women also have to face patriarchal structures in their own culture (Sharoni, 1999).

In Palestine itself, there is a strong patriarchal culture. When the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority controlled the territory under the Oslo Accords, Palestinians had the opportunity to administer laws and legal systems that governed several aspects of their lives. However, strengthening women's



rights and confronting gender discrimination in the family has not been a policy priority for the Palestinian Authority. Instead, the patriarchal culture under the Palestinian Authority government has been strengthened. Strong corruption, collusion and nepotism (KKN) in the distribution of power that only revolves around 'known people', where the power holders are men, further undermines women's struggles (Albobali & Musa, 2022). Such appointments have far-reaching implications in the Palestinian context, particularly in terms of consolidating male patriarchy at the expense of gender equality. More specifically, by "reinventing" the hamula as a state mechanism for consolidating political allegiances poses a potential threat to women. By legitimizing and reinforcing the role of the male head of household as the guardian of female family members, it becomes more difficult for third parties to intervene in cases of domestic violence (Ernudd, 2007). It is very difficult for Palestinian women to advocate for women's rights in the face of continued violence and poverty. Palestinian women suffer from unfair protection and enforcement of laws against women. The problem for women is that in times of crisis the undemocratic and change-resistant tribal system is strengthened, thus, patriarchal values and norms continue to strengthen, and further disempower Palestinian women (Isaac & Abbasi, 2022).

This condition is further exacerbated by security threats from the Israeli military. Depending on the source, however, at least tens of thousands of Palestinian buildings have been demolished by the Israeli government (Aaliyah, 2017; Middle East Monitor, 2023). This particularly affects Palestinian women. Palestinian women, who had previously experienced a patriarchal culture where they were forced to be subordinate to men in the family, were then subjected to forced intervention by the Israeli military. Palestinian women lost their homes, the center of their identity as wives and mothers.

Discriminatory actions by the Israeli army caused physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual harm and resulted in a loss of human dignity and respect. This prompted Palestinian women to start a movement against the Israeli army, as evidenced by the intifada movement. Women's activism in this movement strengthened the idea of gender equality in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Palestinian feminism here strives to end discrimination and struggle against colonization (Lasut et al, 2022).

In this regard, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, championed by the United Nations (UN) and implemented through the dedicated efforts of UN Women, is an important framework for addressing gender inequality and promoting women's participation in peacebuilding and security processes. The WPS Agenda, developed through UN Security Council resolutions, recognizes the particular challenges faced by women in conflict-affected areas and underscores the importance of their participation in decision-making processes (Kirby & Shepherd, 2021).

In the context of Palestinian women, the WPS Agenda is particularly relevant. It is explained by Sulin (2022) that Palestinian women have been affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and have a stake in efforts to achieve peace and security in the region. The WPS Agenda recognizes that women's participation is essential for sustainable peace and that their experiences and perspectives are critical to addressing the root causes of conflict and building inclusive societies. Palestinian women have been actively involved in promoting peace and advocating for their rights. They have been involved in grassroots movements, civil society organizations, and women's networks to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. These women have called for an end to violence, the recognition of Palestinian rights, and the inclusion of women's voices in decision-making processes. The WPS Agenda provides a framework for international actors, governments, and civil society organizations to support and empower Palestinian women in their efforts towards peace and

security. It encourages women's involvement in peace negotiations, the protection of women's rights during conflict, and the provision of resources and support for women-led initiatives. By implementing the WPS Agenda, it is hoped that Palestinian women's rights, agency, and contributions will be recognized and they will have a meaningful role in shaping the future of their society.

## **UN Women's Role in Raising International Awareness of Gender Equality in Palestine**

Gender equality is a fundamental principle for achieving peace, justice and sustainable development around the world. However, in Palestine, prolonged conflict and complex socio-political conditions have created serious challenges in realizing gender equality. In this context, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) plays an important role in raising international awareness about gender equality in Palestine. UN Women has been a powerful force in driving international awareness of gender equality issues in Palestine. Through their campaigns and collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations, UN Women has successfully promoted gender inclusion and empowered Palestinian women to overcome the challenges they face. They have not only changed people's perceptions and attitudes, but also influenced national and international policies on the issue (Prananda, 2022).

UN Women has also been instrumental in advocating to raise international awareness about gender equality in Palestine. UN Women conducts strong and active advocacy campaigns to express the needs and rights of women in the region. For example, UN Women has launched the "HeForShe" campaign that engages men as allies in promoting gender equality. The campaign aims to engage the entire community, including men and boys, in addressing gender injustice in Palestine. According to a

UN Women report, the HeForShe Campaign has brought positive changes in people's perceptions and attitudes towards gender equality in Palestine (Wafa, 2018). Through the active participation of men and boys in this campaign, we see an increased awareness of the importance of their role in creating sustainable change. In addition, UN Women also conducts political advocacy in international forums to increase international understanding and support for gender equality in Palestine (UN Women, 2022a). Gender equality in Palestine is not an option, but an urgent need. We must jointly strengthen advocacy and international cooperation to overcome the barriers that prevent Palestinian women from reaching their potential (Sharma, 2021a).

### **UN Women's Role in Palestinian Women's Education**

Education is a powerful instrument for changing attitudes and perceptions towards gender equality. Actually, Palestinian women have receive high-rate of women's education. In Palestine, women's literacy is increasingly high, from average 90,75% in 2007 to 95,91% in 2019 (Statista, 2019). However, the statistics does not account for the suffering of Palestinian women, especially in education. Education faces systematic hindrances and is occasionally severely impacted by the Israeli military occupation (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2008). According to the Palestinian Monitoring Group, Israeli military and settler actions in the Palestine have led to fatalities, injuries, and detentions affecting 28% of the Palestinian student population. The group also referenced the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which reported that Israeli army incursions and curfews resulted in the loss of approximately 1,525 school days for students between 2003 and 2005, and the most recent conflict, they officially suspended the school for period 2023/2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024). Such circumstances, including the patriarchal culture within Palestinian that the author has discussed above, lead to the forced normalization of

marriage at young age for Palestinian women in conflict zone which diminished the role of their in society (Sabbah-Karkaby & Stier, 2017).

UN Women plays an important role in expanding access to and improving the quality of education for women in Palestine. They work closely with the Palestinian government and local partners to develop Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy which provides a clear roadmap for government institutions to ensure integration and consistency in their interventions to achieve gender equality and the fulfillment of women's rights (UN Women, 2014b). UN Women has launched Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) to serve as a reliable source of evidence-based information and advocacy on gender equality in Palestine, including aimed at addressing the gender gap in education in Palestine (UN Women, 2023a). Through these initiatives, UN Women with its wide partnerships has provided financial assistance, safe educational facilities, and training for teachers to create an inclusive learning environment for girls in Palestine (Sharma, 2021b).

UN Women initiatives have helped to increase women's participation rates in education in Palestine. Girls now have greater opportunities to access quality education and develop their potential (UN Women, 2022b). In addition, UN Women also provides comprehensive gender education to adolescents in Palestine, focusing on awareness of gender issues, reproductive health, and prevention of gender-based violence. Through this program, UN Women seeks to change social norms that disadvantage women and increase understanding of sexual and reproductive rights (UN Women, 2022c).

## **UN Women's Role in Promoting International Support**

UN Women plays a critical role in driving international support for gender equality and women's empowerment in Palestine through advocacy, normative work, partnerships, capacity building and data-driven approaches. By mobilizing governments, civil society and other stakeholders, UN Women works towards a world where women have equal rights, opportunities and representation in all spheres of life. UN Women advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment at the international level. It raises awareness about key issues and challenges facing women and girls, including violence against women, economic empowerment, political participation, and access to education and health care (UN Women, 2023b). Through campaigns, reports, and high-level events, UN Women works with a wide range of partners, including governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities and other UN agencies, to leverage collective action and resources. It fosters partnerships at global, regional, and national levels to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment. These partnerships help mobilize support, share best practices, and coordinate efforts to effectively address gender issues (UN Women, n.d.).

With the support of the Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC), a mental health NGO that has been running a decades-long project in Palestine to increase women's and girls' access to justice and protection services, by developing independent community-based protection system in four branches, namely Palestine, Ramallah, Nablus and Qalqilyah. This is done by empowering community-based organizations (Ormas) to provide protection services to their communities, including protection from gender-based violence. In the project, PCC is building the capacity of community protection committees and six local community-based organizations so that they can link with national services to ensure appropriate referral of cases of violence against women including but not limited to gender-based and

political violence, help women build support networks and gain valuable life skills, and also offers empowerment programs for women and youth. Additionally, the project engages women leaders, most of whom are survivors of violence, to help other women by offering prevention, detection and referral services (PCC, n.d.). Support for the initiative of the NGO Forum Combatting Violence Against Women (Al-Muntada) to amend Palestinian legislation to better protect women from political and gender-based violence is also growing (UN Women, 2022b).

## **Conclusions**

In conflict zones, women are one of the groups that are vulnerable to various kinds of discrimination. To address this, the UN along with its 2030 Agenda of 17 Sustainability Goals seeks to eradicate discrimination felt by women and help women to achieve their rights to achieve gender equality, which is contained in Goal 5, namely gender equality and women's empowerment. In Palestine itself, some of the common problems felt by women are verbal, physical, and psychological violence, lack of access to health services, and restrictions on freedom of movement.

The conflict faced by Palestine itself has been going on for a long time, more precisely since the UN General Assembly divided Palestinian land into three parts managed for Palestine, Israel, and Jerusalem for the international community. In addition, Palestinian society still adheres to a strong patriarchal culture, coupled with the rise of corruption, making the rotation of power in Palestine only around known people, the majority of whom are men. Not only that, the security threat from the Israeli military also haunts women in Palestine. These issues make it increasingly difficult for women in Palestine to advocate for their rights.

Therefore, the UN together with UN Women in order to realize Goal 5 in the Sustainability Goals, created a framework specifically focused on

Palestinian women. This framework is the WPS (Women, Peace, and Security) Agenda to address gender inequality and encourage women's participation in peace-building and security processes. Palestinian women themselves are believed to have been affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but they also contribute to efforts to achieve peace and security in the region.

UN Women has helped Palestinian women achieve their rights and advocate for their cause to the global community. UN Women has also successfully promoted gender inclusion and empowered Palestinian women to overcome the challenges they face. Some of the roles that UN Women fights for Palestinian women include advocacy, education, mobilization, international support, and many more.

UN Women works with civil society organizations and women's groups to build capacity, provide training, and increase women's participation in decision-making. To increase the attention and support of the international community, UN Women engages governments, civil society organizations, and individuals to support gender equality and take concrete action through campaigns, reports, and high-level events. In addition, supporting the Palestinian Counseling Center as an NGO working in the field of mental health and Al-Muntada to improve women's access to justice services and develop community-based protection systems are also among the concrete efforts made by UN Women.

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