



Cooperazione Italiana
allo Sviluppo

Ministero degli Affari Esteri
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

Direzione Generale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo - Ufficio III - Sezione Valutazione

2023 | Summary of the Evaluation Report

Impact assessment of the initiative “Women’s Empowerment and Local Development - WELOD3”

Palestina



AID 10119

This independent evaluation was commissioned by Office III of the Directorate General for Development Co-operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation to the company STEM-VCR through a public tender procedure pursuant to Article 36 of the Public Contracts Code.

STEM-VCR Evaluation Group: Anna Rocchi (Team Leader); Sara Sangiuliano; Jamileh Abuduhou; Maurizio Floridi; Federica Floridi; Gianfrancesco Costantini.

The opinions expressed in this document represent the views of the evaluators and do not necessarily coincide with those of the client.

The picture on the cover represents the back wall of the meeting room of the 'Mehwar Centre for the protection and empowerment of women and families' in Bethlehem, a shelter that supports women victims of violence. It was created by several women housed in the Centre (photo by A. Rocchi).

The picture on the back cover represents a painting by one of the women hosted in the 'Mehwar Centre for the protection and empowerment of women and families' in Bethlehem, a shelter that supports women victims of violence (photo by A. Rocchi).

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|-------|--|
| AICS | Italian Agency for Development Cooperation |
| BWF | Business Women Forum |
| C&V | Communication and Visibility |
| CBO | Community Based Organisations |
| CCA | Common Analysis of Countries |
| CCE | Centre for Continuing Education, Birzeit University |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisations |
| DCI | Defence for Children International |
| FG | Focus Group |
| FPB | Family Protection Bill |
| GAPEU | Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment |
| GBV | Gender Based Violence |
| GPC | General Personnel Council |
| ICHRC | Independent Human Rights Commission |
| ISS | Semi-structured Interview |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MoSD | Ministry of Social Development |
| MoWA | Ministry of Women Affairs |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| PA | Palestinian Authority |
| PACC | Palestinian Anti-corruption Coalition |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SHAMS | Palestinian Association |
| SO | Specific Objectives |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| WATC | Women Affairs Technical Committee |
| WCLAC | Al-Haq, Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling |
| WELOD | Women's Empowerment and Local Development |

1. Introduction

This summary concerns the evaluation report of the Women's Empowerment and Local Development - WELOD3 programme in Palestine.

The programme "Women's Empowerment and Local Development - WELOD3" (AID 10119), implemented between July 2014 and March 2022, focused on a set of actions implemented - on the one hand - by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (now MoSD - Ministry of Social Development) of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which had budget support ex art.15 (for a total of 1,700,000 euro) and - on the other hand - by the local AICS office in Jerusalem, through an on-site fund (for a total of 1,090,000 euro) and an expert fund (for 510,000 euro). The total cost of the programme is €3,300,000. The initiative follows a series of previous projects in similar areas: WELOD 1 and WELOD 2. The programme was supposed to last 3 years, but due to a delay by MoWA in contributing 80% of the budget, the amount of 320,000 euro had to be transferred and spent by MoSD. In addition to the institutional bureaucracy (both on the Palestinian and the Italian side) that created further delays, the pandemic had an impact on the entire process.

2. Background elements of the initiative and theory of change

Gender equality is a significant challenge for Palestinian women in various aspects of life, including health, legal, social and political spheres. Existing laws and regulations in Palestine are not gender-sensitive and fail to adequately promote women's rights and protect them. The lack of laws specifically addressing gender-based violence leaves women vulnerable to various forms of violence, which are widespread in Palestinian society. Moreover, even when laws do address gender-specific aspects, the lack of regulations, enforcement procedures and an effective system of sanctions to monitor the correct and effective implementation of the laws hinders the intended impact on the effective protection of women.

The participation of women in decision-making positions is still rather limited. Official figures for 2022¹ show that women account for about 25% of the members of the Palestinian Central Council, the second highest decision-making body. As for the 2021 local elections, only 22% of women were elected (compared to 78% of elected men).

According to data from the 'General Staff Council' (updated to February 2022), the percentage of women in the public sector has reached 47% of the total number of employees. On the other hand, the percentage of women in management positions is very low compared to men. Furthermore, in the board of directors of the chambers of commerce, industry and agriculture, the percentage of men has reached 99%, compared to only 1% of women; only about 19% of judges are women, and the percentage of female prosecutors is only 20%.

Major gaps in decision-making significantly hinder the advancement of reforms that promote equal access to social services and the promotion of better mechanisms for the defence of women's rights.

Despite the development of several drafts of the Family Protection Law over the past 17 years, its adoption has been delayed, even after the CEDAW Committee urged the Palestinian government in its concluding observations in 2018. This law is crucial because it provides protective measures for women within the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the legal system in Palestine present significant discrimination against women, with the 1960 Jordanian Penal Code still in force in the West Bank, under which women do not enjoy the same rights as men, for example in terms of inheritance of property. Although some amendments have been made to the Penal Code through presidential

¹ Official government structure as reported for 2022.

decrees, comprehensive legal reforms are needed to ensure compliance with international conventions and treaties.

The rationale of the initiative is based on a **theoretical algorithm** built on the observation of the main identified weakness of Palestinian public administrations and services in relation to protection of women's rights, as well as factors that prevent women's full social participation. Furthermore, this circumstance keeps women in at risk of gender-based violence. Some factors can produce significant improvements, namely:

- Gender mainstreaming in government policies;
- Strengthening fight against gender-based violence;
- Strengthening public administrations and women's service centres;
- Creating and supporting women's empowerment processes, with regard to starting up economic initiatives.

These aspects can be enforced through:

- training of public administrations concerned with services and policies in support of women, on gender planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation of national plans;
- training and capacity-building against gender-based violence in women's support centres;
- training and capacity building in women's business support centres;
- involvement of non-governmental actors, in particular civil society organisations (CSOs), in the management of actions carried out by women's support centres;
- provision of technical assistance and financial support to institutions involved in equal opportunities and women's support actions (MoWA, MOSD).

3. The logical framework of the initiative

WELOD3 programme had the overall objective of increasing economic development opportunities for Palestinian women and contributing to the implementation of international tools for the defence of their rights. In terms of **specific objectives**, the programme included:

- a. Strengthening the gender mainstreaming and anti-violence capacities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), the Governorates and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), now the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD);
- b. To strengthen women economically, politically, socially and culturally and, at the same time, to fight gender-based violence by facilitating the reintegration into society of women, who have suffered violence;
- c. To coordinate the cross-sectoral area 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' as European *Lead Donor*.

A number of **expected results** have been identified in relation to these objectives:

- Results for Specific Objective 1: To strengthen the gender mainstreaming and anti-violence capacities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Governorates and the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD).
- Results for specific objective 2: To empower women economically, politically, socially and culturally and, at the same time, combat gender-based violence by facilitating the reintegration into society of women, who have suffered violence.
- Results for Specific Objective 3: To coordinate the cross-sectoral area "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" as European lead donor.

The initiative included institutional and capacity-building actions for the ministries involved and the aid coordination structure, as well as support actions for the anti-violence services run by MoSD and the establishment of the first National Observatory on Women in Distress, Gender-based Violence and Stalking at MoWA.

In terms of beneficiaries, the initiative was aimed at:

- about 400 women, who would benefit from the services provided by the 11 Tawasol and anti-violence services, including socio-economic empowerment activities and combating violence against women;
- about 20 children, who should have benefited from anti-violence services;
- at least 200 Palestinian women's organisations and other civil society organisations working on behalf of women;
- at least 30 local Tawasol member institutions;
- local counterparts, i.e. MoWA staff, in particular heads of departments working with Tawasols (Policy and Planning; Training; Appeals);
- the Governorates, in particular: the 11 Tawasols/Directors of the Women's and Children's Departments; 11 representatives of the future Tawasols Re-integration Committees; 11 directors and/or technical staff of the legal departments of the Governorates;
- MoSD, in particular: the 11 heads of the Women and Children's department of the local MoSD directorates; the social workers of the local MoSD directorates;
- specialised operators, who had to benefit from training, either at university level or in public facilities.

4. Methodological aspects

In terms of the methodology adopted, the evaluation exercise was designed to maximise the widest participation of stakeholders at each stage, including programme staff, partners and key informants, both in person and remotely. To this end, the methodology established a continuous dialogue with all stakeholders involved in the implementation process and created a safe space for sharing opinions, experiences and contributions. The chosen approach was implemented through group meetings and exploratory interviews during the initial phase of the fieldwork; e-mail exchanges; presentations of plans, feedback on field missions and results, and readjustments; an e-mail survey addressed to indirect beneficiaries provided the team with further information; finally, a workshop with indirect and direct beneficiaries provided a means of verifying the main conclusions of the evaluation.

The tools were initially designed following the standard ones adopted by evaluation studies. The target actors for the semi-structured interviews were defined and the questions were adapted according to the characteristics (central institutions, local authorities and target personnel, partner CSOs), always taking into account the evaluation questions and criteria. At the same time, target groups were sampled (groups of beneficiaries of the training organised by the Tawasols, female students benefiting from scholarships and courses at university, groups of women housed or protected in shelters, staff of governorates), taking into account the difficulties of tracing direct beneficiaries. The focus group tools were then adapted to the characteristics of the beneficiaries.

During the field mission, many of the tools initially proposed for both the semi-structured interview (ISS) and the focus group (FG) were modified on the basis of the information gathered, in particular taking into account the different status of the components of the different partners (the one entrusted to MoWA, the one entrusted to MoSD, the one implemented by AICS).

The template for the *focus groups with the Tawasols* was adapted, including data on the participants and information on their assigned role; a grid was added for the focus groups with the CSOs, who

collaborated directly or indirectly in the implementation of WELOD3 activities; finally, the grid for the interviews with CSOs was restructured according to the initial information gathered during the preparation phase of the field mission.

The qualitative survey involved an intensive interview approach around various topics to be evaluated (measured) as a *follow-up* of the integrated interventions implemented in the West Bank and with a specific relevance given by the evaluation team to the free expression of the interviewees. The evaluation covered (a) the budget support component of the government, (b) capacity building activities and (c) awareness-raising activities jointly promoted with civil society organisations.

The survey attempted to answer previously established evaluation questions to facilitate the understanding of the elements characterising the development of the programme and the retrieval of substantial information. The information gathered focused on the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and feasibility of: (i) the mechanisms put in place to promote best practices in the prevention of violence against women and girls and in the protection and rehabilitation of women and girls; (ii) the capacity of the most vulnerable groups residing in the intervention areas to access and utilise the proposed services; (iii) the gender approach used.

The **semi-structured interview** (ISS) was used to collect a large amount of information and data. This tool made it possible to collect key informants' views on various aspects of the activities and topics to be evaluated, in particular: their perceptions, understanding and identification of programme-related changes. The objective was to shed light on the "why" and the "how", specifically explaining the results related to the interventions.

Group interviews helped to create a dynamic that facilitated collective discussion and reflection and provided an environment aimed at facilitating expression and discussion, including controversial and differing opinions. The interview, on the other hand, is a tool open to interpretation and may lack objectivity. For this reason, it was important to carry out a 'context analysis', searching in parallel for sources of verification, which would allow the information and data collected to be observed and confirmed. Within this framework, triangulation served to consolidate the reliability of the information gathered.

The **focus group**, as a qualitative survey tool, aimed to collect the opinions and perceptions of members of the target community/population on the impact of the interventions. Information and data were collected from target groups of the same interest, selected through simple random sampling techniques according to precise criteria and geographical area and/or category of programme participation (government budget support component or socio-economic improvement component of women victims or survivors of VBG, NGO intervention). Discussions were facilitated by interviewers. Focus groups were organised in form of discussion workshops between the participants, who had the opportunity to analyse the main aspects of the programme, as well as their positioning and influence in the context of the intervention.

In group discussions, the evaluator played the role of moderator of the discussion, listening to the participants' answers, but also observing how participants interacted and whether they agreed or disagreed on a certain topic.

5. The results of the evaluation exercise

The 2022 "Common Analysis of Countries" (CCA) identifies the Israeli occupation, along with recurring conflicts, internal Palestinian political division and the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis, as the main obstacle to achieving the "2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs). Besides being an obstacle to peace, these barriers translate into significant challenges to good

governance, enjoyment of human rights and gender equality, economic growth, fiscal stability and human development.

From the point of view of the evaluation of WELOD3 programme, it is impossible not to take into account the difficult and complex situation in Palestine, the daily obstacles to achieve small progress and the great efforts to maintain a daily life, and thus the particular context concerning gender-related issues.

5.1 Relevance

The programme is endowed with relevance as it addresses the needs of Palestinian women and girls, who suffer discrimination and frequent physical and psychological violence on a daily basis, due to the traditional patriarchal system in place and the Israeli occupation. At the same time, it helps to support the institutional capacity building of the Ministries of Social Development (MoSD) and Women's Affairs (MoWA) in the areas of providing protection, counselling and accompaniment services for the reintegration of women and girls, who are victims and survivors of violence. However, the **relevance appears to be mitigated by the initiative's design shortcomings**, which did not sufficiently take into account the actual institutional capacities of the main actors on the one hand, and an up-to-date understanding of the environment, its potentials and weaknesses on the other.

WELOD3 is connected with other initiatives financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Palestine and benefits from previous experiences implemented by the Italian Cooperation (AICS) (formerly Local Technical Unit) in Jerusalem, specifically dedicated to enhancing the social services of the MoSD responsible for accompanying and protecting women, or to collaborating with local NGOs to provide legal assistance to victims of violence. In addition, the programme incorporates a skills development approach targeting young women, who were forced to drop out of school due to the violence they suffered, considering vocational training and skills enhancement a vector for economic, social and human development.

However, the evaluation team found that the relevance of the proposed action was not supported by a real understanding of the environment, its potentials and weaknesses. It seems that WELOD3 was designed more as a mere continuation of WELOD1 and 2 than as an intervention to achieve relevant objectives. The main areas of weakness in the design of the logical framework are: (i) the absence of clear outputs and results and the near absence of detailed outputs, making them almost useless for the results reporting exercise and of little use for project management; (ii) unclear and poorly formulated indicators, referring mainly to activities; and (iii) objectives that are sometimes incorrectly defined and, in the case of capacity building, not detailed.

An assessment of actual needs against what had been achieved previously would have been appropriate, bearing in mind the ongoing evolution of contextual characteristics, with particular reference to institutions and the specific position of the MoWA in relation to the entire institutional system. In fact, the relatively recent creation of the MoWA, (which was itself contested by the various institutional and non-institutional actors, as it was often perceived as a result of the expression of the international community and not of the Palestinians themselves), soon clashed with an environment that was anything but favourable, for reasons of various origins (external and internal). With this important factor in mind, an initial needs assessment would have provided the indispensable data to identify reference and target values, both to be included in the logical framework. These reference values would have been useful for the creation of an appropriate M&E system to process the collected data, allowing for the analysis of progress and monitoring of the achievement of results. The system should also have allowed for the assessment of differences in access to the opportunities provided by the programme, according to the type of vulnerability and changes in the organisational culture of the partners and NGOs/OSCs involved, with a specific focus on gender impacts in the workplace. Data

collection should have been designed to accurately capture gender-sensitive indicators and be closely monitored for each programme partner, including ministries.

Finally, if relevance is interpreted as the evaluation criterion that most of all should allow an intervention to appreciate the multiplicity, **plurality and even complexity of the system** in which it operates, the intervention in question was not able to read and, thus, adequately respond to the needs of the Palestinian context in an up-to-date manner.

5.2 Consistency

A high degree of **internal and external coherence at the level** of all partners involved. From the point of view of internal coherence, the programme fully respects the guidelines of the Italian Cooperation and the international standards and criteria adopted in the field of women's rights and gender issues, as well as a good compatibility with the policies that MoWA and MoSD, the main partners in the programme, intend to implement. External coherence is also high as the intervention is complementary with the main initiatives of other international donors active in the same sectors of intervention.

5.3 Effectiveness

Not very solid **effectiveness considering the** uneven capacities of institutions at the central and local levels, the lack of coordination and adequate articulation between the two main institutions involved, , which limited the overall implementation of various aspects of the programme. In fact, the action of each stakeholder seems to have been implemented separately. Consequently, the results obtained were not consolidated and did not produce an overall positive outcome. However, some positive aspects should be noted, , such as: (i) the progress in the improvement of protection services, offered by the shelters, in particular the study opportunities offered through scholarships awarded to victims and young survivors of violence, which currently represent the most effective activities implemented; and (ii) the initiatives to prevent and combat violence through the involvement of NGOs, in particular in the implementation of a comprehensive awareness-raising action, , which involved boys and girls and reached the community at different levels, enabling the dissemination of key messages for the production of transformation and change in the social fabric.

In order to properly analyse the effectiveness of the programme, this section will report on each individual activity, duly grouped by S.O.

5.3.1 S.O.1 analyzed

Activity 1.1. MoWA budget support for women's socio-economic empowerment policies and services

There is evidence that the Tawasol 'centres' were set up as desks located within the 11 governor's offices concerned, as expressly requested by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), in agreement with AICS, in order to improve MoWA's operations at the local level. The desk was equipped thanks to WELOD funding, while the salary of the Tawasol officer is paid by the governorate².

As reported during the interviews, this activity incorporated at least three *capacity-building* initiatives, mainly aimed at improving the services of the 11 Tawasols in providing guidance and skills development for the socio-economic empowerment of women. The training courses organised with the support of NGOs or higher education institutions (, such as SHAMS, Institute of Women's Studies at Berzeit University, etc.) covered various topics, from legal assistance to be provided to victims of violence to reintegration opportunities. Since the courses were not conducted recently, it

² It is not yet clear whether WELOD3 funds were also used to finance a specific percentage of Tawasolsalaries.

was not possible to collect sufficient evidence and data to understand whether the Tawasols' staff have acquired the expected skills to promote women's socio-economic empowerment.

On the policy side, WELOD3 made few contributions. A good level of commitment is perceived in supporting the urgent passing of the Family Law.

Activity 1.2. MoWA budget support for gender training and programming

According to the reports, during the last year of implementation conducted by MoWA (2019), a workshop organised by MoWA in cooperation with the *Palestinian Anti-corruption Coalition* (PACC) and the *General Personnel Council* (GPC), focusing on the role women play in fighting corruption within institutions, was attended by Gender Unit and Tawasol's staff. Under Activity 1.2, the first 'National Gender Sensitive Media Conference' was held in Ramallah. A group of 17 media and communication companies active in Palestine presented their action strategy to promote gender equality in the Palestinian media and combat negative stereotypes about the role of women.

Finally, MoWA took the lead in the planning and implementation process of the '16 Days of Activism on Violence Against Women and Girls', in collaboration with UN Women and women's organisations. Together, they worked to define the theme of the year and develop the campaign messaging.

In general terms, the human resources included in the project owned the needed knowledge and experience to adequately implement the foreseen activities. However, from the interviews, it is noted that MoWA does not have enough staff to be assigned full-time to manage the activities, and the staff still lacks a good knowledge of gender approaches (despite the numerous training courses attended by the staff within the framework of other projects funded by the Italian Cooperation and other donors).

Activity 1.3. MoSD budget support for the protection and care of women and children victims of violence

This concerns support of the activities organised within the Mehwar shelter and capacity building of the MoSD staff, in particular social workers. According to reports produced by the MoSD, various activities of entertainment, sports, education, etc. were organised in the Mehwar centre for the benefit of the women housed in the centre. According to the interviewees, these activities have, however, declined over time, especially after the centre was handed over by UNFPA, UN Women and AICS entirely to the responsibility of the MoSD.

5.3.2 S.O.2 analyzed

Activity 2.1: Training and accompaniment for the creation of women's enterprises

Based on the evaluation of the business ideas developed by the women, who participated in the training organised by 11 Tawasol during the implementation of WELOD 2, the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) of Birzeit University identified 5 viable and sustainable business proposals to be supported with further training and coaching activities and to be handed over to specialised organisations. This activity did not produce any results at the level of the business idea developed, as noted during the fieldwork and through the interviews.

In 2016-2017, training facilitated by the *Business Women Forum* - BWF on women's entrepreneurship, business plan writing, customer identification and economic feasibility was organised for 16 beneficiaries from the various governorates and Tawasols. Considering the positive evaluation provided by the beneficiaries, a second phase of a larger intervention was organised and 54 more beneficiaries were trained by the BWF.

Taking into account the results of the training evaluation, jointly promoted by MoSD, MoWA and the Tawasol coordinators, a review of the role of Tawasols in the area of women's economic empowerment was prepared, together with the development of a detailed *road-map* and the identification of key training needs.

In 2017-2018, a series of training courses organised by the Tawasols were implemented, with the involvement and facilitation of NGOs, such as El MIFTAH. Groups of women, up to 25 each (including women entrepreneurs - SMEs), benefited from the trainings on "Women's Economic Empowerment" (*business plan*; creation and management of small and medium enterprises; micro-credit)". As reported during the interviews, the training recipients ranged from women already with entrepreneurial experience to young apprentices.

Activity 2.2 Raising public awareness of social enterprise and local women's production

Local funds were allocated by AICS to local NGOs, such as Shashat, El Miftah and Reform, to implement initiatives to promote community awareness of the importance of supporting women's roles.

Shashat organised a workshop for boys and girls from Qualquilia, Selfit and Jenin. The workshops aimed to break traditional stereotypes of gender roles, prevent discrimination and develop positive thinking. In addition, the workshops aimed to strengthen community resilience and spread messages of positive masculinity, encouraging women and girls to have a voice and participate in decision-making spaces at all levels. The Reform organisation trained 15 adolescents, girls and boys on social transformation, breaking stereotypes and promoting community change.

The Tawasols complemented the action described above by organising the following activities:

- local awareness-raising campaigns on women's legal, economic, health and citizenship rights involving about 50 women per governorate, totalling about 550 women with *spill-over* to the surrounding community;
- awareness-raising events to combat violence against women and to reintegrate women victims of violence into society, such as participation in ceremonies on the occasion of 8 March and the '16 Days for Combating Gender Violence', as well as local women's handicraft fairs (at least two fairs: in Jordan and Turkey), awards for women *role models* in Palestinian society, and *sit-ins* in strategic locations, such as ministries and international organisations. Each event involved a minimum of 100 women per governorate for a total of 1,100 beneficiaries.

Activity 2.3. Establishment of a new Tawasol in Gaza Governorate

The establishment of the Tawasol in Gaza was preceded by a skills needs assessment study in the area of intervention, which was the subject of a *call for proposals* launched by AICS through a public workshop to disseminate the initiatives, and to orient participants on the focus that should be given to the assessment. The proposal of the NGO *Women Affairs Technical Committee* (WATC) was the one selected, and the study was entrusted to it in 2016. WATC has an operational office in Gaza, , which facilitated the implementation of the survey through locally recruited staff. This ensured operability and proximity to the research area.

The study lasted three months and was completed in 2017. After the completion of the needs assessment, a second workshop was organised to disseminate the results and main findings of the assessment.

Unfortunately, the construction of the centre was not finalized due to the political differences between the PA, in particular between the MoWA, a strong supporter of the establishment of a Tawasol in

Gaza, and the de-facto government of Gaza. Considering the existing tensions and political disagreements, AICS decided to abandon the idea of building the centre.

WATC offered to support *advocacy* activities in favour of setting up the centre, believing that the need to install such a service in a particularly vulnerable area was a concrete response to the problems related to the spread of gender-based violence. However, WATC could not guarantee concrete political mediation, as these activities did not fall within its mandate as a non-governmental association.

After the presentation of the study, several exchanges took place between AICS, MoWA and WATC, but given the fragile political moment Gaza finds itself in, the decision to abandon the construction of the centre was later confirmed by AICS.

However, WATC was successful in conducting awareness-raising activities to encourage access to legal rights/services and to emphasise the importance of assistance to be provided also to women with disabilities.

Activity 2.4. Creation of university training modules for professionals specialised in the prevention of gender-based violence and assistance to victims

In order to increase MoSD's capacity to respond to cases of violence and counselling skills, three courses were funded under WELOD3. The third course (43 hours of training) was completed in 2018 and was tailored to meet the skills needs of social workers. The idea was to bring together all areas: legal, sociological and psychological. The course should have been integrated into the academic curricula, but lack of funding did not allow this.

Based on the statements of the interviewees, the course structure was designed to analyse violence in a comprehensive manner, including the concept of social trauma of victims, taking into account the needs of social workers and police officers for, such skills.

Activity 2.5. Training in governorates on the use of international tools to combat gender-based violence and on the application of the national case management system

A total of 21 seminars were conducted in 10 governorates (Jerusalem, Ramallah, Qalqilya, Bethlehem, Tubas, Salfit, Tulkarem, Nablus, Jenin and Jericho). Community outreach plans were also carried out for a total of 166 women's organisations and local CBOs. A final event/conference on the National Referral System (Takamol) was organised in 2016.

Tawasols were involved in the dissemination of international knowledge and tools used to combat violence against women for the benefit of civil society organisations that are members of the Tawasol network (a total of 250 beneficiaries): 10 seminars were conducted by local NGOs experienced in the field of human rights and women's protection, , such as Al-Haq, Women's *Center for Legal Aid and Counseling* (WCLAC), *Defense for Children International* (DCI) and the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) in 10 Tawasols on issues related to women's rights and their regulation at the international and local level. In addition, a media network strategy was developed as a long-term cultural commitment to eliminate discrimination against women.

Activity 2.6. Facilitating the reintegration of women victims of violence into society

An *advocacy* action was conducted through a conference on the exchange of good practices and the state of the art of the family protection law process. Vocational training for women survivors was conducted by the INAD Centre for Theatre and Artistic Association. At the beginning of the intervention, further vocational trainings were conducted for the benefit of the protected women. A total of 10 sessions were conducted on: 1. hand sewing and sewing (traditional) (4 sessions) and hand

recycling (6 sessions); 2. hairdressing and make-up for sheltered women using the new facility at the Mehwar Centre (beauty salon for 15 sessions); 6 scholarships were awarded to battered girls and GBV survivors from different governorates (Nablus, Hebron and Jenin) to pursue university studies. Three of them enrolled at Al Quds Open University and the fourth at Al Najah University. Of these, two were hired by the Mehwar Centre and the other two by the Family Defence Society/Nablus. The scholarship programme specifically targeted women victims of GBV, housed in the Mehwar shelter, with the aim of supporting their reintegration by allowing them to continue their studies. The selection criteria for the programme included a willingness to continue their studies, a difficult economic situation and an inability to pay school fees. The programme provided financial assistance by covering school fees and offering a small amount for daily expenses. In total, 24 women benefited from this scholarship initiative.

Finally, a study on the reintegration into society of women victims of violence was conducted by the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University and completed in 2016. Published in both Arabic and English, it was presented at a conference and distributed to university departments, civil society organisations and donors dealing with gender issues. The study can be considered preliminary research on the topic of reintegration of women victims of violence after leaving anti-violence centres on the ground.

Activity 2.7 Public awareness-raising on women's empowerment policies and combating gender-based violence, social communication and visibility, international seminars

The local associations AGAIN (of the Dansewood Association) and Al Harah produced two plays, thirteen performances of 'WOMB' ('womb') were conducted in the target area of intervention. A workshop was also conducted with Al-Harah and Dansewoods artists together with the organisations part of the Tawasols on the effects of infertility on the psycho-physical well-being of women and the family.

The Inad Centre for Theatre and Arts was engaged to develop a manual on good practices for the empowerment of women through theatre; unfortunately, no copies of the toolkit were available at the time of the evaluation.

A second survey was conducted by the Centre for Continuing Education at Birzeit University in 2016 (with the collaboration of external experts) on women's informal employment in Palestine, its causes and implications ('Women's Informal Employment in Palestine: Key Characteristics, Challenges and Recommendations for Future Strategic Interventions').

Finally, as part of the global 16 Days for Combating Gender Violence campaign (25 November to 10 December 2019), an awareness-raising campaign was launched through the radio network Radio Nisaa.

5.3.3 S.O.3 analyzed

Activity 3.1. Coordination of the group of European member countries active in the Palestinian Territories on the issues of gender equality and women's empowerment aimed at sharing the strategy for women's economic empowerment and combating gender-based violence.

European member states joined forces to develop a joint strategy in support of Palestine, in order to establish a framework for coordinated programming and thus serve as a strategic umbrella for the bilateral programming and implementation plans of EU development partners. Gender equality has been identified as a cross-cutting issue within this strategy, with a focus on contributing to SDG5. Furthermore, the joint strategy places specific emphasis on the need to ensure gender-responsive laws and regulations, as well as gender-responsive budgeting and planning. Gender aspects are also

considered cross-cutting under Pillar 5: Sustainable Economic Development, which includes areas such as private sector development and trade, agriculture and labour.³

Activity 3.2. Coordination and drafting of annual reports on the implementation of the EU Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2010-2015 (GAP).

Since 2014, a liaison has been established between the Italian Cooperation (UTL first and AICS later) and the EU Delegation in Jerusalem; a potential collaboration is currently being discussed in the framework of the new EU Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women, , which also concerns the promotion of WELOD3 outcomes. Based on the analysis of the reports, the Italian Cooperation contributed to the development of the European GAP 2014-2015. No further evidence of further contributions to the updating of the GAP could be found.

Activity 3.3. Support to Palestinian institutions in gender mainstreaming policies in the framework of the division of labour in the various sectors of ODA in the Palestinian Territories

The concrete support of intervention to institutions in gender mainstreaming policies is evident in several aspects, in particular:

- The Palestinian National Development Plan 2021-2023 includes several national policies that outline the government's strategic direction to improve the lives of Palestinians. One of the key policy agendas, number 20, focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This policy emphasises Palestine's commitment to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women and to combat gender-based violence. Palestine also aspires to remove all obstacles to women's full participation in community and economic development as well as public life.⁴
- The Gender Working Group (GSWG), during its meetings in October 2021 and May 2022, reiterated its support to the initiative. MoWA expressed the government's genuine political will to consider the *Family Protection Bill* (FPB) as a national necessity and affirmed Palestine's ownership of the FPB terminology. Italy and the members of the *Gender Technical Working Group* remain committed to supporting the passage of the bill and providing financial and technical support to ensure its timely implementation.⁵

Activity 3.4. Participation of local and international civil society in national strategic plans and proposals for response actions

The most significant contribution made by civil society to policy-making is the extension of the maternity leave period from 72 to 90 days.

The participation of the NGO *Rural Women Development Society*, El MFTAH was also recorded in several events organised through WELOD3 on women entrepreneurship.

5.4 Efficiency

Efficiency was partly compromised by the lack of a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure efficient follow-up of expenditure and implementation of activities. In addition, the lack of an adequate systematisation of the documents and information produced during the programme's life cycle did not allow for the necessary corrections to be made to the implementation mechanism, thus

³ <https://south.euneighbours.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/European-Joint-Strategy-2021-2024.pdf>

⁴ https://andp.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/National%20Development%20Plan%202021-2023_English.pdf

⁵ Report on the Implementation of the Common European Strategy 2021-2024 2021: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/European%20Joint%20Strategy%20Annual%20Report%20%202021.pdf>

widening the gap that already existed between different modes of intervention and thus between the results produced by the two programme components. Delays in the implementation of the activities under MoWA's responsibility slowed down the overall progress of the realisation of results and thus the achievement of objectives. The low operational capacity observed within MoWA and the lack of technical tools created discrepancies, that led to progress being recorded on two unrelated levels: that one of ministerial budget support and the one of local funds managed by AICS. This situation particularly affected the traceability of results and did not allow for the development of a governance scheme to serve implementation, in addition to the serious delays in *capacity building* activities in Components 1 and 2. Capacity building was developed in a confused manner, without a clear *modus operandi* and related capacity building scheme was not completed. Institutional capacities to improve the socio-economic *empowerment* of women have not yet been developed. Budget expenditure has been delayed due to implementation problems and inadequate reporting. In particular, MoWA failed to spend a portion of the budget necessary to reach 80% of the expenditure to access the last tranche of the budget. Therefore, part of the funds (EUR 320,000) had to be allocated to MoSD.

On a more general level, it should be noted that the programme endeavoured to allocate financial and human resources strategically. The reallocation of funds between ministries was implemented to resolve budgetary discrepancies, ensuring efficient use of resources. The establishment of the Steering Committee and adherence to approval processes indicate a systematic and strategic approach to resource management. However, delays in the submission of documentation by ministries and compliance with reporting requirements indicate areas for improvement, especially in the area of monitoring.

5.5 Sustainability

The programme operated on different levels of sustainability: from socio-cultural to economic and institutional. In **general**, it can be said that the **overall sustainability** of the programme is poor. In particular:

- Internal coordination mechanisms did not present a high level of sustainability, while the sustainability of coordination with external actors, especially in the areas of institutional commitments, is solid;
- A good level of sustainability is observed with regard to the services offered thanks to the activities promoted within WELOD3;
- Shelter homes continue to support women victims of violence. In particular, the '*Mehwar Centre for the protection and empowerment of women and families*' in Bethlehem;
- the '*National GBV Observatory*' is not yet fully functional as there is little institutional sustainability;
- the programme does not provide for any '*exit strategy*' to accompany the consolidation of the actions carried out during the programme.

5.6 Impact

The **impact** of the programme seems very limited as WELOD3 has not worked as expected in promoting the achievement of equality within society. In fact, in order to effectively prevent gender-based violence, the improvement of actions to achieve gender balance by ensuring more equal access to basic services, resources and opportunities should have been intensified. WELOD3 did not take these needs into consideration, nor did it accompany MoWA in addressing the mentioned shortcomings, consequently it did not contribute to creating a strong institutional mechanism for a comprehensive approach that prioritises the rights and welfare of all women affected by GBV. The strengthening of the Tawasols, to, which the programme has devoted much of its attention, has also clashed with the internal balance of power and influence exerted by other stakeholders in

governorates and central institutions, generating the unexpected result that the effectiveness of Tawasols depends on the capacity and commitment of the individuals assigned to that function. More generally, the creation of the Tawasols has failed to create opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration, which is crucial for women and girls, who have been marginalised or even excluded from their communities and societies because they have denounced the violence they have suffered and thus 'shamed' their families.

Furthermore, WELOD3 was not able to reach very marginalised women, victims or survivors of violence, most of whom reside in rural areas and/or area C, where local authorities cannot easily access them. In fact, it can be noted that the skills development actions only produced important benefits for women, who already had some work experience, but very weak effects on most of the trained women, who lack the funds and additional professional and technical skills to be able to start a small business.

However, WELOD3 also produced positive effects in promoting social transformation by involving NGOs, such as Reform and Shashat that work specifically on building the capacities of girls and boys to change. Most of the adolescents involved in the social media workshops and trainings for promoting social change have learnt to recognise violence and inequality, gaining a better understanding of the behaviour that leads to mistreatment, abuse and humiliation of people's dignity.

Finally, despite the efforts made, very little has been achieved in terms of institutional strengthening;

5.7 The added criterion of communication and visibility

On the side of **communication and visibility**, WELOD3 achieved a satisfactory performance, especially for the very important awareness-raising component, although the development of an ad hoc communication strategy was lacking. As for visibility, it was adequately promoted at all levels of activity.

6. Lessons learned and good practices

6.1 Lessons learnt

The evaluation team documented a series of lessons learnt, bringing together the knowledge acquired during the implementation of the programme.

- The evaluation exercise of WELOD3 highlighted the great efforts promoted by **AICS in an** attempt to address the changing situation in Palestine, the Israeli occupation, and the difficulties and contradictions of the PA. Rebuilding the activities implemented by AICS as the ones of WELOD3 partners was particularly challenging due to the lack of a unified reporting system (including formats and reporting timelines). In addition, due to the duration of the programme and to staff turnover, it was very complicated to reconstruct the whole situation, also from a financial point of view. Among the donors, AICS is recognised as particularly strong for its support to Palestinian institutions and in particular to MoWA and MoSD. In addition, during the evaluation, there was clearly a general and consolidated recognition of its strong role in promoting 'courageous' initiatives, such as the support to Mehwar's creation, which happened at a time when talking about GBV was still considered 'haram' (forbidden).
- The **issue of Gaza** (activity 2.3) showed that despite the efforts and excellent operational capacities of the actors involved, the creation of the centre was not possible. Political differences between the PA, in particular MoWA, a major supporter of the establishment of a Tawasol in Gaza, and the de-facto government in Gaza hampered the finalization of the

activity. During the period when the study was conducted, there were moments of tension between the de-facto government in Gaza and international organisations, following the death of some Italian activists in the area. Considering the existing tensions and political disagreements, AICS decided to abandon the idea of building the centre.

- It has been recognised that women's **economic empowerment** is a multifaceted process that goes beyond capacity building and improving women's knowledge and skills. It should be accompanied by comprehensive interventions that support women in starting their own businesses or other forms of entrepreneurship. This approach can create significant economic empowerment and help women achieve economic independence.
- Understanding the **power dynamics** that exist within society is key to addressing social and cultural norms that hinder gender equality. Building alliances with various community groups, including community leaders, religious leaders, political parties, parents and others, is essential to prevent negative or violent backlash against programmes aimed at addressing gender-based violence. Furthermore, it is important to carefully consider the tools used, such as film and art, especially in relatively traditional communities. These communities may need time and effort to recognise and embrace these mediums as effective tools for social change.
- The essential role played by **MoWA** in raising awareness and especially in establishing a ministry to represent gender issues at the national policy level and at the international level is recognised. However, its role and especially its functions need to be redefined, focusing more on the monitoring and evaluation functions, rather than on the direct implementation of activities.
- The importance of the **civil society involvement** is underlined, especially with regard to the selection of beneficiaries, the implementation of *capacity-building* actions and properly carried out training. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that in order to make the training action more effective, future actions should support entrusted NGOs with the role of coaching in the creation of productive activities among targeted women. Furthermore, *follow-up* for a short period at the beginning of the start-up of the activities, as well as counselling especially on the living conditions of victims and survivors should be supported.
- The opportunity to return to university and continue their studies, offered thanks to the **scholarships for young women victims of GBV**, played a transformative role, strengthening their self-esteem and empowerment. However, despite enrolling in university and holding an academic certificate, the interviewed women reported facing a number of challenges, in terms of social marginalisation and finding employment. A pathway to employment, which should have been identified upstream of the launch of the initiative, should have been accompanied them by removing any discrimination arisen along the way.
- The reputation that shelters have among the population, as they are considered the very last resort to turn to in the event of (mainly domestic) violence, creates a number of obstacles in terms of the creation of new facilities and government support for the existing ones.

6.2 Good Practices

Based on the evaluation, the following good practices were identified:

- The implementation of the scholarship **programme** has proven to be an effective practice to support women victims of GBV, enabling them to become self-sufficient and reintegrate into society. The scholarship programme specifically supported these women in enrolling in university and continuing their studies. As a result, these women gained self-confidence and developed a vision for a better future after obtaining their academic degrees.
- **MoSD** has demonstrated to have the right capacity to fulfil its core functions. Reporting system is well established and, despite the great difficulties faced by all PA institutions (e.g. all PA employees receive only 30% of their salary), the staff is very proactive, motivated and

professional. Shelter management is not an easy task, especially due to the limited resources available (e.g. psychological support for shelter staff). However, compared to a few years ago, the activities of the shelters are well carried out.

7. Recommendations

7.1 General Recommendations

- In order to enhance learning and transformative actions, the **creation of spaces for reflective learning** with all stakeholders through platforms or ad hoc *workshops* is recommended. These spaces should be designed to facilitate in-depth reflection, encourage the sharing of successful practices, innovative approaches and identify opportunities for collaboration and synergies.
- There is clear room for improvement in the implementation mechanism of future interventions if ad hoc technical assistance is provided to institutions in the fields of coordination, organisation (including a clear **programme governance scheme** showing all actors involved) and day-to-day monitoring of planned activities.

7.2 Specific Recommendations

- Based on the findings of the assessment, it is clear that strengthening existing **governmental and non-governmental monitoring and accountability mechanisms** in Palestine will help the entire environment to better respond to real needs and, most importantly, it will give the donor community the opportunity to invest where funds can have a real impact. In practice, there is an increasing need to move from policy creation to policy implementation, prevention and enforcement of existing laws.
- **Systematic Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system to support partners and counterparts in measuring results and collecting feedback.** Based on the results of this final evaluation, a key recommendation for WELOD3 is to organise a robust M&E system. This system should be designed to help partners and counterparts to effectively measure results and gather valuable feedback. By establishing a structured M&E framework, the programme can gradually instil a culture of evidence-based decision-making and learning. Furthermore, the collection of gender-sensitive indicators should be a key component of the M&E system to ensure inclusiveness and address the differential impact of activities on men, women, boys and girls in Palestinian society.
- **A C&V plan and an awareness-raising and advocacy strategy** should accompany further action, to spread knowledge and create a common understanding of the action and the results to be achieved.
- Report and inform on key outcomes or results through **consolidated and standardised reporting**. Each of the implementing partners and key stakeholders must contribute to the reports by providing a solid analysis of the results or progress of the objectives achieved and not just a description of activities.
- Conduct an **in-depth assessment of the capacity-building needs of key implementing ministries in the design phase**, in order to better address existing structural/systematic weaknesses within PA institutions, so as to ensure sustainability and impact. Alongside this, a PA monitoring and evaluation system **must be established**, not only at the level of objectives, but also at the level of **processes** (actual *locus of* the overrated '*gender mainstreaming approach*').
- The evaluation exercise revealed a widespread and well-recognised '**training fatigue**' among PA officials, NGO and institutional staff. People are used to attending training courses on everything, without any indicator for evaluating the impact. As such, they move from one

course to another, driven more by the need to be away from their office than by the need to actually learn and progress in their curriculum. Training must include *follow-up* phases in which the participant can be evaluated not only at the end of the training itself, but also after a specific period (to be indicated in the project proposal). Only in this way will the training guarantee a correct outcome.

- While institutions tend to find it difficult to progress quickly in supporting women in need with innovative and more responsive responses, **CSOs** have demonstrated not only a solid capacity to penetrate the inner channels of society, but also to respond correctly to the main needs of women, especially in remote areas. It would be of great impact to create a link between institutions and CSOs in terms of **training to be provided to staff of institutions and local authorities**, especially those working in sensitive areas, such as gender and gender-based violence.
- Project design should be more results-based (TOC) oriented. The tool of **results-based management (RBM)** should be adopted. In addition, the inclusion of an M&E system should be designed to monitoring and evaluating the results achieved and the processes established. Monitoring reports should elaborate on the problems and challenges faced by implementers, including the main discussion points and suggested solutions.
- In light of the political, economic and governance challenges, the evaluation recommends a priority focus on the **private sector as an engine for employment and growth**, on microfinance, and on an area-based approach to build capacity at the subnational and municipal level to identify needs, set priorities, plan, implement projects and manage resources in a transparent and participatory manner, enabling women to be true proactive entities.
- Given the fiscal and financial uncertainties and shrinking donor budgets, the evaluation team emphasised the need for development programmes to be financially sustainable. As part of this recommendation, it is important to emphasise that when addressing issues of gender equality, women's rights and economic empowerment of women and girls, it is particularly important to also consider those who suffer multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as women and girls with disabilities, older women, survivors of violence, women heads of households and those living in rural areas. A **needs assessment**, designed by population targets and geographic areas, is recommended to better define the business sectors in which women can invest and engage.

