



Report Summary

**Review of the Social Development Sectoral Strategy:
Gender and Anticorruption perspective**

2021



Coalition for Integrity and Accountability – AMAN

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Introduction:

The policies and strategies adopted in Palestine are a major tool to implement and develop public work and services. They are used to devise the instruments needed to confront the challenges and obstacles on the one hand and to inform future directions to promote public work on the other. They aim to create an environment that caters to the needs of male and female staff.

To develop gender-based anti-corruption tools, public policies, and strategies, mainly social sectors strategies, must be reviewed to promote gender-based anti-corruption measures and policies.

The present report is part of the efforts made by the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (AMAN) to institutionalize anti-corruption efforts and promote the values of integrity, principles of transparency, and accountability systems in general with a special focus on social development services sectoral strategies. It formulates recommendations to mainstream integrity and anti-corruption values, including gender-based anticorruption, in the sectoral strategy of the social development services. This strategy serves the poorest and most vulnerable segment of society, which is more likely to be harmed by corruption. It is, therefore, necessary to analyze the strategy to depict the key gender-based gaps and formulate recommendations to fill them.


The analysis is part of “Nid” Program or Women Against Corruption, which aims to put an end to gender-based corruption and inequality in the provision of services in Palestine. The form of occupation most encountered by women is sextortion (sexual blackmail,) when an official exploits his position and influence to extort sexual favors from employees from the other sex in exchange for job privileges or overseeing mistakes¹.

It should be noted that the Palestinian Labor Law does not criminalize sexual harassment although article 3.5 of the Penal Code criminalizes unconsented sexual behavior, which includes some types of sexual harassment. However, the Labor Law of 2000 prohibits discrimination in the workplace between men and women but does not explicitly stipulate the prohibition of sexual harassment or any kind of gender-based violence in the workplace².

A report published in March 2020 by Transparency International on **Breaking the Silence Around Sextortion: The Links Between Power, Sex, And Corruption** mentioned that the most common gender-based corruption is sextortion and sexual bribes, which emanate from the exploitation of a public post for a personal benefit. The international trend now is to consider sexual blackmail in public service institutions a form of corruption. Furthermore, Transparency International recommended developing a legal framework to list sexual blackmail as a form of corruption and devise policies and measures to put an end to this behavior, with complaints and reporting mechanisms as well as data collection and analysis systems.

¹ AMAN Coalition, Integrity Transparency and Accountability to Combat Corruption, 2016.

² Palestine: Gender Equity and Law, Assessment of the laws affecting gender equity and protection from gender-based violence, UNDP United Nation Development Program



The present report sheds light on the Ministry of Social Development, which provides broad services with an effect on a large segment of women, mainly from the less favored groups, including the poor, low-income groups, women, and victims of all forms of violence. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported in 2021 that 11% of Palestinian households are headed by women³. MoSD provides different programs and services to women including the cash transfer program, which serves 45, 742 women-headed households⁴. The Ministry also manages a protection program to provide care and shelter to women victims of violence, maltreatment, and abuse.

Gender mainstreaming in government policies and programs

A review of the social development strategy showed a close connection between the strategy and the **National Policy** Agenda, mainly regarding Priority (7), which focuses on social justice and the rule of law as a key pillar of the strategy. Under this policy priority, efforts include elimination of poverty, socioeconomic empowerment program to target the poor and marginalized groups, development of socioeconomic policies that respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized groups, social integration and creation of job opportunities for the marginalized groups (persons with disabilities, youth, women and liberated prisoners). The second policy priority focuses on providing social protection and development appropriate complementary social protection systems with thresholds, as well as the enforcement of a fair social security law and development and institutionalization of social responsibility with promotion of social dialogue. On another level, the strategy contributes directly to the identification of strategic goals and policy interventions to ensure enhancement of citizens' access to justice. The interventions also aim to promote human rights regulatory framework and enforce it, while ensuring an effective judicial system and promoting the enforcement of court judgments with fair access to justice services on complementary grounds, with a special focus on women and minors.


Finally, since the social development strategy targets women, it is connected to the fourth policy priority **“Promotion of gender equity and women’s empowerment”**. To achieve this goal, interventions must focus on eliminating all forms of gender-based discrimination and all forms of violence against women. They should also focus on removing the barriers that obstruct women’s full participation in socioeconomic development and the public life. The strategy also responds to the fifth policy priority **“our youth...our future”** and includes interventions to enable the Palestinian youth to access opportunities that guarantee them success in the future and effective participation in the public life and state-building with a special focus on the least favored youth.

At the international level, the sectoral social development strategy has been inspired by the pertaining sustainable development goals, which are detailed on pages 88 to 92.

Budget allocations: the social development sectoral strategy does not include any detailed action plan to demonstrate its role in the realization of the National Policy Agenda policies and priorities. It does not include either any budget allocations to the interventions aiming and promoting the system of integrity values, transparency principles and accountability systems and combatting corruption to achieve the third goal.

³ See, review of Palestinian Women situation on the International Women’s Day, 8/3/2021
<https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=3933>

⁴ For further information, see: https://mosd.gov.ps/sites/default/files/studies_research_files/Annual%20statistical%20report%202017.pdf



In the meetings with MoSD teams, they affirmed that the Ministry has been working on allocating budgets to each one of the proposed programs in the plan, with details related to the policy interventions (based on the NPA priorities and policies). The interventions are codified to identify MoSD's contribution to the fulfillment of these priorities.

MoSD also reiterated that budgets have been allocated on the Ministry's citizens budget and that they accounted for gender with a special focus on women. For instance, NIS 500,000 will be allocated to provide legal counseling to four hundred women.

Designing interventions with gender lenses:

One of the weaknesses of the development projects and programs is a lack of attention in gender, poverty and environment issues. They are mentioned as items apart. However, had gender issues been mainstreamed as from the conceptualization of the projects, their integration in the design, application and evaluation would have been smoother. The programs that do not account for the variant needs of men and women and their socioeconomic and cultural situation in the different phases may turn out to be futile, ineffective and unsustainable. It is important for any project to have a clear definition of the goals related to equality and combatting corruption from a gender perspective.

The review of the sectoral strategy and interviews with pertinent informants showed that gender analysis has been conducted to consider the needs of women and men in the project design phase, following the analysis, interventions have been proposed and include promoting the integration of women, children and persons with disabilities in the public life. Furthermore, a citizens' budget and a gender-and-children-sensitive budget have been adopted to ensure the formulation of "inclusive and fair economic policies".

Accordingly, it is important to conduct an ongoing needs assessment that focuses on and analyzes the different roles to take them into account in the design of the project activities and ensure that all social groups benefit from these interventions in a fair manner that responds to their specific needs.

Sectoral strategy's response to a gender-based anticorruption effort:


The social development sectoral strategy stated, “a resilient, solidary, and productive Palestinian society that provides a sustainable decent life to every household and individual and releases their potential; a society that believes in human rights, equality, justice, partnership and inclusion”. It also included a set of governing values that orient the policies, programs and interventions of the stakeholders responsible for the social development in Palestine. The values include justice, equality, rights, partnership, participation and inclusion. Furthermore, the strategic goal 3 states, “promoting the standards of governance, integrity and transparency.”

Conclusion: The analysis and comparison of the strategy with NPA 2017-2022 shows that the social development sectoral strategy included the values of integrity, principles of transparency and systems of accountability to redress and reorganize the social protection sector at all levels. It dedicated a special attention to the creation of national systems to coordinate and organize the interventions based on evidence from studies and research. It provides for monitoring and evaluation systems to implement realistic social development policies, including developing the regulatory framework and restructuring responsible bodies at the organization and program levels. The strategy provides for a policy of disclosure of information to promote social accountability and achieve the principle of integrity and transparency.

Different interventions have been put in place to achieve the third strategic goal, which aim to achieve the following:

- 1- Less violence in the Palestinian society and poor and marginalized groups and victims of violence enjoy full access to the justice system.
- 2- Marginalized groups enjoy social, infrastructural and technology services.
- 3- Social cohesion is promoted and involvement of poor and marginalized groups in the political and socioeconomic public affairs is guaranteed.
- 4- Institutions concerned with social development are efficient, effective and responsive to societal needs.
- 5- Promotion of social accountability.
- 6- Social development systems and policies are evidence-based.
- 7- Development and promotion of the regulatory framework. The proposed interventions to achieve this outcome include development mechanisms that enable social and civil society accountability of the enforcement of legislation, systems and procedures.

The review and analysis of the proposed outcomes and interventions to promote the standards of governance, integrity and transparency showed a lack of detailed interventions to ensure the creation of a corruption-immune environment that promotes governance, integrity and transparency from a gender perspective. The sectoral strategy also lacks a clear gender-based anticorruption perspective with specific goals and outcomes whether it be at the level of combatting corruption in general or gender-based anticorruption efforts in particular.



Regarding integrity: some measures showed that MoSD complies with the values of integrity, most saliently a binding staff code of conduct, a special system to prevent and disclose conflict of interests and several internal circulars at the Ministry's headquarters and district offices to ensure staff compliance with the code of conduct. Furthermore, MoSD prohibits its staff from accepting gifts from service recipients. The staff are subject to the Gifts Regulation No 10 of 2019 and the provisions of the Civil Service Law and the Public Service Code of Ethics and Conduct. However, it is not clear how this is applied from a gender perspective in the code of ethics and procedures.

Regarding transparency: MoSD circulates the eligibility criteria of beneficiaries and the service delivery standards very clearly on the Ministry's website. It also discloses the terms, criteria and mechanisms to access services publicly and on equal basis. However, MoSD's site does not refer to the current social development sectoral strategy although it provides information on previous strategic plans and progress reports. MoSD also publishes its vision, mission and former strategic objectives, which need to be updated based on the social development sectoral plan 2021-2023, with publication of budgets, revenues and expenses.

Regarding accountability: to ensure monitoring, periodic internal progress reports are requested from the directorates general. Based on these reports, shortcomings may be redressed and sanctioned. Furthermore, the Ministry has a complaints system and considers these complaints seriously in accordance with the rules listed in the code of the conduct. The officer in charge of receiving the complaints addresses the plaintiff within the legal period. Complaints may also be filed via the website of the Council of Ministers.

Regarding combatting corruption: In 2017, MoSD adopted a unified e-portal to provide social assistance and outreach the largest share possible of needy and poor households. The portal also helps to coordinate with different stake holders to guarantee fair distribution and equal opportunities and to promote governance and minimize the possibility of fraud, misuse of public funds, nepotism, favoritism or acceptance of bribes. It should be noted here that raising awareness of MoSD staff is important through awareness campaigns and training on the principles of integrity and accountability in the provision of services, mainly to female beneficiaries, to minimize corruption.

Gender-based and anticorruption indicators:

Gender and anticorruption indicators are important to monitor policies and interventions and assess their effect on men and women. They also help to monitor the impact on the beneficiaries of the strategy in general and from a gender perspective, including senior people, the poor, persons with disabilities and residents of marginalized areas. Consequently, the assessment monitors the achievement of gender equity, which is enshrined in the strategy's compliance with SDG's and the NPA priorities to provide social development services to all social segments, mainly to women.

A review of the indicators mentioned in the sectoral strategy showed that they do not refer to corruption in the provision of services. However, the proposed intervention review under the third strategic goal shows that several interventions focus on promoting integrity, transparency and accountability. This was confirmed by the interviewees from the Ministry who contributed to the plan development.

Immunity to mitigate the risks of corruption in the preparation and implementation of the sectoral strategy:

Conclusion: a review and analysis of the social development sectoral strategy and meetings with stakeholders in the Ministry and other organizations revealed serious endeavors to apply the provisions of the national anticorruption strategy, especially in the area of prevention, including:

- There is a code of conduct to promote staff integrity and ethical compliance in dealing with the beneficiaries. The code adopts provisions on how to deal with citizens, colleagues and supervisors. It includes the standard and expected staff behavior in dealing with their workmates, and the public serviced by the Ministry. The conduct is linked to a clear system of reward and sanctions to reward the compliant staff and punish the violators. This promotes integrity and belonging to the job.
- There is a complaints system that is managed by MoSD's complaints unit to ensure serious handling of all complaints in accordance with the rules of the code of conduct and complaints system. The officer in charge of receiving the complaints addresses the plaintiff within the legal period while a complaints system is also accessible on the official website of the Council of Ministers.
- The review and analysis of the social development sectoral strategy 2021-2023 revealed a gender and anticorruption sensitive budget. The strategy refers to the principles of transparency, integrity and accountability and convenes with the priorities of the NPA 2017-2022 on promoting the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and anticorruption. It also includes interventions that promote transparency, integrity, accountability and anticorruption efforts but does not have an action plan with clear procedures and mechanisms bound by timelines to implement the interventions. The plan does not have specified budgets allocated to the detailed action plan.

Awareness-raising and mechanisms to report gender-based violence “harassment, bribery and sextortion”

The sectoral strategy review did not reveal any interventions to end gender-based violence, including interventions to end sextortion, whether targeting MoSD staff or other partners and stakeholders or Ministry’s beneficiaries.

A review of the report on MoSD’s complaints system showed that reporting sextortion is very rare. This could be attributed to the taboo of speaking of this matter since sextortion does not only affect the victim but may lead to a family crisis that affects all family members. Furthermore, the victim may suffer from lack of trust of her surrounding circle or lack of support. Therefore, victims opt to keep this matter confidential. Therefore, many support tools must be mobilized to minimize the repercussions of sextortion. Confidential reporting mechanisms must be devised and be accessible to all. This concurs with the results of the poll conducted by AMAN in 2021 on the submission of complaints to MoSD’s complaints department. None of the women plaintiffs has submitted a complaint on acts of corruption they faced in accessing the Ministry’s services. 97% of the beneficiaries in the West Bank reported not having endured any act of corruption compared to 3% who submitted corruption related complaints (20 beneficiaries). It should be noted that all women beneficiaries who submitted a complaint to MoSD complaints unit regarding an act of corruption they faced in accessing the Ministry’s services are older than 34 years. However, when asking the women beneficiaries about their readiness to file a complaint **in the event they endured sexual exploitation or sextortion by a Ministry’s staff member (official/researcher)**, the results showed that most of the beneficiaries in the West Bank are willing to file a complaint (89%) while 11% reported they will not. It should be noted that women beneficiaries younger than 35 years are more willing to file a complaint in case they face sexual exploitation or sextortion by a Ministry staff member⁵.

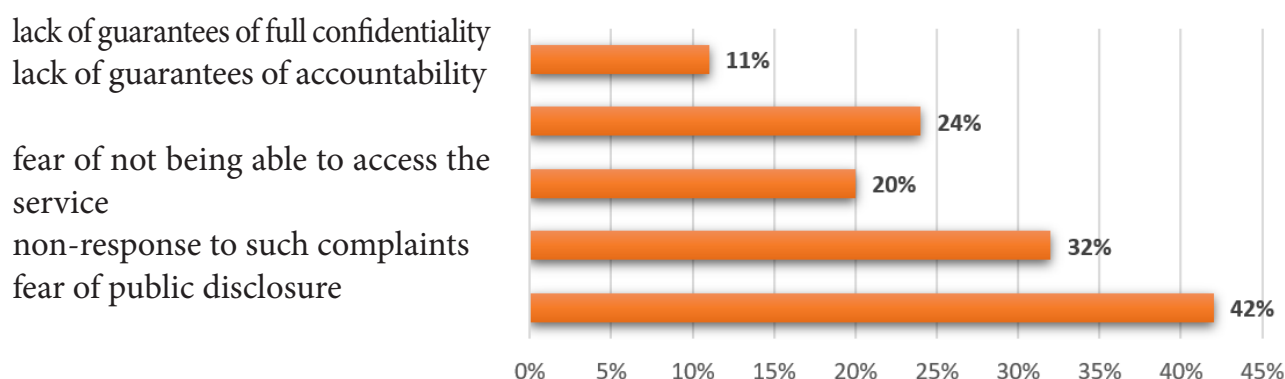
A review of the complaints system at the Ministry showed that it lacked any classification of sexual harassment and sextortion. The closest category is “physical abuse/assault”.

According to the women beneficiaries’ opinion poll conducted by AMAN Coalition in 2021, the reasons behind refraining from filing a complaint in case of sexual exploitation or sextortion by a Ministry’s staff member varied. Most importantly, they were pushed by **fear of disclosing the issue to the public**. 42% of the beneficiaries expressed such concern. Disaggregated by age, the findings showed that all beneficiaries younger than 34 years would refrain from filing a complaint against sexual exploitation or sextortion by a Ministry’s staff member because of fear of public disclosure of the issue (100% of the beneficiaries). The second reason mentioned by 32% of the West Bank beneficiaries was **lack of response to such complaints**.

The other reasons mentioned included **the beneficiaries believe that the complaint will prevent them from accessing the service (20%), or lack of guarantees of accountability (24%). The lowest rate was lack of guarantees of full confidentiality (11%).**

⁵ Findings of an opinion poll of women beneficiaries of MoSD services, AMAN, May 2021

reasons for refraining from filing a complaint against sexual exploitation and sextortion in the West Bank



To overcome this problem and minimize sexual bribery and sextortion, where Palestine has scored 21% of sexual extortion rates according to a Transparency International report, MoSD must raise awareness of the different forms of gender-based corruption like sexual harassment, sextortion and sexual bribery, especially as regards the reporting mechanisms.

The analytical report concluded the following recommendations:


To ensure effective gender mainstreaming in the daily activities of all public services, statistics and reports must include new indicators to develop a better understanding of the values, roles, circumstances and needs of women and men. Therefore, proper indicators must be developed to monitor the other variables that may affect gender discrimination.

The social development sectoral strategy must include anticorruption policies from a gender perspective with interventions to bridge the gaps. Furthermore, MoSD staff must be immunized against all forms of gender-based corruption.

To institutionalize the interventions in harmony with SDGs and NPA's priorities, it is necessary to prepare the social development sectoral strategy in a manner that promotes the values of integrity, principles of transparency and systems of accountability and anticorruption from a gender perspective. The said strategy must be consistent with NPA 2017-2022 and its priorities and policies. This effort must be made now by amending the current 2021-2023 strategy. In the event it is not possible, this effort must be made in the planning for coming years to include the values of integrity, transparency, accountability and anticorruption.

A clear action plan with specific procedures, mechanisms and timelines must be prepared to implement the interventions and promote integrity, transparency, accountability and anticorruption from a gender perspective.

To immunize MoSD staff to combat corruption, the strategy must include action plans with a specific time frame, indicators and outcomes to apply interventions to build staff capacity in the area of promoting integrity and anticorruption in general and to raise their awareness of gender-based corruption.



The study also recommends allocating detailed budgets to the implementation of the sectoral strategy's action plan and proposed interventions within an appropriate time frame. The key interventions should include raising awareness and training of MoSD staff to ensure integrity and transparency in the provision of services, especially to women and to minimize corruption.

To conclude, the strategy must include interventions to raise awareness and to facilitate reporting of cases of sexual harassment, sextortion and sexual bribery and address the legal framework of awareness-raising and reporting. The reporting mechanisms must provide for the collection of detailed data on the forms of gender-based corruption.