***Dirasat***: Human and Social Sciences, Volume 54, No. 2, 2027, 10405

Deanship of Scientific Research

# Examining Socio-Cultural and Political Challenges Impacting the Sustainability of Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Palestine

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Received: 13/1/2025
Revised: 24/2/2025
Accepted: 27/3/2025
Published online: 1/11/2026

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Citation: Sarras, R., & Gharbi, S. (2026). Examining Socio-Cultural and Political Challenges Impacting the Sustainability of Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Palestine . *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 54(2), 10405.
https://doi.org/10.35516/Hum.2026.10405

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aims to explore the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in rural areas of Palestine, with a focus on the Bethlehem and Hebron governorates. It also examines the social, cultural, and political factors influencing the development and sustainability of their entrepreneurial ventures.

**Methods:** The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, collecting data through a structured questionnaire adapted from validated studies. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic to ensure cultural appropriateness and was distributed to 207 participants, with 174 completed responses analyzed.

**Results:** The study reveals that women entrepreneurs in rural Palestine demonstrate resilience and innovation but face significant challenges, including restrictions on mobility due to the ongoing occupation, limited access to traditional financial resources, and societal norms prioritizing their roles as homemakers. Despite these barriers, many have leveraged digital technologies to overcome social and political constraints, expand market access, and diversify their business operations.

**Conclusions:** This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on women's entrepreneurship in conflict-affected regions by identifying interconnected challenges and strategies employed by women entrepreneurs. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and development organizations seeking to establish targeted support systems that enhance the sustainability and growth of women-led businesses in rural and politically unstable areas.

**Keywords:** Political challenges, socio-cultural challenges, sustainability, entrepreneurial innovation

# دراسةُ التحدِّيات الاجتماعيَّة والثقافيَّة والسياسيَّة التي تؤثِّرُ في استدامة رائدات الأعمال الريفيّات في فلسطين

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## ملخّص

**الأهداف:** تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التحدِّيات التي تواجهُها رائداتُ الأعمال في المناطق الريفيَّة في فلسطين، مع التركيز على محافظتي بيت لحم والخليل، كما تستعرضُ العوامل الاجتماعيَّة والثقافيَّة والسياسيَّة التي تؤثِّرُ في تطوير مشاريعهنَّ الرياديَّة واستدامتها.

**المنهجيَّة:** استُخدِمَ في هذه الدراسة المنهجُ الوصفيُّ التحليليُّ؛ حيث جُمِعَت البياناتُ عبرَ استبانة منظَّمة جرى تكييفها من دراسات موثَّقة، ثم تُرجمت الاستبانةُ إلى اللغة العربيَّة لضمان ملاءمتها الثقافيَّة، ثم وزِّعَت على 207 مشاركات، وجرى تحليل 174 استجابة مكتملة.

**النتائج:** تكشف الدراسةُ عن أنَّ رائدات الأعمال في الريف الفلسطينيِّ يظهرن مرونةً وابتكارًا، لكنَّهنَّ يواجهنَ تحدِّياتٍ كبيرة، بما في ذلك القيود على التنقل بسبب الاحتلال المستمر، والقدرة المحدودة على الوصول إلى الموارد الماليَّة التقليديَّة، والمعايير المجتمعيَّة التي تعطي الأولويَّة لدورهن بِوَصفِهِنَّ رَبّات بيوت. ورغم هذه الحواجز، استخدم العديدُ منهنَّ التقنيات الرقميَّة لتجاوز القيود الاجتماعيَّة والسياسيَّة، وتوسيع الوصول إلى الأسواق، وتنويع عملياتهنَّ التجارية.

**الخلاصة:** تسهمُ الدراسةُ في إثراء المعرفة المتزايدة حول ريادة الأعمال النسائيَّة في المناطق المتأثِّرة بالنزاع عبر تحديد التحدِّيات المترابطة والاستراتيجيات التي تتبعها رائداتُ الأعمال. تقدِّمُ النتائج رُؤًى قيِّمةً للمشرِّعين والمنظمات التنمويَّة التي تسعى إلى إنشاء نُظُم دعم موجَّهة تعزِّز استدامة المشاريع التجاريَّة التي تقودها النساءُ في المناطق الريفيَّة والمناطق السياسيَّة غيرِ المستقرَّة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** التحدِّيات السياسيَّة، التحدِّيات الاجتماعيَّة والثقافيَّة، الاستدامة، الابتكار في ريادة الأعمال.

## Introduction

The viability and prosperity of Palestinian women entrepreneurs' businesses are hampered by a diverse array of issues. The political environment in Palestine greatly influences these challenges, in contrast to many other nations where economic obstacles are the main obstacle (Althalathini, 2022). With a focus on the governorates of Bethlehem and Hebron, this study examines how political, sociocultural, and economic issues interact to produce particular barriers for women-led business endeavors in rural locations. The goal is to provide context-specific analysis and useful suggestions for promoting these endeavors' sustainability and resilience.

Prolonged occupation causes political instability, which severely restricts trade and mobility (Aljarah et al., 2024). Business operations are made more difficult by checkpoints, roadblocks, and permit procedures, especially for businesses that depend on imported goods or want to reach global markets (Awwad, 2024). Furthermore, the Oslo II Accord's administrative and physical partitions restrict access to vital resources like land and water, particularly in Area C, which is governed by Israel (Habbas, 2021).

Beyond political challenges, cultural norms also restrict the economic agency of women entrepreneurs. Societal expectations often confine women to caregiving roles, limiting their participation in business networks and reducing their entrepreneurial opportunities (Bullough et al., 2022). Despite these barriers, many women in rural Palestine adopt innovative approaches to overcome constraints, leveraging digital tools to expand market reach and integrate sustainable practices into their businesses.

Sustainability, defined as a strategy that balances economic, social, and environmental priorities, is essential for long-term success (Barrachina Fernández et al., 2021). Innovation plays a pivotal role in this context, enabling entrepreneurs to mitigate risks and adapt to evolving market demands (Deng et al., 2020). This research positions innovation as a key driver of sustainability for rural women entrepreneurs and examines how it interacts with external political and social factors.

To guide this exploration, the study draws on Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Institutional Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory. These frameworks help analyze the relationship between external challenges and innovation orientation, providing a comprehensive understanding of factors affecting business viability. This study addresses the following core question: How do political and socio-cultural challenges impact the sustainability of rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives in Palestine?

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### *The Rise of Women Entrepreneurs: A Global Perspective*

Women entrepreneurs are experiencing rapid growth, establishing themselves as one of the fastest-growing sectors globally. This significant trend has garnered considerable attention from academics in recent years. Research indicates that women have the potential to make substantial contributions to economic development and entrepreneurial activity (Althalathini, 2024; Awwad, 2024). By generating new employment opportunities and boosting gross domestic product (GDP), women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in reducing poverty and social exclusion (Abu-Rmeileh & Iriqat, 2024). This growing body of literature underscores the importance of fostering an environment conducive to women-led businesses. Supporting these ventures allows societies to harness the full potential of women entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to broader economic growth and social progress.

### *Women Entrepreneurs' Challenges Globally*

Numerous obstacles prevent female entrepreneurs from growing and succeeding in their businesses. Bendidi et al. (2024) state that these barriers frequently result from gender biases and cultural constraints, including limited access to markets, capital, and business networks. Additionally, legal and regulatory barriers, compounded by family management obligations, further hinder women's entrepreneurial success. However, while these challenges are broadly acknowledged, there is a lack of specificity in identifying localized impacts and unique contextual differences between regions.

Mastroianni (2024) critiques common portrayals of entrepreneurs as aggressive risk-takers, often overlooking women's emotional and socially conscious attributes, which may align with sustainable, socially responsible business strategies (see

also Dixit et al., 2023). Interestingly, Awwad (2024) highlight that women have distinct entrepreneurial motives, often pursuing social value alongside financial gain. This insight introduces a more nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial diversity but lacks empirical depth regarding how such motives translate into long-term business performance.

Another critical gap in the literature is the insufficient exploration of women's entrepreneurship in conflict-affected regions. Rezaei-Moghaddam et al. (2019) note the scarcity of studies on using entrepreneurship to alleviate poverty and advance gender parity in such environments. Research on the unique challenges women face in these situations, and their potential for fostering societal change, remains underdeveloped.

Gender-based discrimination continues to be a global barrier for women entrepreneurs. Research indicates that women face bias in securing venture capital and higher interest rates on loans, affecting the scale and longevity of their businesses (Awwad, 2024). Despite these insights, few studies provide actionable frameworks for addressing systemic financial inequities. Furthermore, cultural norms often dictate perceptions of women in business, affecting their credibility and market interactions (Awwad, 2024). Addressing these biases requires more robust policy recommendations and structural reforms.

In summary, while acknowledging the multifaceted barriers facing female entrepreneurs globally, future research should offer more comprehensive frameworks for overcoming these obstacles, thereby promoting a more inclusive business environment.

*Women Entrepreneurs' Challenges in Palestine*

*Political Challenges*

The complex environment in which entrepreneurship occurs in Palestine is impacted by sociopolitical constraints. The prolonged Israeli occupation creates significant barriers, including restricted mobility of people and goods (Althalathini, 2024). Bureaucratic delays in obtaining permissions are a burden for businesses that rely on imports and exports. Furthermore, legal inconsistencies created by the two legal systems—Israeli civil law for settlers and Israeli military law for Palestinians—deter investment (Yehuda et al., 2014). Area C, which comprises approximately 60% of the West Bank and is still completely under Israeli control, has very few opportunities for both industry and agriculture. Political unpredictability, ongoing hostilities, and infrastructure destruction increase business risks and cause operational disruptions, according to Morrar et al. (2024). Despite recognizing these obstacles, there remains insufficient exploration of adaptive strategies Palestinian entrepreneurs employ to mitigate political risks.

*Socio-Cultural Challenges*

Socio-cultural constraints also impede Palestinian women's entrepreneurial efforts. Conventional gender roles, societal expectations, and limited social support present significant barriers (Nakhleh & Zureik, 2024). Women often bear a dual burden of family and business responsibilities, leading to exhaustion and reduced business focus (Abuillan, 2023). Cultural norms restricting women's participation in networking events further hinder access to critical business opportunities. Risk-taking, essential for entrepreneurship, is often deemed inappropriate for women in conservative societies (Althalathini, 2022). However, the existing literature lacks detailed qualitative analyses that capture women's lived experiences and resilience strategies within this context.

Sustainability in entrepreneurship encompasses social, economic, and environmental dimensions, often referred to as the triple bottom line: People, Planet, and Profit (Elkington, 1994). Ramya et al. (2024) identify limited social networks and role models as significant barriers to sustainable business practices for women-led enterprises. Mentorship and networking opportunities are crucial for adopting sustainable models, but gaps in these resources persist. Additionally, cultural norms that prioritize family responsibilities can undermine women's long-term business planning and investment focus (Moral et al., 2024). Gender bias further affects the sustainability of women's ventures by limiting investor trust and customer engagement (Love et al., 2024). However, research does not adequately explore policy interventions or institutional support mechanisms that could mitigate these sustainability challenges.

Despite these constraints, rural Palestinian women exhibit innovative approaches to sustainability, engaging in organic

farming, crafts, and informal marketing networks. Training programs and micro-financing initiatives play a vital role in enhancing their livelihoods (El-Ahmed, 2020). Nonetheless, the long-term impact of these innovations on community-wide sustainability requires further empirical investigation.

*Navigating and Overcoming Challenges in Palestine*

Palestinian women entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience. Many seek alternative funding through microfinance institutions and international grants (Nziku et al., 2024). Cooperative models enhance bargaining power and foster resource-sharing networks (Albotmeh & Irsheid, 2013). Digital platforms also provide new opportunities for marketing and customer outreach, mitigating geographical and political barriers (Abuillan, 2023). Specialized training programs further equip women with digital marketing and financial management skills. However, comprehensive evaluations of these interventions' effectiveness in sustaining business growth are lacking.

*Theoretical Framework and Research Objectives*

This study adopts a theoretical framework integrating Resource-Based View (RBV), Institutional Theory, and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece et al., 1997) to address:

1. The impact of political and socio-cultural environments on the sustainability of rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives in Palestine.
2. The resources rural women utilize to sustain their enterprises.

Resources that are rare, valuable, and unique give businesses a competitive edge, according to RBV theory (Barney, 1991). Women in Palestine use cultural resources, social capital, and local expertise to get over financial and market limitations (Bullough et al., 2022). Research needs to focus more on how these resources lessen certain financial and institutional obstacles, though.

Institutional Theory highlights the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping entrepreneurial behavior (Scott, 2014). Prior studies have examined legal constraints and gender roles (Althalathini & Tlaiss, 2023), but further research should investigate institutional reforms and policy frameworks that foster equitable entrepreneurship ecosystems.

This integrated approach provides a robust foundation for understanding the complexities facing Palestinian women entrepreneurs, offering insights into sustainable business strategies and institutional reforms.

*Hypothesis Development*

Hypothesis 1: Political challenges faced by rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives have a significant impact on the initiatives' (a) economic sustainability, (b) environmental sustainability, and (c) social sustainability.

Hypothesis 2: Socio-cultural challenges faced by rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives have a significant impact on the initiatives' (a) economic sustainability, (b) environmental sustainability, and (c) social sustainability.

Hypothesis 3: Political challenges faced by rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives have a significant impact on entrepreneurial innovation.

Hypothesis 4: Socio-cultural challenges faced by rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives have a significant impact on entrepreneurial innovation.

Hypothesis 5: Entrepreneurial innovation in rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives has a significant impact on the initiatives' (a) economic sustainability, (b) environmental sustainability, and (c) social sustainability.

Hypothesis 6: Entrepreneurial innovation mediates the relationship between the political challenges faced by rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives and the initiatives' (a) economic sustainability, (b) environmental sustainability, and (c) social sustainability.

Hypothesis 7: Entrepreneurial innovation mediates the relationship between the socio-cultural challenges faced by rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives and the initiatives' (a) economic sustainability, (b) environmental sustainability, and (c) social sustainability.

**Study Methodology**

*Study design*

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology to investigate the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in the West Bank, focusing on the governorates of Bethlehem and Hebron. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political factors and business conditions that characterize this unique context. The descriptive aspect involved collecting detailed data through a structured questionnaire designed to gather demographic information, business activities, and specific challenges encountered by these entrepreneurs. This method facilitated an extensive analysis of the collected data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The questions used in the survey were adapted from previously validated instruments (Taylor et al., 2015) and were meticulously tailored to ensure relevance to the Palestinian environment and alignment with the research themes. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic to enhance clarity and accessibility for the rural women entrepreneurs. Out of 207 participants, 33 responses were excluded due to low engagement, resulting in a final sample of 174 valid responses.

The analytical aspect of the study allowed for an in-depth examination of individual experiences and contextual influences that are not easily captured through quantitative data alone. This enabled a richer understanding of the socio-political environment and its impact on the business landscape and the personal lives of the entrepreneurs. Given the complexities of the political climate, cultural expectations, and social norms in Palestine, which significantly shape women's business opportunities, a thorough narrative analysis of these factors was deemed essential (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

This research, therefore, integrates both descriptive and analytical dimensions to present a holistic analysis of the economic, social, and political influences on rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine. The findings aim to inform and refine intervention strategies to ensure their appropriateness and effectiveness for this target group.

*Ethical approval*

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments. Ethical approval for the research protocol was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Rural Women's Development Society (RWDS), under the leadership of Dr. Nariman Abu Atwan, Dr. Riziq Shaheen, and Dr. Kifah Manasra (Reference Number: 01/RWDS/2023). Data collection focused on rural women-led enterprises, with the sample selected from lists provided by RWDS. The Ethics Committee reviewed these lists, developed the survey, conducted pre-testing, and oversaw the analysis process. All participants provided informed consent after being fully briefed on the study's aims, methodology, potential benefits, and risks. They were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions.

*Population and sample*

The data for this study was collected from rural women-led entrepreneurial initiatives in the southern West Bank, specifically in the districts of Hebron and Bethlehem. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, with the study's purpose, procedures, and benefits explained clearly before participation. Due to the sensitivity of the research, participants did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, thus supporting data is not available. An online survey was used as the primary data collection tool, utilizing the SurveyMonkey platform (Aljarah et al., 2024). The questionnaire was first developed in English, then translated into Arabic by a bilingual researcher to ensure linguistic accuracy. Peer evaluations were conducted to ensure clarity, precision, and relevance, and revisions were made accordingly before the final version was administered. The survey link was distributed via WhatsApp messages, with the help of the Rural Women's Development Society (RWDS) and the Chambers of Commerce in Bethlehem and Hebron. RWDS field coordinators contacted participants by phone and in person, explaining the objectives and guiding them through the process of completing the survey. Given the restrictions on movement in Palestine due to the ongoing occupation, an online survey was the most viable method of data collection.

Data collection took place from October 28, 2023, to January 21, 2024. A total of 207 responses were received, but 33 cases characterized by low standard deviation were excluded, resulting in a final dataset of 174 responses (Charalampi et

al., 2019). Of the respondents, 51% were from Bethlehem and 49% from Hebron. In terms of business activities, 41.4% of the initiatives focused on food processing, 20.1% on handicrafts, and 11.5% on growing and drying herbs. Smaller portions were engaged in embroidery (6.3%), jewelry (0.6%), and ornamental work (2.9%), while 17.2% reported other activities.

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the majority (46%) were between 41 and 56 years old, 33.9% were between 25 and 40, 14.4% were over 56, and 5.7% were 24 years old or younger. Most participants were married (81%), while 14.4% were single, 1.7% divorced or separated, and 2.9% widowed. Around 33.3% had no children, while 66.7% had children living with them. Educationally, 58.1% held either a bachelor's degree or an intermediate diploma, 27.6% had secondary school education, 10% had primary education, and only 4% held a master's degree or higher.

In terms of the age of the entrepreneurial initiatives, 47.1% had been operating for 1-5 years, 19.5% for 6-10 years, 11.5% for 11-15 years, and 7.5% for more than 15 years, while 14.4% of the initiatives were less than a year old. Regarding income distribution, 71.8% of the initiatives' income was spent on the owners, while 10.9% supported the owners' parents, 11.5% supported the owners' siblings, and 5.7% was allocated to other beneficiaries (see Table 1 for details).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents (n = 174)**

| Demographics | District | | Project Field | | | | | | | Age Group | | | | Marital Status | | | | Education Level | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Bethlehem | Hebron | Food | Growing and | Handicrafts | Embroideries | Jewellery | Ornamental | Other | 18–24 years | 25–40 years | 41–56 years | More than 56 | Single | Married | Divorced | Widowed | Master's | Bachelor's | Intermediate | Secondary | Primary |
| Frequency | 88 | 86 | 72 | 20 | 35 | 11 | 1 | 5 | 30 | 10 | 59 | 80 | 25 | 25 | 141 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 60 | 41 | 48 | 18 |
| Percent (%) | 50.6 | 49.4 | 41.4 | 11.5 | 20.1 | 6.3 | 0.6 | 2.9 | 17.2 | 5.7 | 33.9 | 46.0 | 14.4 | 14.4 | 81.0 | 1.7 | 2.9 | 4.0 | 34.5 | 23.6 | 27.6 | 10.3 |

| Demographics | Elderly Family Member | | Number of Children | | | | Project Age | | | | | | Beneficiaries | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | Yes | No children | 1–3 children | 4–6 children | More than 6 children | Less than 1 year | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | 11–15 years | 16–20 years | More than 20 years | Owner | Parents | Brothers | Sisters | Others |
| Frequency | 90 | 84 | 58 | 64 | 39 | 13 | 25 | 82 | 34 | 20 | 5 | 8 | 125 | 19 | 12 | 8 | 10 |
| Percent (%) | 51.7 | 48.3 | 33.3 | 36.8 | 22.4 | 7.5 | 14.4 | 47.1 | 19.5 | 11.5 | 2.9 | 4.6 | 71.8 | 10.9 | 6.9 | 4.6 | 5.7 |

*Data collection tools*

This study employed a questionnaire adapted from prior research (Bakhit, 2022; Dovbischuk, 2022; Sayraf, 2022). The questionnaire consisted of three sections designed to comprehensively address various aspects of the research. The first section outlined the study's objectives, while the second section gathered demographic information. The third section included the key measurement items for the research model.

The constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scales, ranging from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. This structured approach ensured clarity in capturing the study's objectives, participants' demographics, and the essential measurement items related to the research model.

Aligned with the conceptualization of challenges, socio-cultural challenges (SCC) were measured by eight items, adopted from Al-Qahtani et al. (2022), while political challenges (POC) were measured using five items, based on Sayraf (2022) and Bakhit (2022). To assess entrepreneurial innovation (ENI), six items were adopted from Dovbischuk (2022).

Additionally, sustainability was measured across three sub-dimensions:

- Economic sustainability (ECS) was assessed by five items.
- Environmental sustainability (ENS) was evaluated using six items.
- Social sustainability (SOS) was measured by six items.

These sustainability items were adopted from Nawi et al. (2022).

Measurement Model Assessment

SmartPLS 4 was employed to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and evaluate the construct validity and reliability of the developed scale. Internal consistency and reliability were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients ranging from 0.719 to 0.908, indicating acceptable reliability levels (Hair et al., 2011). All item loadings were statistically significant, ranging from 0.622 to 0.908.

As shown in Table 2, the Composite Reliability (CR) for the six constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019), demonstrating satisfactory reliability. Convergent validity was also confirmed, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all six constructs surpassed the recommended value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019).

Additionally, Table 3 presents evidence of discriminant validity, where the square root of the AVE values for each construct exceeded the corresponding correlation coefficients between constructs, following the criteria set by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Furthermore, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, all below 3.3, indicated the absence of collinearity or multicollinearity concerns, consistent with the guidelines by Hair et al. (2018). To address Common Method Bias (CMB), a full collinearity test was conducted. As demonstrated in Table 4, the VIF values were also below the 3.3 threshold, confirming no presence of common method bias (Kock, 2015).

**Table 2. Measurement Model**

| Code | Construct dimensions and indicators | Λ | Mean | STD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Political challenges (POC): (Cronbach's alpha= 0.871, CR= 0.892, AVE = 0.659)** | | | | |
| POC1 | The lack of basic resources such as water and electricity in some areas is caused by Israeli occupation. | 0.76 | 1.51 | 0.72 |
| POC2 | Israeli barriers and limited crossings make it difficult for women to access markets and sources outside their villages, affecting product distribution and trade. | 0.79 | 1.31 | 0.51 |
| POC3 | Project infrastructure in the Palestinian countryside could be at risk of demolition by the Israeli authorities, putting women's projects in constant danger. | 0.88 | 1.37 | 0.56 |
| POC4 | Difficulty accessing funding and assistance from international organizations due to political instability | 0.79 | 1.48 | 0.63 |
| POC5 | Israeli settlement expansion and confiscation of land cause rural women to lose access to their land | 0.83 | 1.29 | 0.49 |

| Code | Construct dimensions and indicators | Λ | Mean | STD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Socio-cultural challenges (SCC): (Cronbach's alpha= 0.908, CR= 0.931, AVE = 0.683) | | | | |
| SCC1 | Community's perception of women lacking leadership skills. | 0.76 | 2.35 | 1.20 |
| SCC2 | Community's perception of women lacking financial skills. | 0.79 | 2.23 | 1.17 |
| SCC3 | The community expects women to prioritize family over work. | 0.88 | 2.07 | 1.12 |
| SCC4 | Community's perception that women lack information technology skills. | 0.79 | 2.28 | 1.20 |
| SCC5 | Community's perception that women lack entrepreneurial skills. | 0.83 | 2.52 | 1.26 |
| SCC6 | Community's perception that women lack managerial skills. * | | | |
| SCC7 | Restrictive access to education and training opportunities * | | | |
| SCC8 | Patriarchal society restricts women's entrepreneurship * | | | |
| Entrepreneurial innovation (ENI): (Cronbach's alpha= 0.805, CR=0.819, AVE = 0.563) | | | | |
| ENI1 | Adopt new skills | 0.66 | 1.67 | 0.68 |
| ENI2 | Rely on technology in their work | 0.70 | 1.80 | 0.76 |
| ENI3 | Introduce new products or services | 0.77 | 1.63 | 0.74 |
| ENI4 | Acquire knowledge of market needs and requirements | 0.78 | 1.68 | 0.78 |
| ENI5 | Seek creative solutions | 0.83 | 1.54 | 0.61 |
| ENI6 | Search for new ideas and opportunities * | | | |
| Economic sustainability (ECS) : (Cronbach's alpha=0.719, CR=0.757, AVE = 0.541 ) | | | | |
| ECS1 | Focus on generating profits for all stakeholders involved in the initiative | 0.62 | 1.74 | 0.77 |
| ECS2* | Contribute to improving cost efficiency in their operations * | | | |
| ECS3 | Positively contribute to other aspects of their business operations, beyond financial aspects | 0.81 | 1.77 | 0.72 |
| ECS4 | All partners in the entrepreneurial initiative participate in its growth and sustainability | 0.73 | 1.79 | 0.81 |
| ECS5 | Engage in long-term planning and consideration of business goals and sustainability. | 0.77 | 1.67 | 0.77 |
| Environmental sustainability (ENS): (Cronbach's alpha= 0.844, CR= 0.858, AVE = 0.561) | | | | |
| ENS1 | Implemented in response to ongoing climate change | 0.70 | 2.00 | 0.89 |
| ENS2 | Take into consideration the phenomenon of global warming and respond to it | 0.76 | 2.10 | 0.93 |
| ENS3 | Adopt interventions and activities that focus on the environmental impact of their products. | 0.71 | 1.75 | 0.77 |
| ENS4 | Led to their products becoming more environmentally friendly | 0.74 | 1.78 | 0.72 |
| ENS5 | Considered suitable for addressing environmental challenges | 0.77 | 1.83 | 0.71 |
| ENS6 | Continually monitored and improved to enhance their environmental impact | 0.80 | 1.74 | 0.69 |
| Social sustainability (SOS): (Cronbach's alpha= 0.885, CR= 0.889, AVE = 0.685) | | | | |
| SOS1 | Provide self-employment opportunities for women in the community. | 0.80 | 1.62 | 0.72 |
| SOS2 | Ensured gender equality in economic opportunities within the community* | | | |
| SOS3 | Enhanced the leadership and decision-making capabilities of women in the community. | 0.85 | 1.56 | 0.70 |
| SOS4 | Succeed in promoting social well-being within the community | 0.81 | 1.70 | 0.76 |
| SOS5 | Demonstrate social responsibility by providing free services and products to the community | 0.84 | 1.75 | 0.72 |

| Code | Construct dimensions and indicators | Λ | Mean | STD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SOS6 | Engaging in effective communication with the local community and building partnerships with them | 0.84 | 1.68 | 0.69 |

**Note: *** Item excluded as a result of low loadings: SCC6, SCC7, SCC8, ENI6, ECS2, SOS2.
**CR** = Composite reliability, **AVE** = Average variance extracted

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

| Dimensions | ECS | ENI | ENS | POC | SCC | SOS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic sustainability | **0.735** | | | | | |
| Entrepreneurial innovation | **0.419** | **0.750** | | | | |
| Environmental sustainability | **0.587** | **0.524** | **0.749** | | | |
| Political challenges | **0.313** | **0.261** | **0.370** | **0.812** | | |
| Socio-cultural challenges | **0.150** | **0.047** | **0.261** | **0.331** | **0.827** | |
| Social sustainability | **0.462** | **0.257** | **0.399** | **0.300** | **0.078** | **0.827** |

Note: Diagonal bold values are the square roots of the AVE

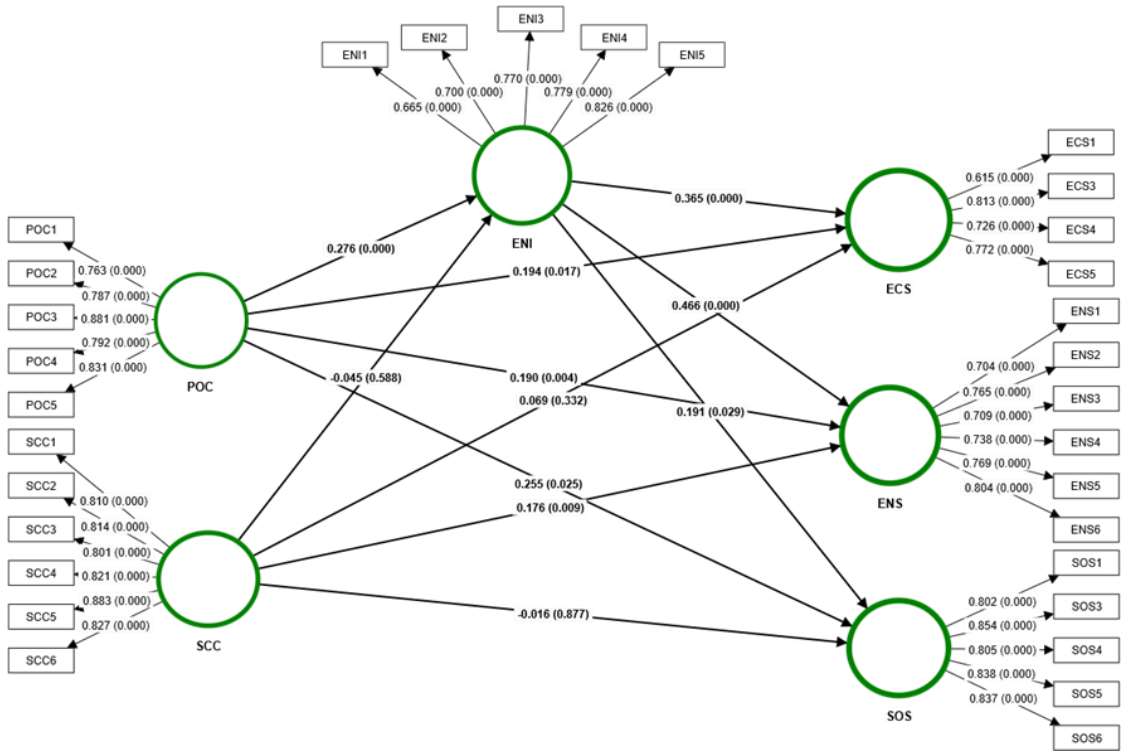



**Figure 1. The Structural Model: Political Challenges (POC), Socio-Cultural Challenges (SCC), Entrepreneurial Innovation (ENI), Economic Sustainability (ECS), Environmental Sustainability (ENS), and Social Sustainability (SOS).**

*Analyses*

Thorough examination of the measurement model for a number of categories, such as political, sociocultural, and entrepreneurial problems, as well as economic, environmental, and social sustainability, is given in Table 2. All constructs have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, showing good convergent validity, and the constructs show great internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70, indicating high reliability. Five indicators of political problems show major barriers that rural women face, including unstable infrastructure and limited access to resources because of the Israeli occupation, with project infrastructure demolition having the highest loading ($\Lambda$=0.88). The social beliefs that impede women's entrepreneurship, especially in leadership and entrepreneurial skills, are reflected in socio-cultural challenges. The social opinion that women lack entrepreneurial skills has the highest mean (SCC5, mean = 2.52).

While innovative solutions and new skills are moderately adopted by entrepreneurial innovation (ENI5, $\Lambda$=0.83), low means suggest that innovation is still limited. Profit generation and long-term planning are the main priorities of economic sustainability, with business process improvements loading highest (ECS3, $\Lambda$=0.81). This suggests that entrepreneurs have a modest perspective of sustainability. Though there is still space for improvement, environmental sustainability shows a rising integration of environmental practices, with continuous monitoring (ENS6, $\Lambda$=0.80) as a critical feature reflecting responsiveness to climate change. Social sustainability places a heavy emphasis on improving women's leadership and employment prospects. The best indication of this is leadership enhancement (SOS3, $\Lambda$=0.85), which highlights the importance of social responsibility in advancing gender equality. Based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, discriminant validity verifies that each construct is unique. Political challenges have the highest correlation with environmental sustainability (0.370), indicating the intersection of political issues and environmental challenges for female entrepreneurs in rural areas.

To evaluate the proposed structural model depicted in Figure 1, which illustrates the relationships among Political Challenges (POC), Socio-Cultural Challenges (SCC), Entrepreneurial Innovation (ENI), Economic Sustainability (ECS), Environmental Sustainability (ENS), and Social Sustainability (SOS), Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 4. The analysis focused on key indicators such as $R^2$, $\beta$ coefficients, p-values, and t-values, with bootstrapping applied using 5000 subsamples as recommended by Hair et al. (2018). The results revealed that POC, SCC, and ENI collectively explained 22.4% of the variance in ECS, 36.1% in ENS, and 12.4% in SOS. Additionally, POC and SCC accounted for 7% of the variance in ENI (Falk & Miller, 1992).

The direct relationships between the constructs, as shown in Table 4, demonstrate that POC is positively associated with ECS ($\beta$ = 0.194, t = 2.380, $p < 0.05$), ENS ($\beta$ = 0.190, t = 2.893, $p < 0.05$), SOS ($\beta$ = 0.255, t = 2.243, $p < 0.05$), and ENI ($\beta$ = 0.276, t = 3.736, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, SCC had a positive but non-significant effect on ECS ($\beta$ = 0.069, t = 0.970, $p > 0.05$) and ENS ($\beta$ = 0.176, t = 2.613, $p < 0.05$), while showing a negative, non-significant relationship with SOS ($\beta$ = -0.016, t = 0.155, $p > 0.05$) and ENI ($\beta$ = -0.045, t = 0.542, $p > 0.05$). ENI, on the other hand, positively influenced ECS ($\beta$ = 0.365, t = 4.407, $p < 0.05$), ENS ($\beta$ = 0.466, t = 6.905, $p < 0.05$), and SOS ($\beta$ = 0.191, t = 2.182, $p < 0.05$). These findings strongly support hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, H2b, H3, H5a, H5b, and H5c, while hypotheses H2a, H2c, and H4 were not supported.

Regarding the mediation effects, the results show that ENI significantly mediates the relationships between POC and ECS ($\beta$ = 0.101, t = 2.812, $p < 0.05$) and between POC and ENS ($\beta$ = 0.128, t = 3.250, $p < 0.05$). However, ENI did not significantly mediate the relationships between POC and SOS ($\beta$ = 0.053, t = 1.583, $p > 0.05$), SCC and ECS ($\beta$ = -0.016, t = 0.501, $p > 0.05$), SCC and ENS ($\beta$ = -0.021, t = 0.511, $p > 0.05$), or SCC and SOS ($\beta$ = -0.009, t = 0.458, $p > 0.05$). These findings provide strong support for hypotheses H6a and H6b but do not support H6c, H7a, H7b, or H7c.

**Table 4. Results of Path Analysis**

| Hypothesis | | β Value | Mean | (STDEV) | T values | P values | VIF | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct Effect | | | | | | | | |
| H1a: | POC -> ECS | 0.194 | 0.204 | 0.082 | 2.380 | 0.017 | 1.205 | Supported |
| H1b: | POC -> ENS | 0.190 | 0.195 | 0.066 | 2.893 | 0.004 | 1.205 | Supported |
| H1c: | POC -> SOS | 0.255 | 0.261 | 0.114 | 2.243 | 0.025 | 1.205 | Supported |
| H2a: | SCC -> ECS | 0.069 | 0.074 | 0.071 | 0.970 | 0.332 | 1.125 | Not supported |
| H2b: | SCC -> ENS | 0.176 | 0.181 | 0.067 | 2.613 | 0.009 | 1.125 | Supported |
| H2c: | SCC -> SOS | -0.016 | -0.011 | 0.100 | 0.155 | 0.877 | 1.125 | Not supported |
| H3: | POC -> ENI | 0.276 | 0.282 | 0.074 | 3.736 | 0.000 | 1.123 | Supported |
| H4: | SCC -> ENI | -0.045 | -0.041 | 0.082 | 0.542 | 0.588 | 1.123 | Not supported |
| H5a: | ENI -> ECS | 0.365 | 0.374 | 0.083 | 4.407 | 0.000 | 1.075 | Supported |
| H5b: | ENI -> ENS | 0.466 | 0.470 | 0.067 | 6.905 | 0.000 | 1.075 | Supported |
| H5c: | ENI -> SOS | 0.191 | 0.205 | 0.088 | 2.182 | 0.029 | 1.075 | Supported |
| Indirect Effect | | | | | | | | |
| H6a: | POC -> ENI -> ECS | 0.101 | 0.105 | 0.036 | 2.812 | 0.005 | | Supported |
| H6b: | POC -> ENI -> ENS | 0.128 | 0.132 | 0.040 | 3.250 | 0.001 | | Supported |
| H6c: | POC -> ENI -> SOS | 0.053 | 0.060 | 0.033 | 1.583 | 0.113 | | Not supported |
| H7a: | SCC -> ENI -> ECS | -0.016 | -0.017 | 0.032 | 0.501 | 0.616 | | Not supported |
| H7b: | SCC -> ENI -> ENS | -0.021 | -0.021 | 0.041 | 0.511 | 0.609 | | Not supported |
| H7c: | SCC -> ENI -> SOS | -0.009 | -0.009 | 0.019 | 0.458 | 0.647 | | Not supported |

The path analysis's findings offer insightful information about the connections between the three dimensions of sustainability—economic (ECS), environmental (ENS), and social (SOS)—and Political Challenges (POC), Socio-Cultural Challenges (SCC), and Entrepreneurial Innovation (ENI). The results show that POC has a substantial beneficial impact on each of the three sustainability dimensions (H1a, H1b, and H1c). This can be explained by the fact that infrastructure development, economic stability, and policy frameworks—all important elements of sustainability—are greatly influenced by political settings. Political problems can encourage reforms, draw investments, and strengthen governance processes that improve social, environmental, and economic outcomes in areas where they are well managed or turned into opportunities.

The ability of political institutions to influence economic policies that support growth, stability, and investor confidence as well as facilitate trade, manage resources, and provide economic resilience is specifically responsible for the favorable effect of POC on ECS. Furthermore, since politically stable environments can result in greater implementation of environmental policies, political leadership is essential in formulating environmental rules, promoting green projects, and fostering international collaborations for environmental protection. Furthermore, political struggles influence the creation of healthcare, education, and social welfare programs, and good governance results in laws that promote social inclusion, equity, and community well-being.

Unlike POC, SCC exhibits no discernible impact on ECS and SOS (H2a, H2c), two sustainability parameters. SCC, however, has a favorable effect on ENS (H2b). The lack of a substantial correlation between SCC and ECS could be attributed to the indirect impact of socio-cultural issues on economic sustainability, including cultural norms, values, and society expectations. While cultural influences influence consumer and corporate behavior, they do not immediately affect the larger economic systems that support sustainability. The increased global knowledge of environmental issues, which frequently results from cultural shifts toward sustainability, could be the cause of SCC's beneficial effects on ENS. Conversely, the absence of a significant relationship between SCC and SOS suggests that social sustainability is influenced

more by political and institutional frameworks than by socio-cultural norms alone.

Moreover, ENI mediates the link between POC and both ECS and ENS (H6a, H6b) and has a significant impact on all three sustainability dimensions (H5a, H5b, and H5c). Through the promotion of innovative business models, technologies, and practices that increase productivity, lessen their negative effects on the environment, and improve social welfare, ENI plays a critical role in achieving sustainability goals. In politically turbulent situations, inventive business people might come up with original ways to get past obstacles and support sustainable development. In these kinds of situations, the mediating function of ENI highlights how crucial it is to support entrepreneurial activity since political obstacles that stimulate innovation can result in both environmental preservation and economic prosperity.

Even though ENI directly improves SOS, it does not significantly mediate the relationship between POC and SOS, suggesting that social policies and political stability are more directly responsible for determining social sustainability. Since norms and traditions may operate as barriers to change, it is possible that socio-cultural challenges do not directly stimulate innovation, as suggested by the lack of a significant link between SCC and ENI (H4). Lastly, the findings show that ENI does not mediate the relationship between SCC and any of the sustainability outcomes (H7a, H7b, and H7c), implying that in order to significantly affect sustainability, cultural challenges may need to be directly addressed through societal reform, policy changes, or education.

In summary, SCC has a minimal direct impact on sustainability, with ENS being the notable exception. POC, on the other hand, considerably impacts sustainability outcomes, especially when mediated by ENI. In order to achieve sustainable development, these findings emphasize the significance of overcoming political obstacles and encouraging innovation; yet, socio-cultural issues may need the use of alternative tactics to promote sustainability.

**Discussion**

Based on the data at hand, we can compare the outcomes from Hebron and Bethlehem by segmenting the findings based on various study criteria, including economic, environmental, and social sustainability; entrepreneurial innovation; and political and social-cultural challenges. With 51% of the participants coming from Bethlehem and 49% from Hebron, the geographic distribution of the participants was roughly balanced. Because of the demographic diversity in the areas under study, it is possible to compare how social, cultural, and political issues affect women in the two locations.

According to the findings of political difficulties, Hebron and Bethlehem share problems with regard to shaky infrastructure and scarce resources brought on by Israeli rule. The results indicate that "the risk of infrastructure demolition" and "difficulty accessing markets due to Israeli checkpoints" have the greatest effects on projects in both regions. Depending on regional conditions and resource allocation, these difficulties could differ. The social-cultural issues, which center on how society views women, seem to be comparable in Hebron and Bethlehem. According to the findings, communities in both regions believe that women are not capable of being leaders or entrepreneurs. The most common problem in Bethlehem was "lack of entrepreneurial skills" (average = 2.52), which reflected unfavorable opinions about women's capacity to participate in the business market.

Both regions have comparatively low levels of entrepreneurship innovation, as seen by the poor responses to questions on the adoption of new technology or innovations in goods or services. Although the degree of preparedness among women to adjust to contemporary technologies may be the difference between Hebron and Bethlehem, this suggests a limitation in the ability to pick up new abilities. Increasing long-term profitability and operational efficiency are two aspects of economic sustainability. The findings indicate that the majority of projects in Bethlehem and Hebron concentrate on sustainable growth via stakeholder involvement and process improvement. "Contribution to improving efficiency" ($\Lambda$=0.81) was a significant feature in both regions, indicating a substantial attempt to improve financial circumstances through sustainable solutions.

The findings indicate that both regions are placing an increasing emphasis on environmentally sustainable activities. With ongoing environmental footprint monitoring, efforts are being made to lessen the impact of goods and services on the environment. Issues like climate change and the effects of global warming have been discussed in both Hebron and Bethlehem. Social sustainability entails giving women economic opportunity and empowering them in the community. It

is evident that both areas are giving women's self-employment options, leadership development, and decision-making skills a lot of attention. Although there is a considerable focus on enhancing communal well-being, local cultural variances may cause differences. In certain places, community involvement was more noticeable than in others.

Even though the difficulties that both locations encounter are very similar, there are a few minor variations in the outcomes. For example, social-cultural issues seemed to be more prominent in Bethlehem, especially with reference to women's lack of entrepreneurial abilities. Hebron, on the other hand, responded more strongly to questions about environmental and economic sustainability, which would indicate a more welcoming atmosphere for companies run by women. According to the data presented, Hebron and Bethlehem have comparable difficulties because of the Israeli occupation and societal issues that restrict the entrepreneurial opportunities available to women. The ways in which these issues affect innovation and economic sustainability vary, though. Hebron prioritizes economic and environmental sustainability, while Bethlehem appears to be more concerned with tackling social and cultural issues. This implies that although both areas are pursuing sustainability and empowerment, their methods vary according to their own local circumstances.

Our findings indicate that the challenges faced by Palestinian women entrepreneurs in their rural enterprises significantly impact the longevity of their enterprises. The combined weight of cultural constraints and socio-political volatility has a substantial impact on these women's capacity to sustain and grow their businesses (Omran & Farraj, 2022). The ongoing political unrest in Palestine has emerged as a significant barrier, severely restricting their access to markets, vital resources, and freedom of movement (Istanbuli, 2016). These restrictions have an impact on their capacity to function and grow, which in turn has an impact on rural women-led groups' financial situation. Additionally, patriarchal cultural norms further marginalize their economic endeavors by restricting them to occasionally lower-paying professions thought appropriate for women (Aljarah et al., 2024). These limitations draw attention to how difficult it can be to navigate entrepreneurial environments in a politically uncertain setting.

In spite of these obstacles, the female entrepreneurs in our research have shown tenacity by adapting their business plans to fit the limitations set by their surroundings. They avoid occupation restrictions by using sustainable and local materials and methods, which also support area economic growth and environmental preservation. According to Awwad (2024), this adaptability encourages a type of sustainability that is strongly related to the socioeconomic environment of the area. Furthermore, by giving other women job opportunities, these businesswomen challenge conventional gender roles and advance cultural norms towards gender equality (Morrar et al., 2024). Their initiatives empower women and build community resilience, which both lead to greater social sustainability.

Innovation serves as a critical mediator in our study, enabling these entrepreneurs to cope with the constraints imposed by their environments. Through creativity in product development, marketing, and management, they manage to sustain their businesses under difficult conditions (Aryani et al., 2024). The synthesis of these findings demonstrates that the sustainability of rural women-led entrepreneurial ventures in Palestine is characterized by a complex interplay between external challenges and innovative solutions. Through quantitative analysis, we identify a unique trend in the challenges encountered by rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine, primarily in the southern West Bank. Our results highlight that political issues exert a more significant influence than economic challenges (Sidik, 2024). This finding contrasts with prevailing assumptions and patterns seen in other nations, illustrating how the prolonged occupation interconnects economic conditions with political instability.

Remarkably, Table 4 indicates that socio-cultural factors rank as the second most influential component. This numerical revelation alters the prevailing narrative, undermining the dominant focus on economic difficulties. The prevalence of political obstacles within Palestine's landscape for women entrepreneurs necessitates a reassessment of support strategies (Sidik, 2024). Designing effective initiatives and policies is crucial in light of the substantial impact of political challenges. Our research emphasizes specific strategies that assist women entrepreneurs in Palestine in navigating a challenging political landscape, even as socio-cultural elements remain significant (de Wit, 2024). These findings provide a quantitative foundation for evidence-based policies that support sustainable practices in women-led business ventures.

By analyzing the direct and indirect effects of Political Challenges (POC) and Socio-Cultural Challenges (SCC) on

outcomes related to economic, environmental, and social sustainability, we highlight the intricate dynamics present in women-led entrepreneurial endeavors. Our hypotheses posited significant direct effects of POC on Economic Sustainability (ECS) (H1a), Environmental Sustainability (ENS) (H1b), and Social Sustainability (SOS) (H1c). Empirical evidence supports these assertions, indicating that women-led entrepreneurial initiatives facing higher degrees of political challenges are more likely to exhibit higher economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Previous research supports the notion that environmentally friendly actions positively influence various sustainability areas (Mokbel Al Koliby et al., 2024), aligning with our findings.

Although there is no statistically significant direct impact of SCC on ECS (H2a), our findings support the positive effects that SCC has on ENS (H2b). However, there is no significant association between SCC and SOS (H2c). This indicates a multifaceted relationship between socio-cultural challenges and different sustainability aspects, highlighting the need for further research into the specific processes influencing the social and economic sustainability of women-led initiatives. In line with our predictions, POC significantly influenced Entrepreneurial Innovation (ENI) (H3), whereas the effect of SCC on ENI was not significant (H4). This suggests that socio-cultural challenges, unlike political challenges, do not act as a direct trigger for innovation.

Our thorough investigation into the direct effects of ENI on ECS (H5a), ENS (H5b), and SOS (H5c) has uncovered strong positive correlations between these factors. Entrepreneurial initiatives that prioritize and internalize entrepreneurial innovation exhibit higher levels of economic, environmental, and social sustainability than those that do not. This phenomenon underscores the importance of entrepreneurial innovation in fostering sustainable business operations across various contexts (Audretsch et al., 2024). An additional layer of complexity arises from investigating indirect effects, denoted by hypotheses H6a, H6b, H6c, H7a, H7b, and H7c. The indirect effects of POC and SCC via the ENI pathways yield diverse outcomes that warrant consideration. Evidence supports the indirect effects of POC on ECS (H6a) and ENS (H6b); however, no statistically significant impact is observed for SOS (H6c). Similarly, the indirect effects of SCC on ECS (H7a), ENS (H7b), or SOS (H7c) via ENI pathways do not show statistically significant impacts. In summary, the findings from our study shed light on the complex interplay between socio-political instability, cultural constraints, and the sustainability of rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine. The research highlights the importance of innovative strategies in overcoming challenges and emphasizes the need for tailored policies that consider the unique socio-political landscape in which these entrepreneurs operate.

Implications for practice

The findings of this research study carry significant implications, highlighting the urgent need for similar investigations in various rural areas of Palestine. Such research would provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs across different sectors. This information is crucial for policymakers and government officials to develop and implement effective policies tailored to support rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine (Orobia et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to advocate for measures that consider the unique political, cultural, and social contexts in which these women operate.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the critical role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in supporting rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine. Collaboration with these organizations can bolster local initiatives, offering essential resources and insights to address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. By fostering partnerships between local entities and international organizations, a more robust and sustainable support system for women-owned businesses can be established (Moghadam, 2020).

The insights gained from this study are beneficial for both the academic community and practitioners interested in sustainable business practices. The varying impacts of political challenges (POCs) and socio-cultural challenges (SCCs) necessitate the adoption of multifaceted strategies to address specific sustainability issues. This underscores the importance of understanding the contextual environment in which Palestinian women entrepreneurs operate, as well as the obstacles they encounter in promoting sustainable practices (Barrachina Fernández et al., 2021).

Ultimately, the implications of this research are significant for scholars and managers in the realm of sustainable

business practices. The differentiation between the effects of political barriers and socio-cultural factors highlights the necessity for tailored strategies that address the diverse aspects of sustainability. Addressing political challenges while implementing targeted interventions for socio-cultural issues is essential for fostering sustainable business models in challenging environments (Althalathini, 2022).

The key takeaway from this research paper is to understand the complex challenges faced by Palestinian women entrepreneurs in rural areas due to political, social, and cultural factors, and how these elements impact the sustainability of their businesses. The paper highlights the pivotal role of innovation in overcoming these challenges, emphasizing the need for targeted policies that support women entrepreneurs in this specific context. It also underscores the importance of collaborating with international non-governmental organizations to provide the necessary resources and support for strengthening women-led businesses in Palestine. Furthermore, the study offers a framework for understanding how these factors influence sustainability in various aspects of business, including economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

**Conclusion**

This research presents a theoretical model aimed at understanding the unique challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine and the influence of social and political factors on their business viability. Utilizing a combination of descriptive and quantitative data, our study illustrates that these enterprises are significantly constrained in their operations and growth due to the occupation and entrenched traditional gender roles.

The primary findings reveal that digital platforms play a pivotal role in enabling these entrepreneurs to navigate socio-political barriers, thereby enhancing their market access and overall business sustainability. Despite the myriad constraints, these women exhibit remarkable resilience and creativity, which are essential for their survival and growth. While existing literature often addresses various barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs, our research specifically focuses on the political and socio-cultural challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine.

These findings indicate that rural women entrepreneurs in Palestine encounter distinct challenges that, if adequately addressed by policymakers and development agencies, can lead to improved business sustainability and, consequently, greater economic empowerment. Furthermore, this study advocates for additional research in other rural regions of Palestine to assess the impact of social and political factors on women's rural entrepreneurship. Conducting sector-specific analyses would provide deeper insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that women entrepreneurs face within specific industries, thus offering a broader perspective on the entrepreneurial landscape. This information would enable policymakers and development agencies to formulate targeted policies and strategies to effectively address these challenges.

In summary, this research contributes to the development and empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs, promoting their sustainable growth and enhancing the overall socio-economic status of the Palestinian economy.

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