



Youth work in Palestine and surrounding challenges



This programme is funded by the European Union



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1. Overview

1.1 Summary



This study explores the situation of youth in Palestine and the methods, achievements and challenges of contemporary youth work interventions, attempting in the process to elicit and critically evaluate the political and pedagogical approaches of youth work underpinning policymaking, programming, funding and research in Palestine.

1.2 Introduction

Commissioned by the RCBS (Regional Capacity Building and Support Unit for the EuroMed Youth Programme IV), this study is part of the ongoing series focusing on specific nations in the MENA region and the characteristics of their youth populations and youth sectors. Each report in the series, in addition to looking at one country, takes a particular thematic focus: in this instance, the situation of Youth Work in Palestine.

1.3 Objectives

The key objectives of this study are to:

- Provide an overview of youth work in Palestine
- Describe the educational and pedagogical background of youth work in Palestine
- Examine the challenges of youth workers for developing projects
- Provide some examples of youth projects in Palestine

1.4 Methodology

This study was conducted using a range of mixed quantitative and qualitative social research methods: quantitative data sourced from the Palestinian Central Bureau of statistics, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and other sources was analysed.

Semi-structured face to face, email and skills interviews were conducted with Palestinian

youth workers and officials during and after a study visit by a EuroMed youth group (consisting of NGO and governmental representatives from EuroMed countries active in the field of youth work) to several locations in Palestine¹. A survey was drafted and disseminated through the networks of study visit participants. In addition, several presentations, group discussions and exchanges and field trips were undertaken over the course of the study visit.

Several other sources of secondary documentary data including Palestinian and Israeli policy documents, newspaper and website articles, NGO research reports and evaluations, academic studies and documentaries have been reviewed and, when quoted directly, referenced.

Whilst it would be a fruitful line of inquiry to explore the specific convergences and divergences within those experiences, such research is beyond the remit of this study. The respective authorities in those states, alongside international agencies operating in refugee camps, have responsibility for the young people under their authority, whereas the Palestinian Authority is only operational within the West Bank and Gaza and its policies and practices only apply there.

Due to time and access constraints, the author was not able to visit Gaza during the course of the study visit to Palestine. It was therefore important, given its unique situation and its high youth population, to ensure that other means were used to secure accurate and comprehensive data about the situation of youth in Gaza. To this end email and Skype conversations with youth workers in Gaza were initiated.

1.5 Limitations of study

There are more Palestinian refugees currently living outside Palestine in other countries, predominantly Jordan, Syrian and Lebanon but many farther afield also, than within Palestine. Whilst undoubtedly still bound to their fellow Palestinians within the West Bank and Gaza through cultural, familial and political ties, the experiences of these populations, shaped by their social, political and economic context, are significantly different from those within Palestine.

The study was conducted in English, further reducing the potential pool of respondents, though during the study visit translation was available and used wherever possible to enable interaction with a greater number of contributors.

¹ For a breakdown of this visit, the composition of the study group and a description of the itinerary, please see the appendices
² Author Photo



2. Context

The Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza is young, in line with the rest of the Arab world, which is experiencing a 'youth bulge'³ peak. Accordingly, the number and proportion of young people reaching the further and higher education age bracket, prior to entering the labour market, is unprecedented.

In a region where the concept of youth work does not traditionally have a strong cachet, the need for rapid and effective adaptation to emergent trends and behaviour on the part of young people is all the more necessary, especially taking into account the transformative events in the region over the past 3 years and the role young people have played in them.

This would present a wide range of challenges to any nation. For Palestine, an emergent nation only recently granted a (largely symbolic) statehood and surviving under military occupation (the economic and political entanglement with Israel), against the background of one of the longest running conflicts in the world, these challenges are even more daunting. This report looks at these challenges, the organisations grappling with them, and suggests potential forward-moving steps.

³ http://www.demographic-challenge.com/files/downloads/1b1b2ce30fd7327d718b545260be001e/dc_the_youth_bulge_and_the_changing_demographics_in_the_mena_region_kronfol_wdadiusercontent_no2011_8.pdf

2.1.1 Definition of youth

The working definition of youth for this report is 15-29, which is consistent with the current international consensus for this age bracket. The Palestinian Higher Council on Youth and Sports, and its predecessor, the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports, defines the bracket as 13-29.

2.1.2 Demography

The youth population is rising in both the West Bank and Gaza. This 'youth bulge' is in line with trends in the wider Arab world. The percentage of young people (15-29 year olds) in Palestine has now reached 29.8% of the total population. Of all young people, 39.6% are 15-19 years old and 60.4% are 20-29 years old. The gender ratio is 104.3 males for every 100 females. The estimated total Palestinian population in mid-2012 was 4.29 million.

This means that at the end of 2010 there were almost 1.4 million young Palestinian refugees worldwide, of which 241,323 reside in the West Bank and a further 352,749 in Gaza. Both these population groups have been on the rise since 2000. Overall, there has been a 180% increase in the youth refugee population in the West Bank since 1975 and a staggering 274.7 % increase in Gaza.

Furthermore, the number of young people in Gaza is expected to almost double in size over the period 2010-2025, according to forecasts from the Palestinian Central

Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). In Palestine, the youth cohort is set to continue growing until the middle of this century, whilst in Syria and Jordan it is expected to peak in around 2035.

Average annual rates of increase during 2000 – 2010 were as high as five per cent in Gaza and close to four per cent in the West Bank, with the absolute number of young people increasing by roughly two-thirds and 50 per cent respectively. These patterns suggest that much of the expected increase in the youth population in coming years and decades will be in these areas. Increases in the number and relative share of young people are the result of a shift from a regime of high birth and death rates to one in which both are low, a process commonly referred to as a demographic transition.

2.2. Background to youth work

2.2.1 Political context

"What are problems facing Palestinian youth workers? 1/ The Occupation..."

Ghassan⁴, Bethlehem

The Occupation

It would be impossible to adequately describe the situation of youth work in Palestine without acknowledging and taking into account the ever present and pervasive impacts of the Israeli military occupation and the accompanying phenomena of settlement by Israeli civilians that came into effect in its current form in 1967 (though there had been

some degree of Israeli military and civilian presence and control in these territories from 1948 onwards), when lands that had been controlled and administered by the Jordanian and Egyptian governments were captured by Israel.

The 1967 'Green Line' established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 defines international discourse around the future borders and shape of a fully sovereign Palestinian state. Following the accords signed in the 1990s as part of the Oslo peace process, the Palestinian National Authority was created to exercise some executive power within the geographically separate areas of the West Bank and Gaza, without, however, bringing the Israeli occupation to an end. Thus whilst the PNA possesses many of the characteristics of a national government, it is ultimately still subordinate in many material aspects to the Israeli government. The occupation exercises effective control in a number of key areas that restrict movement of goods and people, livelihoods and economic development, infrastructural development and access to basic services such as education, health care and water.

Young people, who represent the majority of the Palestinian population, are affected by the major mechanisms of the occupation, and in many respects to a disproportionate degree. For example, it is predominantly young Palestinian men who are arrested and detained by the Israeli military, which has a significant disruptive impact on both their education and employability, in addition to numerous other effects on their physical and mental health.

⁴ Names of contributors have been altered to maintain anonymity

The continued expansion of Israeli civilian settlements within the West Bank also has significant implications for young people and youth workers in Palestine, as does the blockade on the import and export of goods into and out of Gaza that has been enforced by Israel since 2009. The Israeli military is responsible for the implementation of the most extreme of the many restrictions on movement of goods and people within Palestine.

launched from there. Since 2008, Israeli forces have operated a blockade around Gaza, determining what goods and materials can and cannot enter or leave the area.

Another area where young people are significantly constrained in their movements is East Jerusalem. The Israeli annexation

Soldiers and kids tell rumeida Hebron



In 2005, Israel moved its military to the borders of Gaza and evacuated all Israeli settlements in the area. To this day, however, Israel continues to exercise effective control over the land, sea and air around Gaza and has regularly engaged in bouts of armed conflict with Hamas militants in the Gaza strip, ostensibly as a security measure in response to the rockets and armed incursions into Israel that have been

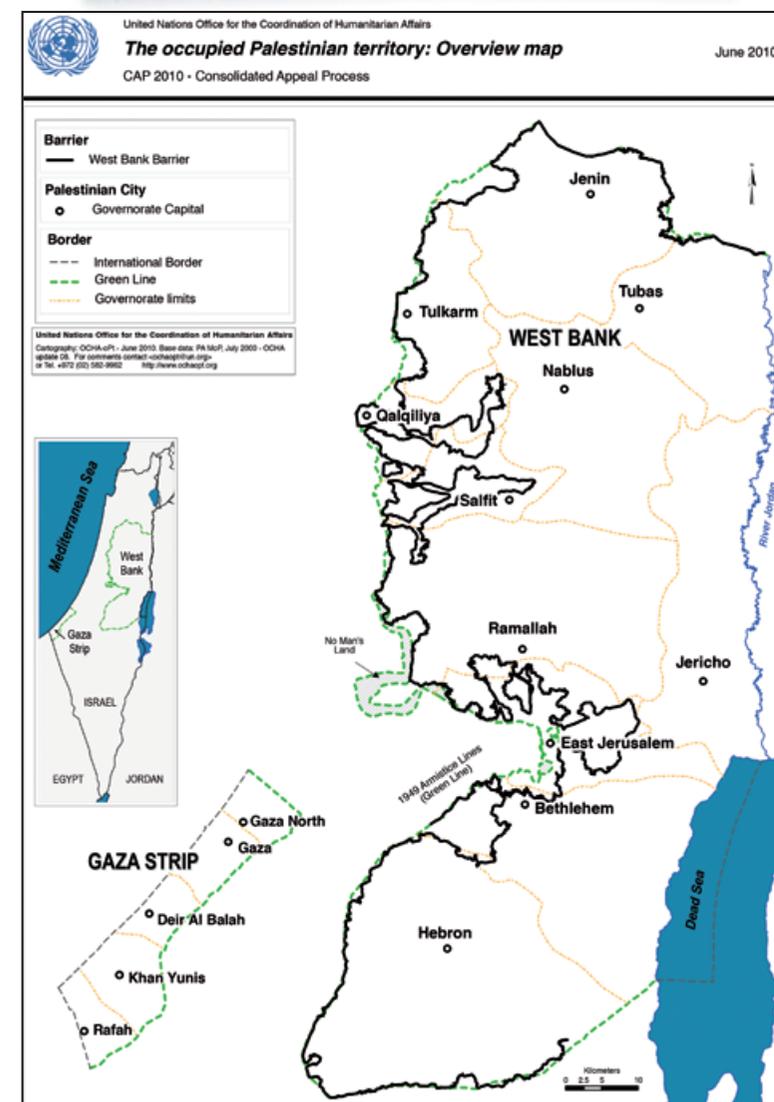
of East Jerusalem, and the disruption of activities linked to the Palestinian Authority⁵, which ultimately cannot exercise any executive power in the area, as well as the

distinct and tenuous special permit regime whereby East Jerusalemite Palestinians are considered 'permanent residents' only as long as they keep a physical presence in the area⁶, along with the construction of the separation barrier from 2004, have all served to create a unique environment in East Jerusalem. The intended final route of the separation barrier, first mooted in 1995 and initiated during the second Intifada as a security measure to prevent suicide bombings (according to Israel), has effectively transferred a considerable chunk (8.5%) of Palestinian land to Israeli control.

Under the current circumstances Palestine thus remains inextricably linked to Israel economically, politically and socially. The first direct talks between Palestinian and Israeli negotiators for a decade took place in 2013. There appears to be little hope within Palestinian civil society that this signals an end in sight to either the occupation or the settlement programme, and the willingness of Palestinian leaders to re-engage with the US-led initiative is controversial.

⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.531576>
⁶ <http://unispa.un.org/unispa.nsf/eed216406b50bf6485256ce10072f637/1eb92add720843285257b6500537b20?OpenDocument>
⁷ <http://www.ochaopt.org/generalmaps.aspx?id=96>
 Accessed 30/09/2013

UN OCHA (Officer for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) General Overview map of the oPt⁷



Internal Politics

Under the Oslo Accords signed by representatives of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the occupied Palestinian territories are divided into 16 governorates, each headed by a governor and subordinate to the Ministry of Local Government. Their major task is to cooperate with mayors and heads of municipal and village councils in their governorates. The power of municipalities and village councils covers administrative responsibilities such as control over local schools. As of 2005, there were 521 local authorities, broken down into 107 municipalities, 11 local councils, 374 village councillor project committees and 29 refugee camps. At national level there is a President and a Prime Minister, who is appointed from the Palestinian Legislative Council, which has to hold elections every 4 years. This should not be confused with the Palestinian National Council, the elected representative body of the PLO, which is comprised of Palestinians both within Palestine and in the diaspora, and has no formal executive or legislative power within Palestine.

There have been no national level elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, the legislative branch of the Palestinian National Authority, since the election of 2006. After the Hamas victory in that election, a number of countries, including the US, levied sanctions on the Palestinian National Authority and broke off diplomatic relations. Fatah remained in control of most of the Palestinian security services and violent conflict broke out in 2007, eventually resulting in the dissolution of the Hamas government by president Mahmoud Abbas, who declared a state of emergency and replaced Ismail Haniyeh with an appointed Prime Minister, Salam Fayadd, asking the

latter to form a new government. Fayadd was replaced in 2013 by Rami Hadallah, who subsequently resigned, only to resume his position in August 2013.

In reality, dual administrations in the West Bank, led by Fatah, and in Gaza, led by Hamas, have developed since 2007 that both claim authority and sovereignty as representatives of the Palestinian people and resistance to the on-going Israeli presence. There has also been a suspension of the intended operation of the various branches of government and the electoral process. This disruption and internal conflict have all served to undermine the confidence of young people in both the political process and established parties and in the political integrity and efficacy of older generations. Some young people are still very active in a number of initiatives that could be characterised as 'political' in nature, including membership of formal party politics and participation in their activities. However, numerous studies and reports note the reduced trust of young people in formal political processes and mainstream politicians and a low level of stated political action. The anonymous 'Gaza Youth Breaks Out' statement published online in 2011 was hugely popular and assumed to represent a large swathe of local opinion in Gaza. It strongly denounced the political status quo as well as the occupation and encouraged young people to take action for change.

There are 19 refugee camps in the West Bank and a further 8 in Gaza, with a combined population of over 673,000 people. More than 50% of these refugees are resident in Gaza, where the population is very concentrated in a relatively small geographical area. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East

(UNRWA) that was established in 1948 continues to take responsibility for supporting the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who are registered as refugees, in addition to those in neighbouring Arab states. Because of the complex question of the Palestinian right of return to lands captured by Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli Conflict and the still unfulfilled obligation of Israel to facilitate this return, the Palestinian Authority is not responsible for Palestinian refugees. In other words, even where the Palestinian National Authority does exercise control in Palestine, it often has to work alongside a longer established transnational presence such as Israel.

The 'Arab Spring'

The past 3 years have seen a great number of changes in the Middle East. Protests about poor economic conditions and state repression in numerous countries have resulted in changes of government, civil war, mass population displacement and, in the case of Libya, direct intervention by NATO forces. The fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt in early 2011 was followed by elections and constitutional change, but continued instability and violence has seen another recent transformation with a SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) military-led coup.

The original change of regime in Egypt in 2011 resulted in a supposedly permanent opening of the Egyptian border with Gaza. However, subsequent instability resulted in temporary closures, while the SCAF coup in July 2013 made it permanent and increased militarisation of the border areas and the closure of many of the tunnels by which the majority of imports enter the Gaza Strip. The Hamas leadership in Gaza originally took a strong position in support of the Muslim

Brotherhood, a move that isolated them from their allies in Iran and Syria, and which has resulted in a significant backlash in Egyptian public opinion against Palestinians in Gaza.

Two years of conflict in another neighbouring state, Syria, have wrought havoc on the physical and social infrastructure and precipitated massive civilian displacement both internally and into nearby countries, particularly Jordan. The gulf monarchies and Qatar in particular, have been seeking to exercise leadership in the region and are pushing for change through the Arab League, in cooperation and consultation with the USA, UK, France and other Western Governments. The major Palestinian parties and factions have links with all of the above.

It is unclear exactly what in the situation and history of the Palestinian context has meant that similar actions did not occur in the West Bank and Gaza during this period. A recent report⁸ suggests the following four key reasons to explain why young Palestinians have not come to actively question the performance of their leaders:

- The discouraging of grassroots activism by a political elite
- A culture of fear in relation to political activity
- International aid deflecting energy toward less contentious initiatives
- The fact that Palestinian youth are more comfortable with resilience in the face of occupation than with breaking away from the political routine

The specific political attitudes and participation of Palestinian youth are explored in more depth in the main body of this study.

⁸ 'Palestinian Youth and the Arab Spring' Mona Christophersen, Jacob Hoigilt and Age A.Tiltnes (Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre 2012)

2.2.2 Economic and social context

Economy

Palestine, whilst classified as a middle income state, has to deal with a number of difficult economic circumstances that have strongly impacted the lives of its youth. The Oslo accords declared the Palestinian 'market' open, yet whilst the availability of certain goods and the profitability of some Palestinian, Israeli and transnational firms has increased, especially in the West Bank, entrenched long term difficulties remain. Furthermore, much of the economic degradation of Palestinian communities is directly linked to the privileged position of Israeli settlers living in the same areas. One of the starkest examples is that of the Jordan Valley, where the economy is predominantly agricultural, as these figures from a report by Maan Development Center demonstrate:

- 1,000 Palestinians (and their livestock) live on 250 dunums (square kilometres) of land, representing 0.25 dunums per person.
- Between 117-130 Israeli settlers have access to over 1,000 dunums of land, representing 7.7 dunums per settler.
- The average Palestinian in Ras al-Auja (village) uses only 30 litres of water per day for personal use.
- The average Israeli settler in Yitav (settlement) is allocated 317 litres of water per day.
- Israelis in Yitav consume 10.5 times more water than Palestinians even though Palestinians pay 11.17 times more for each cubic meter⁹.

After a short three year trend of economic

growth in the West Bank under the stewardship of appointed Prime Minister Salaam Fayaad and his much vaunted Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), the recession began to bite in late 2011 and has not slowed since. This has resulted in rising food and fuel prices whilst wages stagnate, and has contributed to unrest, including public sector strikes¹⁰. In Gaza, as a result of the Israeli blockade, electricity is only available for eight hours a day and access to alternate fuel sources is such as oil and gas is also restricted, affecting many other aspects of everyday activity such as heating, cooking and transport. Many Gazans are dependent on food aid.

More than one third of Palestinian youth is unemployed, with the highest unemployment rate among young people with higher education, where nearly half of all graduates (diploma and higher) are unemployed. Many Palestinians still need to either move out of the country to find employment or travel regularly into Israel to find work there. Restrictions on construction and imports and exports present significant barriers to the full industrial development of Palestinian society. Settlements affect Palestinian livelihoods by reducing access to arable agricultural land and reducing Palestinian employment opportunities whilst at the same time creating new, temporary and lower paid roles for Palestinians in Israeli owned enterprises. This is a particular issue in the Jordan Valley, where settlements are less residential in nature and are more focussed on agricultural production and processing. However, there are also other industrial zones within numerous

⁹ Quoted in 'Parallel Realities: Israeli Settlements and Palestinian Communities in the West Bank'

¹⁰ See www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/09/11/protests-and-strikes-against-recession-in-palestine/

other settlement blocs where Palestinians can work.

The cost of living in Palestine has risen in recent years even while both the global and regional economies have slowed in growth. The West Bank is affected by economic trends in Jordan while East Jerusalem is impacted by fluctuations in the Israeli economy and Gaza by the situation in Egypt.

Poverty and unemployment in Palestine

Palestinians living below the poverty line	25.7%
Palestinians in Gaza living below the poverty line	38 %
Palestinians in West Bank living below the poverty line	18.3 %
Unemployment rate in the Palestine	
Unemployment of Palestinian 18-24 year olds	41 %

There is also a large differential between adult male and female employment rates, despite the significant educational participation of women in Palestinian society.

"Even when people do have jobs, wages are not high, they are not keeping up with inflation. Our economy is connected to that of Israel, so young men cannot get married and cannot afford to feed their families."

Kamal, Gaza

"There are many issues affecting youth in Gaza, but the most major one is unemployment and the inability to kick-off a career path for them, due to the broken private sector and economic wheel caused by the siege, as well as the internal

conflicts that have hindered the public sector."

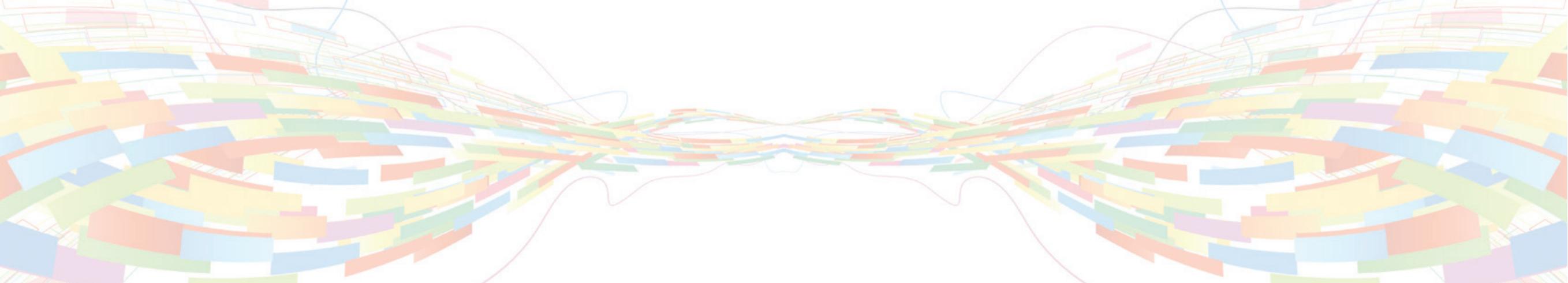
Kameel, Gaza

The Israeli military presence around the borders of Gaza is used to police the area, often with lethal force, and to restrict access to farmlands and fishing waters, further undermining the livelihoods of many Gazans. Many young people who cannot find government or NGO jobs join the underground economy moving goods through the tunnels linking Gaza to Egypt. Since the coup in Egypt and the closure of many of these tunnels, sources estimate that more than half of these young people have lost their black market livelihoods and are again economically inactive.

"40,000-50,000 have been working in the tunnels. This is illegal, unhealthy and unsafe, very dangerous. To my knowledge, over 280 young men have been killed over the past 3-4 years in the tunnels. We don't have safety measures. Young people just come together and start to dig."

Mohammed, Gaza

East Jerusalem and Hebron are amongst the most economically depressed areas outside of Gaza. East Jerusalem is isolated from the rest of the Palestinian economy in a way that undermines the city's historic position as the commercial, transport, tourism, cultural and spiritual centre for Palestinians in the West Bank. A 2009 study of how Palestinians are affected by the wall (both within Jerusalem and in its surrounding area), found that 61.4 of respondents reported that the separation barrier had negatively impacted their family's monthly income, with 26% reporting that fewer members of their family were working since the construction of the barrier.



The five primary factors identified in research by Sharek Youth Forum as contributing to the low employment and economic participation rates amongst young Palestinians are:

- Poor economic performance
- Gender inequality
- Exclusion from entrepreneurial opportunity
- Education and training
- Barriers created by the (legal and political) system

“The lack of employment opportunities for youth has a spiral effect, dragging the poor into ever deeper poverty and driving migration of the best educated and highest skilled”
Mohammed, Gaza

Youth Culture and Identity

Despite the advances made in economic growth and infrastructure development, especially in 'Area A' sections of the West Bank, there has been a gradual growth in distance between the older generation in positions of power and younger people frustrated by what they see as the normalisation of the occupation. This has been noted widely in both anecdotal journalistic dispatches and more extensive and rigorous research studies.

“Globalisation and improved access to information have changed perceptions with regards to cultural norms and acceptable standards of living.”¹¹

There are internal divisions and distinctions between the experiences of Palestinian youth. Geographically East Jerusalemites are isolated from the rest of the West Bank and are inextricably linked to the Israeli economy

■ ¹¹ UNRWA engaging youth 2012

and polity, while Gaza, cut off from resources and easy transport links, also exhibits its own unique cultural features.

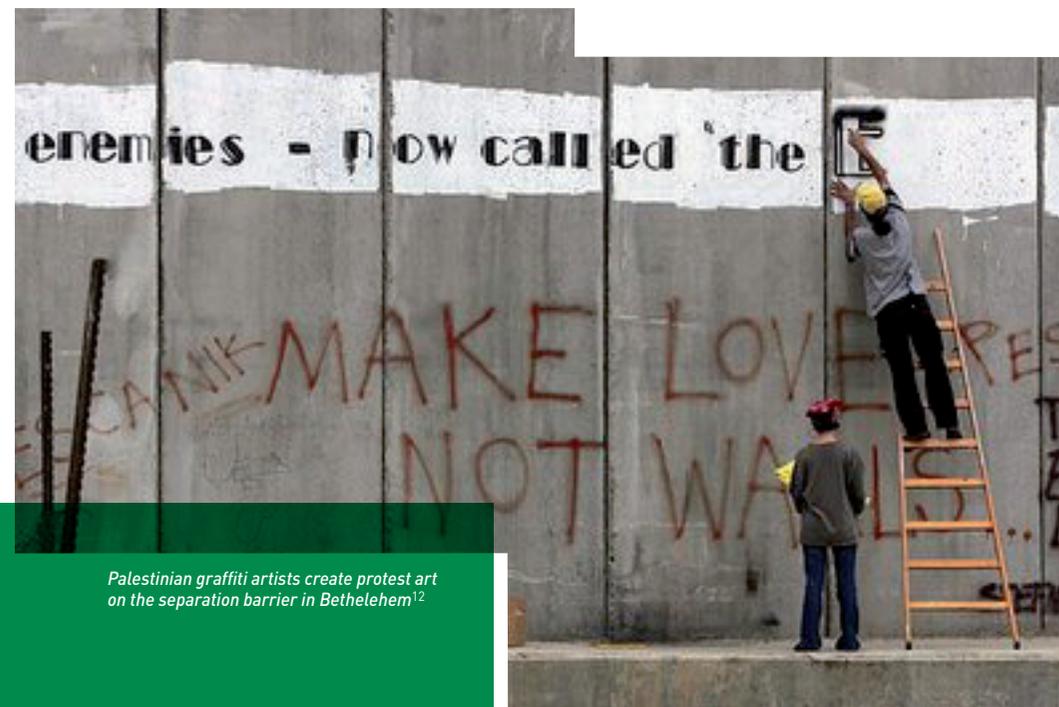
“Gazans have been for a long time now isolated from the outer world, and combining this with the recent confusion of “democracy” in neighbouring countries, has made them kind of unresilient towards the “other” and by the other I mean anyone that is not “myself”, which includes fellow citizens of the country”
Kamal, Gaza

One driver shaping youth identity in Palestine is the fact that children and young people are growing up within a long-term conflict and specifically within a culture of sustained resistance to Israeli occupation and its attendant issues of racism and social and cultural exclusion. In addition to influencing discourse at home, at school and in wider society, this experience of resistance will often include involvement in non-violent direct action against the occupation, through the presentation of alternate narratives to those presented by Israel or the physical rejection of and resistance to manifestations of the occupation such as the separation barrier (referred to by some as the 'Apartheid wall').

Many of the young people with whom youth workers interact are involved in such activities, whether through formally constituted organisations or otherwise. In the past, community level popular committees were the primary mechanism to facilitate the planning and mobilisation of young people in grassroots political activity. Their power has decreased in recent years and been replaced by a greater feeling of disenfranchisement based on the perceived corruption and ineffectiveness of established organisations, while a more diverse range of formations has emerged.

Whether through popular committees or otherwise, participation in direct action is often preceded or followed by involvement in popular education that explores Palestinian history, society and politics and its relation to the occupation.

communication tools have created new ways of reinforcing this voice and opportunities for young Palestinians to cultivate more sustained learning conversations and relationships with their peers around the world, combining virtual outreach and exchanges with face-to-face work in Palestine.



Palestinian graffiti artists create protest art on the separation barrier in Bethlehem¹²

The lack of mobility in Palestine necessitates the development of a strong voice to communicate with the outside world, particularly for young people. Building links to visiting groups from other countries and cultures opens up limited opportunities for more 'global' learning for young Palestinians who are unable to travel. The emergence of the Internet and web based media and

Youth culture in Palestine has been influenced by regional and global trends, with Hip-Hop music and culture, including break dancing and graffiti, becoming popular activities amongst certain sections of youth. On a larger scale, the massive popularity of Arab Idol and its Palestinian winner Mohammed Assaf provides an interesting example of the intersection of cultures and identities in

■ ¹² source:www.madnesswall.com

Palestine in the 21st century. Computer access in Palestine doubled between 2004 and 2011, making it the most digitally connected society in the Arab world¹³. New Media has become a platform for a form of public discourse amongst Palestinian youth. However, reports indicate that family and religion continue to remain powerful anchors for the development of identity amongst Arab youth. Many young people are also involved in traditionally conservative religious practice, which has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years.

Gender

Palestinian women are proportionately more represented in higher education than their male counterparts. In addition, a 2011 study showed that in the period 2000-2009¹⁴ female representation in seven key professions had risen, including those of doctors, lawyers and judges. The proportion of female pharmacists in Palestine rose by almost 20% during the same period.

Nevertheless, women continue to be underrepresented in the labour market (with overall labour market participation for women at 17%, especially in professions that are often deemed socially unacceptable for females. Around 10% of households in Palestine are female led; female land ownership, however, stands at only 8% and only around 2% of women hold any kind of investment portfolio.

Early and forced marriage, gender based violence and the continued enforcement of patriarchal traditional norms undermine any movement toward gender equality

¹³ <http://technologist.ps/2012/07/05/more-than-half-of-palestinian-youth-own-computers-have-access-to-internet/?lang=en>

¹⁴ <http://globalministries.org/news/mee/pdfs/BSabella-Palestinian-Women-Achievements-and-Prospects-1011.pdf>

in Palestine. Young women coming into adulthood are particularly affected by the bleakest examples of these phenomena (80% of reported suicides in Palestine are among young women).

At the political level there is legislation ensuring a basic minimum level of female participation in the Palestinian Legislative Council and 16 of the current 132 representatives are women. There have also been several women Ministers in the Cabinet.

Education

Education is a key priority for Palestinian families and young people. Enrolment in education is high.

Educational Enrolment and dropouts in Palestine (2011)

Overall enrolment of young people 15-29 years	44.8 %
15-17	84.9%
18-22	50.8%
23-29	11.9%
Drop-Out and Non-Attendance rate for youth overall	29.7 %
Drop-Out and Non-Attendance rate for young men	34.2 %
Drop-Out and Non-Attendance rate for young women	25.9 %

Tertiary education is provided by a mixture of Universities, University Colleges, Polytechnics and Community Colleges. There are 10 universities in the West Bank and Gaza, and a total of 48 tertiary institutions¹⁵. These are mostly public, fee charging institutions. The economic situation of many young Palestinians is such that completing higher education may take many years.

2011 data indicated that the proportion of males (15-29 years old) who have completed their first university degree or better stood at 8.6%. It is higher for females (15-29 years old) with a percentage of 11.1%. The percentage of those who did not complete any educational stage is 3.5% for males compared with 1.7% for females for the same age group. The data also indicated that 0.7% of young people (15-29 years old) are illiterate, broken down into 0.8% for males and 0.6% for females.

Access to education in East Jerusalem¹⁶ is particularly complicated and compromised, given its five overlapping systems without any umbrella responsible authority. Coupled with the economic issue, it is perhaps this sector of East Jerusalemite society that has been most negatively impacted by its unique situation and the construction of the separation barrier.

Health

Palestinian youth are generally considered to be healthy by international standards, with a relatively good level of access to health care. However a number of factors in recent years, including the siege of Gaza, rapid urbanisation in other areas of Palestine, food shortages and rising drug use, especially in East Jerusalem, have resulted in poorer nutrition and a higher level of non communicable diseases such as heart disease and diabetes in the Palestinian population.

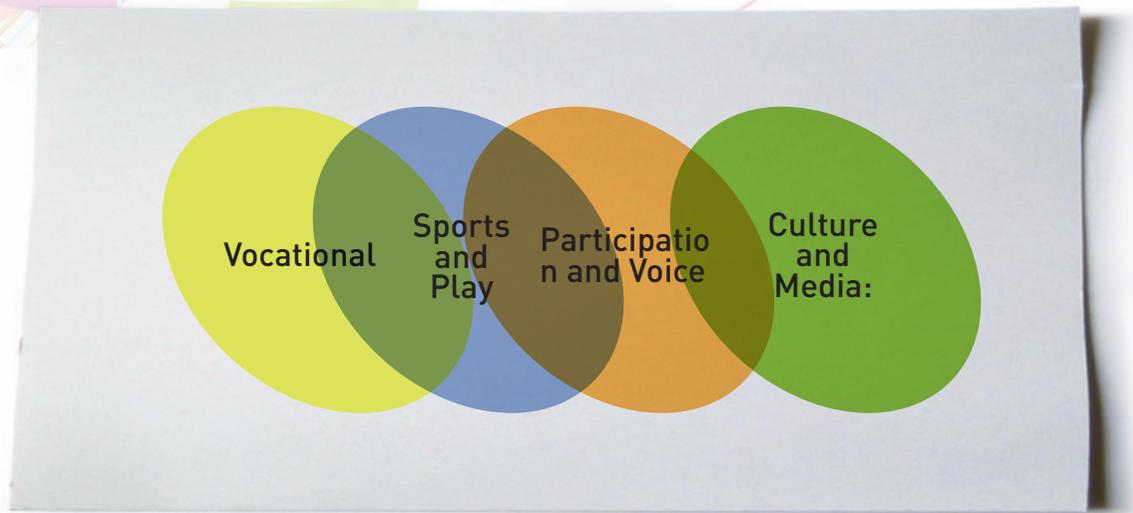
In addition, the impacts of the occupation include steep rates of psychiatric disorders including post traumatic stress and depression as well as risk behaviours such as alcohol use, violence and smoking. The sustained impact of the occupation on the situation of Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza, combined with other factors, has produced quite specific conditions in terms of the health of young Palestinians that youth organisations need to address.

Making specific reference to the Palestinian population of Jerusalem, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian discusses the feeling of 'trappedness' that results from 'the complex web of harassments, abuses, traumas, and the power relations that dominate the daily lives of Palestinians'. Results from a national level study of school children showed that extensive exposure to violence was associated with higher levels of post-traumatic distress and more somatic complaints in both the West Bank and Gaza regions. Children in Gaza in particular show higher than average instances of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Over 7000 children have been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned by the Israeli military justice system over the past ten years. Research by bodies such as Adaamer and UNICEF list the major support needs that this will create as those children mature. Israeli military closures can also prevent Palestinians accessing health care, as can high medical costs, and many young Palestinians feel that the standard of healthcare available to them in Palestine is inadequate to meet their needs and maintain their health.

¹⁵ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/occupied_palestinian_territory_review_of_higher_education.pdf

¹⁶ http://www.ochaopt.org/jday/ocha_opt_jerusalem_report_2011_03_23_web_english_Chapter_5.pdf



"There is a need for this kind of work, since the youth are exposed to lack of opportunities on one hand and the educational system is very weak as well"

Amal, Jenin

3. Educational and pedagogical context of youth work in Palestine

There is an accepted consensus amongst those working with young people that mainstream formal education in Palestine is ineffective in developing children and young people holistically in a manner that fully prepares them for participation in public life. Many respondents expressed frustration at the strong focus on learning by rote and examinations within the school system. The 'Tawijhee' the exam that marks the end of secondary education, often determines access to higher education opportunities. A diverse range of educational interventions and systems exist outside the formal

education system, some with their roots in long held traditions, some born of necessity and circumstance under the current status quo. For the purposes of this study, these approaches have been categorised into four main areas.

Vocational: learning by doing, providing for different learning styles and strengths and matching curricula to job market needs. A variation within this category is organisations looking to promote economic self-reliance and entrepreneurship. Examples of organisations running programmes in this field are Al Nayzak and Young Leaders.

Sports and play: Projects that promote personal health and well-being and interpersonal skills for young people through participation in play activities and team sports such as football. Examples of organisations running projects in this field are the African Community Society and Project Hope.

Participation: Projects that facilitate learning and confidence building through involvement

in decision making and project management linked to community development. Examples of organisations working in this field are Sharek Youth Forum, Zajel and Maan Development Center.

Culture and Media: Projects that encourage the continued cultivation of a Palestinian cultural identity; helping young people build their own identity and self-awareness through activities such as music and drama. Examples of organisations working in this field are Freedom Theatre and Hébron Rehabilitation Committee.

These approaches are by no means exclusive of one another and there are many organisations running a range of projects to reach Palestinian youth in different ways and to meet different needs. The common denominator often shared by these diverse activities is that they favour 'learning by doing'. However, whereas some are skills based and intended to promote individual development by the development of technical skills or fitness, others situate learning activities in a real world context. These are mostly group activities that are intended to promote shared learning and exchanges between people who share certain common factors in their situation and upbringing. Understandably, this focus comes to prominence more in projects that are rooted within a specific geographical community, such as refugee camps. Other organisations, especially those concentrated in urban centres such as Ramallah, recruit from a wider spread of young people to undertake municipal, regional or national level work. This often links to more specific skills based training for youth, and their relationship with the organisation is more temporary and transient. Few organisations, however, articulate their projects in educational terms or express a clear relationship between the

content of their projects and a grounded pedagogical approach.

A key characteristic of much of the best that youth work in Palestine has to offer involves facilitating the self-expression of young people and enabling them to tell their stories, be they personal or collective, via a range of means, and developing skills in areas such as broadcasting, filmmaking, theatre or poetry in the process. This has multiple potential benefits, such as developing feelings of individual self-efficacy, interpersonal communication skills and a greater sense of connectedness through dialogue with peers abroad. This can also have a further practical benefit in the generation of direct relationships that facilitate exchanges and learning and a constituency of outsiders informed through personal interaction and experiences on the ground who may be motivated to undertake domestic advocacy or fundraising in support of Palestinian youth.

"People in Europe or the US do not have an understanding of the situation, particularly to engage with marginalised communities. These are the communities I want us to connect with. We have always been treated as a collective identify, not as individuals, we have lives, aspirations and dreams. One way is to engage young people, rappers, to reflect on these stories and relate them to their own lives. It would mean a lot to a Palestinian who is living in a refugee camp to know that someone can relate to me, it would make me feel normal, despite all the separation that we have experienced since 2007."

Kameel, Gaza

4. Role of government

Until the Oslo Accords, youth policy throughout the Palestinian population both within Palestine and with the rest of the world came under the responsibility of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) and its Higher Council for Youth and Sports. This body organised hundreds of youth camps in Palestine and in neighbouring nations throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, bringing together thousands of Palestinian youth during the First Intifada. As political activism at the time was being reinvigorated with a new wave of nonviolent approaches pioneered through local Popular Committees, this was one of the most active Higher Councils. With the return of the PLO leadership to Palestine and the creation of the Palestinian National Authority, the Higher Council was dissolved and a brand new Ministry for Youth and Sports took its place. Youth organisations and centres must now register with the NGO department of the Ministry of Interior.

This Ministry eventually produced a major youth policy in 2006, through a process funded by GTZ (German Technical Cooperation). This was complemented in 2010 by the development of a three-year cross-sectoral strategy covering youth and adolescents, with very clear priorities and attendant targets for outputs, supported by UNICEF. It is currently unclear what impact the dissolution of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the reconstitution of a Higher Council in these areas will have on how this strategy is extended or replaced.

The 2010 strategy contained four main strategic objectives:

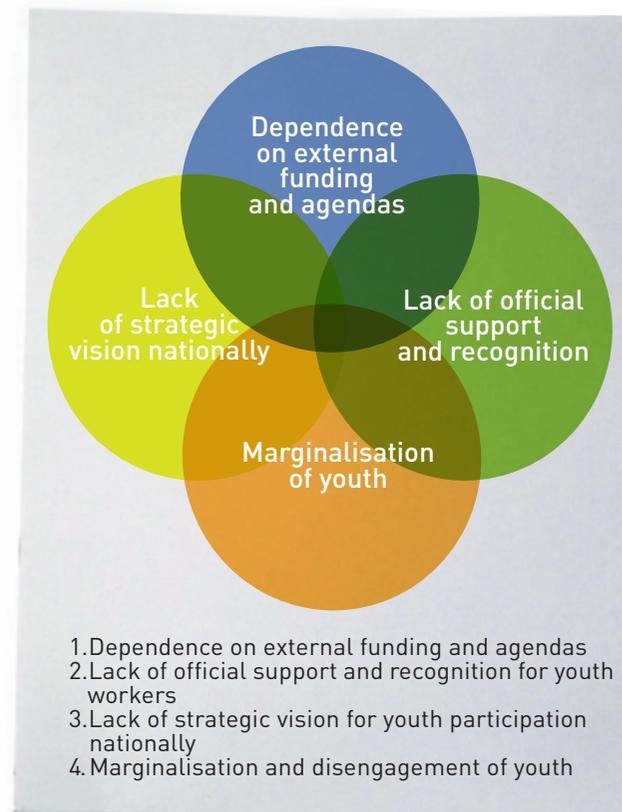
- *Promote, expand and improve participation of youth and adolescents in all aspects of life*
- *Develop and promote values of citizenship, allegiance and civil rights among youth*
- *Empower youth economically, socially and politically*
- *Enhance the quality of and access to programmes and services delivered to youth and adolescents*

No review of this strategy has yet been published.

In 2013 the operations of the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) were put on hold and the dormant Higher Council was resuscitated and designated as the primary national body working on youth issues by executive order from the President. It is unclear what the long-term implications of this change will be in terms of policy and budgetary commitments made by MoYS.

5. Challenges

Key challenges facing youth workers and youth organisations in Palestine



5.1 Dependence on external funding and agendas

"Reliance on international donations only and neglect of local opportunities (is a problem)."
Jamal, Ramallah

A complaint voiced by many participants in the study, and evident in the broader literature, relates to the lack of sustainable and flexible long term funding for youth organisations. Many struggle to diversify or sustain their income and thus suffer from the strain of constant insecurity. Other survive as mainly or exclusively voluntary organisations but are then hamstrung in terms of the scale or scope of services that they are able to provide. There is significant dependence on funding from international donors.

This situation reduces the autonomy of Palestinians themselves in determining the scope, focus and structures of projects. International funding tends to be limited in its size and timeframe, comes with a number of conditions and priorities enforced by the government, multilateral body or NGO leading the project, is insecure and both time and labour intensive, coming as it does with significant reporting requirements and stringent restrictions on what constitutes effective and appropriate expenditure.

Given the current paralysis of the PLC (Palestinian Legislative Council) and the uncertain and uneven rule of law in Palestine, there is a lack of political accountability and of a clear and transparent government agenda in most areas. This confusion, combined with the

financial heft of aid agencies and NGOs, combines to give those external agencies a great deal of influence over civil society organisations and programmes, as well as over the employment market, not least because local and international NGOs provide a clear employment route for suitably qualified young Palestinians in an otherwise depressed economy.

This is a situation much bemoaned in literature on the economy and politics of Palestine, and by participants in our study. The disproportionate influence of external funders and partners can be linked to three negative experiences of those working with young people in Palestine:

- The obligation to present, plan, execute and evaluate work within short term project funding cycles
- The demand to reframe and reprioritise work to meet new and shifting funder agendas that often fail to relate to the experiences and opinions of the youth workers themselves
- The regular provision of isolated and generic 'capacity building' training that is not tailored to the Palestinian context and is not combined with other, longer term forms of support for small local NGOs

"We do not need foreigners to come and teach us how to herd sheep."

Ubaid, Nablus

This has led to the development of workers in youth organisations who are administrators fluent in the requirements and language of international organisations, who are equipped to navigate

the funding environment and participate in activities deemed necessary to "build their capacity". While all of these things may be necessary to ensure individual career progress and even organisational survival, they are problematic on a number of levels: they result in a large amount of time being spent on administration and funder relations and for the most part they serve to entrench the existing relations between local youth organisations and international NGOs and agencies, rather than facilitating steady progress toward greater self-sufficiency for those organisations, thus ultimately slowing the development of a domestic youth sector.

Young people working within these organisations are also developing skills sets that are driven by the agendas of the aid industry and not by those of the local economy and society.

"Some people have CVs full of 'three day proposal writing' training which are useless. You think you have accomplished something but it is absolutely useless...the NGOs keep you attending their courses...they keep you consuming...to get a job sometimes you have to have volunteered for a year"

Kamal, Gaza

Furthermore, their capacity to work strategically, planning longer term programmes of work that can effectively meet the needs of their beneficiaries, is hamstrung by the limitations of their funding and the often very brief timeframes available to access such funding. Having to shift the emphasis of work in order to access funds to sustain the organisation can result in the co-option of organisational agendas and

processes. At its worst, this situation leads to the perception on the ground of wilfully irrelevant and costly work that is actually detrimental to Palestinian interests and anti-development.

"Programmes for youth do not work. They do not fit their needs or their interests. People need small scale income generation projects but they are diverted into training programmes on gender, conflict resolution, international relations, etc. The focus on human rights, gender etc is a diversion. Such women are in need of a sack of flour to feed their families, of some means to develop their skills and career, of some way to be truly influential in civil society."

Kamal, Gaza

5.2 Lack of official recognition and support for youth workers

Despite the shortcomings of the Palestinian public school system, teaching is a viable career option for young Palestinians, supported through public funds, with progression routes and a clear, structured qualification pathway. However, there is little by way of professional development opportunities (training, networks and resources) for teachers as educators. Neither is this system matched with an equivalent that provides infrastructure for those working as informal educators.

This rests on the assumption that youth unemployment in Palestine can be tackled by producing youth with more 'market ready' skills. However, the

overall economic situation mitigates the possibilities for either significant career development or the easy start up and growth of independent businesses, despite the best efforts of NGOs such as Leaders Organisation to respond to the demand for more skilled and entrepreneurial youth.

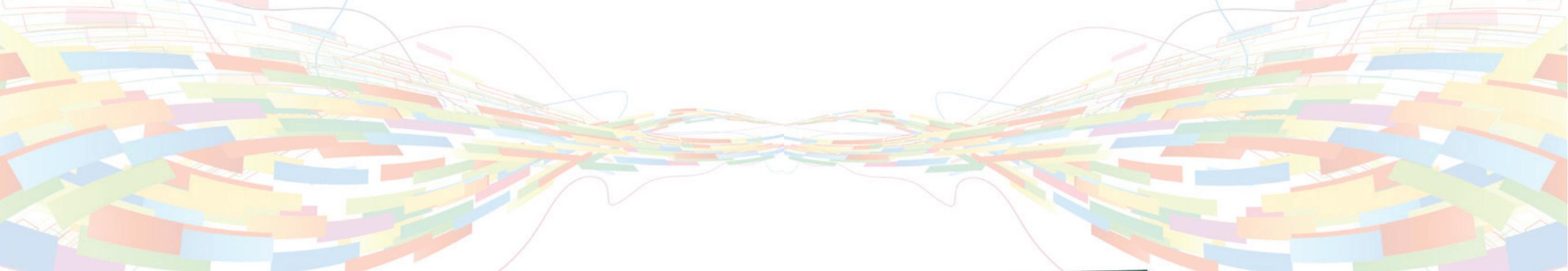
Since there is no consistent method of defining or regulating informal education, there is a diversity of methodological approaches often determined by the priorities and approaches of the NGOs leading the work and the particular expertise and methods of the consultants selected to lead the training of trainers sessions for youth workers expected to roll out education programmes.

"We are not recognised or supported"

Abeer, Hebron

On a more positive note, there is a recognised system of training and accrediting social workers in Palestine that functions well. There is also an active professional association for Palestinians working in this vocational area. This association provides peer support and professional development opportunities, a platform for discussion and debate about key and pertinent issues and a public face for the professional: giving social workers weight in engaging with government and enabling regional and international networking activities.

Some Palestinians working with young people are qualified social workers and as such are involved in this set of activities. However, there is not as yet an equivalent organisation for professional youth workers. Neither is there a



vocational education route enabling students to develop as youth workers, no qualifications in the field and no professional or academic resources that represent a specifically Palestinian body of youth work praxis. This leaves those who wish to develop and gain esteem in their field without a support structure and leaves a great deal of space for poor and ineffective practice by ill equipped organisations who, by accident or design, may take on projects that will not deliver true value for young people.

It is unfortunately a more attractive proposition for generalist NGOs to move into youth work in order to take advantage of policy agendas and available funding rather than because they have specific or relevant expertise, and likewise for youth organisations to focus less on grassroots constituency building and more on relationships with bigger, mostly international institutions and competition with their peers.

"Youth work is not recognised as a profession, not understood by the public community, anybody can do youth work but few do it based on educational process, quality of trainings, active learning, restriction on mobility, many repetition of ideas, and few organisations create new approaches an ideas, sustainability of youth groups"

Ola, Jerusalem

This also means that there is limited public understanding and awareness of youth work. Despite the prominence of the youth demographic within the Palestinian population, there is a limited public profile for youth work or understanding of its purpose and

approaches. Participants in the study group were very keen to highlight the lack of general understanding of youth work among the Palestinian population. One particular misconception that concerned them was the idea that work with young people is a waste of time and does not contribute either to the community or to the economic and social development of the individual. In addition, some felt that there was a lack of understanding within the community of the effort and resources required to maintain vital youth services and no recognition that working on such services could be part of a career path.

5.3 Lack of strategic vision for youth participation nationally

"There is a gap between the planned strategic plans and the ones applied on the ground. Young people are not involved in decision making in the field of youth. Youth work is concentrated on trainings and conferences and the big image of this field as a whole"

Hasan, Ramallah

Whilst the formulation of a national youth policy and youth strategy are positive steps, there is a lack of the coordination and communication that would ensure that this policy is relevant and that would enable active and responsive monitoring of its implementation and efficacy. The strategy itself only covered a three year timeframe and has lapsed without replacement or review. Its short span can potentially be attributed to its funding as a project by external funders and the budget allocations within it attributed to, at the time it was written, as yet unraised external funds that would support the full implementation of specific provisions of the strategy.

"It is dangerous to transplant learning from Europe or America or Japan. To just adapt the training on the plane and come in. Training materials should precisely respond to local conditions and situations"

Kameel, Gaza

There are currently over 200 'youth organisations' in addition to over 400 'youth centres' officially registered with the NGO department in the Ministry of Interior. What this means in practice varies. Some of the organisations

specifically serve the needs of young people but may be mostly staffed by adults whereas others are geared directly toward economic or social development across the country and are led and driven by young people. Student organisations mobilising young entrepreneurs aged 18-30 would currently be bracketed with (for example) community centres providing recreational activities for teenage refugees, among many other heterogeneous types of organisation. There is not a clear categorisation or regulation of these organisations, nor a differentiated offer of support services.

The opinion of participants in the study was that youth involvement in the formulation of the strategy was limited and narrow and that there had been no serious attempts to build dialogue with young people or youth organisations around its effective implementation. The major shift, within the lifetime of the strategy, between one state institution, a Ministry, and one quasi state institution, a Higher Council, while regarded with mixed feelings by participants in the study, is certainly an example of the turmoil the Palestinian government has experienced in recent years and the drastic changes that can occur.

Whilst the bodies of the Palestinian Authority have the trappings of a state, economically they can still be very much subject to the vagaries of the sector that channels resources to it. Furthermore, there is no clear strategic distinction between government and civil society in that the strategy appears to place civil society as subordinate to the imperatives of the Palestinian Authority,

and at times as effective extensions of government. This is demonstrated by the significant replication of services and by the subcontracting of NGOs as service delivery agents within Palestinian Authority (PA) sponsored programmes. In such instances the skills and expertise of youth workers are in demand but their agency and autonomy is not promoted or supported.

“Some NGOs are acting as extensions of government at local level”
Rashid, Nablus

There are other informal NGOs working in the field that are not linked to governmental structures. Youth organisations thus face tough choices with regard to where they apply their time and energies in order to build and sustain their existence. Access to international funding and support may be contingent on falling into line with the strategic imperatives of others, rather than looking to advocate for or set an agenda of one's own.

“Until now we do not have independent youth work. It is difficult to work both locally and internationally”
Omar, Bethlehem

There is insufficiently disaggregated data about youth demographics and how they are engaged qualitatively. A strong youth policy should be well informed and speak to the needs of all young people, including the most marginalised and needy. That there is no true coordination of policy between institutions in the West Bank and Gaza at national level further serves to isolate youth NGOs in the two

different areas from one another. NGOs in East Jerusalem face the challenge of operating in an interstitial space, where they cannot access support from the Palestinian Authority and cannot expect it from the Israeli government, and so to some degree experience the worst of both worlds. This is another area where the specific nature of the Israeli occupation is a major factor and the complications of coordinating nationally across a set of territories that remain occupied are not to be underestimated. However, Palestinian institutions hold a degree of responsibility for further exacerbating the situation of fragmentation that currently exists. The transition from a Ministry to a Higher Council was welcomed by some participants as it represented a decoupling from the turgid PA and PLC (Palestinian Legislative Council), but there was widespread confusion amongst participants in our study regarding the mandate of the new Higher Council and its approach to civil society.

5.4 Marginalisation and disengagement of youth

“There should be real opportunities for youth to be involved, not just for show or symbolic ones”
Ghassan, Ramallah

Whilst participation in decision-making processes around issues that affect them is a human right, children and young people are often excluded from such processes due to a number of cultural and political factors. In the family, the community, education and in politics in Palestine, it is still very much a struggle

for young people's voices to be heard but conversely, some organisations struggle to involve those very young people.

Despite the impressive commitment made in the 2011-2013 Cross Sectoral Strategy to *‘Empower the youth, promote their participation on all levels and integrate them in leading positions and elected bodies (should be a priority)’* there is no clear demonstration of this commitment being implemented and the involvement of young people in policy making and implementation encouraged, even in areas where they are the direct subjects or beneficiaries of the work.

Mainstream politics in Palestine normally involves active affiliation with one of the major political factions, be it Fatah, Hamas, or other groups such as the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) or the DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine). This participation can come at a price as there is an extreme polarisation between the parties and, depending on which is the dominant faction (Fatah in the West Bank or Hamas in Gaza), the affiliation of a young person may result in persecution, exclusion and even arrest. Certainly in a difficult job market where the public sector provides many of the available opportunities and the concept of ‘Wasta’ or patronage still holds a heavy influence, the economic threat of going against the political grain can be a strong disincentive to engaging in political debates.

“The political instability and the deactivated legislative counsel that restrict a big share of the advocacy campaigns attempted are big challenges”
Ubaid, Nablus

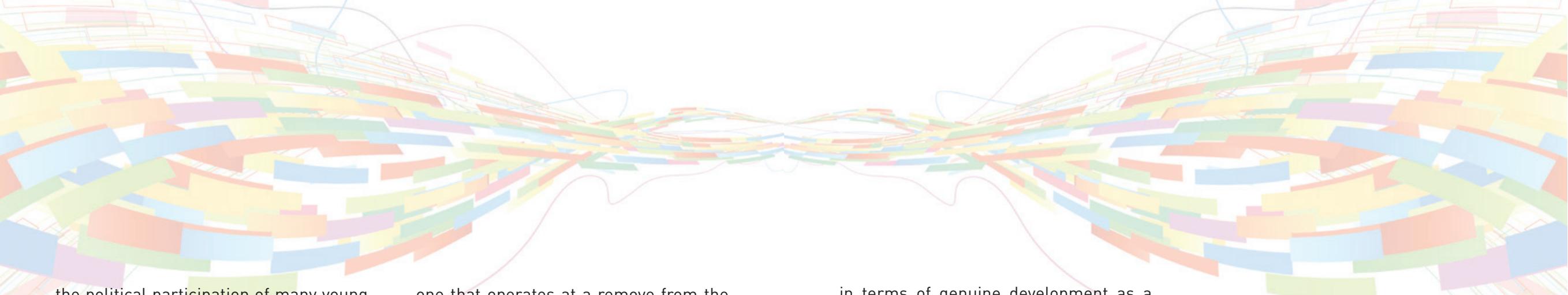
The aforementioned corruption and wasta has turned some young people off political participation altogether. There is a strongly ingrained mistrust amongst young people of the incumbent ruling parties in the West Bank and Gaza and of both the corruption that has been seen to develop under their authority and the extent to which they are prepared to restrict freedom of expression and human rights in order to maintain their dominance and enforce their agenda.

“There is a sense that the local government is threatened by youth initiatives for what they might evolve into if given a wider space of freedom”
Amal, Jenin

There has been some internal repression of youth organisations due to perceived liberalism or the anti-establishment agendas that they are seen to be promoting. For example, there is significant tension in Gaza between the Hamas administration and youth organisations that have resulted in clashes, violence and the closure of organisations. In winter 2010, Hamas shut down the operations of Sharek Youth Forum in Gaza, allegedly in reaction to mixed gender training programmes that they were running.

“NGOs have been closed for ridiculous reasons such as having mixed gender groups. Everyone knows that these are ridiculous reasons and then there were no spaces to express yourself unless it conforms to Hamas overall way of being”
Kameel, Gaza

While arrest and harassment can limit



the political participation of many young people, disillusionment can too. The long term suffering of communities in Palestine, despite the Oslo Accords, ongoing negotiations and the recent statehood bid initiated by Mahmoud Abbas, has left many young people angry or apathetic.

There are, however, avenues for community-based actions outside of the mainstream, such as the radical approaches and positions adopted by direct action movements that confront the Israeli occupation on the streets. Using applied nonviolence to express their dissatisfaction and aligning with international civil society movements such as BDS, these youth are taking action, not waiting for the Palestinian Authority or Palestinian Liberation Organization to resolve the conflict and hand them a Palestinian state on a plate. These movements and organisations can on occasion face challenges when engaging with the international aid community, where political participation work tends to be addressed in a relatively narrow and formalised fashion, and, in the specific case of Palestine, funding for community work is typically focussed on either service delivery or, where it is advocacy oriented, on the internal 'state building' process. As a result some youth organisations eschew engagement with or fundraising from large funders altogether. Many youth organisations face stark choices about how 'political' they can be if they want to access international funds. For others the alternate approach and language of the NGO world is a safer means of promoting civic association than the mire of domestic politics, albeit

one that operates at a remove from the realities of the street.

A further factor inhibiting the participation of youth in politics or community activity is the severe economic pressure to become successful, get a job, be relatively comfortable and able to start a family, which is perhaps a more achievable, if consuming, priority for many young Palestinians. Thus, employment and employability programmes are in demand, and have the additional attraction for organisations of being less contentious politically. This may result in surface level approaches that do not engage young people in fundamental critiques of or solutions to the issues in the community around them. Even worse, in some instances these approaches can become nakedly exploitative. One respondent in Gaza shared the following insight:

"There is a problem with the focus on public-private relationships and partnerships.e.g. on vocational training. They (NGOS) train youth and send them to work for lower rates in the (Palestinian) private sector organisations. These companies then don't pay or they lie about their costs and underpay. The NGOs are sometimes aware of this. They (companies) are suffering because of the blockade and closure so they want to cut costs. NGOs are collaborating. Everyone knows what is going on"

Kamal, Gaza

Such programmes maintain a system of dependency whereby aid money flows, either directly or through civil society institutions, to the Palestinian public and private sector, with very little to show

in terms of genuine development as a result, and young people are often the biggest losers in the process.

Where public sector institutions to facilitate youth participation do exist, they are frequently unequal, uninclusive and tokenistic. A Palestinian Youth Parliament, modelled after the Palestinian Legislative Council and intended at first to be filled by national election, was created in 2004 and has been periodically operational to the present day. The participants in our study did not hold its record as a representative body in high esteem. Each of the 10 universities in the West Bank and Gaza has government approved student councils, but these are perceived as an extension of the political mainstream, and may alienate the independently minded or non party political. In addition, these institutions are quite exclusive. There is little to suggest a concerted effort to engage rural youth, young women or youth with disabilities on a large scale, despite the very distinct experiences, needs and voices that these groups could bring to policy discussions. Youth organisations face a major challenge in reaching these populations and bringing them to the table in the decision making process.

6. Palestinian Youth NGOs

Below are a few examples of the organisations striving to support and empower Palestinian youth. While they are not exclusively representative of this

sector, it was felt that each would add something distinctive to the report, given their geographical location, thematic focus and youth constituencies.

Sharek Youth Forum (www.sharek.ps)

Sharek youth forum is a youth initiative tackling development issues from a unique perspective. It is an issue-based and staff-led organization of committed and dynamic young people, whose primary philosophy is anchored in the principle of involving young people as active participants in civil society. Its main aim is to provide a space for Palestinian young people to get together, develop their distinctive ideas, display their creativity and implement projects that focus on community development.

These projects are currently bracketed in four categories:

Step Forward: Focuses on initiatives supporting young people in their transition toward young adulthood through access to employment or on support in launching their own businesses.

Bridges: Focuses on the psycho-social needs of young people, supporting their wellbeing and personal development by ensuring access to a diverse range of education and play opportunities.

Partners: Focuses on developing the voices of children and young people within Palestinian civil society, linking them to the wider community and highlighting their contributions.

Advocacy and Human Rights: Youth participation runs through the Sharek Programmes as a standing principle. It takes centre stage in this fourth strand. In addition to the major periodic studies of the state of youth in Palestine that Sharek has prepared and published, it recently launched perhaps its most ambitious advocacy project yet, the Youth Palestinian Legislative Council, which has already, in its outreach phase, engaged over 5000 young people aged 18-30 and which aims to create a permanent structure for young people to advocate to the authorities on key issues both locally and nationally.



Working group during Sharek youth forum

Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) (www.hebronrc.org)

Hebron has the highest unemployment rate in the West Bank (26.1% as of May 2013) and, aside from East Jerusalem, is the only part of Palestine where settlements are to be found inside urbanised Palestinian areas. The closure of large parts of the old city, where trade craft and tourist industries were previously located, has hit the local economy hard. In addition, the historic old city has begun to fall into disrepair under the occupation. HRC was established specifically to address both the degradation of local culture and history and the decline of the local economy.

HRC thus runs a number of programmes committed to preservation of cultural heritage in Hebron, the improvement of living conditions for families inhabiting areas adversely affected by the occupation, the promotion of tourism and combating poverty and unemployment.

Youth involvement is a major component of these projects. HRC runs work camps that involve youth from Hebron and from farther afield in the West Bank. These camps provide cultural education as well as offering young Palestinians an opportunity to be an active part of the rehabilitation effort and develop key skills relevant to the construction industry in the process. Some of the courses on offer such as, for example, traditional Arab carpentry, are certified by the Palestinian Authority and thus provide significant currency in the employment market.



Young People from Nablus participate in the HRC Campaign 'Hebron: History and Memory' on a 'cultural convoy' trip to the old city.¹⁷

¹⁷ http://www.hebronrc.ps/?option=com_content&view=article&id=790%3A790&Itemid=99&lang=en

Freedom Theatre (www.thefreedomtheatre.org)

The Freedom Theatre has a very specific vision of a future Palestine transformed by the contributions of the Arts. It has four key objectives:

- Raise the quality of performing and visual arts in the area
- Offer a space in which children and youth can act, create and express themselves freely and equally, imagine new realities and challenge existing social and cultural barriers
- Empower the young generation to use the arts to promote positive change in their community
- Break the cultural isolation that separates Jenin from the wider Palestinian and global communities.

Participants in Freedom Theatre programmes train intensively in acting, scriptwriting and theatrical arts and put on full shows of reinterpreted and original works for Palestinian and international audiences. The local and global reach of the theatre has enabled hundreds of Palestinian youth to not only develop skills in the arts, project management and technical professions, but also to travel the globe and build a unique international platform, informing outsiders about the situation of the Palestinian people and more specifically about that of Palestinian youth.

Utilising the strong support base of material support and volunteers that this approach has garnered, Freedom Theatre continues to provide opportunities for young people from the refugee camp in Jenin and to enable them and other Palestinian and Israeli Arab actors to reach out to and engage with marginalised and isolated Palestinian adults, children and young people through initiatives such as the Freedom Bus, which is an annual package of touring arts, mixing innovative participatory theatre techniques with traditional storytelling and music and building partnerships with other local NGOs to encourage synergy and coordination of efforts to support and build communities under occupation.

"Art is a tool for resistance and a kind of education. Without art I can't make change." Fidaa Ataya, Freedom Bus Volunteer



Playback Theatre with Freedom Theatre artists in Fasayil, Jordan Valley

Aida Youth Centre (www.key1948.org)

"When there is no hope there is no life. We are here to bring hope to young people again."

Over 4,000 refugees live in the Aida camp in Bethlehem, which exists in the shadow of the separation barrier. Unemployment levels in the camp have risen to 43% and currently 39% of the residents in Aida camp are living in poverty on less than \$2.00 a day. The Wall has also cut the camp off from nearby farmland and recreational areas for its youth. Against this rather bleak background, Aida Youth Centre has worked to engage young people and the wider community in positive activities and develop a hub for communication with the broader world through:

- A women's gym
- Community development activities such as cleaning, recycling and construction
- Handicraft training and marketing of handmade embroidery
- Psychological support programmes

The centre works in partnership with specialised organisations and UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) to provide tailored support programmes across a range of areas based on the expressed and identified needs of the community. The active youth board of 10 members participates fully in the development and delivery of activities.

The youth of the centre raised the funds to construct the gigantic 'Key of Return' that sits at the entrance to the camp, a permanent reminder of the commitment of the refugees within the camp to claiming their right of return. There are plans to build a museum to promote historical understanding, bridge the gap between past and present for young people and shed more light on the situation of Palestinian refugees for the many international volunteers who pass through the camp.



The Key of Return at Aida Camp

African Community Society (www.acs-jer.org)

The African community society has a unique location within the Old City of Jerusalem and is rooted in the close-knit community activism of the small group of African Palestinians within the Old City.

Its activities and remit, however, extend much further, seeking to objectively and holistically meet the needs of Palestinian youth and involve them in the development of the Old City as a whole, as well as seeking to 'decrease the gap between all Palestinian Youth' including those in '48' (Israel) through internal exchange programmes.

Based in the very heart of the Old City, the ACS uses an approach that draws upon the rich history and culture of Jerusalem, inculcating local children and youth with a greater understanding of both the past and present situation of their society, and seeking to put that understanding within a broader context by enabling them to travel around and learn more about the rest of Palestine, giving youth transferable technical skills in areas such as sports, photography and drama, and by encouraging them to participate in projects that contribute to the sustainable development of the Old City and East Jerusalem.

In a city beset by endemic educational, employment, crime and drug issues, ACS provides a beacon of hope for disenfranchised young Palestinians and is a positive force to promote Jerusalemite and Palestinian culture to the world.



Participants in an AJS Summer Camp¹⁸

¹⁸ Photograph from www.acs-jer.org

Al Nayzak (www.alnayzak.org)

Al Nayzak is a uniquely entrepreneurial Palestinian NGO that promotes practical scientific learning for Palestinian youth and their involvement in research and innovation that contributes to the ongoing development of science and technology and builds their skills and credentials for future career development.

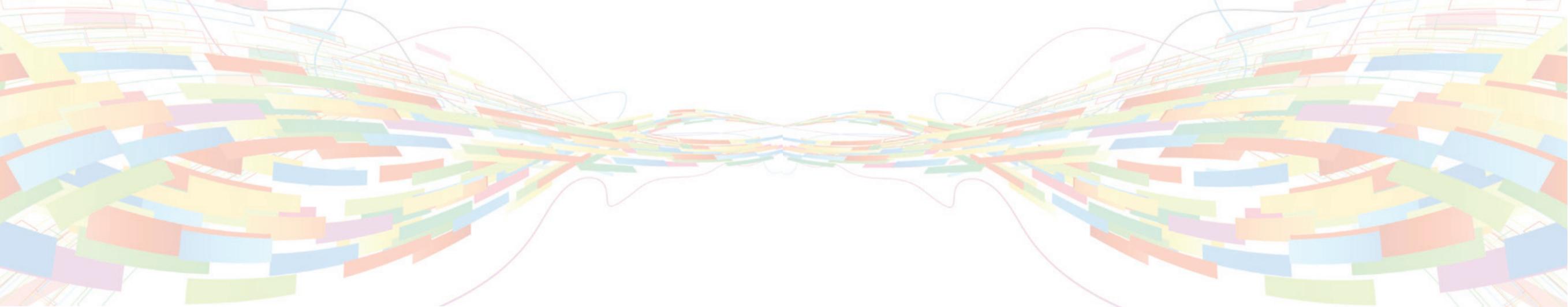
Basic Science and Technology education is provided through programmes tailored to the secondary school curriculum and delivered in schools. Young volunteers interested in going further and working in the fields of research or applied science and technology respectively are oriented toward more rewarding, competitive and challenging programmes that include close contact with national and international institutions and companies.

For young people of working age who show promise and commitment, further possibilities are available through the 'Made in Palestine' and 'Made in Jerusalem' programmes that train young people in business administration and entrepreneurship at the same time as supporting their scientific development and networking with local businesses in relevant sectors. These programmes incorporate the possibility of applying for funds to launch pilot projects.

Al Nayzak maintains a clear strategic focus and relentlessly pursues it in order to make the best use of its resources and make an important long-term contribution to the development of Palestinian youth and community. By aligning itself with educational curricula and the private sector, it also helps build the confidence of young people in the workplace as well as academia and breaks down the barrier between education and applied learning.



Entrants in the STEP programme



Project Hope (www.projecthope.ps)

The largest English language teaching provider in the West Bank, Project Hope works in the fields of language, arts, technology and sports, using a mixture of local and international volunteers, whom it hosts in its onsite apartment, to work with children and young people in and around Nablus. Eschewing major international funding, Project Hope operates through two sister NGOs in Palestine and Canada, with the latter serving as a fundraising and recruitment hub and working very closely with its Palestinian counterpart as a colleague rather than a funder or overseer. As well as seeking to improve the quality and reach of English language teaching, which helps the future employability of Palestinian youth, Project Hope also uses the passions and talents of volunteers in fields such as music and drama to inspire children.

In recent years the organisation has innovated in the field of graphic design; running programmes that develop young people's skills in storytelling, writing and art; and facilitating a competition inviting submissions for a compiled graphic novel that capture the experience of young Palestinians. The completed novels are then marketed commercially to generate further revenues for Project Hope activities.



Participants in a Project Hope Web Skills project¹⁹

¹⁹ www.projecthope.ps

Zajel Programme (<http://youth.zajel.org/>)

" Zajel changed my life, allowed me to get to know people from around the world, to get to know my country more and more and also helped me in my educational life with its workshops "

The Zajel programme, which is currently operated by the Public Relations department of An Najah University, the biggest public organisation in the West Bank, has three key objectives:

- To challenge the stereotypes about Palestinians that exist in the West,
- To foster international communication and intercultural dialogue,
- To involve Palestinian youth in organising activities that serve their community

Initiated by a Nablus based youth NGO in the early 2000s, Zajel has found a natural home within An Najah, which provides a supporting infrastructure for the programme and whose large student population is a rich recruiting ground for volunteers keen to give their time and develop their skills. Zajel runs a volunteer development programme that involves students in the planning and promotion of cultural events on campus, trips to other community projects and the hosting of a range of external speakers who can broaden the learning of young people from the Nablus area.

The programme also coordinates the hosting of visiting international delegations and interns. Its showcase project organises large study camps several times a year for Palestinian and International visitors that involve skills sharing workshops and extensive tours of the West Bank, designed to facilitate intercultural exchange and dialogue.



Zajel Summer Camp 2013 Participants

Camps Breakerz Crew, Gaza (www.campsbreakerz.com)

Camps Breakerz Crew, (or CBC as they are popularly known) were formed in 2004 by young people in Nusuirat Refugee Camp to represent and entertain their local community and provide skills training to other children and young people in their community.

They have established international links in Australia, the US, Europe and Asia, organising and promoting large-scale community events, performing in universities, zoos and community centres at home on special occasions and internationally at major international events and conferences. Hip Hop culture, a highly globalised youth discourse of the present, provides an initial common ground to connect with communities of breakers, DJs, MCs and graffiti artists all over the world with a shared enthusiasm.

Generating some of their income commercially through the marketing of their services as entertainers and promoters, CBC promotes a culture of skills development and fun that also helps Palestinian youth project a fresh image of themselves, refuting stereotypes that others might have about refugee children from Gaza using the medium of dance.



Breakdancing Workshops in Nusuirat²⁰

²⁰ http://www.campsbreakerz.com/Gallery.aspx?n=Photos#.Ukz3UxCP_t8

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is key to note just how immense the challenges facing any youth organisation in Palestine are. The sobering realities of, first and foremost, the occupation and secondly and consequently the internal situation in Palestine remain the critical factors affecting both young people and youth organisations. The participants in the study were keen to highlight the severe challenges that shape and often threaten to compromise their work.

A consolidation of the responsibilities of the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian Liberation Organization respectively, and of the President's Office and the Palestinian Legislative Council, with a newly elected Prime Minister, would go a long way toward contributing to a more conducive, transparent and supportive environment for civil society organisations generally, and youth organisations in particular. Much of the continued inefficiency of youth organisations and the lack of coherence in the implementation of key strategic agendas can be linked to the dormant state of the Palestinian Legislative Council and

the unclear and less accountable state of Palestinian governance and public policy planning and execution in the current era, and by association with the dominating presence of government agencies and NGOs from other regions, predominantly Europe and the US.

When the national institutions of debate and decision-making are not fully functional or open to scrutiny and public participation, the situation will inevitably be as bad, if not worse, for young people, contributing to their continued marginalisation. In fact, Palestinian civil servants deserve credit, as do the existing organisations in the youth sector, for their persistence and tenacity, which has produced the modest progress that has been made in developing strategies and policies relevant to young people.

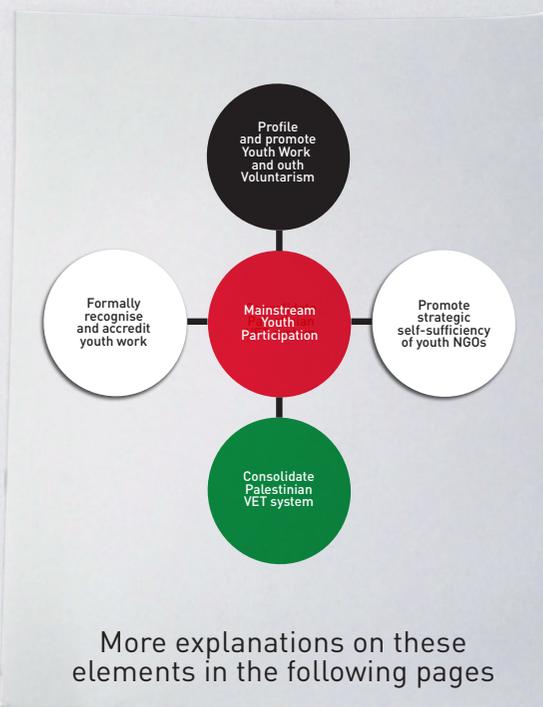
The same is true of the general state of the Palestinian economy: young people suffer from economic problems as much, and in many places more so, than their counterparts elsewhere.

The compounding impacts of the occupation and recession have placed major pressures on young people and their families.

Nevertheless, it is clear that many youth organisations in Palestine are making a major contribution to the upliftment of their communities and the development of the economic and social capital of the nation. The outstanding achievements of organisations such as Al Nayzak, Freedom Theatre and the African Community Society in radically different ways, using their own distinctive approaches and tools, are a testament to the resourcefulness, ingenuity and commitment of youth workers in Palestine and to Palestinians as a whole.

With such a young population, it is essential that the achievements and knowledge of such organisations be well exploited to truly catalyse the potential of the nation as a whole. To

this end, this report makes five recommendations for the consideration of national level bodies and their international partners as well as youth workers themselves and their organisations.



7.1 Formalised Recognition and Accreditation of Youth Work

A system should be put in place by the Palestinian Authority to recognise youth workers by developing a recognised system of accreditation and recognition of youth work at different levels under the National Occupation Classifications and the National Qualification Framework set out in the National TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) strategy²¹ and by integrating it into a national qualification framework. This programme could be delivered in both vocational and academic colleges. Seed funding could be provided for a project to develop an independent national network of youth workers.

There are clear advantages to creating a system that accredits, regulates and supports volunteers and professionals working with young people. It allows for a public, accountable field where time, effort and the development of individual workers is acknowledged and recognised and where a baseline standard of service delivery can be defined and measured whereby the needs of the youth population and the appropriate methods of informal education for meeting those needs would be discussed and developed in partnership by civil society and the Palestinian Authority.

- The development of a set of tiered qualifications aligned to levels of experience and responsibility, ranging from support functions to lead workers to managers responsible for coordinating youth services
- Allocated funding to develop strands of research and teaching in

academia that continue to develop local knowledge and evidence and inform a specifically 'Palestinian' youth work

- A strategy for recruiting and training young volunteers and channelling them into vocational pathways in order to maintain a strong base of workers for the youth and community sectors.

This would fit well within a more coordinated overall approach at national level (see below) that strategises for the development of an independent youth sector. Without a clear infrastructure for youth work, the field will remain indistinct, without a clear direction or set of benchmarks. It may be worth consideration creating a Ministry, department or Higher Council for Youth distinct from whichever institution is to take responsibility for sports policy.

7.2 Complete the consolidation of VET (Vocational Education Training) system

There are currently at least four separate vocational certification regimes in operation by branches of the Palestinian Authority. The consolidation of the vocational and technical education system under one authority and set of legislation could simplify access for young people and help define the areas of governmental and civil society responsibility. To this end, a consultation with youth and the private sector around current and future market needs, the skills sets required and gaps

²¹ (http://www.tvet-pal.org/sites/default/files/11-02-09_revised%20TVET_strategy-final_Signed-version_EN_0.pdf)

in the present education sector would be necessary. A strong foundation for doing this was laid in the creation of the National TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) Strategy in 2010. However, its continued relevance and current efficacy should be reviewed as a matter of urgency. Youth's voice should be an essential component in ensuring that this strategy is effectively rolled out.

The consolidation of the VET sector to incorporate an accreditation scheme would enable NGOs delivering high quality VET to become recognised technical colleges and thus provide national qualifications to their beneficiaries. This would in turn support the sustainability of Palestinian civil society organisations, recognise and reinforce their success when they establish and demonstrate the capacity for quality education and share the burden of VET provision across sectors without generating unmanageable demands on government institutions.

These training centres should be developed based on local expertise and economic needs, enabling youth NGOs to operate enterprises employing their students. This would allow them to not only build the capacity of individuals to access and craft job opportunities through one-off training seminars but also to provide job opportunities within their own enterprises.

Furthermore, NGOs and government should seek to create beneficial links with existing Palestinian industries to explore and create practical learning opportunities within Palestinian businesses, helping young people to develop

market ready skills and contribute to the development of existing enterprises without sacrificing their wellbeing or livelihood. There would certainly be scope for extending such cooperation to public-private-voluntary recruitment schemes whereby civil society organisations could provide informal education and life skills training to prepare young people and graduates for the workplace.

The current preference of young Palestinians for starting their own business may say as much about the poor quality of available jobs as it does about their entrepreneurial spirit. Research should also take into account the extent to which new SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) will be able to meet short to mid-term economic development needs and consider areas where larger scale industries may need to be prioritised.

Finally, increased investment in e-learning at state level could pay handsome dividends in broadening the appeal of and access to education. The high cost of vocational and higher education is a burden for young people and given that Palestine has one of the highest rates of Internet access in the world, the market is there to create lower cost mixed media training and complement face to face education using online resources.

7.3 Mainstreaming of Youth Participation

"Youth are playing an essential role in leading this community in many aspects"

Abeer, Hebron

Supporting youth participation in public

affairs requires a national strategy to promote the empowerment of young people as both participants and contributors to the development process. It is also an opportunity for young people to play a role in determining their priorities and needs and participate in decision-making. Youth participation would help lay the foundation for several forms of effective partnership across different sectors and among international NGOs, institutions working with youth and those affiliated with political parties.

The emergent national level networks fostered by NGOs such as Sharek are very promising. These need support and encouragement from the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian Liberation Organization, but not co-optation. A process could be established to clarify areas of focus, key functions and responsibility whenever there are overlaps in mandate and constituency. Government has a key role to play given that the networks that it chooses to engage with will automatically have some degree of credibility and access in public affairs as a result. The integration of the sizeable refugee population, amongst the most marginalised, in dialogue with UNRWA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), is also central to this process.

"Government should host and organise youth NGOs and make sure their mission is aligned with the national goals for the HCYS (Higher council for youth and sport)"
Ubaid, Nablus

If parallel institutions such as the Palestinian Youth Parliament are to be

maintained or revitalised, they need to be considerably revamped, in consultation with young people, and their purpose and powers made clear, in order to avoid creating toothless institutions that risk competing with and undermining civil society institutions. Their efficacy in helping build the decision-making capacity of young people, their acquaintance with legislative procedure and their sense of citizenship are clear. However, the evidence base in general, and even more so in the specific instance of Palestine, indicating that the 'young leaders' involved in such institutions are a/representative of young people as a whole or b/influential in bringing the opinions of those young people to bear upon public policy, is less than convincing. Such initiatives alone will not be enough to guarantee the rights of children and youth in the Palestinian public sphere.

A mechanism or set of mechanisms for ongoing critical dialogue should be established, with a legislated obligation for relevant public bodies to report back on commitments that they have made to implement specific measures regarding young people. These could include:

- Policy scrutiny panels made up of youth representatives or a mixture of adults and young people to VET policy
- Youth 'auditing' schemes where young people evaluate and examine the inclusion of young people in particular aspects of public policy and programming and report back publicly to both their peers and to the general public
- The designation of youth focal

points in each Ministry and higher council across all areas of government to assume responsibility for reviewing and advocating for child and youth participation within their thematic areas

- Regularly scheduled meetings or conferences involving ministers, civil servants, young people and civil society organisations, with standing agenda points based on the national youth policy framework.

Additional, more far-reaching measures that should be considered:

- The mainstreaming in key institutions of youth participation training facilitated by Palestinian youth workers and young people, based on the grassroots experiences and expertise of those young people and linked to the training and development needs of the civil service
- Participatory budgeting giving young people the power to influence the distribution of funds for youth focussed projects. This could operate on different levels e.g. national youth consultation on the priorities for the funds, selection of regional candidates to sit on the review panel, regional selection of eligible applicants, review of short-listed applicants and awards of grants. Young people participating in this process as panel members should also be rewarded with additional certification recognising the time invested and skills developed in project management, recruitment and selection.
- The development of a national level youth development index, in

collaboration with youth organisations and the Higher Council, drawing on global experiences of applying and customising the UN Youth Development Indicators to local contexts, which would provide a common frame of reference for different agencies.

"None of the organizations invite young people to tell them what they want. It didn't happen at all. Ask them!"

Kamal, Gaza

7.4 Profiling and promotion of youth work and youth voluntarism

Investment in grassroots youth work, especially community centres rooted in specific communities is important but a broader commitment to supporting such organisations to promote themselves and articulate their work within the community as a whole is equally vital. This approach would require as a prerequisite, and go hand in hand with, the consolidation of and structuring of the informal education sector as a whole and help address any preconceptions within the community about youth work, its purpose and its relationship to other initiatives within the community.

One aspect of this approach should be to work toward more cooperation and partnership between various community organisations and to promote the involvement of older community members in the work of youth organisations. This could be as beneficiaries: for example, young volunteers could teach basic digital literacy skills to older people in order to help them communicate with family and friends outside the country or

to find new resources for their initiatives; or as volunteers, with older people contributing their knowledge and skills to youth development initiatives.

At national level, the commissioning of research on the nature and impact of youth work, and more specifically the impact of volunteering, would be a healthy contribution to the pool of knowledge on this subject. In its 2010 strategy, the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) committed to promoting volunteering and civic responsibility amongst young people. A fuller exploration and articulation of the diverse benefits of volunteering for young people and their communities would be both useful and informative and could also highlight successful approaches and development areas to ensure that the resources and time expended are in the best interests of all. Youth workers could also be promoted as healthy role models for young people.

7.5 Strategic promotion of the self-sufficiency of youth NGOs

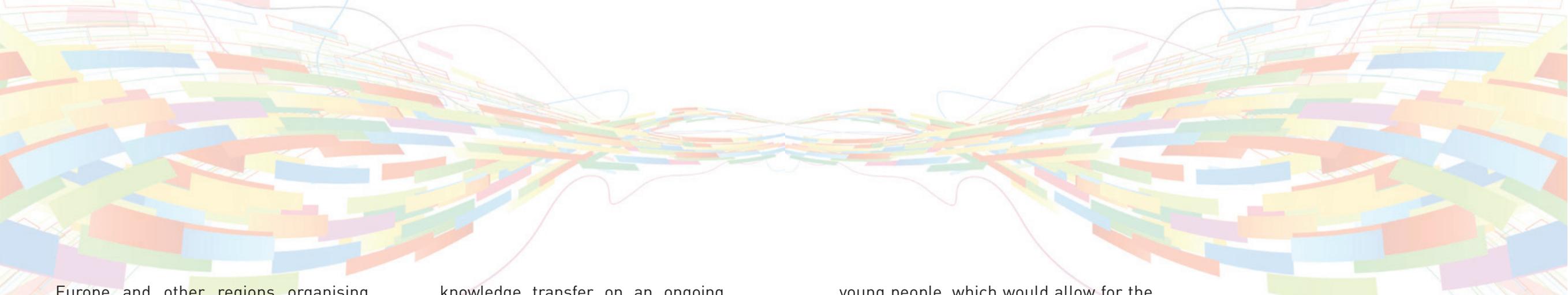
As long as the sustainability of youth participation activities is contingent on international funding and such activities are seen as projects rather than permanent policy mechanisms to be integrated into the structures of governance, they will not achieve their declared aims. Youth organisations need to build on a long-term strategic basis, and to pursue a course of strategic development themselves, even if this means declining funds that would require a diversion of focus or resources. Youth organisations should not be a source

of cheap outsourced labour for foreign NGOs and governments or of cheap local manpower for transnational companies. Their orientation should be determined by the young people they serve.

It would be very positive to see the encouragement of distinct specialisation by NGOs able to access and develop clear expertise in particular fields. This would allow for a range of activities in specific sectors that are tied to local and national needs. Hebron Rehabilitation Committee and Al Nayzak are examples of organisations that take a bold approach in a particular area, namely the preservation and restoration of physical infrastructure and cultural heritage and scientific innovation respectively, and both seek to involve and develop young Palestinians in the process.

Furthermore, where international links with grassroots civil society are in place, a shift of emphasis away from large scale international funding toward more modest mutual aid that comes with fewer 'strings attached' could help youth organisations retain or reconnect with their grassroots links and shape organisational approaches and structures that more genuinely reflect and interact with the situation on the ground.

Wherever the capacity exists for Palestinian organisations to establish their own independent fundraising mechanisms in other countries, up to and including the registration of sister NGOs run by supporters in those countries, this option should be preferred to sustained grant funding from streams within Palestine. Youth organisations from



Europe and other regions organising exchanges to Palestine should liaise with their Palestinian partners to ensure the maximum economic benefit for their hosts and consolidate their financial independence outside of established funding structures.

Many youth organisations currently spread themselves thin by operating across numerous programme areas, based on a mixture of actual needs and the priorities of the available grant-based funding. A streamlining process that enables organisations to become leaner and more focussed would ensure a diversification of activities nationally, whilst laying the foundation for more strategic approaches locally, along with a reduction in unnecessary replication of services and greater innovation in youth projects.

These changes would require a number of key steps:

- A more sustained and detailed needs assessment at national level supporting a clear identification of the key areas for development within the youth sector.
- Ongoing strategic support for youth focussed and led organisations to help guide them in formulating and effectively implementing specialised strategies over time would be preferable to the piecemeal capacity building currently provided by international funders with little local expertise²².
- A national network of youth NGOs could promote peer led approaches to facilitate the sharing of learning and

knowledge transfer on an ongoing, Palestinian led basis.

- Development of local partnerships between NGOs with mutually beneficial and complementary approaches and skills sets.
- Promotion of solidarity links between civil society organisations in Palestine and community level partners or supporters abroad, emphasising the autonomy and agency of Palestinians in their initiatives and promoting small scale community level giving and mutual aid.
- Cooperation between the Palestinian National Authority and international funders to develop grant programmes focussed on developing the economic self-sufficiency of Palestinian youth organisations through income generation.

And finally...

A measure that would ultimately provide a strong basis for all of the above would be the formulation and passing of a youth law that clearly defines the scope of what constitutes 'youth' in Palestine, the responsibilities of different actors with regard to youth and the obligation of public institutions to appropriately involve young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of policies affecting them.

Other legislative and election laws could then be amended to fit in with an umbrella youth law to ensure the involvement of

²² Representatives of the Higher Council on Youth and Sports could provide such expertise, with key figures in industry and experienced in civil society providing hands-on guidance to specific organisations.

young people, which would allow for the development of a National Youth Strategy with 'teeth'. Any serious attempt to involve young people should take the lack of transparency and accountability in the current policy-making and formulation process into account and implement measures to offset the identified issues undermining the trust of young people in the authorities.

This process would contribute to strengthened institutional accountability and the elimination of corruption in public life in Palestine. Young people could be positively engaged in measures to hold the institutions of the Palestinian Authority to account and channel their energies in order to revive and transform these institutions, confident that their case has not only an international but also a national level legal grounding. This would put young people at the heart of the Palestinian constitutional framework and enshrine a true commitment on the part of Palestinian institutions to youth engagement and participation. This will clearly be a hard fought process and one that would demand a substantial shift in political priorities and will.

"You cannot live if you do not have hope. We work to give young people hope again"
Ghassan, Bethlehem

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Youth work in Palestine and surrounding challenges

The Study Visit

In June 2013 a Euro-Mediterranean Youth Study visit was organised in the West Bank of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Fifteen Palestinian participants hosted 26 representatives from across Europe, including members of 6 National Agencies for "Youth in action" program and two SALTOS (EuroMed and Participation), as well as one representative from the Palestinian EuroMed Youth Unit itself and one from RCBS (Regional Capacity Building and Support Unit for the EuroMed Youth Programme IV). Over a 5 day period, the group shared an intense and unforgettable experience, taking in a lot of new information and discussion, a wide range of enjoyable social activities and a liberal dose of the famous Palestinian hospitality, not to mention a lot of food!

Facilitation was led by **Shadi Zatar** and Mohamed Rabah, Palestinian freelance trainers, who produced an engaging and participatory programme that created many opportunities for connection and exchanges between the participants. As well as sharing reflections on the situation for young people in their own countries, the group took part in sessions exploring the nature and impact of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza on young people. Participants were treated to a plethora of thought-provoking, informative and often inspirational contributions from the following guest speakers and trainers.

Olga Baus, Head of Social and Civil Society, EU Delegation, Jerusalem and **Jibril Rjoub**, Secretary General of Higher Council for Youth and Sports, Palestinian Authority, who officially opened the event.

Bernard Abrignani, Director of the RCBS (Regional Capacity Building and Support Unit for the EuroMed Youth Programme IV) presented a comprehensive picture of the current EU Youth Situation regarding Employability and Entrepreneurship as well as the 4th Phase of the EuroMed Youth Programme, its funding structure and the opportunities available for participating organisations. He stressed that under current EuroMed regulations, unlike previous versions, bi-lateral exchanges between European and Palestinian partners were possible without the involvement of an Israeli partner.

Wasim Khizno, Director of the International Affairs, Higher Council for Youth and Sports, Head of the Palestinian Euromed Youth Unit, Palestine gave a detailed overview from the perspective of Palestine on the history of the occupation and its specific impacts on a number of aspects of Palestinian existence.

Rania Aljawi, Youth Development Program Director, Save the Children Palestine, specifically addressed livelihood issues, sharing findings from a wide-ranging STC (Securities Training Corporation) study in Gaza.

Fatima Abdulkarim, Karama Campaign, discussed issues of mobility, access and human rights in

the West Bank and Gaza under Israeli Occupation.

Mohammed Mbaid, Director of the International Youth Foundation, Palestine and **Thuqan Qisawi**, Trainer, (former program director of the American Friends Service Committee, Palestine) both presented their own experiences of working to uplift young people in Palestine and the perseverance and dedication required to achieve results in the field, as well as their personal inspirations and motivations.

Members of the group also participated in a large scale live action role-play (LARP) activity coordinated by enthusiastic Palestinian proponents of this unique form of multi-player game.

Participants took on Israeli and Palestinian roles of various ages, professions and political persuasions and played out a storyline that included real-time developments and changes that demanded a response.

This game was an innovative way of introducing European participants to key characteristics of different perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the occupation and internal Palestinian politics.

After these initial meetings and presentations the group toured the following locations and visited organisations in the West Bank:

Bethlehem

A tour of the **Aida Refugee Camp** and youth center, including the presentation of a short film about the experience of Aida and its residents since 1948 and a description of the music and sports programmes run by the center and the plans for an on site museum, followed by a visit to **Palestinian Child Home Club**, an NGO with a purpose built training facility including IT facilities. Here local volunteers joined the group for a number of discussions on formal and informal education and employability, brainstorming youth driven responses that could be adopted in Palestine. The group also visited the Church of the Holy Nativity, an important Christian holy site in the centre of the city of Bethlehem.



The wall of the Aida Refugee Camp and youth center

Role playing game to introduce European participants to key characteristics of different perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the occupation and internal Palestinian politics

Hebron

The group was hosted by the **Hebron Rehabilitation Committee** for a presentation on the history of the old city, its current situation and the economic impact of the occupation and settlement on Hebron before visiting these sites as well as the Al-Ibrahimi Mosque.

Jerusalem

A tour of the majestic Old City of Jerusalem, including some amazing rooftop views, a trip up the Mount of Olives and a talk from a **UN OCHA** (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) representative on the Israeli government's redrawing of the Municipal boundaries of 'Greater Jerusalem'. This was followed by a trip hosted by Yasser Quos of the **Afro-Jerusalemite Society**, an NGO based in the Old City that supports children and young people as well as seeking to preserve the unique heritage of Afro-Jerusalemite Palestinians.

Ramallah

In Ramallah, the group spent time with two very different organisations: the **Palestinian Prisoners Club**, an organisation established in 1993 by former Palestinian prisoners who spent at least a year in an Israeli jail. The purpose of the club is to assist and support the thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The club operates in a variety of ways, ranging from legal aid and political action for the release of the prisoners, to aid to their families. This gave a very clear insight into the systematic use of imprisonment against the Palestinian population by the Israeli government.

Leaders Organisation hosted the group for a discussion of the current state of youth leadership and social entrepreneurship in the West Bank. This youth led group, founded in 2002, focuses on the role of youth in development in Palestine, through both economic empowerment, especially the provision of support to young people looking to start businesses, to the development of social and political leadership.

Closing

Once back in the conference room, the group reflected on and discussed the nature and state of youth work in Palestine, themes within Palestinian youth work and the major constraints on effective youth work. Many of the direct quotes and observations in the main body of this study are drawn from these discussions. Further reflections were drawn from in-depth one-on-one interactions with individual participants in the course of the five days.

The final, energetic and hopeful activity that helped close the formal programme was an organisational marketplace where Palestinians and visitors alike were able to highlight their NGOs, their specialisations, the assets they have to offer and any needs or proposals that they wished to share with the group. A number of promising nascent partnerships came into being as a result of this session, with their chances of success strengthened by the solid personal relationships and understanding built up over the course of the programme.



Old City of Jerusalem



The west wall

Youth work in Palestine and surrounding challenges



This publication has been edited and financed by the Regional capacity building support unit (RCBS) for Euromed Youth Programme IV dealing with the countries participating in the ENPI South (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia).

The overall objective of RCBS is to support the Euro Mediterranean youth units (EMYUs) in their efforts to ensure an efficient implementation of the Euromed Youth programme and an optimum achievement of results.

Specific objectives are:

- guidance and training activities for EMYUs and project leaders and organisations,
- coordination and synergies between actors and stakeholders (youth in action programme, Euromed platform, etc.),
- visibility and communication.

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The EU-funded Euromed Youth Programme under the European Neighbourhood Policy in collaboration with SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed Resource Centre

Design and layout by Alain Dalerici. Photo credit: INJEP. Printed in FRANCE, April 2014



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Youth work in Palestine and surrounding challenges

Youth work is changing and opening new interesting perspectives for the future. The field of youth work within Meda countries is living strong changes and the role of young people is more and more relevant in the society.

It is the third issue of a collection in several languages called «*Youth Work in...*» composed of publications dedicated to youth work in the European Neighbourhood South countries.

This collection aims to support the cooperation within EuroMed area providing a depth reflection about the nowadays issues and challenges in youth work in the Euro Mediterranean context.

Youth work in Palestine and surrounding challenges is the result of the Study Visit, organized with the coordination of RCBS (Regional Capacity Building and Support Unit for the EuroMed Youth Programme IV) held in Palestine from the 20th to the 26th June 2013 that gave the chance to contribute, during five days, to the overall reflection about youth work in Palestine with a specific focus on field projects. The specific aim of this study is to supply some new keys for reading the ongoing situation of youth work in Palestine, the challenges, strategies and good practices.

This publication provides:

- an overview about Youth Work in Palestine;
- an educational and pedagogical background of youth work in Palestine;
- some challenges of youth workers for developing projects;
- some examples of youth projects.

Download it for free at: www.euromedyouth.net
and <http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/>



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