

Chapter Four:

Education and Human Development

Forward

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A letter from a Palestinian child to the world:

“Sir, I have a grandmother whose diary has collected layers of dust and whose yellowed papers were eaten by moths, as if they were trying to delete some of what my grandmother has witnessed over the years. I riffled through the pages, my eyes racing to read what her shaking hands wrote. While I flipped the pages questions nibbled on my mind, “Why, why is my grandmother Palestinian? Why is my father Arab? Why is that man black? Why am I female? The repetition of the questions made me feel grief for the discrimination that my grandmother endured. The world seems to be in the hands of a great dictator, saying to those not to his liking or from a different ethnicity or color or religion, ‘Go to the valley, go the abyss and dive into the depths of the world, for that is the place of servants,’ and to his own people, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, climb onto the magical carpet so I can take you to my palaces, for that is the place of the masters.’ My God! Do you enjoy seeing humiliation in the eyes of people or when you see civilizations and cultures and peoples wither! All that to maintain your name held high and known to all. What is the fault of an Arab created by God as such or a Negro made black by God? What is the fault of a woman created female? Are we not all from mud?”

What if the scales of the world were turned and males became female, whites black, and Arabs European? Perhaps after such an inversion people’s dignity would be restored and people would feel human, or maybe the oppressed would seize the chance to take revenge on those that oppressed them, and history would cycle again. I see, Sir, that there is no answer to the questions, or even to the problem of discrimination, unless mercy and humanity defeated the love of domination and humiliation and our vision became so acute as to see the insides of people and their emotions and grow to respect them. Why not instill this principle in our old before the young so that we may be their example, and we could construct a safe community whose personality is coined to shy away from war and its destructive results.”

Nour Jihad, 15 year old

Foreword¹

The experiences of many nations under various circumstances have shown that education is one of the main pillars of progress. The connection between education and human development depends on the specificity of each nation, but there are some general bases and common denominators.

First: Education has become a necessity, much like food, shelter, health, and work. Therefore, affording suitable education opportunities has become a community priority in which governments, institutions, groups and individuals cooperate.

Second: The availability of qualified human resources is important for economic development in any community or country. It relies on the condition of the country in terms of natural resources, geographical location, the relative competition in economic sectors, and the heritage and interests of the country.

Third: Education, in the inclusive sense, shapes the identity and culture of the community and guarantees the protection of the identity and the continuation of culture. Culture is the element that

distinguishes a community from others and connects communities with one another.

Fourth: The increasing connectivity of the various parts of the world has created international standards that no educational system can ignore. There are deep and intertwined circumstances introduced by globalization and its effects of economic and cultural dominance; therefore, an educational system must keep abreast of rapid changes and embrace modernization.

Fifth: Globalization has led to a deep educational crisis for countries with limited income, with potentially catastrophic implications. Such countries need competent human resources to achieve prosperity but lack the basic foundations and practical mechanisms to establish a sustainable education system capable of producing an educated citizenry. The crisis is all the more difficult to escape because the cost of education, especially higher education, has come to be connected with the international economy. The budgets that poor countries can allocate to education remain at the level of local economy, far lower than the international economic level.

Education is one of the main pillars of development

Globalization has led to a deep educational crisis for countries with limited income

1. Parts of this chapter have been published in specialized journals by Ramzi Rihan, the principal author, and forwarded to governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Section One: Education in the Palestinian Context

Statistics indicate that the Palestinian education sector would continue to be a huge one requiring attention

The educational challenge in Palestine is qualitative and quantitative

The state of Palestine, regardless of what its final borders will be, is small and limited in natural assets. Its people are its primary resource, which renders demographic data highly important. Accurate information in that regard is now available and forecasts have become possible after the population census was conducted at the end of 1997. The results of the census registered the population of the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip at about 2.9 million.² The population is estimated to reach 4.9 million by 2010, 6.7 million by 2020, and 7.4 million by 2025.³ The predictions indicate that increases in the population may be among the top challenges facing Palestine, but at the same time indicate that the human resources necessary for progress would be available, provided that suitable economic and social strategies are implemented. Human beings are simultaneously producers and consumers. Reaching equilibrium between production and consumption is a vital precondition for political stability based on a firm economic and social foundation that guarantees growth and sustainability.

Among the population issues directly connected to sustainable

human development are the low average age of the population due to high fertility rates and the continuing migration of young adults in search of employment. Population between the ages 5-19 (school age) made up 39% of the population in 1997 and the percentage is expected to decrease slowly to reach 38% in 2010 and 35% in 2025⁴. Statistics indicate that the Palestinian education sector will assume enormous dimensions, requiring the attention of the state for at least a full generation. The growth of the education sector embodies the population challenge in both its aspects: providing the necessary resources to educate such a large population, and laying the basic foundations for development and prosperity by developing a modern education system. Education is a community investment in human resources whose benefits are not only economic, but also cultural and social. The educational challenge in Palestine is both qualitative and quantitative.

The situation in Palestine is complicated by a convergence of several problems. The failure of political negotiations after an entire decade had discouraging effects on the organizational and planning activities of the Palestinians. The long years of waiting dashed many of the aspirations that Palestinians had come to hold at the peak of the first Intifada, which was a reaction to attempts to destroy the Palestinian existence through

2 . See: Final Census Results, summary; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 30 November 1998.

3 . Population in Palestinian Territories, 1997-2025; PCBS, September 1999.

4 . Previous reference.

occupation. The unstable conditions, embodied in the intermingling of interim and permanent status solutions, intensified the conflict between meeting immediate needs and working toward future goals.

The rise of unemployment is one of the primary examples of the contradiction of priorities. The crisis was relieved to an extent by broadening employment in the public sector and by rising enrollment in higher education institutions. The first phenomenon led to decreased productivity and higher production costs in the public sector, with salaries consuming almost 60% of the PNA budget, a burden that cannot be borne in the long-run. As for the second phenomenon of rising university enrollments, it can lead to deferred unemployment with effects that may be far worse than those of current unemployment levels.

The Palestinian economy is a problem that has evaded solution for many years. For half a century it has relied on external sources of income, making it feeble and highly prone to instability. At the beginning of the 1950s, the UN established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Soon after, employment in the Gulf States became available. With the Israeli occupation of 1967, work in Israel became a primary source of income, and Arab aid provided via

the Jordanian - Palestinian Committee supported many vital projects. Other international aid began to flow into Palestine after the establishment of the PNA. The PNA was entrusted with responsibilities that outweighed its abilities in many economic sectors. The excessive reliance of the Palestinian economy on the Israeli economy made it structurally unstable. Also, land confiscation and control of water sources deprived the Palestinians of a large portion of the few natural resources they possessed.

Section Two: General Education

The primary education sector in Palestine is relatively large and is continually growing. The number of students in the West Bank and Gaza in the year 1967-68, the beginning of occupation, was close to 220,000. When the PNA assumed responsibility for the education sector at the beginning of the scholastic year 1994-1995, the number had climbed to 650,000, tripling in 27 years. The number of students at present is about one million, and is expected to reach one and a half million in ten years.⁵

Schools are categorized according to the supervising body as governmental, private, or UNRWA. The situation is different in Jerusalem, which has schools

The intermingling of interim and permanent status solutions, intensified the conflict between meeting immediate and long-term needs

The number of students at present is about one million

5. See: a) Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1968, No. 19, PCBS. b) Annual Statistics Education 1994-1995; PCBS and Ministry of Education, September 1995. c) Five-year Education Development Plan, Palestinian Ministry of Education, September 2001. d) Predictions of General Education in Palestine 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, PCBS, December 1999.

officially operated by the Islamic Waqf Directorate, although they are connected with the Palestinian Ministry of Education. Others are operated by the Jerusalem Municipality or the Israeli Education Department. Some

private schools also operate kindergartens, but demand is low due to the fact that kindergarten lays outside the official education sector, although enrollment is constantly rising. There are boys' schools, girls' schools, and coed schools.

Table (4-1): Number of students in schools and kindergartens according to area				
Area and school year	Kindergartens	Schools		Total
		Primary*	Secondary	
Palestinian territories				
1994-1995	36,829	572,529	45,339	654,697
2000-2001	69,247**	830,765	76,363	976,375
West Bank				
1994-1995	35,768	355,269	27,678	418,715
2000-2001	46,728	495,364	45,484	587,576
Gaza Strip				
1994-1995	1,061	217,260	17,661	235,982
2000-2001	22,519	335,401	30,879	388,799
* Primary level comprises grades one through ten; secondary level comprises grades 11 and 12.				
** The number of kindergarten pupils increased to 77,402 in 1999-2000 then decreased the following year due to security and economic reasons.				
Source: The Palestine Annual Statistical Book (2) November 2001, PCBS.				

In ten years, 75% of all children are expected to complete grade twelve

No substantial discrepancies are detected between the enrollment of males and females of school age

The continuing increase in the number of students is attributable to two factors: first, high fertility rates and the resulting low average age of the population, as mentioned earlier; and second, the constant increase in demand for education.

In the 1970s, roughly half of all children attended school through basic education, and one-third remained to complete secondary level. Today, enrollment in the middle years is almost at 100% and

more than half of Palestinian children complete grade twelve. In ten years, 75% of all children are expected to complete grade twelve.

It is worth mentioning that no substantial discrepancies are detected between the enrollment of males and females of school age, with male students making up 50.1% of the student base for the scholastic year 2000-2001 and female students 49.9%. The number of female students exceeded the number of male students in the secondary level,

which is a worrisome indicator, attributed partly to the trend of school abandonment (dropping out) among male students in the secondary level (16 years and older,) most probably in order to accept menial jobs in light of the economic crisis.

It is interesting to note the high rate of kindergarten enrollment, especially in Gaza. It serves as a potential indicator of radical social changes in the development of educational aspirations and awareness in the family, the regression of extended family, which previously was a primary source of childcare, and the increasing number of working mothers. The time is now for kindergartens to be brought into

the core of official Palestinian educational planning.

Undoubtedly, the growth in the size of the primary education sector will gradually decrease with a decrease in fertility rates and total enrollment of the school age population, but both of these elements will not come into play before 2010. Therefore, contending with the size of Palestinian educational needs, which is a problem and an opportunity at one and the same time, will remain a challenge for at least another decade. In addition, the number of returnees may not match the prediction upon which assessments were made, which poses an unknown element that may confuse expectations and impede implementation of plans.

Table (4- 2): Number of Kindergartens and Schools in 2000-2001				
Area and school year	Kindergartens	Schools		
		Primary*	Secondary	Total
Palestinian territories				
1994-1995	436	1,141	333	1910
2000-2001	811	1,316	519	2,646
West Bank				
1994-1995	423	842	294	1,559
2000-2001	596	967	448	2,011
Gaza Strip				
1994-1995	13	299	39	351
2000-2001	215	349	71	635

Source: The Palestine Annual Statistical Book (2) November 2001, PCBS.

This unprecedented demand for education carries some negative effects; overcrowding in schools is much too high for a sound education process to be

maintained. More than 100 schools employ a two-shift system. There are also a number of schools housed in unsuitable buildings. This situation is a leftover from occupation, which did not tend to

Table (4-3): Average Number of Students per Classroom				
Level	Supervising body		Private	General average
	Government	UNRWA*		
Kindergarten				
1994-1995	-	-	28.6	28.6
2000-2001	11**	-	25.0	25.0
Primary				
1994-1995	35.9	43.6	27.8	37.1
2000-2001	36.1	46.1***	25.6	37.3
Secondary				
1994-1995	31.9	-	19.6	30.2
2000-2001	31.5	-	17.7	30.2
* UNRWA schools offer only primary level education. ** One governmental kindergarten. *** The average number of students per classroom at UNRWA schools in 1999-2001 reached 47.7. Source: previously cited under table 1.				

build schools or hire teachers.

Tables 2 and 3 show that the number of schools, which increases by 100 each year, has not been able to cope with the increasing number of students.

While conditions improved at private schools, which require high tuition, governmental schools remained as is and conditions at UNRWA schools worsened, with congestion reaching levels unacceptable under any set of standards.

Table (4 - 4): Ratio of Students to Teachers			
	Kindergartens	Schools*	Total
Aggregate			
1994-1995	1,211	19,843	21,054
2000-2001	2,743	32,502	35,245
Governmental			
1994-1995	-	13,533	13,533
2000-2001	3	22,953	22,956
UNRWA			
1994-1995	-	4,370	4,370
2000-2001	-	6,129	6,129
Private			
1994-1995	1,211	1,940	3,151
2000-2001	2,740	3,420	6,160
*Comprise grades one through twelve. Source: The Palestine Annual Statistical Log (2) November 2001, PCBS.			

The numbers of teachers and the ratio of students to teachers portray a better picture than the actual conditions in overcrowded classrooms. The situation improved slightly in kindergartens

and private and governmental schools, but regressed to an extent at UNRWA schools. There are complaints among teachers regarding low wages, especially at governmental schools, where salaries average \$350 per month, forcing many to take second jobs to increase income.

There are complaints among teachers regarding low wages, especially at governmental schools

Table 4-5: Ratio of Students to Teachers					
Area and school year	Gover nmental	UNRWA kindergarten	Private	Private	Total
Palestinian territories					
1994-1995	39.9	36.9	19.5	30.5	31.1
2000-2001	26.8	37.9*	17.3	25.2	27.7
West Bank					
1994-1995	29.9	32.9	19.1	30.3	28.9
2000-2001	25.4	33.7	17.2	25.3	24.9
Gaza Strip					
1994-1995	34.0	38.7	25.4	33.2	36.0
2000-2001	30.7	39.5	18.0	25.1	33.3
<p>The student -to-teacher ratio at UNRWA schools registered 39.5:1 in 1999-2000. Source: The Palestine Annual Statistical Log (2) November 2001, PCBS.</p>					

The conditions and trends illustrated in these tables may cause the education process to become a passing or trivial matter in the lives of students and teachers. It is impossible to predetermine the thin line between marginal improvement and collapse. The real danger may lie in the direction that seems to enjoy the widest backing on the political front, which is to allow the quality of the educational system to deteriorate to an unsalvageable level. Despite this grim possibility, there are serious efforts underway to improve education.

The handing of full responsibility for maintenance of the education sector to the Palestinians in August 1994 was a major turning point that occurred with unexpected speed. The Palestinians were informed

that the responsibility was in their hands only a month before it was handed over, and the 1994-1995 scholastic year began three days after the transfer. The transfer was pulled off without a hitch, although the Israelis held back some information and files. The entire process came immediately on the heels of the Intifada and its disruption of attendance, which had left the educational system in a state of chaos. Added to that are the results of negligence of the sector by occupation authorities over many years.

Palestinian curricula

West Bank schools used to employ Jordanian school curricula and Gaza schools featured Egyptian curricula. It was important to eradicate the duality and establish Palestinian curricula designed to create a united

There are serious efforts underway to improve education

Palestinian identity and distinguished culture, especially with the return of many Palestinian students of different ages, grades, and educational backgrounds. The issue was raised at a conference held in 1990 under the auspices of UNESCO, and The Palestinian Curriculum Development Center was established in 1995. The curriculum plan was realized in 1995 and work is underway on finishing details, composing textbooks, and training teachers.⁶ New curricula were taught in the first and sixth grades beginning in the scholastic year 2000-2001 and the second and seventh grades in 2001-2002. Implementation will continue to include additional grades every year until completion in 2004-2005.

According to the Palestinian curriculum plan, curricula will be harmonized in all Palestinian schools. The plan divides study years into two parts: primary, from first to tenth grades, and secondary, which comprises grades 11 and 12. The primary level is in turn divided into two stages, lower primary, grades one through four, and higher primary, from fifth to tenth grades. The three stages have been assigned the titles preparation, empowerment, and initiation, respectively, which seem to be quite expressive and suitable should their implications be truly achieved.

As for the primary stage, the National Education Committee introduced the subject of social sciences and created a subject called

national education for grades one through nine. These are positive developments that may help the education system improve its citizens' ability to push forward the wheels of social progress. Technology and applied sciences are taught from the fifth grade until the eleventh, which is an important step in facilitating a trend toward vocational and technical education, which will be discussed later. Also, one class period per week is reserved for free activity, which agrees with the evident tendency toward decentralized management in schools and allows students and teachers an opportunity to be creative. Arts and crafts are taught in the primary level, focusing attention on a field that has until recently suffered utter neglect. One elective subject is offered in the empowerment stage (grades five through ten,) which could be a third language (English is taught in all schools beginning in grade one), home economics, health sciences or environmental sciences. A variety of technical classes are offered in tenth grade from which the student must choose two. The classes are agronomy, industrial sciences, management, and tourism sciences.

The methods of the plan seem sound and its objectives positive, because it expands and modernizes study subjects and allows for a degree of flexibility, but at the core it relies on the traditional method of rote memorization more than on developing skills. This weakness starts in the first grade, considered the foundation.

The Palestinian Curriculum Development Center was established in 1995

curricula will be harmonized in all Palestinian schools

6 . See: The First Palestinian Curriculum Plan; General Administration of Educational Curricula, Ministry of Education, July 1999.

It is no longer possible to deal with children as objects

Box (4 - 1) First grade curriculum

The first grade curriculum contains 30 classes per week distributed as follows: Arabic Language (eight classes), Mathematics (five), Islamic Teachings, English Language and General Sciences (three each), Social Sciences and National Education, Arts and Crafts, and Physical Education (two each), Civil Education and free activity (one each). This curriculum was born from purely academic thinking that fails to understand the nature of a child when he/she joins school. It neglects the student's mental needs, abilities, and interests. It also fails to address the level of professional competence with which the curriculum should be implemented. Finally, it perpetuates the deeply rooted traditional approach that considers a child an empty pot to be filled with dictated information and tested on the ability to memorize information.

It is important, then, to delve deeper into the issue of education and raise questions that have yet to receive proper attention at the official level in Palestine. The first question concerns the educational philosophy at the lower stages of schooling, because everything that follows relies on it. Social changes have made children primary, dynamic participants in the education process, and it is no longer possible to deal with children as objects whose abilities are limited to reaction, without the capacity for action. This change poses a challenge to educators and parents and is the foundation on which to raise a generation able to handle changes.

The most important change concerns the lower stages of schooling and requires redefining

their mission from one of conveying information to one of personal development and social upbringing of children. It means that the learning and teaching process must change from a unilateral process in which the teacher is the only party with direct influence to a joint venture based on the interaction of teacher and pupil. While the change means delaying the delivery of some information to the child in the first years of study, he or she will be better equipped and more highly motivated to learn in later years, resulting in an information and skill base at the end of schooling superior to the one achieved at present. Consequently, the proposed change reorganizes priorities in a manner that would lead to a more effective investment over the years of growth.⁷

7 . This direction is presented with better detail in: Ramzi Rihan; Contemplation of Palestinian Education in the 21st Century; The Inaugural Five-year Education Development Plan for the Period 2000-2004, first edition, Ministry of Education, July 1999.

Box (4 - 2) The new curricula and discrimination against women

Analysis of textbooks for the first and sixth grades, prepared by the Palestinian Ministry of Education for the first time in the history of Palestine, revealed that they are still models of discrimination against women.

- Jobs held by women are extremely limited and considered secondary compared to those reserved for men. The sixth-grade Arabic language book mentions one job for women, besides that of being a mother, by mentioning educator Sameera Azzam, and only once. Men are allotted more than 40 jobs, including educator, inventor, discoverer, physician, athlete, governor, and farmer. The book mentions no fewer than 70 "great" men.
- Activities and hobbies connected with women were connected with a woman's place in the home. Women are said to make the food, clean, sew, knit, and supervise the study of the children, while men are portrayed as politicians, presidents, artists, and athletes. In Jordanian curricula, women are mentioned as part of the audience at athletic events, while the Palestinian curricula omitted even that part, detaching women from any sports activity or one connected with movement, even from a strictly scientific perspective. Science books contain no pictures, examples, or experiences connected with the matter.
- Women are shown with head cover and long gown, and nowhere do they appear wearing anything different.
- The percentage of mentioning male personalities is far greater than that of mentioning female personalities in all the books. Mathematics books were ranked the worst in this regard, followed by science and Arabic language. Compared with Jordanian textbooks, the percentage of mentioning male personalities is much higher in Palestinian books.
- The Arabic language was adapted in some textbooks, such as Arabic language, science, and civil education, to be used in a neutral manner that avoids discrimination, using personal forms (we draw, I read, we think) or passive forms. Other books, such as mathematics, technology, and arts continue to use masculine imperative forms, indicating that discrimination still exists.⁸

As for the secondary stage plan, one of its features is that it divides the stage into two tracks, academic, and vocational/technical. The academic stage contains basic requirements and

three science subjects (physics, chemistry, and biology), of which the student must choose two, and three literary subjects (economics and management, history, and geography), of which the student

8 . From an unpublished study by Tafida Jarbawi about curricula and gender, 2001.

Only one-quarter of students enroll in the scientific track at present

must select two. The academic track is completed with the secondary school final examinations, tawjihi, at the end of 12th grade. The plan cancels the division of the academic track into scientific and literary tracks, which is a positive development because

the division has become vertical instead of horizontal and because many considered the scientific track superior. It should be mentioned that only one-quarter of students enroll in the scientific track at present.

Box (4 - 3) Electives and the true freedom of choice

There are conditions that must be met to guarantee that students are able to choose elective courses in the 11th and 12th grades in a manner that would not make the philosophy backfire. Schools must be improved from the scientific and logistical perspectives to accommodate many class branches according to the choices the students make, and students must be properly counseled in 10th grade when they are making the choices. As an example, it is expected that only a few students would choose Physics, which means that an insufficient number of competent educators would be available at the higher education level to teach Engineering, Technology, and precise sciences. The result of advanced curricula would then be regression in the human resources necessary for economic development in Palestine. Also, the discrepancy in resources from one location to another may affect the availability of resources necessary to allow students the freedom of choice, especially in disadvantaged and neglected areas where qualified teachers are scarce, which would further increase hierarchy in society.

The questions discussed above have prompted reconsideration of the Palestinian curriculum plan. Work is now underway at the Ministry to issue an addendum that contains some changes to the original plan. One of the main changes expected is the return to the system of scientific and artistic tracks, which could be viewed as a step in the wrong direction. This, however, does not deny that the plan was ambitious. The problem lies not in the objectives of the plan, but in determining the timeframe required to implement it. It has become clear that the original plans, both qualitative and

quantitative, require far more time than was initially calculated, for three reasons: self-imposed difficulties intrinsic in any radical change process, limited human and financial resources, and the continually deteriorating conditions since the original plan was conceived.

At the same time, textbooks that were used in the "curriculum enrichment program" are improved based on the remarks of teachers who have used them. The first edition of any book is considered a first trial edition and the second a second trial edition. Hence,

textbooks will undergo two stages of editing in addition to the vast process of deliberation and review that they enjoy when first published.

Despite many justified criticisms that could be targeted at curricula and textbooks, they deserve appreciation. The reason is twofold: first, the curricula and books proved to be of good-not excellent-quality, although they were created in a short time and with limited resources and experience. Second, the curricula and books could be seen from a dynamic perspective in that they continually interact with changes instead of being rigid.

Vocational education and training

Vocational and technical education and training represents a qualitative step forward in Palestinian educational thinking.⁹ The Ministries of Education, Labor, and Higher Education, and other parties participated in planning for this track. Bureaucratic barriers were overcome to shed needed light on the issue, which enriched discussion and achieved a comprehensive vision. This track comes as the natural result of the size of the population and the educational and economic standing in Palestine. Population growth and the increasing demand for education make the steady tendency toward the academic track a cause for imbalance in Palestinian society. The centrality

of human resources and the scarcity of natural assets in Palestine position vocational and technical skills as an integral part of economic development.

Several characteristics distinguish the vocational and technical education and training plan. Students join the track after finishing 10th grade, and tutelage is offered in the form of complementary units, which allow for flexibility and quick change according to need, in addition to encouraging rehabilitation when needed. The curriculum offers training based on a connection to domestic industries, and students receive a diploma when finishing secondary school after two years or two and a half. The track offers closed programs that do not allow for continuing official studies and open ones that permit students to go on to vocational and technical colleges. A goal was set of raising attendance in the vocational track from the current rate of 3% to a rate of 7% by 2004-2005.

The Five-year Education Development Plan

The Ministry of Education constructed a five-year comprehensive development plan that stretches from 2000-2001 to 2004-2005.¹⁰ The plan targeted five main areas for development:

1. Raising enrollment to about 74% in the secondary stage by the year 2004, building new schools, and

Despite many justified criticisms that could be targeted at curricula and textbooks, they deserve appreciation

Vocational and technical education and training represents a qualitative step forward in Palestinian educational thinking

The Ministry of Education constructed a five-year comprehensive development plan

10 . Five-year Education Development Plan, 2000-2001 to 2004-2005, Ministry of Education, October 1999.

Lack of necessary resources is not the only obstruction to developing the education sector

- canceling the two-shift system.
2. Improving the quality of education by implementing the new curricula in full by 2004-2005, increasing the number of teachers, decreasing the number of students per classroom, and renewing school furniture and equipment.
 3. Developing formal and informal education. This includes enacting the education law, developing technical and administrative aspects of school management, encouraging preschool education, and expanding vocational and technical education.
 4. Developing managerial skills, which include planning, management, finance, and striving for a decentralized educational system.
 5. Developing human resources in the education system by improving programs to train teachers before and during service.

The quantitative requirements of the plan are enormous

The quantitative requirements of the plan are enormous, although the objectives are reasonable. In the governmental sector alone, without UNRWA and private schools, the objectives mean that the number of students from 1998-1999 to 2004-2005 would increase by 43%, and would require a 61% increase in the number of teachers and 67% more classrooms. Costs for implementing the plan were estimated at \$1.9 billion, including \$1.4 billion in operating expenses, mostly salaries, and the remaining \$0.5 billion for capital expenses,

mostly buildings. This requires that the Ministry of Education budget for the year 1999-2000 be twice what it was for the previous year and doubled again for the year 2004-2005, reaching \$480 million, close to 10% of the GNP.

The plan was proposed and discussed at an international conference on education held in Ramallah on 20-21 October 1999, when it was determined that the funding requirements of the plan were impossible to achieve. Therefore, the Ministry of Education began reviewing and reassessing the plan within the framework of comprehensive development. The reassessment included examining all possible alternatives and studying the cost-benefit analysis of each element in the immediate and long-term ranges, and an amended plan was published in September 2001. The amended plan clung to the principal bases and general guidelines of the original but decreased the desired percentage of enrollment in the secondary level in 2004 to 68%, ruled out the option of doing away with the two-shift system, and reduced some activities. The necessary budget dropped to \$1.5 billion, including \$1.2 billion in operating expenses. The amended plan was slated to be unveiled at a second international conference, but the political situation did not allow it, and the plan was temporarily suspended.

The distinguished professionalism that marked the planning process at the Ministry of Education, be it in

determining priorities, setting goals, or calculating quantities, deserves recognition and praise. However, the deterioration of economic conditions in Palestine, with the rise in unemployment, the spread of poverty, and the destruction of infrastructure and businesses, looms heavily over the possibility of realizing the amended plan. The conditions that have been nothing less than abysmal for over a year require enormous resources for rebuilding and will increase the competition between meeting immediate needs and achieving educational goals. The education sector, by virtue of its size, is the first candidate among sectors that will not receive development funding at the current stage.

The education sector has suffered directly from the lack of security in Palestinian daily life. One hundred fifty schoolchildren have been killed and 148 school buildings hit with Israeli rockets. It has become extremely difficult and dangerous for students and teachers to reach school on a daily basis due to the hundreds of military checkpoints on roads. In 1994, the Palestinians constructed a strategic plan to rebuild and develop the education sector as well as many other sectors, but the current crisis dealt that plan a severe blow, jolting it backwards in many respects. Consequently, preventing further deterioration and reconstruction of the sector have become critical priorities, which will necessarily delay further development.

Lack of necessary resources is not the only obstruction to developing the education sector in Palestine. The human factor is no less significant, as it is the focal point of any radical change. The education outlook prevalent in Palestine is characterized by traditional ways of thinking. The Ministry of Education is engaged in several endeavors, including preparing curricula, training teachers, and building schools, and has recently been very active in training teachers and other educators, to improve their professional skills. However, the Palestinian education system is still blemished by authoritarianism in a community controlled by hierarchical relationships, with team-based, interactive relationships still noticeably weak. The Palestinian educational system desperately needs a clear vision that can adapt to the current situation and meet the challenges of a new century.

Section Three

Higher Education and Development¹¹

The Palestinian higher education sector has grown at a very high rate during the past two decades, particularly in the past five years. Statistics compiled at the end of September 1997¹² indicate that 41% of people with baccalaureate degrees obtained them from Palestinian universities, 46% from

The deterioration of economic conditions looms heavily over the possibility of realizing the amended plan

Palestinian education system is still blemished by authoritarianism

The Palestinian higher education sector has grown at a very high rate during the past two decades

11. In 2002, the Ministry of Higher Education formally became an integral part of the Ministry of Education.

12. See final results of the census; Summary, PCBS, 30 November 1998.

other Arab universities, and 13% from international universities. Statistics also show that 18% of people age 25-44 have finished high school and that about 36% of those who finished high school are specialized in scientific fields (6% of the total age group in question). An indicator of the trend towards enrollment in literary and human-interest fields, just as in the case of high school, is that only one-quarter of students at Palestinian universities major in scientific fields. In recent years, overall enrollment levels in higher education in Palestine have noticeably increased.

Important achievements for the Palestinian higher education sector:

Establishing universities in the shadow of occupation speaks to the ability of the Palestinians to succeed under the most taxing of conditions. This raises their self-esteem, contributes to producing political, social and economic leaders, and attracts human and financial resources to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The biggest accomplishment was graduating students on a scale that exceeded expectations. According to the results of the general census in the West Bank and Gaza, conducted in December 1997, the numbers of people obtaining post-secondary degrees were as follows (Jerusalem excluded)¹³:

- Diploma degrees (two years college): 72,000, including 51,000 (71%) from Palestinian

institutions.

Bachelor Degrees: 66,000, including 27,000 (41%) from

- Palestinian institutions.

Graduate education degrees: 6,100, including 1,000 (14%)

- from Palestinian institutions.

Clearly, Palestinian institutions have supplied the Palestinian community with a substantial percentage of university graduates. It is not an exaggeration to say that without an educated citizenry, the Palestinian economy, with its public, private, and civic sectors, could not have faced the situation that arose after the inception of the PNA nor successfully managed the responsibilities and opportunities that emerged. There is no doubt that the percentage of people choosing to pursue higher education locally compared to those who choose to go abroad is increasing, which means Palestine is steadily stepping in the direction of developed or moderately developed countries, where most students enroll in local institutions. This positive change increases the status of Palestinian higher learning institutions and posits on them the responsibility of upholding international educational standards of vision, content, and quality.

As for females, the number of higher education degrees awarded, regardless of the place of study, equals 58% of those awarded to men, but the gender gap rate is decreasing among younger segments of the population (under

13 . Previous source

age 30) and will perhaps disappear entirely in time. Undoubtedly, the greater availability of local higher education opportunities encouraged more women to continue their studies. The distribution of graduates among the various fields of study reveals some imbalance, with less than one-third of higher education graduates specializing in scientific fields (natural sciences, mathematics, computer sciences, medical professions, engineering and agronomy). Palestinian higher education institutions have contributed to increasing the number of graduates in social sciences and other art fields due to the ease of establishing these programs compared with scientific programs. Perhaps the biggest gap in the Palestinian higher education sector is the overall lack of

technical education opportunities, which remain extremely limited.

Students are still choosing Palestinian universities in growing numbers. Annual increases in the numbers of matriculating students average 8,000, and the aggregate number of university students jumped from 28,000 in 1994-1995 to more than 75,000 in 2000-2001, expected to top 130,000 by 2009-2010 if growth holds steady. The general impression among many professionals in the higher education field is that rapid and sustained enrollment increases have negatively affected the sector. By comparison, the number of students at community colleges rose slightly in the same period, from 4,000 to 5,000.

The gender gap rate is decreasing among younger segments of the population

The biggest gap in the Palestinian higher education sector is the overall lack of technical education opportunities

Box (4 - 4) Multiple universities and poor coordination

There are ten universities operating in Palestine, and the low levels of coordination among them is attributed to four factors: the persistence of unnecessary and counterproductive competitive attitudes instilled during occupation, the undue emphasis on political considerations as opposed to organizational considerations at the PNA, limited management capabilities of the education ministry and its affiliated groups, and a lack of revenue streams for higher education institutions, which forced them to cover deficits using any means, without regard for consequences.

Higher education as an investment in human development

Higher education is considered a socioeconomic activity designed to meet the needs of the community as well as respond to the desires of individuals. Economic growth and cultural development are achieved through skills and abilities that individuals acquire. Higher education can be viewed as an investment with dividends manifested in increases to the gross national income by raising the productivity of educated people. However, the goals of higher education go beyond the economic dimension to include social advancement and scientific and cultural productivity in all its forms. Scientific advancement was preceded for centuries by political and economic globalization, and it is difficult to separate any scientific activity (in the broad definition of science) from what is happening across the world. Informational globalization has increased the degree of competition in this regard, and all these points deserve study.

Determining the needs of a community for high levels of professional competence is a very difficult task under the best of conditions, and is all the more difficult in the Palestinian situation, considering the volatility of its political and economic condition. The current students of Palestinian universities will work well into the middle of the current century, and no one can predict

what the conditions of the state of Palestine will be then. Therefore, rigid centralized planning for education is both impossible and inadvisable. The Palestinian educational system must cultivate the ability to calculate the effects of and adapt to an ongoing process of rapid and cumulative change.

Students choose a major field of study based on self-determined goals and external factors. Students have certain preferences and aspirations with regard to the quality of their lives and will necessarily pursue different paths to realize their dreams. Just as decision-makers cannot always accurately predict the needs of the population, individual students may not always be able to quantify their goals.

Reconciling the needs of the community to its abilities and helping individuals develop their own abilities to achieve their goals are core responsibilities of the state, but the higher education environment in Palestine is highly sensitive. Human resources are the main pillars of the Palestinian economy due to the lack of natural resources, and making those resources available qualitatively and quantitatively will be the strategic determinant of the Palestinian economy. Considering the weakness of the Palestinian economy at present, there is a pressing need to spend wisely on higher education. In the eight years of the PNA's tenure, expectations were that matters would be handled better than before due greater latitude in internal governance.

The goals of higher education go beyond the economic dimension

Rigid centralized planning for education is both impossible and inadvisable

Human resources are main pillars of the Palestinian economy due to lack of natural resources

This expectation was accompanied by the perception that Palestinian socio-economic policies would be clearly defined over a long time horizon, and were therefore granted great weight.

The difficult period that the Palestinian people have endured for almost two years could be considered a lesson for higher education. The sector emerged under occupation and was able to develop in spite of the difficulties imposed by the first Intifada. The difference is that the current situation, despite the presence of the PNA and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, poses a challenge more serious than before. The increases in the number of higher education institutions and students, increases in required human and financial resources, and heightened competition for those limited resources has vastly complicated the planning and development process, rendering traditional approaches obsolete. Development of the sector requires a double-pronged strategy: unified acceptance of the national strategy at the Ministry of Education in conjunction with other ministries and the various segments of society, and a decentralized and comprehensive execution of the strategy by all affiliated educational institutions. Management skills in the higher education sector must mature and develop to achieve positive coordination and to avoid suffocating rigidity on the one hand and lack of structure and discipline on the other.

The economics of the Palestinian higher education sector

When discussing the economics of higher education, focus was placed on the financial crisis suffered by Palestinian universities, especially tuition and the official support allocated by the government budget. This attention, however, remains superficial, failing to delve into the foundations of the economics of higher education. The quantitative and technical details of the economics of education are beyond the scope of the PHDR, but several summary points must be made.

The primary indicator of the health of an educational system is the amount of total spending, public and private, on the education sector as a percentage of GNP and which is low in Palestine compared to other countries. Justification exists for increasing spending on education on the condition that the education system will be judged by its future dividends. The second indicator is government spending on education as a percentage of the national budget; here, too, disparities exist, with the Palestinian figures low compared to those of other countries. Another indicator is the ratio of public to private spending on education within the context of an analogous economic policy. An analogous system is one in which tax increases translate into higher spending on education and lower tuition costs, and where decreased tax revenues translate into lower levels of support for education and higher tuitions (free market economy).

Management skills in the higher education sector must be promoted

However, the call for increasing spending on education, particularly higher education, must be accompanied by fulfillment of the necessary conditions. Continuing increases in the demand for quality higher education at the current rate would certainly require more financial resources than the national economy can provide through its public and private sectors. In this situation, quality of education will eventually drop below minimum requirements, rendering spending on higher education useless.

There are also questions about the ability of the Palestinian higher education sector to survive

There are also questions about the ability of the Palestinian higher education sector to survive. For a quarter of a century, this vital sector relied on external aid, beginning with Arab assistance and then European. The financial crisis appeared immediately after aid ceased. Sustainability of the Palestinian higher education sector requires the fulfillment of two conditions: spending must be within levels that the national economy can afford, and economic growth resulting from increasing levels of competencies through higher education must be at a level that can sustain future spending. Although external aid could be relied upon to cover developmental needs for a time, the previous two conditions must be met at least to cover operating expenses, which necessitates a strategic direction, political will, and competent management for execution.

There is a perception that the number of Palestinian universities is large compared with the population

Organizing the Palestinian higher education sector

The model of a higher education ministry was chosen to organize higher education in Palestine without considering other organizational options to determine the model most suitable for the local condition. Several models rely on councils, governmental or non-governmental bodies, or independent entities rather than ministries. The justification for forming the ministry was the failure of the Palestinian Higher Education Council, established in 1977, to coordinate among universities and guide the development of higher education. However, the performance of the ministry so far suggests that the causes of failure or success do not depend only on the organizational model, but on other factors as well, such as the lack of political will.

Higher education in Palestine embraced the model of multiple independent institutions when it was established. There is a perception that the number of Palestinian universities is large compared with the population, while vocational and technical colleges are scarce. The success of the Ministry in encouraging the growth of vocational colleges and halting the establishment of new universities is considered an indication of the success of the chosen organizational model.

Attracting students to vocational education requires awareness and a different set of incentives. It is possible, for example, to transfer a large portion of aid allotted to higher education to the students rather than institutions by establishing a national scholarship fund that offers financial assistance to deserving students who choose to major in fields of study encouraged by the higher education sector. Also, tuition may be raised in fields of study with surplus numbers of students and lowered for majors in which student numbers are scant. It should be noted that the system employed in the Palestinian higher education sector has been the opposite of the recommendations above from the start, with tuition determined as a percentage of the estimated cost of the program. Therefore, tuition in scientific fields, which are in need of student encouragement, is much higher than tuition in literary fields, where students are abundant. As mentioned earlier, central planning of community needs must not be overemphasized, but it is possible to guide and direct the process of higher education without jeopardizing the people's right to choose the type of education they desire.

The Ministry of Higher Education, in addition to being the supervisor of higher education, may assume other constructive roles, such as the role of mediator nurturing the spirit of cooperation among universities. Also, the entire higher education sector, represented by the Ministry and the universities,

may face social and political pressures to achieve equilibrium among the size of the sector, the size of spending it receives, and the quality of its production. It should be noted that the Ministry of Higher Education became the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 2001.

Higher education: between law and reality

Enactment of the higher education law in December 1998 did not clarify the confusion within the education sector. The law defined the objectives of higher education and the authorities and responsibilities of the Ministry. It also guaranteed academic freedom and the independence of institutions and maintained the sanctity of the university campus. It categorized institutions as governmental, operated by the ministry; public-non-profit institutions operating with PNA financial support, -and private, institutions operated by companies.

There was a compelling need to enact a law to organize the function of the higher education sector, but several remarks could be made about the law that was enacted. The law adopted the model of a higher education ministry without considering the alternatives, and granted the ministry some authorities in supervising institutions that at times cross over into interference. There is also a question about including private Palestinian universities in the sector, which already suffers from an inordinately large number of

Attracting students to vocational education requires awareness and a different set of incentives

The financial crisis at the higher education level appears insignificant in light of the potential crisis that may occur

institutions. In addition, the law did not determine special objectives that warrant the establishment of governmental institutions and did not address the historical situation of higher education in Palestine, nor did it analyze the chief factors affecting it. In the end, the law functioned as another bureaucratic framework layered on top of others. Implementation of the law has been impeded because not all the necessary regulations and instructions for it have been issued.

The quality of higher education

The quality of Palestinian higher education receives enormous attention, especially due to the widespread perception that its quality has declined in recent years. Higher education relies on primary school education, which suffers lack of resources necessary to keep abreast of the rapid quantitative growth. It must be kept in mind that controlling enrollment rates in primary schools is impossible, whereas it is possible at the university level. The financial crisis at the higher education level appears insignificant in light of the potential crisis that may occur if population growth continues at the current rate, which exceeds growth rates in the national income.

Despite improvements in curricula and venues, the school system has not changed much. The authoritarian system continues to

thrive, relying on dictation and rote memorization without attention to the importance of nurturing character, integrity and the development of interpersonal skills. Implementing radical reforms in educational methods will take several years. Therefore, the impact of primary school education on higher education will remain unchanged for the immediate future.

Higher education must bear additional responsibilities toward students, especially in the first stages of their tenure. Among the responsibilities is to counsel students socially and academically, broaden their horizons, encouraging them to excel and be creative, and raise their linguistic skills, especially in the Arabic language. What happened in Palestinian universities was the exact opposite; there is more attention on core subjects in the major field of study than on basic skills, general education, and development of personality. As a result, higher education also embraced the dictation and rote memorization methods, and was forced to do so due to the limited abilities of the students. Therefore, most graduates could be described as educated, but not aware. This description applies at the baccalaureate level in addition to the higher education level, and although the situation is similar in many other countries, this is no excuse for failing to correct the Palestinian situation.

Most graduates could be described as educated, but not aware

In May 1997, the Ministry of Higher Education issued the "Rationalization Plan for Higher Education 1997-2001"¹⁴. The plan comprised many provisions, some of which have been implemented. It was followed by the "Proposed Direction for Palestinian Higher Education," issued in October 1997¹⁵. Work on a "Palestinian Strategy for Higher Education" was underway but was delayed because of the situation. Until now, the basic structural problems of the sector have not been remedied.

Education professionals agree that raising the quality level of the product of higher education without considering the poor quality of ingredients is an impossible task. At the same time, there seems to be a pervasive reluctance to address the problem openly and to treat it radically, which may be attributed to the social pressures to expand university education in the absence of necessary funding. It could also be attributed to competition among universities to introduce new programs, which is one of the factors that led to erosion of the priorities of higher education.

Section Four: Conclusion

The current stage may represent a rare opportunity to raise the quality of education in Palestine despite the magnitude of problems

inherited from forced regression under occupation. Handing Palestinians responsibility for education, the attention given to the issue by official and civic groups, external aid, the limited size of the Palestinian education sector and the availability of education development experts form a strong foundation for progress.

Progress requires following two different paths simultaneously; the first is immediate action despite the situation, which includes most of the accomplishments made to date. The second path requires implementation of cumulative radical change in the entire education sector. This path begins in the first grade and continues gradually year after year. It cannot be expected to pay dividends before 15-20 years at the primary school level and 20-25 years at the university level. Continuing immediate improvement is important, but pursuit of short-term solutions in the absence of a comprehensive vision for the future is not helpful, leading in the long-run to further regression in the education process.

Implementing the two-path system is based on two requirements: first, the bases of radical change must be determined in accordance with the current situation and modern educational methods, while considering that the bases themselves are constantly changing. Second, calculated balance must be maintained at

14. Rationalization Plan for the Higher Education Sector (1997-2001) Ministry of Higher Education, May 1997.

15. Proposed Direction for Palestinian Higher Education: A Vision for the Future; Ministry of Higher Education, October 1997.

Genuine reform at the core means changing perceptions and attitudes

every stage between the requirements of development and the requisites of reform within the limits of available resources, human or financial. The following is a brief analysis of some of the basic areas of needed reform, which should later be examined in detail by experts and working groups to assure the integrity of the recommendations as well as the plans needed to implement them.

The primary shortcoming of the current educational system is that its objectives remain mostly academic

Genuine reform necessitates changing perceptions and attitudes, which in turn will require the reeducation of professionals at every level of the system. This long-term reeducation effort will require more financial resources than those needed by the program of short-term improvements currently in place. However, the difference in levels of financial resources required for the two paths is minimal and should not represent the decisive factor. The need to expand and improve school buildings and equip them, supply textbooks and teaching aids, and train teachers all exist whether the path of radical reform has been chosen or not.

Education is to develop the capabilities of student

Spending on radical reform is a more useful investment than spending on immediate improvement. It eventually leads to a more productive population from the economic standpoint, in addition to making them more advanced on humanitarian, social and cultural levels. The issue of securing adequate funding must also take into consideration difficulties in implementation. The

process of changing attitudes and perceptions is not a simple task and requires a long-time horizon in order to be fully achieved. The primary shortcoming of the current educational system is that objectives remain mostly academic. In the past, students were praised for simply “memorizing the lesson,” while all other potential benefits of education are theoretically and practically ignored. Developing a clear vision derived from a modern educational philosophy is essential, especially at the current stage, in which foundations are laid for a new future free from the burdens of the past.

The Palestinian education strategy should be based on the following basic concepts. First, a student is a human being with free will and is at the center of the education process. Second, education is interaction between the students and their surroundings. The teacher is a very important factor in this equation, but not the only one. Third, the goal of education is to develop the capabilities of student, and while academic knowledge is one of those abilities, there are others no less important. Among those abilities are use of knowledge, integrity and decency, psychological and emotional development, interactive skills, and dedication to a robust work ethic.

Efforts to modify the course of our current educational path should be based on harnessing the strengths of the Palestinians and steering them towards the desired objective.

Those strengths will enable us to realize our objectives, if the political will is present.

The small size of our land and population makes the educational development requirements in Palestine modest compared to international standards. Development can be achieved by formulating a realistic strategy that concentrates on quality instead of quantity and focuses on content, not form. The Palestinians, inside and abroad, possess a bounty of human and financial resources that have not yet been properly utilized for the benefit of the national welfare. Palestinians can potentially derive much more benefit from the enormous levels of international attention and external aid they are given.

Although there are hidden agendas behind the aid, Palestine could avoid the extremes of submission and rejection and could handle the situation more wisely. Success in this struggle depends on clarity of objective, reasonability of plans, seriousness in execution, and honest assessment of progress. Undoubtedly, the Palestinians are ready at this stage to accept genuine changes to their conditions, and are in fact eager to participate in new beginnings after a generation of occupation. This resilience of spirit is an important element for development that should not be disregarded. A philosophy that clings to the status quo is no longer acceptable. We must reach for and embrace a policy of “new beginnings.”

