

ENHANCING SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH CULTURE AND ARTS Occupied Palestinian territory



Murals out of recycled material and beautifying the city © Qattan

The geopolitical reality and the weak legitimacy and capacities of the Palestinian Authority have led to an increased fragility of the Palestinian cultural identity. It has also negatively impacted social cohesion between and among the Palestinian population.

4.8 million Palestinians live in three disconnected areas (West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip) as a consequence of Israeli Occupation for more than 50 years. This has been aggravated by the intra-Palestinian divide during the last decade. Furthermore, it has prevented the growth of democratic space, sustainable economic development and the effective delivery of public service. Palestinian culture has been equally challenged by an increased influence of traditional and conservative elements and groups within a fragmented society.

Switzerland is committed to a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians based on a negotiated two-state solution. The Swiss Cooperation Strategy for the oPt aims at contributing to the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and democratic Palestinian state. Under its engagement in strengthening local governance and effective service delivery, Switzerland has partnered with the Abdel Mohsen Qattan Foundation (AMQF), a well-known cultural Palestinian institution promoting non conflictual interactions, pluralism, transparency, accountability, non-discrimination and participation.

The goal of this collaboration is to enhance social engagement and participation and to promote the

role of people as agents of change using culture and artistic creativity (puppets show, radio drama, and murals out of recycled material, short films, exhibitions, theatre plays, writing, music and songs) to enhance democratic debates, promote social inclusion and active participation of youth and women within the community and between the community and the local authorities. Art projects are created by people, with people and about people. Concretely, local teams – which are made up of artists, teachers and community members – define priority issues and decide on actions able to generate adequate response by local authorities. Projects are also created by artists through an open competitive call to produce artworks that are inspired from communities' needs.

Involving citizens – and in particular youth and women – to participate in public discussions in a constructive manner, supports the overall objective of strengthening social accountability in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Up to now (end 2018), this intervention has been implemented in 15 locations situated in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.



"Yes Theatre" working with community members and municipality in Hebron ©Qattan

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- › People participating in the project perceive it as a platform and an opportunity through which they can express their aspirations and meet their responsibilities as active players in their communities. The involvement of women in the project is high as they may voice their needs as women.
- › The project has also opened new channels of communication with local decision makers: it has empowered citizens to influence local authorities and hold them accountable for their responsibilities and duties.
- › Artists see societal value in their artwork that is inspired from people's needs and with which people can easily relate to, and interact with.
- › Concrete examples of involvement of project members include: active participation in the formulation of Strategic Development and Investment Plan in Municipalities, membership in local planning committees, such as the Social Committee or the Committee on Good Governance.
- › Examples of project outputs include: creation of a safe place for children to play after school, organization of a functioning municipal garbage collection system following community-led cleaning activities.
- › Boys and girls, men and women participate jointly in activities, rather than separately, increasing therefore the cohesion of the community.
- › In Qalqiliya Municipality (North West of the West Bank), more than 1'000 citizens participated in the artwork about women's names, bringing to the forefront the presence of women in the public sphere. The local team organised an art exhibition including 4 artworks of mixed media depicting the issues identified by the community such as second hand markets, and the marginalization of women.
- › In the Gaza Strip, a group of women filmmakers produced three films to highlight priority community problems such as flooding caused by rain and

Testimony:

"On a personal level, this project brought me a lot of knowledge. I have had the chance to know my own people in my own city differently, to understand how they think and what their concerns and dreams are. I felt closer to people and their issues, and the trust they gave me made me feel more responsible than ever towards my community and myself..." (a team member, Nadira Moghrabi)

A photo exhibition about illegal cars in Ni'lin. © Qattan



sewage water; poor housing conditions of people internally displaced since Summer 2014; and health hazard due to landfill in the central of Gaza City affecting inhabitants.

- › In the town of Deir Al Ghusoun in the Northern part of the West Bank, community members advocated against the demolition of old houses, while wishing to transform them into cultural spaces. As a consequence, the Municipality canceled its decision to demolish the historic olive oil press house. In parallel, families in the community offered four old houses to serve as community and cultural spaces. In addition to that, school pupils cleaned the municipal park, which had previously been abandoned and unused: as a response to civic engagement, the Municipality supported the re-activation of the park which now serves several thousand people.

PROJECT IN BRIEF

PARTNERS

Abdel Mohsen Qattan Foundation (AMQF)

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

To enhance the social engagement and participation of the citizens through arts and culture.

TARGET GROUPS

Marginalised communities and groups, in particular young men and women (school students and young artists), communities living in difficult living environments (such as the Jordan Valley, marginalised areas in the Gaza Strip); Teachers, parents and communities at large (approx. 7'200 persons, from each 35% women); Cultural institutions active at grassroots level; Local authorities (Municipalities, Village Councils) in selected areas of intervention; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Local Government.

PHASE OF DURATION (1st phase)

January 2016 to December 2018

PHASE BUDGET

SDC contribution CHF 769'000.-. Total budget CHF 1'029'000.- from which AMQF's share is CHF 260'000.- and "in-kind" as the contribution for the preparatory phase and the availability of AMQF premises in the oPt throughout implementation.

Imprint

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation;
Cooperation Office Gaza & West Bank

Link to SDC's strategy in the oPt:

<http://www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/gazaandwestbank/>