



We are Nablus

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Economic and Cultural Empowerment of Palestinian Women in the governorate of Nablus

Idea

The idea for this project came up as an outcome of several visits to Palestine that were undertaken by Dar al Janub activists between 2006 and 2011. One of the most obvious impressions of these trips was the omnipresence of Western "aid"- and „development“ organizations on the one side, whereas – on the other side, especially in the West Bank, the impression of a drastic and poor social and economic situation of the Palestinian people increased. When taking a closer look, however, the structure, objectives and policy of a Western supported “development Industry” became more and more visible.

At the same time, we were confronted with the hard struggle for survival of local Palestinian welfare and social institutions that are not funded by Western donors because they are labeled as “Islamic” or “Islamistic”. Western donors seem to dislike their objectives for an independent Palestinian economy and their grass-root social work initiatives just as the Israeli occupying power does. Their struggle for autonomy, self-management and re-appropriation is an alternative to a policy of dependence that was implemented during the Oslo-period. Evidently, from a Western perspective, it are these NGO’s that are not eligible for support.

This alarming development was the basis of the discussions between SCCS and Dar al Janub who have born the idea of the development-project “We are Nablus”. In the rebuilt old town of Nablus the members of both initiatives formulated the guiding principles of this project, taking into account that each Palestinian initiative is limited by the occupation and that "empowerment" without "power" may not be sustainable. In order to achieve sustainability, any initiative that normalizes the occupation, will not be fostered. This goal

can only be implemented by strengthening local and autonomous structures of the Palestinian people.

For SCCS and Dar al Janub such an approach involves a standard of cooperation that is based on an equal eye-level which means that there is not a side in this partnership that brings the development to the other and the other side receives help. Anyone who walks through Nablus can find millenary benefits of human development at every corner, so it would be far more than presumptuous to call this project development cooperation. Nablus is a vivid and functioning city. Although it's in the permanent state of emergency, high unemployment and little chance of re-establishing the old small-scale industries; It is a perfect example of organizing a way of living under these harsh circumstances and therefore a grand opportunity to learn about self-organization, especially for projects settled in the Western part of the world. "Development" is not a question of "development by Western donors"- It is a question of recognizing and resisting the obstacles formed by the occupation and the Western world that inhibit self-development.

Project Background

Palestinian women make up approximately half of the Palestinian society. Evaluations of the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 revealed that Palestinian women were involved widely in political action and public affairs. The ratio of women who participated in the elections was 47% versus 53% for men, 44% out of these women voted in favor of the opposition. They came from the young, poor and marginalized parts of the society. The votes of these women have to be regarded as a clear statement for a change, they describe the willingness to find alternative ways to face the ongoing state of war and occupation. The creation of sustainable development presupposes that women, especially those from marginalized parts of the society, participate in the development of means to resist the occupation and to defend the rights of the Palestinian people.

The need for the establishment of an effective Palestinian national economy is very urgent. Today, 75% of the Palestinian economy depends on Israel. This fact has been compounded by Israel's control over most of the land through confiscation, the apartheid wall, and the closure of areas' policy, making the possibility to enhance the concept of Palestinian trade and labor very low. The structural distortions in the Palestinian economy has increased due to the policies of donors and funding countries. Such policies made the economy dependent on others. It was this funding that did not support the establishment of a sustainable national economy which includes all sectors of Palestinian people. After the

siege of Gaza, also in the West Bank, independent NGO's and grassroots movements who represent large parts of the young, poor and marginalized segments of the society, were boycotted.

Through Oslo and the political boycott after the elections in 2006 class contradictions reached its peak. Women who support the opposition, and refuse the policy of the Oslo Accords, suffer the most since the rate of women's participation in the production process does not exceed 15%, compared to 67% for men. In addition, the unemployment rate in occupied Palestine is around 30%, and more than 50% of women workforces are out of work, most of them are University graduates.

I. Problem statement

1. It is noticeable that, especially among younger parts of Palestinian society, unemployment increased drastically during the last year. Women are most affected by these social developments.
2. Through Oslo a donor policy was implemented that increased and intensified internal contradictions by supporting and creating social elites throughout Palestinian society. Against this background, Oslo failed to bring about sustainable development.
3. The aid and Western funding also shaped Palestinian civil society in a way that privileged supposedly Western values such as individualism and personal autonomy over collectivism and self-sacrifice for collective activism. This policy, in addition to the closing of many traditional NGO's, has led to the deprivation of large segments of the Palestinian people from the assistance of social services. Clearly, this effects NGO's that provide social services for marginalized parts of the society, in particular women and the poor. Thus, what seems to be at first glance a conflict between Western and non-Western, religious and nonreligious values, proves to be from a distance a conflict of classes along the question of occupation and self-governance. Besides, Western funding and assistance is always temporary.
4. Therefore, building a national economy and sustainable development is the real answer to root the citizens in their land, and to resist the policies of occupation that are based on the confiscation of land and the creation of new settlements. This also requires the re-activation of social structures in resisting the occupation. Through Oslo a process of so called NGOisation destroyed longstanding collective social structures that enabled large parts of the society – and women at the very forefront - political participation.

5. All the indications show that a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears as far off as ever. Israel and its allies are trying to impose a state with temporary borders and to drive forward the progressive fragmentation of the West Bank. To face this development requires two things:
 - a) The creation of a self-dependent national economy that depends on the local capabilities to enhance resilience.
 - b) Starting dialogue and interaction with Western public opinion leaders to explain the reality of what is happening on the ground against the Palestinian people with the support and aid of Western governments.
6. The stereotypical perception and representation of (marginalized) Palestinian women as being oppressed and passive, made it impossible to create the conditions for a dialogue on an equal eye-level. It is such a one-sided perception of “the other woman” that is fostering mutual resentment. Young, poor and marginalized Palestinian women had not been introduced adequately and appropriately to the Western public opinion.

II. Background : beneficiary region (Nablus)

Since Oslo, the social and economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza worsened dramatically. The establishment of the so called “Palestinian autonomy” implied that the Israeli occupation passed on its responsibility to satisfy the basic needs of the Palestinians to the international community. This economic degradation went hand in hand with an increase of Israeli settlements and the expropriation of Palestinian land. In this situation, the international community tried to foster the Palestinian infrastructure by building huge projects such as the international airport in Gaza or water processing facilities. However, most of these facilities and infrastructures have been destroyed by acts of war and aggression.

Since 2009 the economic situation in Gaza is worsening dramatically. However, also in the West Bank small industries and agricultures, that were intact in former times, do not exist anymore. There is only a small number of enterprises left that future the incomes of just a handful of people. We should not be surprised, therefore, that many Palestinians perceive themselves as people that have been degraded to supplicants of international donors. Unemployment, the lack of political perspectives and the ongoing military pressure had enormous destructive effects on the Palestinian society. Indeed, humanitarian help of

international donors is necessary, but nevertheless, this help is neither sustainable nor can it contribute to a long-term solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Western donors invested large amounts of money in training and equipment of police forces in the West Bank. It is such a donor-policy that gives the impression of a very selective support with the aim of keeping an occupied society under control. Yet, at the same time, this selective support broadens the economic gap in the West Bank. Whereas privileged regions (e.g. Ramallah) and elite groups profit from the money of the Western donors, the majority of the people (most of them in C-Areas) is excluded from any economic welfare.

During the last years, numerous Palestinian NGOs who were depending on International donors were closed. These NGO's could not maintain their work because the Palestinian authority or international institutions stopped the stream of money upon untruthful grounds, arguing that these NGOs support terrorism. Against this background, the traditional religion-based „Zakat-committees“ are of great social relevance. Without these committees, or without self organized neighbourly help, the situation would be even worse. These committees organize medical treatment, books for schools, building material for destroyed houses and so on.

Additionally, Zakat-committees provide the necessary means to implement sustainable activities for education, social work and economic development. The beneficiaries of these services, instead of “receiving help”, become an active part of civil society. Zakat-committees thereby create the possibility for others to help themselves. For example: Women working in cooperatives can make their families more independent from Western donors and can build a sustainable economic perspective. Young people who can get a proper education in safe places can develop perspectives without war and occupation and will be able to pass on the concept of “education against oppression” to others.

In the international political fields the creation of a Palestinian state has receded into the distance. From the perspective of Palestinian civil society, however, it is very important to plan a life under occupation and to develop alternatives to the ongoing state of war and occupation. In spite of numerous initiatives (Roadmap, Geneva initiative...) no solution is in sight. However, a just solution for Israelis and Palestinians, still is one of the key issue for peace in the whole Middle-East region. The European Union is a very important player in this key issue. On the one side, it is accepted as being independent and objective, on the other side, the EU is not active or willing enough to play an effective role in supporting the Palestinian rights.

III. General Objectives

- Establishing Leading Capacities for Palestinian women: Education should enable women to strengthen their role within Palestinian society in order to defend the rights of the Palestinian society against occupation, empowering them to articulate their agendas towards Western donors and to foster the dialogue with European civil society.
- Supporting a sustainable economic perspective, jobs and incomes for women in the occupied territories.
- Empowering local Communities to become more independent from Western donors and the Israeli economy.
- Raising awareness and increasing the sensibility for the specific questions of development policy in Palestine
- Changing the prevailing public opinion within European society, that Palestinian women are oppressed by, and dependent on Palestinian men.
- Enhancing the dialogue between Austrian and Palestinian civil society

IV. Specific objectives

1. Providing financial support for sustainable projects such as folk embroidery, natural soap industry, and glass-painting. All these projects will be supervised and carried out by Palestinian women and will rely on the potential of local products, which will finally be exported to Western, as well as local and regional markets.
2. Eliminating the stereotypes and prejudices who claim that women's adherence to their Palestinian, Muslim culture and civilization poses a threat to the West by showing the diverse aspects and faces of Palestinian civil society.
3. Exchange visits and meetings between Palestinian Muslim women leaders and Western leaders to create dialogue, interaction and cooperation by exchanging views on political-, economic-, social and cultural aspects of Palestinian society.
4. Providing the possibility for Palestinian women leaders to visit the West in order to explain the Situation in Nablus from their perspective and to deliver insights into the actual political-, economic- and human-rights situation in Palestine.
5. Finally, those exchange visits can serve as a communication platform between Western and Palestinian NGOs.

6. Empowerment-Trainings for marginalized Palestinian women in the governorate of Nablus have to be established in order to further improve their economic, political and legal possibilities and raising their participation in public life.
7. Holding exhibitions of national products locally, regionally and internationally.
8. Creating a showroom for displaying and selling products of Nablus project. Based on long term considerations, the project will finance its expenses with those revenues.
9. Establishing markets for Palestinian products in Europe
10. Presenting the political, social and humanitarian situation of Palestinian society to European public.

V. Envisaged activities to be carried out

1. Establishing national economic projects, such as natural soaps, all types of folk embroidery and glass-painting and thereby fostering local capabilities and the capabilities of marginalized women in the governorate of Nablus.
2. Conducting feasibility studies of the intended productive economic projects such as embroidery and natural Nablus soap and finally exporting them.
3. Preparing materials and training manuals for intended projects.
4. Holding workshops and training courses for women who will engage in these projects.
5. Preparing training materials for civic education, human rights and international humanitarian law.
6. Conducting training sessions, lectures, workshops and numerous meetings for a group of Palestinian women to train them on the issues mentioned above. Participants should become aware of their right to resist the occupation.
7. Organizing meetings between the participating leaders of Palestinian women from marginalized parts of the society and the representatives of the Western public opinion.
8. Renting showrooms to exhibit and sell the products of the project and afterwards expanding the project by using the profits. As already mentioned, the project should become more and more independent until, finally, it's able to finance itself.
9. Training of 200 women in matters related to civic education, administration, economy, human rights, and law. The participation rate is 66 ladies annually. Three courses will be conducted in a period of four months each.

VI. Beneficiaries

Direct beneficiaries

10. A group of marginalized and unemployed women with qualifications and scientific capacity to engage in and supervise the economic projects referred to. The numbers of such group would be 15-30 women.

- A group of 200 girls, aged between 18 to 40 years will be selected on the basis of being marginalized politically and economically.
- A group of 15 to 30 Austrian students and academics engaged in the project and dialogue program.

Indirect beneficiaries

- Marginalized and unemployed women who benefit from the economic outcome of the project. (300)
- Women who benefit from the conferences and public events (500)
- Family and community members of Nablus, who benefit from the economic outcome and improved capacities of the women included in the project (700)
- Austrian students and academics who benefit from the public events in Austria (700)

VII. Implementing NGOs

● Social Charitable Center Society (Nablus)

The Social Charitable Center Society (SCCS) was established in 1978 in the city of Nablus, the second largest city of the West Bank. It is a non-governmental and non-profitable organization. It was founded by a group of people in order to provide support, humanitarian and social services to the poor and needy. The SCCS focuses also on providing support to the injured, marginalized women and children in this city. The SCCS was established in the old city of Nablus, where the poorest people live.

The SCCS provides health, social, educational, cultural, and rehabilitation services to women and children who suffer from certain health problems. In addition, SCCS also runs a kindergarten for children under the age of six and offers professional childcare for very small, symbolic fees. The SCCS strives to expand its scope of community work for marginalized groups, especially women, through the implementation of cultural, social and economic projects.

The SCCS is registered and cooperates with the local authorities. It has an accurate and transparent accounting system, overseen by an external auditor who submits periodical reports. The SCCS Board of Trustees sets policies for the Association and oversees its implementation. The Director General is responsible for presenting periodic reviews on work progress to the Board of Trustees.

Contact:

Social Charitable Center Societys

Nablus, West Bank, Palestine

Tel./ Fax: +970 9 2384131

Website: www.sccs.ps

Email: Sccs.nps@gmail.com

- **Dar al Janub – Union for Antiracism and Peace Policy (Vienna)**

The Austrian NGO "Dar al Janub (House of the South) - Union for Antiracism and Peace Policy" was founded in November 2003 by Austrian, Turkish and Arab students. Its main goal is to raise awareness for the developments in the so called global South. Dar al Janub's activities are mainly focusing on issues concerning the Arab World, paying special attention to the humanitarian and political reality in Palestine. Therefore, the goal is to improve the relation between Europe and the Arab world, by analysing and criticizing the colonial attitude of Europe.

Regarding the European history of colonialism and the current relation between Europe and the Arab world, the association mainly focuses on overcoming this cleavage and to create an atmosphere of real dialogue on equal eye-level. Therefore it is necessary to show the authentic viewpoint of the Palestinians in Europe. The unconsciousness of the backgrounds and reasons of the conflict in Palestine, the extent of the public desensitisation because of the warped and fragmentary reporting and the medial underrepresented fate of the Palestinian People, especially the Palestinian refugees induce a contradictory situation: Our main field of work is to fill this gap within the European society. The developments in Palestine are strongly influencing our work. With its work Dar al Janub makes a contribution to ensure and push forward the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, especially the right to an independent state and the right of return for the Palestinian refugees.

Contact:

Dar al Janub – UNION FOR ANTIRACISM AND PEACE POLICY

Kleistgasse 8/3

1030 Vienna

Austria

Tel.: +43 (0) 676 78 93 413

Website: www.dar-al-janub.net

Email: union@dar-al-janub.net

VIII. Budget

USD 100.000

IX. Period of Time

24 month (01/01/2013 – 31/12/2014)

X. Funding organization



The OPEC Fund for International Development
Uniting against Poverty

Dates, Facts and History of Nablus

- More than 145,000 inhabitants (with the refugee camps and villages 300,000 inhabitants)
- Second largest city of Palestine
- Founded 72 CE
- Surrounded by more than 10 illegal Israeli settlements
- Location: 42 kilometers east of Jaffa, 110 kilometers west of Amman, 63 kilometers north of al-Quds.
- The University of Nablus (an-Najah) has more than 20,000 Students and was founded in 1977
- History:
 - For 500 Years Nablus is a central trading post in the region, till the occupation
 - Nablus had developed trade relations with Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, Baghdad, Mosul and the Mediterranean Region

- In 1882, 32 soap factories were founded
- Nablus was the greatest producer of cotton in the region 225.000 k in the 1837
- The famous sweet *Kunafeh* has its origin in Nablus
- History under Occupation
 - In 2002 the Israeli army killed 80 people in the “Operation Defense Shield” in Nablus
 - From June till September 2002 the Israeli army entered Nablus and held a 24 hours curfew in the so called “Operation Determined Path”
 - Several mosques and the Greek Orthodox Church were damaged in these attacks
 - In the old market F-16 bombings destroyed 3 soap factories and established an overall loss of USD 80,000,000