

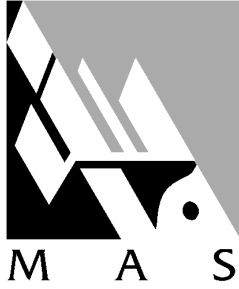


Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)

The Role of Youth Organizations in Enhancing Social Capital in the Palestinian Territories

**Majdi Al-Malki
Hassan Ladadweh**

2011



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The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)

Founded in Jerusalem in 1994 as an independent, non-profit institution to contribute to the policy-making process by conducting economic and social policy research. MAS is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of prominent academics, businessmen and distinguished personalities from Palestine and the Arab Countries.

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MAS is dedicated to producing sound and innovative policy research, relevant to economic and social development in Palestine, with the aim of assisting policy-makers and fostering public participation in the formulation of economic and social policies.

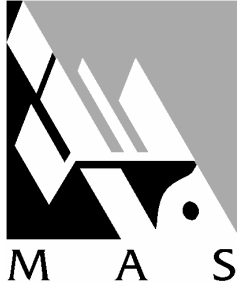
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- ◆ Promoting knowledge-based policy formulation by conducting economic and social policy research in accordance with the expressed priorities and needs of decision-makers.
- ◆ Evaluating economic and social policies and their impact at different levels for correction and review of existing policies.
- ◆ Providing a forum for free, open and democratic public debate among all stakeholders on the socio-economic policy-making process.
- ◆ Disseminating up-to-date socio-economic information and research results.
- ◆ Providing technical support and expert advice to PNA bodies, the private sector, and NGOs to enhance their engagement and participation in policy formulation.
- ◆ Strengthening economic and social policy research capabilities and resources in Palestine.

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Foreword

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute is pleased to introduce this study about the role of youth organizations in enhancing social capital in the Palestinian Territories. This is the seventh study in the research program titled “Deployment of Social Capital for the benefit of development in the Occupied Palestinian Territories” which MAS undertakes with support from the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development.

The aim of this study is to design policies to help improve the role of real and virtual youth networks in enabling social capital; that is to develop self assurances and positive values and behaviors, social coherence, solidarity, and voluntary work. Youth organizations and networks currently play as important a role as family and schools in forming the personalities, values, and behaviors of young generations.

The work on this study started before the outbreak of the youth revolutions in Tunis and Egypt. These revolutions demonstrate the importance of youth associations, particularly the virtual ones. Youth associations turned out to be a powerful tool for revolutionary change and to put an end to dictatorial ruling classes and corrupt ruling class which wasted national resources and denied the people freedom and democracy. Youth associations and networks have since invoked interest in youth problems and aspirations as well as among policy makers. The challenge of investigating deeper the youth associations should not be underestimated.

With the publication of this study I would like to thank the researchers for their original work as well as the reviewers who helped to enrich the study. Finally I would like to thank the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development for its funding for this study and continuous support for the research programs at MAS as well as the Palestinian development effort in general.

Dr. Samir Abdullah
Director General

Executive Summary

International literature on development has shown that the differences in development between countries with dissimilar cultures is not only a product of variation in physical capital, human capital, and natural resources, it is also a result of discrepancies in social capital and social networking avenues. These networks help maximize the ability of individuals or groups to achieve their goals and satisfy their needs through resources and relations that can be obtained through these networks.

Within this framework, the networks and groups that integrate individuals in the participation of local community through its formal and informal institutions are considered to be one of the key elements of the concept of increasing social capital; along with collective action, cooperation and exchange of information, communication, and trusting others.

It is necessary for effective youth organizations, which are part of the civil society, to operate as one of the incubators of these basic elements whose activities contribute to the creation of an environment that enriches the social capital of youth and society as a whole.

In the respect, sound investment and good governance in the youth sector is an important contribution to the advancement of the development process in the Palestinian Territories. Young people constitute the largest demographic group in society; and the most effective and active in many areas. Investment can be more sustainable if it is directed towards building a generation that is better able to creatively and positively cope with various internal and external challenges. To create a generation aware of one's abilities, rights, and duties to one's country on the basis of citizenship and equality; as well as one that participates in the development process and thus benefits from it.

(5/4) There is no doubt that interest in the youth sector has increased substantially after the emergence of the Palestinian National Authority. The number of youth organizations has been growing consistently with various specialized projects in addition to the forming of several youth committees who have been actively working in a variety of different fields. Such institutions, in its diverse forms, work within a wide range of social relationships and within a complex system of values, desires, and expectations. These relationships include communication with the member

institutions themselves, their families and surrounding communities, and the relevant official bodies (such as municipalities and local councils, regulatory and governmental bodies, and donor institutions). There is no doubt that the political reality imposes itself and influences the power and efficiency of these institutions through the activities of the different parties, factions, and occupation measures that keenly monitor and restrict the actions of these institutions in many areas. The particular political situation in Palestine has maximized the role of these institutions and the diversification of its activities that are directed at the local or the national communities as well as to intensify their interaction with social surroundings and with other similar institutions. This has given these organizations a good opportunity to more positively influence the social environment of the Palestinian Territories.

In this context, the importance of youth organizations in the Palestinian territories is highlighted, for they play a vital role in raising awareness of the young people in several aspects - political, social, cultural, and health - and represent an important framework for political action during the direct Israeli occupation. These youth organizations, which form a real aid to factions of the Palestinian national movement, have participated effectively in the national action against the militant occupation. Thus, these youth centers and committees have become workplaces for the development activities and suitable places for young people to express their political convictions and national duties. In fact, since the emergence of the Palestinian National Authority, both the work and diversity of these institutions have expanded to include programs that focus on the development of the abilities of young people and the development of their health and educational, professional, artistic, sporting, and cultural skills. This has inspired these institutions to adopt new goals, in terms of its vision and community direction.

This study intends to explore the role of youth organizations - both traditional clubs and modern institutions in addition to online social networks - in generating (or disabling) capital in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This is done by monitoring their success in hosting youth activities (measured according to the breadth of the activity), the nature of these activities, what the activities generate in terms of networking and an increase in values, and a culture that reinforces the major elements of social capital enhancement. This study also reveals the extent of contribution by youth organizations in promoting collective action, social cohesion, and trust amongst young people and towards their institutions;

also in enhancing human capital and in the increase of national consciousness and their sense of citizenship. Furthermore, this study explains the role of these organizations in expanding the social relations through social networking and other channels of communication and coordination. The study takes into account the available opportunities and potential as well as the different challenges and constraints affecting the prospective strengthening of the role of these institutions. The study also looks at the interaction between these institutions and various other socially influential parties within the Palestinian society (such as the community, local authorities, school, and family).

The study focuses on the following elements of social capital: the participation of individuals and institutions in collective action, the extent of their involvement in social networks, the contribution of institutions and networks in strengthening mutual trust among themselves and other institutions, and the values, norms, and behaviors that either sponsor or reproduce that trust; especially those values and behaviors that contribute to the promotion of national affiliation and the development of their personality, talents, competencies, knowledge, and abilities that promote values of equality, citizenship, social solidarity, democracy, and public action.

The quantitative aspect of the field research has revealed an abundance of programs and projects for young people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Also, a large variation in the nature of these programs and focus of issues has been equally copious. The overall picture shows that the issue of youth empowerment is being given a special attention on many fronts. There is the continued presence of traditional activities including sports clubs, scouting, cultural activities, and entertainment (such as folk dancing). Additionally, the occupied Palestinian territories are being exposed to a wide array of new activities within funded programs, including a variety of activities that target different aspects of the reality of young people. These programs are designed to reach large groups of youth, especially in areas that are usually classified as secondary or of little significance (villages, for example).

These programs that target young Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have two primary goals: enhancing the opportunities available to empower young people and mutually empowering their organizations (including clubs). The reality of the Palestinian youth is characterized in the Sharek Youth Forum as such: “The energy of youth may be an opportunity or a catastrophe”. This is a concern to several foreign and

international bodies asked to increase the funding dedicated to youth issues, the development of multi-level programs, and dealing with various facets of youth concerns and priorities.

In this context, it can be seen that the focus of these programs is the development of communication skills among young people, including skills in the use of the electronic communication tools, how to market their expertise, and how to develop management and professional skills in different areas (especially new areas such as media, information technology, photography, and others). Some of these programs are designed at a high level and thus exceed the target of youth and expands geographically and socially (to different areas and social groups, especially to women and people in rural areas). It is obvious that these programs will positively impact the experiences and skills of young people. At the same time, it will help lay the foundation for increasing the degree of youth empowerment and activate their societal role accordingly. One clear benefit of these programs is that they are designed to encourage young people to work within a team. Such programs push youth towards the development of teamwork skills through participating in joint activities.

However, the more essential problematic issue is the impact of conflicts to the collective Palestinian youth identity. One aspect of this identity is resistance. Yet, these organizations do not consider the aspect of resistance (or even identity) amongst Palestinian youth so much as they try to create a more globalised human being; one who has the communication skills needed for a globalized world, but is without a solid foundation in the development of the national identity (with one dimension being resistance) - which ultimately determines one's priorities and subsequent choices.

While the results of the quantitative section have shown that youth organizations suffer from many negative aspects during the process of promoting social capital among young people, this general diagnosis originates from the recognition that the existence of these institutions is of great importance. It is the third side in the social institutions that directly affects young people and their fates in addition to the family and the educational institution. Thus, the conclusion is that these organizations play a vital role, but require major development efforts in many fields, especially the creation of a proper environment in which to operate, improving the content of their programs and activities, enhancing their surrounding environment, and the dedication of more space for youth to lead and guide their organizations so that it resembles a situation that strongly encourages young people to realize their potential.

In this respect, it has been shown that the traditional institutions are superior in certain aspects, especially in the field of trust and solidarity. However, modern institutions show greater efficiency in other areas. This is linked to the nature of both types. For example, traditional clubs represent organizations that are based on expanded membership. In contrast, modern institutions are mainly based on specialty and professional work and thus generate a tendency to deal with youth as “the customer-the service provider”, meaning that they aim to meet their demands as such. Therefore, each type develops certain aspects of the reality of the Palestinian youth. It is necessary to strengthen the cooperation and integration of both types to better exploit their comparative advantages. This cooperation exists today where many programs for young people are being driven by modern institutions and implemented through the framework of traditional institutions.

The performance of youth organizations is affected by the general community framework in which it operates (the camp or village or neighborhood) along with its social and cultural dimensions. It is also affected by the general prevailing circumstances in the occupied Palestinian territories. Moreover, performance is affected by some internal factors related to the administrative structure of the institution as well as by mechanisms of action and follow-up. The quantitative results in this context were disappointing as the officials of the examined institutions emphasized the objective barriers and neglected the subjective factors, limiting the organizations’ abilities to maximize their impact in the area. This has been addressed in the qualitative section of the study.

The study shows through various qualitative research tools - interviews, focus groups, and case studies - the importance of the role played by youth organizations (both clubs and modern institutions) as well as by social networking in the promotion of social capital among young people. The importance of this role is apparent through the contribution of these institutions in promoting and raising the level of collective action and cooperation within the Palestinian youth and also through their participation in various programs and activities offered by these institutions. Whatever the nature of these programs and activities and the changes that occur to it, it still provides a favorable climate for the exercise of teamwork among young people. Moreover, it promotes the spirit of unity through sporting events and through cultural and collaborative work (which have a significant positive impact on the development of their abilities and skills in the context of collective work and solidarity).

The study also shows the important role of youth organizations in promoting social cohesion through interaction between youth and their local communities (including group activities and outreach programs). Youth institutions as a whole - as a social actor and incubator of various activities - contribute to enhancing the integration of young people amongst themselves and in strengthening their communication with their communities. Nonetheless, note that this role is affected by a group of internal and external factors, including: the nature of the organization (club or modern enterprise), the nature of the environment in which they exist (the village or camp or city), the degree of political and social division and polarization in the community, and the degree of the institutional management's awareness of the of its community role.

Field data from this research illustrates the important role played by the youth organizations in promoting young people's confidence in themselves, in their organizations, and in their communities. This is in spite of the emergence of criticisms directed towards institutions because they are being widely affected by the community and the political divisions - as well as by the traditional surrounding culture - and in spite of some of the negative aspects of discrimination between the members based on gender, religion, or political affiliation which still prevails in some institutions. In general, these institutions provide an interactive environment with colleagues in the context of team spirit and on the basis of equality. This contributes to the promotion of young people's knowledge of others without guidance from the family and far from the limitations of the school. This environment involves young people from different age groups in a set of new interactive and communicative experiences which provides space to meet, interact, and communicate with others and also engages them early new life experiences, refines their personality, enhances their independence, and raises those values and practices that help boost confidence.

The study shows some of the factors that negatively affect the role and contribution of these community institutions; which are factors inhibiting their role in promoting social capital. The most important factors are the following: the relative lack of youth participation within the leadership of their youth institutions, poor communication between these institutions and the family due to the poor understanding of the community role, the weakness of the relationship between these institutions and the schools, the emergence of some aspects of discrimination and exclusion related to gender, the subordination of some social divisions and political situations in their local communities, the declining demand of young people for some community activities (such as collaborative volunteering and cultural

activities), the increasing dependence on external financing which causes disruption in some programs, the lack of sustainability, and the fact that they are often dependent on the agenda of the funders .

As for online social networks, the study shows their importance in the strengthening of social capital - despite the diversity of its content - as a result of its important role in the creation of relatively organized networks of youth. It also shows their importance in promoting communication, cohesion, and trust among young people in all areas of the Palestinian presence. Additionally, the study explains the contribution of online social networks to the development of the national awareness of young people and the promotion of democratic values. Furthermore, it gives reason for the growth of a sense of citizenship for young people and a realization of the importance of their role in contributing to national issues through the general expansion of the space available for the Palestinian public to communicate, exchange views, and debate freely.

At the same time, the study showed many of the challenges faced by these online networks that may have a negative impact on its role in promoting social capital. These challenges include the following: fragmentation of online youth groups, the difference of slogans in these groups, and the emergence of many manifestations and negative practices of young leaders (such as unchanging election tendencies and arrogant rejection of other parties, leaders, or existing institutions and of senior generations).

Recommendations:

- ✧ It is noted, generally, that youth organizations in its two forms provide opportunities and broad prospects for the young people to develop their skills, their personality, and their talents in various fields through the activities, facilities, and various means provided by these institutions. Therefore, the phenomenon of the feeling of tentativeness of young people toward these institutions and some of its activities reflects the lack of awareness of parents and the local community just as much as it reflects some of the prominent negative aspects of these institutions (which is one of the key challenges that needs to be addressed at the policy level). The problem does not lie only in the availability of funding or the necessary infrastructure. It also lies in the need to develop community awareness of the role of these institutions and their importance to children. The problem also exists in the need to maximize what is available and accessible and to expand such access to areas and communities of different populations. This is a

collective responsibility generally born by each of the three development partners (government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector).

- ✧ The role of the managers of these institutions and its leadership is important and essential because they (along with the family and the school) are direct partners in the upbringing of different generations. They are custodians of our children. Therefore, we must pay more attention to these bodies at the different administrative levels and enhance their capabilities through managerial, psychological, educational, and social training. This will contribute to enhancing administrative efficiency and professionalism and will refine the leadership experience until we ultimately have institutions with a more democratic, participatory, and tolerant environment; further contributing to the generation of social capital.
- ✧ We need to promote coordination in order to develop a complementary relationship between the triangle of education (school), family, and youth organization. Each of these three parties has an important role in promoting social capital. We can develop this relationship through the formation of joint committees between the three parties (like the parents' committees in schools) to follow up on issues of youth. It may be possible for municipalities and local councils to play an active role in being attentive to these committees, providing them with whatever they need to facilitate their work, improving perceptions, and enhancing communication with the local community as a whole.
- ✧ We must support and strengthen the efforts and activities that aim to transform youth organizations into female-friendly institutions - in which relations are based on equal opportunity and fairness between the sexes - in order to enable these institutions to maximize their role in generating social capital. There is no doubt that allowing females to participate in the management of youth organizations, developing their leadership skills, and promoting mixed or female activities will encourage them to join these institutions and increase their confidence.
- ✧ The generation of social capital is a long-term, community-based, cumulative process which requires stability and sustainability. It contrasts with the reality of the majority of programs and activities of youth organizations, especially the modern ones which suffer from dependence on foreign financial support (to varying degrees) due to lack of financial resources available to them. This has led to the

emergence of several problems within these institutions, as research shows. For instance, the lack of sustainability of some of the programs and activities, the common dependence on the agenda of funders (declared and undeclared), and the imbalance between the various activities for the benefit of the funded programs, regardless of the importance and priorities specified by the institution. Therefore, these institutions should strive to achieve greater independence from external funding, aiming to find self-funding sources. This has already been done by many institutions; specifically, some of the clubs that began to activate and rationalize the use of its facilities and services provided by its members and its audience.

- ✧ The physical and virtual networks set up by youth organizations provide an important incubator for the development of collective action of these institutions. It maximizes the use of shared resources, as well as the chances of accumulating experience. At the same time, it provides important channels of communication with and among young people and beyond traditional ties (including the creation of cross-border avenues). All of this entails opportunities and spaces for collective action for youth as well as maximizing of their effectiveness. It directs them towards a more effective use of their energy and leisure time and creates opportunities to accumulate experience and develop their skills and expertise in various fields. It is noted in this respect that the effectiveness of the existing local networks is still limited, particularly with regard to its inability to form suitable societies or frameworks governed by well-defined work principles towards local actors and community funders. External financing is still an important determinant of the mechanisms of action and their relations among themselves and with other actors in this area. Competition for external funding is therefore a key factor to networks and it continues to promote dialogue with funders as individual institutions compete (with the goal of obtaining funding). This means that the existence of the network itself does not guarantee the provision of an effective environment for joint work, competition, or even conflict among them. Regarding this, it is important to advance the content of the work of these networks, develop the foundations for joint action (and perhaps a document of honor among them), and promote the rules of transparency and accountability in its systems as networks and institutions (including facilitating youth access to information such as the content of programs and projects and the funding mechanism). This view is based on the assumption that the flow of information and providing a proper framework constitute an

important condition for activating the role of young people. It is necessary to emphasize the importance of maintaining the diversity of these organizations in terms of concepts, the intellectual and ideological orientations, and the political and social choices. It is therefore required to move away from the logic of trusteeship and instead develop incentives to compete and conflict with each other in a transparent atmosphere guaranteed by law. This may be an incentive to build local, regional, and international networking with a target of maximizing the resources available to similar organizations and integrating them in competition with other institutions in order to maximize its role and influence on young people.

- ✧ We should pay particular attention to the issue of young people in Jerusalem. This is due to its own position in the Arab-Zionist conflict and the privacy of its status - for it is outside the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority and subject to an accelerated process of Judaizing - and since young people are being targeted on a systematic, programmed basis in accordance with their attempt to dim Jerusalem's Arabic characteristics. This requires different mechanisms of action in Jerusalem as well the adopting of the self-regulation logic and activating the role of various actors in Jerusalem (including political parties, NGOs, and local community institutions). The role of youth organizations maintains a particular importance in this area. They provide space, facilities, and mechanisms that form the necessary foundation for the practice of young people to different activities. They develop their skills in various areas (including social communication and networking) and enrich values and attitudes both enhance and are consistent with the Palestinian national identity.