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**MECHANISMS FOR AND APPROACHES TO
THE STRENGTHENING OF PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN
PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND
CIVIL SOCIETIES IN THE ARAB WORLD**

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Note: The references in this document have not been verified. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESCWA.

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anticipate emergency priorities will also benefit Palestinian society in the long-term. In order to meet the current economic crisis in Palestine, job creation programmes are a high priority, and training Palestinians abroad in crisis management-related fields or investing in local industry and buying Palestinian products could greatly contribute to the rebuilding of the Palestinian economy and increase employment. Further examples of emergency preparedness and response measures in which the Arab countries could participate may be found in section D below.

C. BUILDING CAPACITIES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Given that as Palestine has a plentiful experience of civil society work and a solidly developing civil society, but organizations are often understaffed and individuals in need of technical knowledge, it was proposed that experts from organizations and institutions around the Arab world come to Palestine as volunteers in order to support Palestinian NGOs, learn about their needs and transmit valuable knowledge. This mutually beneficial process would not only strengthen the participating organizations, but would also provide the basis for further understanding and joint programming.

Joint workshops and trainings should be held in order to build up a corps of colleagues across the region that will form a continuing communication network with participants sharing experience and building further knowledge. Manuals and training materials should be circulated more widely, and the web should be employed to make those materials more accessible. Cooperation in this field will have to overcome a culture of competition.

D. MECHANISMS FOR COOPERATION AND ACTION

1. *The strengthening, institutionalization, and streamlining of networking between Palestinian and the Arab world NGOs through active campaign participation, in order to ultimately ensure efficiency in service provision and foreign assistance*

Palestinian and comparable national networks of NGOs must be enhanced and Arab NGOs networks strengthened, either by upgrading existing or creating new ones. Through the process of promoting the urgent need to end the occupation and lay the foundations for sustainable development in Palestine, those networks can be invigorated and the precedent and foundations for continued strong relations can be set. The coordination of activities, sharing of information and resources and carrying out joint projects can help to reduce duplication and make the best use of available funding. Many of the civil society actors interviewed for this paper believed that the potential for substantial work and collaboration is present in existing networks. However, there is great concern for their efficacy, given the focus on discussions of organization and structure rather than a substantive activity and programme design, planning and follow-up.

The establishment of new and strengthening of existing sectoral networks and development of incentives for such networks to have real impact, outputs and transparency in Palestine and the region is critical to any serious efforts at sustainable development. Such networks can be both the forum for the exchange of concrete information and experience, including the comparison of legal structures, strategies for good governance and institutional development, project successes and failures and urgent needs and a venue for debate on development issues and policy. Such sectoral networks should not be limited to the traditional groupings of health and education but should also include, inter alia, networks of trade unions, youth, disabled persons and professional and academic institutions.

2. To establish strategic Palestine-related action-advocacy campaigns in the Arab world

(a) *Mobilizing popular voluntary relief efforts throughout the Arab world in response to events in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*

Donations, whether in cash or kind, from the general population in the Arab world could be an important mechanism for awareness-raising about Palestinian issues. There could be continuous and long-term as well as event-specific aspects to such campaigns. Long-term activities could include sponsoring a particular child's education, family-to-family support or 'adopting' a family to help. Fundraising campaigns for ambulances and mobile clinics, hospital equipment, mobile libraries and building or rebuilding school-rooms and community centres are further examples. Donations to such programmes need not be large. Food, book, sanitary item and toy drives could be very important as well, provided such items could be easily imported through Israel, not only for the relief they provide, but in the wider awareness-raising, involvement and mobilization of people of all ages and demographic backgrounds. Clothing is less of an urgent necessity for Palestinians, but in the wake of an event like the devastation in Rafah, household items could also be useful. Fund drives via the television or radio have proved very effective in the past. NGOs could organize a day where their employees volunteer one day of their salaries to support relief and development efforts in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for long-term building, within the Palestinian development vision. This model could also be encouraged in the private and Government sectors.

Professional sectors could also be mobilized through the need to devise innovative solutions to local problems. The urgent need for housing in some areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip invites investigation into models of low cost, efficient shelters, constructed out of easily-available materials appropriate to the climate, which could be used throughout the region (or beyond) in response to refugee situations or in order to combat overcrowding and, in the process, create a number of jobs. The need for housing could also offer an opportunity to investigate energy-efficient or alternative energy options which could benefit the whole region.

The activities outlined in this section could build a people-to-people solidarity based upon the real needs of the Palestinian people and recognition and support of their continuing resistance. In addition, the mobilization of the Palestinians in diaspora would further strengthen such activities.

- (b) *Conducting awareness-raising campaigns about the situation in Palestine in order to build public support for issues that could be linked to local priorities and have the potential to initiate regional social movements throughout the Arab world*

Awareness-raising campaigns, besides simply tackling the harmful effects of occupation, could be issue- or sector-based, and could be conducted around, inter alia, human rights, education, transparency, youth, children, farmers, educators, refugees and the disabled persons. They could also include or be linked to the popular boycott of Israeli products. People must be mobilized to put pressure on their own Governments to bring about democratic reform and respect for human rights. The creation of Friends of Palestine societies, and support for such groups as already exist could make this process more inclusive.

- (c) *Conducting campaigns within the Arab world to put pressure on Israel to change their policies towards the Palestinians*

Advocacy campaigns focusing on Israeli policies towards the Palestinians would have to respond to immediate and long-term agendas. Successful advocacy campaigns in support of Palestinian rights can be conducted within each sector or generally, but a vision is required for all advocacy campaigns.

The Arab world has the capacity to promote Palestinian issues through powerful campaigning, either independently or with the support of partners. Use should be made of such legislation of Article 2 of the European Union (EU) trade agreements with Israel, which state that Israel must uphold human rights in order to be a trading partner with Europe. While there are nascent boycotts of settler products in some countries, more wide-spread advocacy and the threat of restricted trade could effect real change.

- (d) *Influencing policy makers, donors and Governments*

A vision for the creation of a powerful Arab bloc is needed in order to influence Western and international governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions with respect to regional issues and concerns. Rather than serving a narrowly-defined political vision or short-term reactive measures, such a bloc should work to promote a long-term vision of development in the region, and must be based on peoples' real needs and priorities and popular support that has evolved from the more localized advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. Arab-based initiatives with people-based approaches will avoid donor-driven programming and externally-

determined policies that are less likely to promote Palestinian steadfastness, resistance and independence.

Such work should however, be linked with international bodies. There should be a coordination and follow-up committee that meets regularly and works to mobilize and monitor the network of Arab NGOs working around Palestinian issues. Regular dialogue and debate should be held with Arab parliaments, and strategies should be found to deal with the Arab League. Such a committee could ensure that alternative reports are produced for the United Nations, and work to organize lobbying efforts with political bodies in order to influence United Nations decision-making and work with local, regional and international political parties.

(e) *Links with movements and campaigns outside the Arab world*

In promoting the Palestinian vision for development and rehabilitation and recognizing that vision as the potential catalyst for a number of influential movements for social change in the Arab world and elsewhere, Arab networks should forge strong links with social and grassroots movements around the world. The indigenous peoples', human rights, political liberation youth and women's movements are all potential allies. It is important to learn about those different movements and their relevance to the Arab context. Arabs have traditionally been quite isolated in this respect, although organizations are increasingly networking with Southeast Asia and Central and South America. Campaigns on specific issues can build vital coalitions and the use of such existing international tools for advocacy as forums and laws can make local campaigns more effective.

As with other strategies, networking with and mobilizing the Palestinians living in the diaspora and Arabs living abroad will further strengthen efforts.

E. FINANCING

1. *Increasing the number of joint projects and studies in the region*

With increased coordination within the Arab world, there is the opportunity to maximize the benefits of available funds and resources. Work to coordinate resources between Arab organizations and research aimed at development on the most professional and participatory scale would provide Palestinian and Arab organizations with data to support their own initiatives and proposals to external partners or donors. The higher the quality of indigenous research, the less external forces can impose an alternative agenda upon local development.

2. *Developing Independent and Arab-based funding schemes*

People-to-people funding initiatives, twinned institutions that incorporate financial sponsorship, organizational income-generating projects and investment in

Palestinian production are all funding schemes that can help to ease the dependence of Palestinian organizations on foreign donors which may have externally-determined agendas.

While the ideas presented above comprise preliminary strategies and mechanisms for activities to be undertaken, a plan must be formed on how to implement those ideas. Sectoral networks should be strengthened or created and be inclusive of organizations from throughout the region. Such networks should undertake to be as inclusive and representative as possible of the regional civil society organizations in their field. An official representative to each network from each participating country should be elected on a biannual basis. Each sectoral network should elect members to participate on a committee that is comprised of representatives of all sectors. All formal communications, conference and workshop proceedings, events, announcement and news of those networks should be posted on the Internet and accessible to all, as should all implementation plans and reports of ongoing activities of the networks. On-line discussion groups could aid in evaluating and monitoring activities, developing visions and brainstorming on new ideas.

The creation of coordination and representative bodies for regional civil society organizations should be coupled with the laying out of a work-plan, the assignation of tasks and the development of follow-up and support procedures and resources. It is imperative that administrative issues should be minimized, in order to avoid focusing excessively on structure rather than the content and actions of those bodies.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through working together to support Palestine, Arab world organizations can strengthen existing networks, improve communications, build capacity and develop and influence policy and funding strategies. The partnerships that develop in the course of efforts to support Palestinian resistance and long-term development could provide a global model for regional cooperation and establish the foundations for reform throughout the Arab world.

An immediate Arab-based initiative and process should be established and supported. We recommend that a specialized workshop should be organized in order to discuss the content and structure of this initiative and how it could be operationalized. The next meeting in Beirut may offer an opportunity to explore a comprehensive approach to the discussion of various significant issues of concern in the Arab world, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, democracy in the Arab world and Arab human development. Palestinian civil society is aware of the strong links between those three issues. It is high time to network, coordinate and create genuine cooperation among civil societies in the Arab world, in order to address those issues.
