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FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Incubating Young Leaders in Palestine
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Disclaimer
The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDEF or any of the institutions referred to in the report. All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

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I. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

(i)   Project data

This report is the evaluation of the project entitled "Incubating Young Leaders in Palestine", which was implemented by the Ramallah-based association called Zimam for Creativity and Development between 1 December 2020 and 31 May 2022 (18 months), without any extensions.

The project objective was to promote the emergence of a generation of young leaders who are in touch with the reality of their communities. This was the first UNDEF grant to Zimam.

The project was implemented in Nablus (which includes three refugee camps and 62 small towns and villages), Qalqilya (which includes 34 villages), and Gaza. The implementation was carried out in partnership with five community partners: Can'an Community Development, Samaritan Legend Association, the Cultural Forum, the Charitable Association for Care and Enabling Youth, and Gaza University.

The project primarily targeted 40 youth, with the intentional aim to bring together young people of different religions and to achieve gender parity in the implementation of activities.

The objective of this evaluation was to undertake an in-depth analysis to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project, which would help UNDEF to plan for future project strategies. The evaluation adopted an outcome-based approach to determine whether anticipated project outcomes have been achieved and where the project achieved more impact.

(ii)   Summary of findings

The success of this project was manifested through the following:
-   The project was highly relevant because there was an urgent need to empower and enable young Palestinians to become future leaders.
-   The project was implemented as per the project documents and followed a coherent and well-articulated theory of change despite all the challenges of the Palestinian context, the coronavirus crisis, and the security problems.
-   It had a substantial impact on increasing the resilience capacities of Palestinian youth, especially those in the West Bank.
-   It had a considerable impact on shifting youth mindsets toward more positive, entrepreneurial, and collaborative ways of thinking.
-   It had a significant impact on building the capacities of partners and fostering a win-win partnership strategy.
-   It had a significant impact on overcoming the lack of trust between youth and officials, and on fostering a solution-oriented collaboration between youth, officials, and community members.
-   It empowered and built the capacities and knowledge of 40 potential future leaders on key topics related to democracy, governance, and public policy. It also enhanced their participation in municipal elections, community initiatives, and councils of camps and universities.

Coherence

The project was undoubtedly coherent and fell within the scope of the organisation's areas of specialisation. It was fully consistent with Palestine's political priorities as well as the other UN agencies' interventions.

Relevance

The project as a whole was highly relevant, as it met the below criteria:

- The problem analysis focused on the absence of a democratic experience among young Palestinians as they had never participated in national elections and had a common mindset that it was because of the Israeli occupation, corruption, and lack of economic and political opportunities. As such, young Palestinians felt hopeless and desperate.
  That focus made the problem analysis very relevant, as it met the youth's need to be positively engaged and to develop a sense of belonging to their communities.

- The project design was relevant, coherent, and addressed a logical theory of change shared and assimilated by the Zimam team members, partners, and the youths themselves.

- The selection of intervention communities was relevant and targeted diverse and representative populations (cities, camps, and villages).

- The selection of partners and the partnership strategy were relevant and enhanced the project's effectiveness.

Effectiveness

The intervention rationale was pragmatic and created synergies between components and activities. However, the formulation of project outcomes was vague, making them difficult to demonstrate their achievements.

Overall, effectiveness was considered to be satisfactory. When exploring the project's effectiveness, the evaluator focussed on:

1. Youth empowerment and the new skills gained by young participants as a result of the multicomponent training programme; and

2. The opportunities and/or space created for youth self-expression, participation, and collaboration, as a result of joint activities with CSO partners, local authorities, the private sector, and community members.

Whilst the project as whole was considered to be very effective, it was more effective in the West Bank than it was in Gaza, and most effective in villages - where there was a possibility for municipal elections to take place, contrary to cities and camps.

Efficiency

Workshop costs corresponded to the number of participants, the duration of trainings, and the expertise of the trainers and facilitators that were hired.

It would have been desirable if the project allocated small grants to fund youth initiatives so their ideas and proposals could be implemented and turned into reality.

Impact

The outcome mapping made it possible to account for many change effects at multiple levels, as some outcomes where anticipated, but others weren't.

Anticipated outcomes include:

- The change in youth's mindsets and beliefs regarding their roles;
- The perceptions of decision-makers towards youth and understanding how they can be positively engaged in the development of their communities;
- The increase of young participants' knowledge and skills on topics related to democracy, public policy, and local governance; and
- The expansion of youth networks and social capital among their communities and across the Palestinian territory, thereby overcoming the challenges of restrictions on movement and breaking the negative stereotypes.

Unanticipated outcomes that were captured include:

- The change in the mindsets and attitudes of local authorities, private sector representatives, and community members, who began trusting youth and taking them into consideration;
- The increase in community collaboration especially in the villages and camps, where youth had the space to lead community initiatives; and
- The project's contribution to strengthening community resilience by creating a spirt of unity and a sense of collaboration for shared objectives between youth from different backgrounds, political affiliations, and Areas.

Sustainability

The project had numerous compelling elements of sustainability. The theory of change and the project approaches were well-articulated and implemented with consistency, not to mention that they were adopted by partners and youth councils that tried to use them. Additionally, they could also be used and replicated by other youth organisations and institutions.

Zimam's approaches to engaging partners, youth, and stakeholders contribute to the organisation's social capital and strengthen the sustainability of its activities.

UNDEF added value

UNDEF had a considerable added value, as working under the label of a UN agency reinforced the much-needed legitimacy and trust in the organisation, especially given the context characterised by division and scepticism.

The political neutrality of UNDEF strengthened the credibility of the project's promise to offer an impartial safe space for Palestinian youth and to equip them with the concepts and techniques that can help them to analyse situations and design public policies, regardless of the historical political division.

Recommendations and lessons learned

The evaluation resulted in recommendations and lessons learned. It highlighted the effectiveness of a pragmatic and targeted approach, even in a complex and volatile context like that of Palestine. It has also recorded a number of good practices on strategies for how to initially approach different communities.

Furthermore, the evaluation noted the importance of the partnership strategy in involving young people and ensuring that support is obtained at the local level.

Additionally, the evaluation generated a number of recommendations related primarily to the considerable and growing need to involve young Palestinians - especially those from Gaza-, and to the importance of providing small grants for youth to fund their community initiatives and support their legitimacy and influence in their communities.

II. PROJECT CONTEXT AND STRATEGY

(i) Development context

Youth in Palestine comprise 30% of the population, of which 38.1% are adolescents aged 15-19 and 61.9% aged 20-29.

The Palestinian society has been continuously described as a 'young society'; nevertheless, due to the complexity of the Palestinian context, youth face an extreme level of pressure and grievance which drives them to despair, disengagement, and even engaging in risky behaviour.[1]

On the one hand, they struggle with the highly tense security situation, and they clash with the Israeli settlers (soldiers or army) daily. Over the past two years, 517 Palestinians and 30 Israelis were killed, and an estimated 30,000 people were injured.

On the other hand, youth face difficult living conditions and extreme poverty, as the most recent data indicate that 36% of the Palestinian population live below the poverty line. At the same time, food insecurity rose from 9% to 23% in the West Bank, and from 50% to 53% in Gaza. In 2021, unemployment also remained as high as 26% across the occupied Palestinian territory, but more than half of the workforce in Gaza were unemployed and 83% of workers' wages were below the minimum wage.[2]

- **Double exclusion as a result of settlements and internal conflict**

The Palestinian parties in power are divided territorially; Fatah rules the West Bank and Hamas rules the Gaza Strip. Both territories are under Israeli military occupation and are ruled by a discriminatory regime. In 2021, The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) recorded 129 complaints on arbitrary detention in the West Bank and 80 in Gaza, which were often related to freedom of expression and association.[3]

The absence of a political prospect to resolve the long-standing conflict with Israel, the political division between Fatah and Hamas, and the outdated Palestinian political system, are all factors that affect the resilience of young Palestinians, make them vulnerable, and discourage them from civic participation, volunteering, and taking active initiative to propose solutions and actions for the benefit of their communities.

(ii) The project objective and intervention rationale

Palestine suffers from a lack of representative and effective leadership that has translated into political despair and a deteriorating democracy. Youth do not have a model of leadership and "positive engagement opportunities" to develop their leadership skills and prepare themselves to better serve their communities.

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[1] https://palestine.unfpa.org/en/node/22580
[2] https://www.ochaopt.org/content/53-cent-palestinians-gaza-live-poverty-despite-humanitarian-assistance
[3] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/30/palestine-impunity-arbitrary-arrests-torture

The project's objective was to promote the emergence of a generation of young leaders who are in touch with the reality of their communities.

The project strategy aimed to produce a cohort of 40 youth leaders who possess the skills, network and confidence to run for elections and lead their communities towards a democratic future.

Target group(s)/beneficiaries:
- Youth leaders: 40 youth leaders (15 from Gaza and 25 from the West Bank) between the ages of 18 and 35, with a +50% share of women participants.
- Youth participating in Siaseh cafes: 15 participants in each session, 18-35 years old, with a +50% share of women participants.
- Participants in Townhall meetings: Members of the public of all ages incl. political and social leaders.

The project's activities were the following:
- Training workshops on topics such as communications, campaign management, negotiations, and policy formulation.
- Meetings with business, social, and political sector leaders.
- Producing policy papers with policy recommendations.
- Presenting policy recommendations to relevant ministries and municipalities.
- Leading Siaseh cafes across the regions of the project.

The project's intervention rationale intentionally followed the below theory of change:
IF we engage youth in interpersonal and policy-related skill-training,
And if we arrange for youth to meet with leaders and go on field visits to public and private institutions,
And if we make youth collaborate closely with their own communities,
THEN we will have youth who are capable, confident and connected. So, there will be more youth leading political campaigns and running for elections.

- **Project outcomes**

Outcome 1: Improved skills, self-confidence and understanding of political campaigns and democratic processes among youth leaders (18-35 years of age).

Outcome 2: Safe spaces for pragmatic dialogue that foster participatory approaches, human rights and accountability and encourage active citizenry have increased in Palestine.

(iii)   Logframe

Project activities	Project outputs	Project outcomes	Long term project objective
1.1.1: Design the format, content and materials for the baseline survey by Zimam M&E team 1.1.2: Completion of baseline survey (before the start of the training workshops) 1.1.3: Compiling data and report drafting of baseline survey **1.1.4:** End of project survey **1.1.5:** Compiling data and report drafting of End of project survey	**Output 1.1.** Baseline survey on the current knowledge and experience in the project area & end of project survey reports.	**Outcome 1:** Improved skills, self-confidence and understanding of political campaigns and democratic processes among youth leaders (18-35 years of age).	Promote the emergence of a generation of young leaders who are in touch with the reality of their communities.
1.1.1: Design the format, content and materials for the baseline survey by Zimam M&E team 1.1.2: Completion of baseline survey (before the start of the training workshops) 1.1.3: Compiling data and report drafting of baseline survey **1.1.4:** End of project survey **1.1.5:** Compiling data and report drafting of End of project survey	**Output 1.2.** Forty (40) young leaders are equipped with policy and interpersonal skills.		
1.3.1: Design the format, content and materials for the sensitization activities 1.3.2: Four meetings with Palestinians leaders and stakeholders from social, political, environmental and business sectors. 1.3.3: Four field trips to ministries, factories and areas with environmental challenges. 1.3.4: Four virtual brainstorming meetings1.3.5: Gather evaluation material and feedback from participants	**Output 1.3.** Policy recommendations on Palestinian society challenges prepared by 40 young leaders.		

2.1.1: Design the format, content and materials, and locations for the meetings by Zimam 2.1.2: Meetings with stakeholders to identify facilitators for the Siaseh cafes. 2.1.3: Thirty (30) Siaseh cafes (youth-focused) Siaseh cafes held in 4 communities across the West Bank and Gaza 2.1.4: Members of the public, including youth, participate in **six** townhall meetings 2.1.5: Gather evaluation material and feedback from participants.	**Output 2.1.** 450 young Palestinians' awareness of democratic norms raised through community debate and discussions.	**Outcome 2:** Safe spaces for pragmatic dialogue that foster participatory approaches, human rights and accountability and encourage active citizenry have increased in Palestine.
2.2.1: The entire youth cohort designs the format, content and materials, and locations for the meetings 2.2.2: Meetings with stakeholders and potential speakers to identify topics and mechanisms to invite large audiences. 2.2.3: 10 campus initiatives which students engage in, across the WB and Gaza 2.2.4: Gather evaluation material and feedback from implementing partners and Zimam participants	**Output 2.2.** Ten (10) briefing papers on campus initiatives issued by youth cohort.	
2.3.1: Design the format of awareness raising acitivity, and contact relevant officials 2.3.2: Group meeting with youth leaders to identify 15 youth participants 2.3.3: Presentation of policy recommendations to public officials 2.3.4: Advocacy of policy recommendations in the media	**Output 2.3.** Awareness of public officials raised in three key ministries on the benefits of implementing youth leader (YL) policy recommendations.	

III. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The objective of this evaluation was to conduct an in-depth analysis to better learn about the process of change in the different project communities and understand what makes a UNDEF-funded project successful in the particular context of Palestine.

The purpose of the evaluation was to:
   a) Assess the relevance of the thematic priorities and project focus in the Palestinian context, the effectiveness and efficiency of the project's implementation, its impact and sustainability.
   b) Assess the project's outcomes and impact, despite the tense situation in Palestine including the restrictions in place due to Covid 19.
   c) Understand how the strategy and designed actions contributed to outcomes achieved in different communities.
   d) Provide lessons learned and highlight good practices that may inform and inspire UNDEF for future projects.

The evaluation adopted an outcome-based evaluation approach to collect, analyze, and report on findings and recommendations.
This evaluation methodology was more focused on achievements rather than activities, and on effects rather than implementation. This approach is especially useful when the aim is to understand the process of change and how the intervention as well as other factors have contributed to this change.

The evaluation included the following steps:
   ▪ **Desk review**
First, a desk review of the project progress reports, and other relevant documents, was conducted to identify the different stakeholders that the programme influenced as well as outcomes that could be derived from the progress reports and other documents produced by the project team. The understanding perceived from this exercise was used to plan the evaluation.

   ▪ **Staff meetings**
To further expand the overview of outcomes achieved, the evaluator held two meetings with the project team of Zimam: The purpose was to provide a space to:
   - Brainstorm additional outcomes that were not reported in progress reports, positive as well as negative outcomes, and to show how the programme contributed to these outcomes.
   - Elaborate on the contribution of Zimam to the outcomes, as well as the working relationship between Zimam, Implementing Partners, local authorities, and youth leaders.
   - Derive lessons learned from the adaptive management strategy due to the COVID-19 crisis.
Findings on outcomes from the above were used to manage field data collection.

Data collection was conducted among:

- Three implementing partner CSOs;
- Twenty Youth Leaders;
- Three local authorities; and
- One private sector representative.

▪ **Evaluation limitations**

This evaluation faced many delays due to the delayed approval of travel to Palestine. Checkpoints made transport between communities in the West Bank particularly difficult and time consuming. Additionally, and because of the security issues and the travel restrictions, the evaluation was not able to cover all the communities and youth leaders, and the evaluator was not able to visit Gaza to make a clear assessment on how change took place under its very distinct youth context.

The evaluator particularly appreciated the efforts of Zimam and youth leaders who made this evaluation possible and smooth despite all challenges.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i) Coherence

▪ **Internal coherence**

One of the key strengths of this project is the significant internal coherence.

The project's objective was to promote the emergence of a generation of young leaders who are in touch with the reality of their communities, which was fully in line with Zimam's mission as described in all of its documents and expressed by the founder and team members.

"Zimam ("reins" or "taking the initiative" in Arabic) is a pioneering grassroots youth movement that challenges the status quo. Taking a domestic approach to conflict resolution, we work with the leaders of tomorrow to build a more democratic, actively engaged, and pluralistic society."
Source: Zimam web site

Zimam had the advantage of being a youth CSO that has a clear philosophy, a long-term vison and strategy, and a well-articulated theory of change to empower Palestinian youth and build future leaders.

Zimam's founder and team members developed the following organisational approaches to implement the project: (i) engaging youth positively; (ii) building an inclusive connection between the different Areas of the West Bank and between the West Bank and Gaza; and (iii) developing a long-standing partnership with partners.

All the team members of Zimam who were interviewed shared the same vision, the same philosophy on youth engagement. That is to say, the same belief in the value of positively engaging youth to empower them and enhance their sense of belonging and their participation in decision-making processes in their communities.

- **External coherence**

The project came at an opportune moment, coinciding with the announcement of the *Year of Youth 2020* and the setting out of priorities for youth by the Palestinian Prime Minister.

The project is also in line with the memorandum of understanding signed between the Higher Council for Youth and Sports, UNICEF, UNDP, and UNFPA, for the establishment of a Palestinian National Volunteer Service Programme [4]. Although there were no intentional synergies between the project activities and the aforementioned programme, it is expected that, thanks to the trainings received throughout the course of the project, youth beneficiaries will have roles in and contributions to other projects.

(ii) Relevance

The project as a whole was highly relevant, as it met the below criteria:

- The problem analysis was relevant (cf. section II above, development context subsection).
- The project's response and design was relevant, coherent, and addressed a logical theory of change and relevant and valid assumptions.
- The security, political, and social risk analyses and mitigation were relevant.
- The selection of intervention communities was relevant.

- **The relevance of the project's response and design**

The project's response to the identified problems was highly relevant, as it managed to circumvent the almost ineluctable structural obstacles such as the occupation and the suspension of democratic participation in Palestine.

The project has indeed responded to the needs of Palestinian youth and to the needs raised by the interviewed participants, which included:

- The need for hope and resilience in the face of the political, social, and economic stresses.
- The need for the different groups of Palestinians to socialise and unite around constructive activities.
- The need for belonging and civic participation in a context where military occupation and internal political division deepen exclusion and isolation of Palestinians, particularly the youth.
- The need to be recognised by the community, decision-makers, and peers, as active stakeholders who bring added value.

The project's design responded to this complex issue through a pragmatic and phased approach: it strengthened the individual capacities of youth, offered them a space of tolerance, freedom of expression, and critical thinking, and prepared them to voluntarily engage in community activities.

- **Participants' selection**

The selection of participants was relevant, met the predefined criteria, and provided an opportunity for inclusive participation of young people from different regions, religions, and political affiliations. Project participants from the West Bank and Gaza were recruited through online advertisements and word of mouth among partner associations, followed by interviews and a selection process aimed primarily at ensuring the diversity of participants - including religious diversity (namely minorities like Christians and Samaritans).

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4 https://www.unicef.org/sop/press-releases/palestinian-prime-minister-unicef-unfpa-and-undp-sign-memorandum-understanding

The selection process chose youth who already had commitment and minimum skills to become leaders in their communities.

> ▪ **Integrating gender-sensitivity**

The Zimam team paid particular attention to the participation of young women, who, in the conservative and patriarchal social context of Palestine, experience a multitiered isolation; both because of security concerns due to the threat of attacks or arrests while commuting, and because of the conservative mindsets. Generally, young women are not allowed to travel alone to attend activities and/or meetings.

The Zimam team and the association's director were aware of this issue and spared no efforts to not only convince the fathers in person, but also to adapt the time and place of activities to enable young women to participate.

These efforts also went so far as to involve parents or allow someone to accompany them to events and activities.

(iii)   *Effectiveness*

The project was very effective thanks to the solid design of the theory of change, the adequate analysis of the change hypotheses, the complementarity of its activities, and their rigorous implementation in accordance with the logical framework.

Even though the project was managed according to the same rationale and the same discipline across the different communities of intervention, the external factors unique to each community considerably affected the attainment of results. The assessment noted more effective results in the West Bank communities.

Youth in Gaza, who already live under more challenging conditions, were more difficult to engage and needed more time and effort to demonstrate change. Additionally, the Israeli attack against Gaza (during the 3ʳᵈ phase of the project) and the violence escalation by the Israeli settlers in the West Bank caused some changes in the schedule.

Outcome 1: Improved skills, self-confidence, and understanding of political campaigns and democratic processes among youth leaders (18-35 years of age)
Youth were exposed to different narratives and perspectives and were able to directly examine the reality of their community thanks to the trainings, meetings with local authorities (including the minister) and representatives of the private sector, field visits, and dialogue workshops with community members. They were able to grasp the complexity of public policies and the importance of knowledge and skills in proposing concrete solutions for their communities. The most notable skill that the evaluator observed was the young people's ability to debate political issues with tolerance and a great deal of reason.

- 97.4% of the participants are supportive of democracy.

- 94.8% of participants agree that the Leadership Incubator program helped them understand and believe in democracy more.

- 94.7% of the participants said that their skills in writing and analyzing policies improved after joining the program.

- 86.9% of the participants said that they are more confident to meet with officials for accountability after joining the program.

Source: Endline capacity assessment survey

During the focus group discussions and/or the results mapping, youth, and especially those belonging to Fatah and Hamas, were actively listening to each other and commented on the various subjects related to their communities with respect and tolerance. Youth who ran for municipal elections also demonstrated a tangible ability to manage electoral campaigns and convince voters.

Officials interviewed during the evaluation testified that young leaders showed a strong capacity of moderation with community members and demonstrated leadership in facilitating exchanges during a conflict in the Dar Saleh community until an agreement was reached. Since then, local authorities have had more confidence in these youth, their skills, their ideas, and their proposals.

Outcome 2: Safe spaces for pragmatic dialogue that foster participatory approaches, human rights and accountability, and encourage active citizenship have increased in Palestine

- **Creating meeting spaces between youth and their pairs for a more pragmatic dialogue**

Young Palestinians are isolated in their communities due to movement restrictions and the scarcity of opportunities to meet, participate in democratic process, and express themselves. They also face the extremely difficult challenge of being in a situation where they are subject to repression on the one side, and fundamentalism on the other.

Some youth admitted that they trust only one political party, and they do not see a reason to question their decision. Some other youth from Gaza had never left their community and had never been exposed to different groups of people.

During the Siaseh café sessions, debates were organised and governed by respect and tolerance rules. Young people learned to express themselves, to listen actively, to form opinions, as well as to moderate debates with restraint and impartiality. Some discussions were heated, and some youth left the debates, yet, according to the young interviewees, the exercise was worth it.

- **Creating meeting spaces between youth and decision-makers to foster participation**

Incubating Young Leaders in Palestine exposed youth to peers from different communities and with different backgrounds.

The project connected its participants with Palestinian decisionmakers, which made political issues more concrete than merely abstract discourse.

During the meeting with the Minister of Transport, participants discussed several policy challenges and shortcomings in the ministry's deliverables. That conversation opened the door for constructive accountability and inspired thinking and planning for future changes.

Meeting with local authorities and participating in the field visits was an eye-opening experience for youth with regards to public policy and local governance issues. They become more sensibly critical and adopted a concrete approach when considering political issues. They started to question the positions of decision makers and political parties based on facts, results, and real contribution to their communities, rather than based on feelings of belonging and emotional alliances.

- **Youth initiatives create dynamics among their pairs, and in their family and community environments**

Well thought-out communication around project activities and youth initiatives in their communities gave the young participant visibility, repute, and influence among their friends, families, and communities.

The interviewed youth listed several cases where peers in their circles had decided to follow in their footsteps and get involved in community and civil society work.

Moreover, the young women who won in the municipal elections became "community influencer". The video of Maisaa, a young participant who became a member of the Dar Salah municipality, and the youngest elected member in Palestine, had gone viral on the village's Facebook page. She has been inspiring many other young women who saw her as a good example to follow. The impact of this dynamic of positive promotion of youth participation was encouraging citizen participation and appreciating the commitment of youth.

Figure 1 Maisaa posing besides the extension road she initiated in Dar Salah

(iv)   *Efficiency*

Overall, efficiency was considered to be satisfactory. However, the number of young beneficiaries was more or less limited.

The cost of capacity building programmes was relatively high compared to development programmes and was close to the cost of short public policy studies. Nonetheless, the workshop costs corresponded to the number of participants, the duration of training sessions, and the expertise of the trainers and facilitators that were hired.

While the project management cost was reasonable, the choice to spend USD 8,000 for a pre- and post-survey to assess the capacities of the 40 youths remains arguable, especially given that the findings of this assessment did not inform the training programme or the project decisions.

It would have been desirable if the project allocated small grants to fund youth initiatives so their ideas and proposals could be implemented and turned into reality.

(v)   *Impact*

Outcome mapping made it possible to account for many change effects at multiple levels and to collect concrete impact stories.

- **Direct positive change effects on youth attitudes and beliefs**

The project directly contributed to changing many negative attitudes and beliefs that youth had, and its different activities helped youth acquire more self-respect. It also created opportunities for democratic participation that youth didn't have before and paved the way for them to participate.

The young people interviewed all agree that the project contributed to changing their perception of community participation. Before the project started, the common idea was that youth had no place and no say in important decisions that affect their communities. However, after participating in project activities, especially trainings, field visits, and meetings, young people became convinced that they can be actively involved in the development of their communities, either by participating in municipal elections (for those eligible), or through activism and volunteering. They stated that they feel more motivated to actively engage in their communities.

All interviewed youth agree that their perception of decision makers has changed positively. Before the start of the project, youth had a negative view of decision-makers, believing that they were indifferent regarding their needs. Nonetheless, after meetings with decision-makers, and in particular, with the minister - who listened to them, answered all their questions, and even extended the duration of the meeting - youth thought that decision-makers can hear young voices if spaces for constructive dialogue were made available, that they, too, have a role to play themselves in holding officials accountable, and that they need to draft policy proposals and questions if they wanted to be respected and heard.

''Before the project, the prevailing mindset was one of scepticism and criticism towards politicians and officials, which I shared. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the minister's openness and willingness to listen to us, the youth, and explain public policy mechanisms. As a result, I now feel more comfortable reaching out to representatives of authorities, and I believe my colleagues feel the same''
Young participant from Dar Salah

The system of Areas and travel restrictions exacerbate social isolation and increase prejudice between different groups of Palestinian youth. Joint activities and meetings made it possible to create ties between young people from different communities and, above all, to refute the prejudice. Some youth who had negative and discriminatory perceptions towards youth from other communities and political affiliations recognised that thanks to project activities and intensive field work, their negative perceptions changed for the better. Youth from the city changed their opinions about youth living in the camps, and youth from Ramallah changed their perceptions of youth living in Nabulus, etc.

- **Empowering youth for leadership roles**

The interviewed youth confirmed that they indeed have assimilated the concepts and new knowledge on the promotion of democracy participation and good governance. They acknowledged that thanks to the trainings, they acquired new knowledge on government activities, public policy design, election campaigning, and economics or resource management.

''As someone who is passionate about public policy, I decided to replicate the training I received from Zimam at the university. The team at Zimam was supportive and provided me with the space and training support I needed to do so. I am determined to deepen my knowledge of the topic and to engage more students in this training''
Young Participant from Ramallah

A young participant took the initiative to transfer the knowledge and skills they received from the project trainings to their fellow members of the association and members of university councils, and they intend to expand this type of training to include other youth.

The young beneficiaries interviewed during this evaluation explained that the project was an opportunity to overcome barriers of fear and mistrust when contacting the members of local authorities and it offered them a chance to be active and influential leaders in their communities.

Several young project participants ran for the municipal elections, and three candidates won and two of them became the female elected municipal members for the first time. The young ladies explained that the project's activities conducted with the organisation and the support of their colleagues had a considerable impact on boosting their self-confidence and pushing them to run for the elections in the first place. Once elected, the pair advocated within municipal councils to create youth councils to foster the active participation of their peers, and they were considered as role models for young women in their villages.

Figure 2 The new Youth Council Dar Salah. Source: Dar Salah Facebook page

Young refugees living in the camps, who are deprived of running for municipal elections, found other ways of engagement to make life easier for the camps' inhabitants. They proposed solutions to the camps' managing committees, including creating covered waiting areas in bus stations and offering to recycle waste. A young participant was elected to manage the youth centre in a refugee camp, and with the support of Zimam, he mobilised his peers to set up a room to host youth from the camps and conduct cultural and artistic activities.

- **Boosting the engagement of local authorities and other stakeholders to positively engage youth**

The interviewed local authority representatives shared the perception that young people are disinterested in serving their community and no longer believe in the value of community and volunteering. However, meeting young leaders, listening to their proposals, and witnessing how they were able to engage municipal representatives and convince them to solve community problems allowed local authority representatives to re-discover youth through a new perspective: they were

motivated to serve their communities and had the required skills to do so. Yet, youth did not find the space nor the necessary support to participate.

As such, local authorities in Dar Salah decided to set up youth councils in parallel with municipal councils. This idea of youth councils replicated the principles of youth incubators so that youth can better participate in community development plans and can be encouraged to submit proposals and solutions to the municipality.

Moreover, the director of the Dar Salah municipal council decided to hire a young leader who participated in the project to motivate other youth and disseminate the positive message that commitment and competence do pay off. It was a paid part-time opportunity.

> *The director of a factory in Gaza explained that following meetings with the incubator youth, the management decided to implement the proposals put forward by the youth to minimise import costs of a product and manufacture it locally. The factory benefitted from the multidisciplinary knowledge of the youth and the freshness of their ideas, and as a result, the management decided to hold these meetings more regularly.*

- **Strengthen Community collaboration**

This impact was greater in villages and refugee camps than it was in cities like Ramallah and Gaza. This project showed that introducing young people to local governance through village councils and refugee camps' management committees is more accessible and efficient.

Youth from Dar Salah were able to address the problem of a street that got too narrow and caused several accidents. They stepped in and mobilised inhabitants through social media and videos explaining the issue, and the call for action was well received by community members. The youth organised a collective workshop during which they agreed with the village council members and the owners of adjacent lands to establish a joint agreement and raise funds to expand the road.

Initiatives carried out by the young leaders in the Aqab Jabr camp contributed to the creation of a dynamic and motivated the inhabitants to put an end to their state of collective disengagement. Even in the absence of representative elections within the camp, the cohabitants went to express their opinions and present their suggestions to the managing committee. They created a collaboration space to carry out activities such as the establishment of a youth culture centre. According to the testimonies of young participants, this dynamic broke the general state of frustration and offered positive examples of participation even under the difficult camp conditions.

In cities like Ramallah, the project helped to reinforce young people's belief in the importance of public policy in formulating solutions and advancing society.
Participatory dialogues with officials helped to reinforce this idea and install ambition in young people to take on positions within the Palestinian Authority.

- **Decompartmentalising the space for broader collaboration**

The project directly helped to break the rift between Palestinian provinces and to break the blockage imposed by Israeli security forces. It also rebutted prejudice and misconceptions resulting from internal division.
Owing to participatory activities, the project created meeting spaces for youth from various parts of the West Bank and youth from the besieged Gaza Strip. This not only made it possible to rupture the

isolation and strengthen the feeling of belonging, but also laid the groundwork for forming future municipal lists should elections take place.

(vi) *Sustainability*

The project remained dependent on external funding, even though ensuring the continuity of projects, especially in Gaza, has always been a major challenge.

Despite this, the assessment identified several elements of sustainable development for this project, namely:

- **The specialisation and the strategic planning of the implementing organisation**

In the Palestinian context, the legitimacy and recognition of the various stakeholders are two factors that are essential to the continuity of any initiative. Zimam succeeded in convincing and reassuring the various stakeholders through their political neutrality, the pragmatic nature of their approaches, and the effectiveness of their interventions.

The project was part of a long-term change strategy designed and planned by the implementing organisation, which had already proved itself capable of positively engaging youth to gain the trust and support of local communities, of partner CSOs, and of stakeholders, especially the youth.

Thanks to the trust of UNDEF and to the wide scope of echoes on Zimam, the organisation was able to obtain new funding for phase 2 of the project, and negotiations are underway with other donors to replicate the project in many other communities.

The project proposed a coherent, well-articulated and well-documented approach that helped CSO partners and municipal councils to replicate the incubator's theory of change in order to encourage youth to lead community initiatives.

- **Zimam's approaches strengthened the project's sustainability**

Zimam used a positive youth development approach to engage youth in their communities, schools, peer groups, and families in a way that recognises, leverages, and builds on their strengths. This has resulted in major sustainability elements, namely the continuity of the project's impact on youth perceptions, relationships, and practices, which changed as a result of the project activities.

- **Promoting peer-to-peer learning to disseminate knowledge**

Zimam involved and engaged the young volunteers who showed commitment and had leadership qualities in managing the project activities, thereby constantly creating opportunities and motivation for all young volunteers.

Consequently, youth from the association who appreciated the trainings voluntarily offered to deliver the training for other groups of young people with logistical and technical support from the association. As such, and as part of this project, two young leaders took the initiative and replicated the public policy trainings for the benefit of their colleagues from universities and youth municipal councils.

- **Building the capacities of partners**

Zimam's partnership strategy rests on an empowering approach, as it supported its partners by offering knowledge and providing logistical support to create their founding documents, develop their own work plans, and create their own networks of youth volunteers in their communities.

Not only does this approach make it possible to implement projects in the target communities, but it also guarantees a certain level of sustainability.

(vii)   UNDEF added value

The added value of UNDEF is undoubtable.

UNDEF showed great openness and ability to take risks in investing in such a project and enabling Zimam to apply their innovative approaches. It is thanks to UNDEF's trust and support that Zimam acquired a stronger position to generate buy-in from other donors and to sustain funding for their activities.

In the highly polarised political context of Palestine, where youth experience mistrust and often fear being manipulated and exploited for political reasons, operating under the UNDEF reinforced Zimam's legitimacy and reassured youth that the goal was to promote values of democracy.
The philosophy of Zimam, their vision, as well as their approaches are in line with UNDEF's role to strengthen civil society organisations and to foster collaboration.

The project and its products were transparently branded as supported by UNDEF. Young participants interviewed during this evaluation recognised the UNDEF mission and values and showed trust in its role in Palestine and engagement towards that role.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions	Recommendations
The *relevance and coherence* of the project are undebatable; the implementation partner's expertise, the theory of change, and the approaches perfectly meet the needs of young participants and the priorities of the Palestinian context.	The theory of change was valid. It needs to be consolidated by grants for youth-led initiatives to showcase their ability to design solutions and projects and implement them.
The project strategy is deep-rooted, pragmatic and well-articulated. The Zimam team members all share the same philosophy on change and adopt the same approaches when working with youth, partners, local authorities, and community members. This enhanced the project's effectiveness and its suitability.	Zimam should continue developing its expertise, tools, and approaches, and should offer to build the capacities of other Palestinian CSOs and youth organisations working on youth engagement. The youth incubator programme should be adopted by other CSOs and Youth Councils to be duplicated and scaled-up.
The Zimam team is multidisciplinary and highly qualified. They combine a deep understanding of the Palestinian context, good experience in working with youth, and good mastery of the technical programmatic procedures and approaches. The Zimam team successfully tailored approaches such as positive youth development, inclusion, and gender equality to the local context and the specificities of the Palestinian communities. This helped them to overcome cultural barriers and enhance the appropriation of the project's theory of change by youths, partners, local authorities, and members of the communities.	
The project was more effective on the West Bank than it was in Gaza. Interviews with youth from Gaza revealed a clear gap between the project's impact on young people's attitudes and knowledge in Gaza versus the West Bank. Youth in Gaza were more sceptical and vulnerable, and had fewer chances to be engaged and involved, even at the community level. The project documents offered few analyses as to why change took place differently in the two contexts.	The next incubator phases and the future youth projects in Gaza should take into consideration the critical and unique situation of youth living in Gaza, as it has subsequent requirements such as larger funds, longer engagement processes, and clear project objectives and action plans.
The project's inclusion of different Palestinian communities was *highly effective*. The variety of backgrounds of the participating youth enhanced the social capital, challenged stereotypes, and created a sense of unity between the Palestinian	It is strongly recommended to continue with this inclusive approach and replicate the project in other Palestinian communities in order to promote the dynamics created by the project.

youths.	
The project had a *considerable impact* on empowering young participants, especially those from the West Bank. By recognising the youth's skills and offering them a culturally sensitive safe space, participants were able to build networks, acquire knowledge, share ideas, and actively participate in their communities. As a result of the project, three youth were elected in the municipal elections, some obtained jobs, and others became more engaged in their local communities.	Zimam should tailor their training to the needs of CSOs and youth councils, who would in turn adopt Zimam's approaches in order to better engage youth in Palestine. The next phase of the project should continue to engage and support young participants from the first phase.
The project had a major impact on fostering trust and collaboration between young participants and local authorities and community members in the area of proposing concrete solutions to community challenges. However, this impact was limited by the absence of grants to fund youth initiatives.	For future replications and scaling, it is recommended to add a small grants component to the project and the budget to enable youth to pilot their proposed solutions.
The partnership strategy with partners and key stakeholders was particularly relevant and effective. The mobilisation of representatives of the private sector and of the minister was also a relevant choice to respond to the youth's need for professional opportunities and for accountability, respectively.	The partnership strategy could be more sustainable and could be more intentional in generating more opportunities for youths, be it in the private sector or the government.
Elements for the *sustainability* of the project include: - The change philosophy of Zimam which is deeply rooted within the organisation and the commitment of their team; - The consistency of the project implementation and monitoring processes; - The quality of the resources produced (training materials, manuals, etc.); - The networking; and - Zimam's trusted reputation among different partners.	When replicating and scaling-up, and to ensure that a great impact is achieved, Zimam should deliver future projects with the same change philosophy and the same consistency. It would be important to focus on organisational development and to carefully maintain the partnership strategy in order to sustain the project's impact.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED

This was a well-designed and effectively implemented youth engagement project.
Factors of success include the below:
- The social capital of the organisation (it was well-known and seen as legitimate by the various stakeholders).
- The highly qualified project team.
- The project design with a theory of change that was shared and assimilated by the implementation team and the partners.
- The strategy used to enter new communities, which was pragmatic, culturally sensitive, and politically neutral.
- The choice of partners (they were from within the communities, credible, and well-known at the local level).
- The partnership strategy, which was based on empowering partners and building their capacity.
- The adequate approach for positive youth engagement (recognition, accountability, and exploring their potential).
- The quality of the training programme and the diversity of learning formats.
- Well thought-out communication.

The case of Zimam demonstrated that even though the organisation did not have a significant track record, the quality of the project proposal submitted by the grantee's finance team could demonstrate their capability to manage funds. Indeed, UNDEF showed audacity and open-mindedness in agreeing to fund this young organisation.

This project has demonstrated that even in the complex and difficult context of Palestine, setting realistic objectives in terms of the number of beneficiaries and communities of intervention, and adopting a pragmatic approach that includes relevant and useful activities such as training and community services, can engage different target groups, regardless of their political affiliations and sensitivities, and generate impact at both the individual and community levels.

Given the numerous challenges of the Palestinian context, it is increasingly relevant to engage Palestinian youth in order to increase their individual resilience and help them cope with the stress they face. Youth in Gaza face double exclusion compared to their peers in the West Bank as a result of settlements and internal conflict, which makes engaging them more difficult and therefore requires additional funding, effort, and monitoring to achieve meaningful change and results.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation Questions:

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to the context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	- Was the objective of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? - Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? - Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Coherence	The extent of the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution.	- To what extent did this intervention fit the context and the development priorities? - To what extent is this intervention coherent with other interventions which have similar objectives? - To what extent is the intervention coherent internally? - To what extent is the intervention coherent with wider UNDEF objectives? - To what extent is the intervention coherent with international obligations?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve the objective and goals?	- To what extent has the project's objective been reached? - To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? - Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objective? - What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	- Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? - Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? - Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objective?

Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? ▪ What are the outcomes the project have achieved and how? ▪ How do outcomes achieved contribute to the program's overall goal? ▪ What were the external factors and actors (including the support from other, likeminded interventions) that contributed to these outcomes either positively or negatively? ▪ Did the political situation in Palestine, its related consequences and Covid 19 undermined the project realizations? - How do the project strategies fit between the different communities, especially Gaza and west bank?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

Annex 2: Persons Interviewed

27 November 2022	
Arrive to Ramallah	
Coordination meeting with Zimam team	
28 November 2022	
Travel to Bethlehem	
Interview	Implementing Partner (Nibras)
Interview	Member of local council who won elections after being part of the "incubating young leaders" project
Interviews	Youth participants
Interview	The head of the local council in Dar Salah
29 November 2022	
Travel to Jericho	
Interviews	Partner (Kanaan)
Interviews	Members of local council who won elections after being part of the "incubating young leaders" project
Focus group with Youth Participants	
30 November 2022	
Travel Nablus	
Interviews	Implementing Partner (Samaritan Legend)
Focus group with project participants	
1 December 2022	
Gaza (online)	
Online Focus group with project participants	
Online Interview	Implementing Partners (Vision)
Online interview	Business community representative which engaged with the project
2 December	
Ramallah Focus groups with project beneficiaries	

Annex 3: Acronyms

Covid-19	Coronavirus
CSOs	Civil society organization
ICHR	The Independent Commission for Human Rights
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
USD	Unites states dollars
YC	Youth Council
YL	Youth Leader