

## **Strengthening the Marginalized Communities in Palestine through Civic Education Approaches**

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### **Introduction**

Education in its broad terms means an ongoing lifelong learning process that constantly brings out people's potential both as individuals and as members of society, who constantly seek to improve their living conditions, and to advance the quality of their lives through the acquisition of skills. ICCS, 2023 declares that civic education provides young people and society members with knowledge, understanding and dispositions considered necessary to participate successfully as citizens in society. It is therefore the individual that is considered the backbone of development, and lifelong learning and education are the bases through which comprehensive and sustainable development are achieved (Hassan, 2023).

The concepts and approaches of civic education are attributed to the legacy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who elaborates in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1997, the process of analyzing this relationship to arrive at the forms of consciousness and ways in which systematic oppression and marginalization function. His approach is based on dialogue as the most effective learning tool and the most democratic and humane way. Ruiz-Eugenio, Tellado, Valls-Carol and Gairal-Casadó, (2023) explain that, through dialogue, we not only learn from others, but we also learn about ourselves, and this makes us more conscious and more aware of "ourselves and our realities. As a result, we come to realize the state of marginalization, where awareness acts as the catalyst and the driver" for striving towards change (Thomsen and Weilage, 2023). This is because "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education." (Freire, 2000, p. ). Therefore, civic education forms a unique and realistic learning experience that reflects reality together with a state of knowledge that

is responsible for achieving awareness of actual needs, thus paving the way for a clearer vision of the future (Jerome and Moore, 2023).

The approach we are talking about here is known as Neighborhood (*Mujawarat* in Arabic) aims at driving the learning process within an environment of dialogue, which includes topics that address learners' daily urgent needs, and which the learners regard as basic burdensome problems that cause stress and pain (Hoggan-Kloubert and Mabery 2022). The concept of neighborhood based on the act of neighbourly visit of different members of society in the training needs identification process, take gender into consideration. The members share common desires and experiences gathered in an atmosphere of acquaintance, learning, dialogue, meditation, and self-enclosure. Sliva, Oliviera, Branco & Flores (2022) explain that cultural psychology, based on the notion of education as a historical and cultural process, constitutes practice and the understanding that the individual and society are built independently.

This paper will discuss the implementation of the neighborhood "Mujawarat" approach in community centers for youth and adult education in Palestinian marginalized villages and country-sides. The activities target two aspects: social participation and 'employability' and personal participation, which have a strong focus on practical application. Among the outcomes, new community initiatives are equally important as improving career prospects of individuals and strengthening local partners and to increase local ownership.

### **Community Centers for Adult Education**

Since 2010, DVV International has accompanied the Ministry of Education, and Dar Al-Kalima University with local governmental sector in the development and implementation of a strategy for adult education. Eight Community centers have been established in 5 different Palestinian regions (Jenin and Nablus - northern district, Hebron -southern district, Jerusalem, and Gaza). They are flexible resources institutions established in accessible places open to people of all ages. The centers plan their activities based on the requests, requirements, and current needs of local people. The key missions of the adult education centers range all the way from animating professional growth by cultivating crucial skills, to forming an environment that encourages the lifelong quest for knowledge<sup>1</sup>. Community centers focus on societal awareness as an integral part of intellectual and personal development to improve the quality of life of young people and adults and enable them to reach their full potential.

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<sup>1</sup> Sanadze, R., & Santeladze, L. (2017). *Adult education centres as a key to development-challenges and success factors*

In addition, community centers for youth and adult education work to invest the energies of young people and their free time in acquiring various educational and professional skills within the framework of lifelong learning, which benefits the local community and contributes to positive change in social, economic, and cultural life and the strengthening of community solidarity. In addition, it encourages youth initiatives that motivate them to volunteer work and enhance youth participation in community work.

Community centers for youth and adult education provide within their programmes various areas of active and positive community participation, as a direct result of guidance and counseling sessions, as they work to stimulate volunteering, and adopt community and cultural initiatives as opportunities for people to put newly acquired knowledge and ideas into practice and actively participate in shaping their environment, which motivates more people to educate themselves and consult adult learning and education institutions. This path promotes the values of participation, community solidarity, community and popular learning that makes individuals feel liberated and provides new insights that help people acquire new competencies. Cultural learning paths, community initiatives, volunteer days, social entrepreneurship projects, cultural evenings and events, cultural and social exchange paths and other cultural, community and popular activities.

In the context of the cumulative and constructive experience of the work path with community centers for youth and adult education, the neighborhood approach (Mujawarat) was developed and piloted to serve learning and training opportunities in the community for the promotion of community and cultural learning opportunities and community participation opportunities.

### **Civic education activities (Mujawarat - Neighborhood)**

The concept of the Mujawarat/Neighborhood is initiated by a Palestinian educator Munir Fasha, who believes that life experiences of each individual create statements of knowledge and defines it as the freedom for decisions and thinking that are shared among groups of individuals seeking to live accordingly and learn from other experiences<sup>2</sup>. This process does not put the learner in a paradoxical context or in a situation of competitiveness within society, but rather seeks to strengthen interconnectedness with the rest of society to achieve mutual benefit. Since the discussion here is about leadership and innovation as human and social acts, it can therefore be argued that what

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<sup>2</sup> Munir Fasha, *My Story with Mathematics* (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2016), p. 41

contributes to the development of the individual would inevitably do likewise for society.

Education for development needs to break free from the “banking model of education” (Freire, 1970). The learner’s role is no less important than that of the facilitator, particularly that learners form the basis of the learning process. The type of learning societies needed is that which leads to an awakened consciousness and an awareness of the learners’ reality and the obstacles by which he/she is surrounded. This is because learners would in no way regard any problems raised within the learning process as real unless they revolve around fundamental issues related to their familial, social and economic life, and touch upon daily urgent needs in a manner that is consistent with the capaciousness and unity of life as whole.

The Mujawarat (Neighborhood Education), also known as emancipatory learning, was designed to enable the participants from the various societies to read life through raising awareness through dialogue, considered a process through which humans can learn the truth about their circumstances so that they can shift from a state of negative adaptation to a state of action and anticipation of opportunities.

In 2022, over 35 females and 3 males from the West Bank participated in the Mujawarat activities. Participants were mainly learners in the activities of community centers for adult education who registered, aiming for personal development that enhanced employability, and community and cultural learning and participation. It is essential to engage different groups of society in the training needs identification process, take gender into consideration and bring on board experts with various experiences.

### **Mujawarat within the Employability and Personal Development Process**

This activity was given to 20 participants (local artisans): 17 females and 3 males who intended to establish small enterprises by gaining entrepreneurial competencies. The activity entailed three rounds of Mujawarat:

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> round is called “Education of Hope” and aims at highlighting and building on the importance of individuals’ active participation in collective and individual lifelong learning paths. Mutual support and shared learning experiences are understood as two main components of resilience, both for individuals and for communities at large. This round took place in the Dar al-Kalima campus before joining the technical learning courses aimed at increased employability of the

participants. The training lasted for 55 hours including mosaic training workshops, packaging and online marketing which all were given at the workshops inside the DAK campus by professionals.

2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> round is called “a Road Map” and aims at supporting the learners to see their potential alongside the possible roads available (or those that can be made available) for them to decide on their next steps and plans. This round takes place directly after the participants finish the technical and complementary training path of learning or personal development courses. Many products were created by the participants and provided a digital website for marketing, also they took part in cultural festivals that are organized by the DVVI “Stories of Palestine” that enables them to sell their product locally and internationally.
3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> round takes place six months later and is called “Reflection”. It allows the group to revisit their road maps, reflect on what happened in reality, how it impacted them and what they aspire to do next.

### **Mujawarat within Community and Cultural Learning and participation**

This activity targeting 15 women from one of the Palestinian refugee camps in Bethlehem. These women are active and sources of influence among their communities, aiming to solve some of society’s problems. The activity entailed three rounds of Mujawarat:

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> round is “Land Preparation”, preparing the group of learners with concepts and establishing a dialogue about identity and community. Through using the PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) method, different social problems were proposed such as pollution, recycling awareness, bullying at schools, women rights, etc.
2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> round is “Pouring Seeds and fixing them in the fertile land”, reflection on a learning path action for the local community by the group. The participants were distributed into three groups and practiced the Mujawarat activity among their societies to come up with the two main issues that were needed to be solved for community development.

A week later, two short courses were implemented in a local cultural center about community mobilization. There was also the writing of proposals for community initiatives, aiming to orient the participants to structure the plan for their community development.

Two proposals were made, the first about recycling awareness and bullying; targeting the young adults at high schools believing that the change can be initiated with this society segment.

3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> round involves appreciating wheat spikes and harvest; a final round of reflection on the results of this collective work on individuals and on their community and discussion on what happens with the spikes next.

### **Results Civic Education Activities**

Civic education provides opportunities for active participation, promotes the development of attitudes towards important aspects of civic life, and develops dispositions in young people to make positive contributions to their societies. Carretero, Haste and Bermundez (2015) explains that experiencing real-life civic action is important to cultivate civic identities that provide authentic and effective sources of motivation, purpose, responsibility, agency, and efficiency. Thus, participants' feedback and pre- and post- training documentation suggest that there is a positive influence on restoring hope and positive thinking. Participants developed new perspectives on the importance of learning and active participation as well as restoring their trust in what they can do to change the reality for themselves and for their communities.

The socio-economic domain, as justified by Hebert and Sears (2001), requires knowledge of social relations in society and social skills, as well as vocational training and economic skills for job- related and other economic activities. Some participants, especially artisans, were able to gain for the first time new financial support for their small projects after they were introduced through this project to professionals who saw their determination and success. Ehrlich (1997) contended that "Civic learning – in the sense of how a community works and how to help it work better and learning are mutually reinforcing". (Ehrlich,1997, p. 61)

Community wellbeing is a function of many factors working in concert to promote an optimal quality of life for all members of a community. Merriam and Kee (2015) declare the relationship between lifelong learning and community wellbeing is argued from a social capital perspective. In addition, Herbert and Sears (2001) indicate that the social citizenship refers to the relations between individuals in a society and demands loyalty and solidarity, in which, after the project, several small groups of participants initiated a number of community initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in their

communities and finding new income-generating opportunities for themselves and for their families.

The Mujawarat approaches have driven the learning process within an environment of dialogue, which includes topics that address learners' daily urgent needs especially the effect of bullying upon school kids, and which the learners regard as basic burdensome issues that cause stress and pain. Freire emphasizes that dialogue generates critical thinking, and without dialogue there can be no communication, while without communication there can be no education. Therefore, exposing such a need for dialogue calls for broadening our perspectives and analyzing needs within a learning context that is consistent with the assessment of reality, and relevant to the reality of the local community.

## **Conclusion**

Non-formal citizenship education in Palestine is oriented towards generating a sense of human dignity and empowerment of each individual to become capable of contributing to a free society, in which coherence, tolerance and friendship among people from all ethnic/ cultural/ religious backgrounds are strengthened and upheld; and in which individuals' unique personalities and characters are empowered and their respect to human rights, including the right to be different, are strengthened ( Freire, 2008). Accordingly, the DVV International, Dar al-Kalima University and the Community Centers for Adult Education are working jointly to develop and provide programs to enhance Palestinian understanding of their own realities, challenges, and potential, both as individuals and as communities.

The learning process in both Mujawarat activities is based on dialogue with the community, forming a unique and realistic learning experience. Dialogue and appreciative mutual learning have to be at the core of any citizenship education activities in order to achieve the desired goals. It reflects reality together with a state of knowledge that is responsible for achieving awareness of actual needs. Empowering the local community centers for Adult Education and ensuring the sense of local ownership and collective benefit are key to the success of popular citizenship education approaches, thus, paving the way for a clearer vision of the future.

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### **Abstract**

The Mujawarat (Neighborhood Education) is an emancipatory learning designed to enable the participants from the societies to read life through raising awareness by the use of dialogue, which is considered a process through which humans can learn the truth about their circumstances so that they can shift from a state of negative adaptation to a state of action and anticipation of opportunities. Dar al-Kalima University with the DVV International implemented a civic education approach "Mujawarat" to 35 females and 3 males from Palestinian communities. The participants were mainly learners in the community centers for adult education activities who registered aiming for personal development that enhanced employability, and community and cultural learning and participation. It is essential to engage different groups of society in the training needs identification process, take gender into consideration and bring on board experts with various experiences. Among the outcomes, new community initiatives are equally important to improve career prospects of individuals and also to strengthen local partners and increase local ownership.

### **Key words**

Civic Education – Neighborhood/ Mujawarat – dialogue – Community participation – Employability

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## **Renforcer les communautés marginalisées en Palestine par des approches d'éducation civique**

Rose Kando

### **Résumé**

Le Mujawarat (éducation de quartier) est un apprentissage émancipatoire conçu pour permettre aux participants des sociétés de comprendre la vie en les sensibilisant grâce à l'utilisation du dialogue, considéré comme un processus permettant aux êtres humains d'apprendre la vérité sur leurs circonstances afin qu'ils puissent passer d'un état d'adaptation négative à un état d'action et d'anticipation des opportunités. L'université Dar al-Kalima, en collaboration avec la DVV International, a mis en œuvre une approche d'éducation civique "Mujawarat" auprès de 35 femmes et 3 hommes issus de communautés palestiniennes. Les participants étaient principalement des apprenants dans les centres communautaires pour les activités d'éducation des adultes qui se sont inscrits en vue d'un développement personnel améliorant l'employabilité, ainsi que l'apprentissage et la participation communautaires et culturels. Il est essentiel d'impliquer différents groupes de la société dans le processus d'identification des besoins en formation, de prendre en compte la dimension du genre et de faire appel à des experts ayant des expériences diverses. Parmi les résultats obtenus, les nouvelles

initiatives communautaires sont tout aussi importantes pour améliorer les perspectives de carrière des individus que pour renforcer les partenaires locaux et accroître l'appropriation locale.

### **Mots clés**

Éducation civique, Mujawarat, dialogue, participation communautaire, employabilité

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## **Fortalecimiento de las comunidades marginadas en Palestina mediante enfoques de educación cívica**

Rose Kando

### **Resumen**

El Mujawarat (Educación Vecinal) es un aprendizaje emancipador diseñado para capacitar a los participantes de las sociedades para comprender la vida mediante la sensibilización a través del diálogo, considerado como un proceso mediante el cual los seres humanos pueden aprender la verdad sobre sus circunstancias para poder pasar de un estado de adaptación negativa a un estado de acción y anticipación de oportunidades. La Universidad Dar al-Kalima, en colaboración con DVV International, implementó un enfoque de educación cívica denominado "Mujawarat" con 35 mujeres y 3 hombres de comunidades palestinas. Los participantes eran principalmente estudiantes de los centros comunitarios para actividades de educación de adultos que se inscribieron con el objetivo de lograr un desarrollo personal que mejorara la empleabilidad, así como el aprendizaje y la participación comunitaria y cultural. Es esencial involucrar a los distintos grupos de la sociedad en el proceso de identificación de las necesidades de formación, tener en cuenta el género y contar con expertos con diversas experiencias. Entre los resultados, las nuevas iniciativas comunitarias son igualmente importantes para mejorar las perspectivas laborales de las personas y también para fortalecer a los socios locales y aumentar la apropiación local.

### **Palabras clave**

Educación cívica, Barrio/Mujawarat, diálogo, Participación comunitaria, Empleabilidad