



Youth And Youth Institutions, Structures, Projects and Clubs

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Chapter One: The Theoretical Framework of the Research – Research Background

1. Introduction:

Youth organizations are among the major institutional bodies that care for and influence young people. Youth organizations primarily seek to develop the capacities of young people in that they are the hope for tomorrow. These institutions also organize different sports, artistic, cultural and educational activities aimed at youth development, seeking to promote a spirit of teamwork, volunteerism and positive values, while attempting at the same time to protect youth from negative trends such as sectarianism, factionalism and fanaticism. They also seek to oppose obsolete norms and traditions and replace them with norms and traditions that conform with the society's' cultural heritage.

Palestinian youth aged 0-24 make up 65 percent of the total Palestinian population in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, and youth are thus seen as key agents of change, and as the basic foundation for building a future Palestinian state. Therefore, it is critical that development interventions take youth needs into account. However, Palestinian youth have been the subject of systematic oppressive policies and practices by the powers of colonialism and occupation, including torture, humiliation and inhumane treatment aimed at suppressing their will and undermining their ability to contribute to the interlinked process of democratic change and national liberation.

In addition to the external problems they have experienced, and continue to experience, youth are also affected by general social problems, and specific personal issues. This situation has created a state of imbalance and lack of direction in some cases, and created serious obstacles preventing youth from realizing their goals. Thus, youth are undergoing a crisis situation that remains deeply rooted in Palestinian society. Hence, working for and with youth has become an urgent national necessity that requires concerted efforts by all sectors. Youth have material, social, economic and psychological needs that they seek to satisfy. These needs can only be met through close interaction with society and its different institutions.

A 1995 study carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and UNIFEM¹ found that there were a total of 366 youth clubs and centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, of which 315 were functional and 51 were either closed or non-functional. The total number included 28 women's centers: 27 functional and one non-functional. There were a total of 292 centers in the West Bank, 242 of which were functional and 50 of which had

¹ PCBS and UNICEF, 1995, Comprehensive Survey of childhood and youth centers: Summary of Report 1 (for youth and women centers). Jerusalem, p 11.

been closed down, while there were 46 youth centers in the Gaza Strip. In term of women's centers, there were 17 such centers in the West Bank only one of which had been shut down, and 11 in Gaza In general, 88% of the centers were located in the West Bank, roughly 38% of which were situated in the central area, 27% in the south, and 35% in the north of the West Bank. In contrast, 38% of all clubs in the Gaza Strip were located in Gaza City..

Currently however, there is now a total of 507 youth centers and clubs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip according to a PCBS survey carried out in 2006.² According to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, there are 338 youth and women's clubs. On the other hand, the number of youth institutions or other institutions with youth programs, under which Sharek Youth Forum was included as part of the "Partners" project reached 250 institutions, including 24 institutions for young women (17 in the West Bank and 7 in Gaza Strip). The researcher was able to identify a total of 122 additional institutions, including 40 women's institutions and centers, which brings the total of youth institutions, centers, clubs and projects to 710.

There is an apparent variation in the distribution of both youth and women's centers between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, meaning that these centers do not respond to existing needs, especially for women's centers, which account for just 27 out of 315 centers. Thus, there is a pressing need to establish more clubs in order to bridge this gap, especially in Gaza Strip, and in the rural areas of the Jenin and Tulkarem districts.³

Geographically, lists and addresses of youth institutions reveal that youth institutions are mainly concentrated in the central West Bank, particularly in the Ramallah district. Their activities vary, focusing primarily on youth groups. About 39% provide different aspects of youth activities either as their main focus or as part of their work, 19% provide sports activities, 6% provide rehabilitation activities, 6% focus on educational activities, 8% provide cultural activities, about 19% target women and workers', and finally, 8% offer services to groups with special needs, such as detainees, ex-detainees and people with disabilities.⁴

In terms of quantity, the number of centers is again concentrated in the central West Bank. There are 61 centers in the Ramallah and Al-Bireh districts for example, compared to just 11 and 15 in the Qalqilia and Jericho districts respectively. The Annex illustrates the number and distribution of youth institutions and clubs in the different districts of the West Bank. The Annex provides a total number of 321 clubs, which differs from the abovementioned totals. It is difficult to decide whether these figures are accurate in view of such discrepancies in numbers, as no NGO or governmental body can claim

2 PCBS, 2006, Census of Economic Establishments 2004 and its updates up to 31 December 2005, Ramallah, Palestine. Unpublished data.

3 For more information, see PCBS, *op. cit.*, pp 34-38, and PCBS, Final Findings of Population Report, vol. 1, 1999, table 6, pp 53-69.

4 Development Studies Center. Human Development Report 1998-1999, Ramallah, p 12.

to have comprehensive statistics on youth institutions in Palestine. Hence, we have presented the reader with all figures obtained in order to be used as a basis for any future research on youth institutions aiming at verifying and correcting the numbers presented. As such, the listing of institutions working with youth is in need of a separate and well-designed research in order to accurately record the actual number of institutions working with, and for youth.

Other youth institutions are also concentrated in the central West Bank. Their main headquarters are located in the Ramallah district and some may run branch offices in cities and villages in the north or south of the West Bank. In that the total population of the central West Bank is less than that of the north and south respectively, the need for establishing new institutions to respond to the minimum level of youth needs in other areas is evident.

Certainly, this is not the first study addressing youth institutions, structures, projects and clubs in Palestine. However, literature related to youth issues has not addressed youth-related policies and there is an obvious deficiency in local literature proposing future policies in this regard. Therefore, this study aims to lay the ground work for a more detailed elaboration of this issue. The present study seeks to explore the views of youth institutions, structures, projects and clubs in order to develop potential solutions for this important sector both in theory and practice, by assessing the current status of youth institutions on one hand, and proposing certain policies that would promote the role of youth in their institutions on the other.

The study consists of three chapters. Chapter one introduces the theoretical framework, study background, introduction, research problem, reasons for the selection of this issue for research, the significance of the research, hypotheses, research questions, research goal, research methodology, research framework, obstacles and problems, and research concepts and terminology. Chapter two addresses the status of youth within youth institutions, structures, projects and clubs through three topics: the first addressing membership and objectives; the second dealing with youth and decision-making in youth institutions; and the third addressing youth membership and programs of youth institutions, structures, projects and clubs. Chapter three is also divided into three topics with the first addressing youth empowerment, the second examining awareness-raising and educational programs and proposed programs and the third topic presenting general recommendations and a list of questions raised. This last chapter is followed by an annex.

Finally, this study is preliminary and may re-open new prospects for more detailed discussion and study on future programs and policies for the youth sector.

2. Research problem:

In many countries throughout the world, youth constitute one of the key supporting elements and investments in a society's future, and young people

are an important driving force of social change. Palestine, where young people aged 24 years and under make up 65 percent of the population, is no exception. In such a context, it is critical that development processes engage Palestinian youth, and take their specific needs and visions into account, if they are to be successful.

Youth have material, social and psychological needs that they seek to satisfy. These needs are linked to the specific characteristics of this period in the life cycle. However, youth institutions often lack the capacity to address these needs effectively.

Partisan, familial, tribal, local and regional considerations have a major role in the formation of political and cultural awareness. However, such considerations present obstacles and restraints preventing youth and youth institutions from achieving a wider and more active participation in, openness, and development of the political, social, economic and cultural spheres of society. The Palestinian experience has proved this notion true at the level of both NGOs, especially youth institutions, and at the level of official institutions. This trend was evident in the make-up of municipal and village councils appointed by the former Palestinian Authority (PA). Until recently, youth were excluded from nominations by the PA. Latterly, a small number of youth were appointed to some councils in response to internal pressures related to resignations and the need to complete the quota for a number of councils.

The low awareness of the near political, cultural, social and economic environment and lack of knowledge of the effective laws, including elections law and other codes, create obstacles to the active participation of youth. The identification of barriers and obstacles that prevent youth from participation in public life, specifically the Parliament, is a necessary step towards developing programs and proposing plans, projects and solutions that would enable youth to realize their rights and positively influence the legislative, social, economic, cultural and political environment in order to place youth issues high on the national agenda.

The success of youth and youth institutions in reaching an advanced level of participation and effectiveness is still hindered by several obstacles and barriers, which constitute the core of this research problem:

1. What role does cultural heritage playing in limiting the public participation of youth in Palestine?
2. What is the role of tribal norms in limiting the effectiveness of youth institutions and youth participation in Palestine?
3. What are the impacts of effective laws, including the elections law, on youth participation?
4. What role does Palestinian civil society in general, and youth institutions in particular play in activating youth? Do they pay significant attention to youth issues?
5. To what extent are Palestinian youth institutions unified/fragmented?
6. What programs are targeted at youth by youth institutions and political parties?

7. Is there real, practical space for youth within these parties?
8. Or on the contrary, has youth participation only been a focus of their literature and theoretical presentations?
9. What is the level of youth awareness of their issues, rights and roles? How does this relate to socialization processes and political awareness?

3. Reasons for selecting the issue of this research:

The selection of this issue is based on several academic and practical reasons.

Academic:

The selection of the issue of youth and youth institutions, structures, projects and clubs as a focus for this research is based on a belief that youth participation is a key factor in the practice of democracy. Therefore, youth participation has become a national trend enjoying consensus by the majority of the political spectrum at the Palestinian level as well as globally, and is an indicator for measuring nations' advancement and development. Therefore, research on this issue is expected to generate public debate in the future, which would have a positive impact on decision-makers.

Reasons for selecting this issue lie in the fact that the issue of youth and youth institutions are highly significant in view of the importance of youth in Palestinian society and in the process of change.. Hence, the actual motives for conducting this research are not solely academic but are more related to approaching one of the most sensitive issues in the Palestinian society. This is an important indicator in terms of the democratic development sought by Palestinian society. Another factor is the almost complete absence of such in-depth studies addressing the issues of youth and youth institutions, leaving a gap of information on this vital issue. In the absence of basic information on this topic, decision-makers cannot be sure as to the effectiveness of their work and policies, and may subsequently pursue decisions and policies that do not meet the real need of Palestinian youth.

Practically:

This aspect is attributed to the researcher's desire and belief in the importance of addressing this topic, which corresponds to the nature of his study and work focus on civil society issues.

4. Research significance:

The significance of the research is based on the following:

1. Young people under the age of 24 constitute 65 percent of Palestinian society.
2. Youth represent the generation that will assume responsibility for the future and is therefore capable of effecting positive social change.

3. The core value of this study is to propose concrete policies in order to address the current situation of youth institutions and youth themselves, in something that other such studies have often failed to do.
4. Previous youth activism has made the youth movement popular in Palestine.
5. Highlighting the importance of youth institutions in Palestine.
6. Making recommendations that would assist Palestinian decision-makers.
7. To serve as a reference on youth and youth institutions.
8. To address the poor representation of youth in Palestinian public institutions.
9. This study will have both theoretical and applied dimensions.

5. Hypotheses:

Overall hypothesis:

Youth institutions do not effectively represent the real needs of youth, because they do not engage youth in the decision-making process.

Related questions:

- Is the weakness of youth institutions attributed to the personnel of these organizations?
- Is lack of active participation on the part of youth, due to the fact that it is not perceived as a priority for them because of their engagement with other issues?
- Is the reason linked to the poor capacity of youth and a lack of knowledge of citizenship rights and duties?
- Are youth convinced that participation mechanisms and consequently youth institutions will not make any difference to their status?
- Have the programs and activities of youth institutions failed in gaining the acceptance of youth?

6. Research questions:

1. Will the amendment of the Elections law, the facilitation of electoral procedures, the cancellation of district divisions and the adoption of electoral lists lead to the increased political participation of youth in Palestine?
2. Will promoting the concept of citizenship as a relationship of belonging between individuals and their society based on equality limit the current strength of norms and traditions, and thus promote youth political participation?
3. Will enabling the youth movement and youth organizations, clubs and societies to assume their role in influencing the public sphere as civil society organizations, rather than being prohibited from practicing political activities by virtue of the law, make them influential lobbying and advocacy groups that cannot be overlooked or underestimated?

4. Can the development and promotion of networking, coordination and cooperation among the different youth institutions help youth reach the legislative authority?
5. What role is expected from civil society institutions in promoting the political participation of youth?
6. Can programs aimed at raising youth awareness of their legal rights and of civic issues, and building their capacity in terms of empowerment, leadership and communication, play a major role in activating their political participation?
7. What is the role of Palestinian political parties and factions in promoting youth political participation in Palestine?
8. Is there a role to play by media in supporting youth by stressing their right to participation and demonstrating their different abilities and potentials on the basis that youth participation is in the interest of all?
9. How does the prevailing culture in society affect youth political participation?
10. Does the prevailing culture shape the nature of youth political participation?
11. What are the positive or negative implications of this?
12. How do the attitudes of the political leadership towards democracy affect the political participation of youth?
13. What is the potential of promoting youth political participation, and how?

7. Research goal:

This research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the status of youth institutions in order to help develop policies that promote the role of youth in their institutions and influence institutional decision-makers to gear their work towards the benefits of youth.
2. Examine the mechanisms utilized to increase youth membership in these institutions.
3. Propose activities and programs that would upgrade the performance of youth institutions.
4. Highlight to situation of youth participation in these institutions.
5. Identify obstacles hindering active participation by youth in Palestine.
6. Propose policies to upgrade youth participation.
7. Develop programs targeting youth in youth structures, institutions and projects.
8. Develop a view of the current status of youth political participation.
9. Assess the status of youth political participation.
10. Identify barriers preventing youth from practicing their basic rights and having active political participation.
11. Make recommendations, suggestions and solutions for mechanisms to advance the institutional status of youth.

12. Serve as a specialized reference on youth and youth institutions in Palestine.

To answer research questions and achieve its objectives, we will adopt the scientific methodology detailed below.

8. Research methodology:

Methodology is the method used by the researcher in studying the problem or phenomenon raised by the research topic. Therefore, the research topic guides the researcher in deciding on the research methodology. If a researcher adopts a methodology that does not agree with the research problem, it would not be possible to reach logical findings that reflect an accurate reading or conclusion from the reality under study.

Therefore, an historical methodology has been selected as a suitable approach to this research. This methodology is used to study phenomena and events that have occurred in the past, as well as to study current phenomena by resorting to the time when they emerged, developments they have gone through and factors shaping them in the current form. This methodology can help understand the present and predict the future. Nevertheless, there is also a need to use the descriptive method, which describes the case under study and its characteristics. Analysis and comparisons will also be utilized in order to enrich the study and achieve the planned objectives since this study is regarded as a theoretical-applied research.

Since this study is theoretical-applied, it depends on a number of research instruments for collecting data and soliciting opinions in order to conduct analysis and reach meaningful conclusions. Research techniques used to support or reject the hypotheses include in-depth interviews, as well as a review of literature such as books, periodicals, websites, newspapers and primary sources, including laws and documents, and literature of youth institutions in particular, such as their brochures, periodicals, newsletters, bylaws, reports, training materials, promotional materials, minutes from meetings, files and working papers. On the other hand, a sampling method was used whereby a sample was selected to represent the study population to achieve the purposes of the study without having to interview the entire population under study. A random sampling method was used on the basis that members of the study population are identified and have a certain level of harmony.

Therefore, the study conducted a survey of institutions concerned with youth either directly or indirectly, including sports clubs, youth institutions and youth structures and projects in the West Bank. This was done in order to collect, classify, analyze and interpret information in a scientific and objective way, and to reach conclusions that would help in developing plans and strategies for youth.

Finally, it should be noted that the great majority of the institutions involved in the research are located in the central area due to recent political developments which have limited freedom of movement. However, about 85% of these institutions have their main headquarters in the central area and run branch offices in other districts. A total of 36 institutions were researched. These institutions were represented by the director, deputy director, a coordinator of youth programs or a member of the Administrative Committee, provided that such person is knowledgeable about the detailed life of the institution. Annex 1 presents a list of institutions visited as part of this research.

a. Research sample:

Having identified geographical research population, institutions were selected for study by using a simple random sampling method.

b. Research instruments:

1. Questionnaire: This is an appropriate research method for obtaining information, data and facts related to the current status of the researched institutions. For this purpose, the researcher developed an open ended questionnaire consisting of 24 questions. Answers to the questionnaire provided the main material for the study. Questions covered all aspects related to the institution, starting from the year established, to its internal organization, and to its programs, coordination and networking with similar institutions. Thus, the questionnaire was comprehensive. The use of open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to express their views in details, which was essential in exploring the realities of the institution and for proposing future policies. Additionally, the questions contained in the questionnaire followed a logical sequence. The questionnaire is presented in Annex 1 of this report.
2. Interviews: Interviews were conducted with a number of officials in youth institutions. This process provided the research with an added value, especially in view of the experience and expertise of the selected interviewees.
3. Observations made through direct experience and information gathered by means of direct observation and listening.

9. Research framework:

- a. Duration: 25/9/2000-30/4/2006.
- b. Location: Youth institutions throughout Palestine, predominantly in the central West Bank.

10. Obstacles and problems:

Usually, field research may encounter more obstacles, constraints and problems than that faced by theoretical research since field research is linked to time, place, individuals and both objective and subjective conditions. Such

constraints may affect the progress of the research and thus affect the research material itself. Main obstacles and problems encountered during the field work can be summarized as follows:

- a) The Intifada and the subsequent closure of Palestinian cities and villages and geographical fragmentation of the West Bank. While the majority of institutions surveyed are based in the central West Bank, some youth institutions located in the south and north were difficult to reach for the abovementioned reasons.
- b) In spite of relentless follow up, some youth institutions in the south and the central area failed to response to questionnaires that were faxed to them, together with a letter explaining the purpose of the research.
- c) Several researched institutions delayed responding to the questionnaire for various reasons.
- d) In many cases, the researched institutions did not adhere to the deadlines for administering the questionnaires, which were originally set in consultation with them. The researcher had to pay several visits to some of these institutions in order to be able to meet with the person in charge.
- e) The researcher also found difficulty in obtaining some information about clubs' lists as staff members of the General Directorate of Clubs in The Ministry of Youth and Sports were not available in the office. Communications were made with the Ministry's district offices and staff were called at home in order to obtain the lists.
- f) During the preparation stage, it was evident that there is a lack of adequate resources and references in existing literature on the issue of youth. This gap was bridged through personal interviews and the questionnaire.
- g) Conflicting information was obtained from the different institutions, especially in terms of figures and other sorts of information. All relevant figures have been documented in the study in order to observe scientific objectivity.
- h) Data were not updated regularly.
- i) Conflicting information was also obtained on names or numbers even from the same Ministry or organization.
- j) There is an evident lack of coordination among the relevant official and youth institutions with regards to the exchange of information.
- k) In some cases, official institutions and NGOs were unable to provide accurate and adequate information on the current status of some youth clubs in terms of whether they are functioning, frozen or have been totally shut down.

11. Research concepts and terminology:

1. **Youth:** refers to both male and female young people in the age group between post-adolescence, to the age 24. In this research, youth refer to the age group between 15-24 years according to UN definition of youth. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), youth represent 19.5% of the 3.8 millions Palestinian population in 2006. The

number of young males reaches 387,749, constituting 19.7% of the total male population and 51.3% of the total youth population. In contrast, the number of young females reaches 371,901, constituting 19.4% of the total female population and 48.7% of the total youth population.

2. **Youth institutions:** These refer to the research unit, i.e. youth institutions, clubs, projects, and structures in the West Bank that work with youth directly and have headquarters and an organizational structure. These are non-profit organizations that provide youth with cultural, awareness-raising, sports, arts or other types of services and activities. When the term "youth institutions" is used later in this research, the reader should bear in the above definition. In order to avoid confusion, the following points should be emphasized:
 - a. Youth institutions: Institutions that work specifically for, and with youth.
 - b. Clubs: These are clubs that do not have any partisan or sectarian goals and which provide services to all members and citizens on an equal basis.
 - c. Projects: Units or departments within NGOs that are concerned with youth
 - d. Structures: These refer to popular structures focused on youth, which are affiliated to national factions and usually adhere to the political agenda of their respective factions. These structures have political and advocacy agendas that reflect their vision and philosophy. They strive to recruit the largest possible number of youth to join them. These structures are considered the youth grassroots branches of their respective factions.

Finally, it should be noted that the sample institutions are youth and women's institutions, which have cross-cutting goals, philosophies, policies and programs. However, women's institutions mostly seek to focus on young women through their programs and activities.

3. **Participation:** The process, through which one can play a role in the political and social life of the society and can have the opportunity to participate in the development of public goals and in identifying the most appropriate means to achieve these goals.
4. **Political participation:** These are voluntary activities practiced by members of the society in order to select their leaders and representatives and contribute to the development of policies and decisions either directly or indirectly. Thus, political participation is not limited to voting in a certain electoral phase, but rather, related to general and clear trend and concern on the part of citizens regarding political decisions and their consequences reflected in their participation.
5. **Quota:** A proportional, limited share allocated to a specific group through a system that defines this share.

6. **Civil society:** The collection of community organizations, including institutions, societies, agencies, councils, trade unions, political parties and other formations that have a grassroots nature and organizational structures. They contribute to establishing the bases for democracy and limiting the state's influence and intervention in society by holding the state accountable before the general public.
7. **Affirmative action:** This is an action taken by the government or a private institution to compensate a group for discrimination that has been taking place in the past on the basis of differences of gender, race, ethnicity, religion or inability to maintain study, employment or political participation.
8. **Empowerment:** The collection of processes that are aimed at increasing the capacity and skills of, and information available to all members of the society in general, and target groups in particular, in a systematic way that ensures sustainability and involves both material and moral forms.
9. **Networking:** A joint process among institutions, groups or individuals, who agree on a certain framework to share and exchange experiences, opinions and thoughts and share information and communication in a way that does not affect their independent entities.
10. **Development:** A movement that seeks to achieve a better life for a community through the positive involvement of community members or through an initiative from the community itself. If such initiatives are not taken by the community, this movement would resort to provoking and prompting this initiative to ensure a collective and effective response.
11. **Voluntary work:** Efforts made by an individual without remuneration for the benefit of his/her society and for personal motives. These efforts are aimed at sharing part of the responsibility assumed by social institutions in providing welfare services on the basis that opportunities for citizens' participation in the activities of these democratic institutions should be open to all and that participation represents a form of commitment on the part of citizens.
12. **Community development:** People's right to identify their needs and effect positive economic, social, cultural and environmental changes, and their right to identify programs aimed at such changes and to participate in the implementation of these programs in order to reorganize their lives, the community and environment, starting from the family.
13. **Person with disability (with special needs):** A person with a total or partial, congenital or acquired consistent impairment in any of his/her senses of physical, mental or intellectual abilities, to a degree that limits the possibility to meet the needs of his/her usual daily life compared to other, non-disabled peers.
14. **Unemployment:** All unemployed people over a certain age who do not work for a wage or do not have their own business in any type of work and

who have taken certain steps to seek employment for a wage or to set up a personal businesses.

15. **Accountability:** An important political mechanism in good governance institutions to hold officials accountable for their actions, verify their decisions and allow them the opportunity to clarify any ambiguous points or respond to charges made against them, whether they are elected or appointed. The same applies to public institutions.
16. **Transparency:** The opposite of ambiguity or secrecy in political action, referring to the provision of full information on public activities to the press, public opinion and individual citizens who wish to remain informed about both the positive and negative aspects of government's actions.
17. **Freedom of expression:** Freedom to talk and express oneself in political and public issues.
18. **Corruption:** Misuse of one's position in order to achieve personal gains, either through direct bribes or generating material or other forms of benefits by indirect means.
19. **Political parties:** These are voluntary organizations linking citizens and their government. Parties provide candidates for public positions and organize campaigns to support the selection of these candidate and compete with candidates of other parties for the different local and national-level positions. In addition, political parties encourage political participation on the part of citizens and prompt them to vote for their representatives.
20. **Democracy:** A term of a Greek origin meaning "rule of the people." This concept has evolved over time to reflect rule of the majority, while ensuring the rights of minorities and accepting pluralism.
21. **Shura (consultation):** A political term used by some Islamic scholars that refers more to consulting people or centers of power on certain issues, rather than the rule of the people. Unlike democratic systems of rule, this process of consultation does not bind a leader to applying the principle of consultation per se if he wishes not to do so, or to implementing the outcome of the consultation once made.

Chapter Two: The Status of Youth in Youth Institutions, Structures, Projects and Clubs

Topic One: Membership and Goals

I. Youth: Data and Figures

Studies and reports issued by UN agencies and experts consider all individuals in the age group 15-25 as youth. Some countries have a higher upper limit for this age group, reaching 28 or even 30 years. At the beginning of the current century, the number of youth in the world was estimated at 1.4 billion, representing about 20% of the world's population. Over two thirds of the world's youth live in developing countries. With regards to Arab countries, statistics indicate that youth constitute over half of the population in most Arab states. This percentage even reaches a high of 65% in some of these countries. This demographic fact should always be part of the focus of all studies, measures and policies developed to address youth issues. Issues of the young generation vary and Arab youth are confronted with critical challenges affecting their very existence, dignity and even humanity. To address these challenges, youth have to assume numerous significant tasks, which necessitates providing them with the required resources and capacity.⁵

At the Palestinian level, the most recent statistics issued by PCBS under the title "Population Indicators up to 31/12/2005"⁶ indicated that by the end of 2005, the number of Palestinians all over the world reached 10.1 million, with 3.8 million residing in the Palestinian Territories, including 2.4 million in the West Bank and 1.4 million in Gaza Strip. A further 1.1 million reside in Israel, 3 million in Jordan and 462,000 in Syria. The largest proportion of the population (13.9%) lives in the Hebron district,, followed by Gaza district and Jerusalem district, in which 13.0% and 10.6% of the population live respectively. The lowest proportion of the total population at the end of 2005 was recorded in the Jericho and Jordan Valley districts, which contain just 1.1% of the total population in the Palestinian Territories. Up to 45.8% of the population is below the age of 15, while the proportion of elderly people stands at just 3.1%. According to PCBS statistics for 2006, youth aged 15-24 represent 19.5% of the population in Palestine (759,650). The number of young males is 387,749, constituting 19.7% of the total male population. In contrast, the number of young females is 371,901, constituting 19.4% of the total female population.⁷ For more details, please refer to Annex 2 on the demographic status of the Palestinian population by age group, gender and nationality.

Palestinian society is predominantly 'young', where youth constitute one of the key supporting elements and investments in a society's future, and young people are an important driving force of social change. Youth are the future of humanity and the most dynamic group in any given society in view of their physical and intellectual capacity, creativity and tremendous ability to make an input. Therefore, great attention should be devoted to this age group, especially in that they face general social, and personal problems that affect

5 www.arab-ipu.org

6 PCBS, MAS and Palestinian Monetary Authority, Economic and Social Monitor, 4th Quarter, Vol. 4, January 2006, pp. 45-46. See also: www.pnic.gov.ps

7 PCBS, 2006, Population Projections in the Palestinian Territories, Revised Estimates, op. cit.

their lives and encounter a multitude of obstacles preventing them from achieving their goals. In other words, youth are subject to a crisis situation that is deeply rooted in the society.

Therefore, it is imperative to work with the youth sector as it represents the generation that will assume responsibility for the future and is thus the one that is capable of effecting a process of social change.⁸ Youth have material, social, economic and psychological needs linked to the characteristics of this period in the life cycle that they seek to satisfy .

II. Membership in youth institutions

Although the different youth institutions are mainly dependent on youth membership, there are discrepancies among youth institutions in terms of membership. At the same time, there is a certain level of overlap between these institutions in terms of membership conditions. Youth institutions have both closed and open membership, as described below:

1. Youth clubs:⁹

Membership in youth clubs is open to both male and female young people as long as they meet the conditions specified by the clubs' bylaws. Members of youth clubs have a number of different categories:

- a) Founding member: A member who signed the club's establishment document and whose name is included in the list of founding members, provided that he/she is not less than 25 years old.
- b) Active member: Any person aged 18 or over, who has been a member of the club for at least once year and who has paid his/her membership fees.
- c) Supporting members: A member that is less than 18 years old that has all membership rights and duties apart from nomination and voting.
- d) Student members: A member who is studying abroad. Conditions that apply to supporting members also apply to student members.
- e) Honorary member: This kind of membership is granted by the Administrative Committee to those who have provided services to the society or the club. Such members will have the same status as supporting members, excluding payment of membership fees and applying for membership.

Although procedures for membership in the different youth clubs are straightforward, the rate of membership in these clubs is still low among youth. Data indicates that just 9.3% of youth in the age group 10-24 years are members of sports clubs, 4.0% are members of cultural clubs, while 6.9% are

⁸ For more details, see: Ziad Othman, "The Role of Youth in the Process of Social Change". *Tasamoh (Tolerance) Journal*, January 2003, from p. 77.

⁹ Club's bylaws, articles 5, 6 and 18.

members of public libraries. Membership in cultural institutions is lower among females compared to males, especially in rural areas.¹⁰

2. Youth structures:

The different youth structures are similar in that their bylaws grant both male and female young people the right to become members. Conditions for membership are similar among the different structures, requiring that the applicant should have a proven record of good conduct, is aged between 14-35 years, that they adhere to the club's bylaws, should not be a member of another, similar youth organization, and that they should pay annual membership fees. As such, membership in Palestinian youth structures is open to all young people and there are no exceptional conditions for accepting members.¹¹

3. Other youth unions:

Other youth unions are limited to certain youth groups, such as the General Union of Palestine Students, which is similar to other youth organizations but is distinguished by the fact that its membership is limited to Palestinian students in the country and abroad.¹² Other examples are trade unions, which stipulate that the young member should be a worker, and the detainees' club, which stipulates that the member should be a detainee. The Palestinian Youth Council only accepts institutions and not individuals as members, since it is a coalition of a number of Palestinian youth organizations and structures.¹³

4. Youth projects:

These projects usually circulate application forms to groups of youth in order to accept them as members. They may stipulate that the member should first participate in their activities in order to be accepted as an active member,¹⁴ and that he/she should pass through an interview process.

5. Institutions with closed membership:

10 PCBS, 2005, Youth in the Palestinian Territories: Facts and Figures, Ramallah,, Palestine, p. 29

11 For more details, one can refer to the bylaws of the following structures and institutions: Fateh Youth organization, Progressive Youth Union, Independence Youth Union, Democratic Youth Union, Islamic Bloc Youth Union, Islamic Group, Palestinian Youth, People's Party Youth, and Palestinian Youth Movement – Juzoor.

12 It is noted that the leadership committee, and specifically the Union's chairperson, are not students. According to Ibrahim Khreisheh, the Union's chairman, this is due to the need to make use of people's expertise. Personal interview with Ibrahim Khreisheh, Ramallah, 25/9/2000.

13 The bylaws of the trade union, the prisoners' club and the Palestinian youth council.

14 Examples include: Tamer Institute, and Women Affairs Technical Committee.

A major example is the Palestinian Council for Young Political Leaderships, which limits membership to 100, focusing on elite members only.¹⁵

III. Goals of youth institutions

Referring to the bylaws of the different youth institutions, including youth clubs, structures, projects and institutions, one can find that their goals may vary to include national, educational, social, economic, cultural, artistic, sports and voluntary community work-related objectives. Their goals are described below:

1. At the national level: Youth institutions believe that the current phase is still a phase of struggle for national liberation. Therefore, they maintain goals related to struggle for achieving the national rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of the independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, the struggle against Israeli policies, especially settlement activities, land confiscation, house demolition, and the Judaization of Jerusalem and other issues. They also acknowledge the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, preserving Palestinian achievements, promoting the sense of national and nationalistic belonging among youth and resisting the "normalization" of relations with Israel.¹⁶
2. At the educational level: Youth institutions seek to empower Palestinian youth in the educational sphere through working for educational curricula that preserve Palestinian heritage and Arab civilization and promote the values of democracy, human rights, and civic education. They also work for the development of a unified Palestinian curriculum, building new schools and expanding the existing ones, responding to schools' needs, making mandatory education universal, reducing school dropout rates, reducing university tuition fees, updating universities, and developing vocational education centers and institutes.
3. At the social level: Youth institutions work to raise community awareness to protect Palestinian youth from increasing social problems such as substance abuse, violence, HIV/AIDS and other problems threatening the wellbeing of youth, in addition to promoting positive social attitudes and values that provide youth with a sense of stability, self-reliance, responsibility, and public interest among youth, as well as educating them about different sexual and reproductive health issues. Finally, youth institutions also strive to eliminate negative values such as egoism,

15 Samer Sinjelawi, Chairman of the Palestinian Council for Young Political Leaderships. Personal interview, Ramallah, 25/9/2000.

16 According to the bylaws, section 4, article 9, goals of Fateh Youth organization do not include this item. Nevertheless, the organization's leadership member Ibrahim Nimer stressed in a personal interview in Ramallah, 30/9/2000 that the movement rejects the "normalization" of relations with the Israeli side.

selfishness, self-interest and other values that are regarded as negative by society.

4. At the cultural level: Youth institutions work to raise and upgrade the intellectual and cultural level of youth in the face of a policy of blackout, distortion and falsification aimed at Palestinian national culture. On the other hand, these institutions also seek to revive and preserve the Palestinian popular heritage, as well as to preserve and consolidate long-standing traditions and values and reject negative values, traditions and attitudes.
5. At the arts and sports level: Youth institutions make every effort to organize different arts and sports activities. To this end, youth institutions form artistic and sports groups and committees, such as music, theater, singing and traditional Dabkeh dance committees, in addition to sports teams and scout groups.
6. Community and voluntary work: This type of work is regarded as a major goal sought by youth institutions. Therefore, institutions seek to establish a spirit of voluntary work in order to make use of youth energy for the sake of public interest.¹⁷ Youth institutions encourage youth initiatives that help expand their role and increase their solidarity with social groups in view of the positive economic, moral and/or national implications of such activism.
7. At the economic level: Youth institutions seek to provide economic assistance to families adversely affected by Israeli policies, in addition to striving to address the problem of unemployment and absorb graduates in governmental institutions, considering that youth are an integral part of the development process. This is in addition to supporting young people, particularly students, by providing them with educational scholarships, health treatment grants and housing opportunities.

The above applies not only to youth structures, but also to youth institutions, projects and clubs. A distinguishing character of youth institutions and projects is that they focus more on education about the values of democracy and human rights, which is considered one of their major goals. In some cases, goals of such youth institutions and projects do not explicitly mention political issues since these are mostly NGOs that do not adopt specific political positions. As such, there is no need to designate a separate space to detailing the goals of these institutions, since they generally overlap with the above indicated goals of youth structures.

Topic Two: Youth and the decision-making process in youth institutions

17 Saleh Al-Ahmad, The Importance of Voluntary Work, Al-Waha Journal, Issue 9, September 2000, p. 1.

I. Youth participation in responsible positions

Participation refers to all aspects of involvement in decision-making, the implementation of plans and programs, making use of services offered by development organizations or participation in public services or public events that would increase social cohesion, and awareness of values which community development is seeking to achieve.¹⁸ Participation is also the process through which one can play a role in the political and social life of the society and can have the opportunity to participate in the development of public goals and in identifying the most appropriate means to achieve these goals.¹⁹

Different kinds of bylaws regulate the participation of young members in the decision-making process. In spite of the idealistic statements included in these bylaws, they are often just words that have no practical implications. Nevertheless, we cannot say that all researched and other institutions are similar in terms of youth participation in positions of responsibility, as there are discrepancies among these institutions with regards to youth participation in their leaderships.

Assuming a leadership role in the different youth institutions is often done not through elections, but by means of appointment or nomination, or on the basis of seniority, personal relations, social or economic status. Even when democracy is practiced in its best forms through free, democratic and honest elections, such democracy remains incomplete because "internal compromises" along factional, regional or tribal lines.

More often, youth institutions try to justify such behavior rather than seeking to take the required steps towards increasing youth participation in positions of responsibility. Each institution has its own justifications and views to defend and might explain that special subjective and objective circumstances have forced them to act in such way, whether democratic or non-democratic. Based on the above, the following points present the outcomes of interviews conducted with the researched institutions with regards to youth participation in leadership roles:

1. Youth clubs: Youth participation in leadership roles within such clubs starts firstly with involvement in the founding committee, which is responsible for managing the club for a period not exceeding 12 months. Secondly, youth also participate in the Administrative Committee to be elected through direct secret ballot by members of the General Assembly with the right to vote. Such elections take place once every second year.²⁰

18 Mohammed Abdul-Fattah, *Social Service in the Area of Community Development*, Alexandria: Scientific Publishing Office, 2nd edition, 1996, p. 190.

19 Abdul-Hadi Al-Johari et al., *Studies in Social Development (An Islamic Approach)*, Alexandria: Modern University Office, 1999, p. 166.

20 Club's bylaws, articles 18 and 19, op. cit.

Participation in the General Assembly takes place through specialized committees formed according to the different positions of the club. These committees are chaired by a member of the Administrative Committee and are assigned the task of developing plans and programs and assisting in their implementation. These are the roles through which youth participate in positions of responsibility in sports clubs for example.

2. Youth structures: The bylaws of all youth structures provide for the right of youth to be active members in the structure through voting and nomination, which refers to their right to assume leading positions. Although this is a genuine right for youth, interviews conducted with representatives of the different structures (Fateh Youth Organization, Islamic Bloc Youth Union, Islamic Group, Progressive Youth Union, Independence Youth Union, Palestinian Democratic Youth Union, Palestinian Youth and People's Party Youth)²¹ reveal that leadership positions are allocated either through elections, appointment or nomination on the basis of seniority. Although all agree that direct and secret ballot is the basis for enabling youth to take part in leadership positions and in the general activities of the structure, they tend to put the blame on certain circumstances that prevent them from following this approach.

Systematic violations of internal democracy are not limited to these factors but also include breaches of the bylaws with regards to the terms for assuming leadership positions. For example, some bylaws stipulate that the head of the administrative or organizational structure should be a student, but in many cases, persons assuming these positions are not students. In addition, people of up to 45 years old were found in leadership positions within some of these institutions and structures, although the bylaws clearly provide for much younger ages. This practice deprives youth from their right to participate in positions of responsibility, while also violating the bylaws. The Independence Youth Union is the only structure that fully adheres to the required members' age, as illustrated by the fact that two members of the leadership committee resigned in September 2000 because they had reached the age of 35 years old.²²

3. Youth institutions: The situation in youth institutions is not different than that in youth structures in terms of youth participation in leadership positions. Active members have the right to vote and nominate,²³ which means that youth have the opportunity to participate in positions of responsibility through democratic elections by means of direct and secret ballot. However, some youth institutions have the same problem as youth

21 Personal interviews with Ibrahim Nimer, 30/9/2000, Sheikh Farhat Ass'ad, 25/9/2000, Abdul-Hakim Masalmeh, 23/9/2000, Nasser Mattar, 21/9/2000, Muntaser Hamdan, 21/9/2000, Mustafa Badarneh, 22/9/2000, Luay Al-Qaryuti, 22/9/2000, and Munjed Abu Jeish, 23/9/2000, respectively.

22 Muntaser Hamdan, op. cit. Walid Atatrah and Abdul-Salam Atari, Personal interview, 20/10/2000, Ramallah.

23 Constitution of the general Union of Palestine Students, article 9, para 2. See also the Constitution of Friends without Borders, article 11, para 5.

structures in terms of having persons in charge who do not meet membership criteria, thus depriving youth from practicing their right to participate at the leadership level. Some justify this situation by the need for the experience and expertise of such competent individuals.²⁴ Although these institutions have their bylaws and constitutions, these are rarely followed. The prevailing perception is that the lack of accountability and absence of genuine democratic traditions are among the main reasons for keeping the status quo. Another reason is related to the use of a quota system by some of these institutions.

4. Youth projects: The situation is different for youth projects run by NGOs working with youth groups. This is mostly attributed to several factors, mainly the small number of members and the absence of a political factor, as these institutions are non-governmental and non-political and their agenda is different than that of other youth institutions.

Therefore, we find that youth participation in leading positions in youth projects is greater than that in other youth institutions, as members of these projects have the ability to select the different activities and in many instances, to get involved in the planning and implementation processes through their participation in periodic meetings on a weekly or monthly basis.²⁵ This system allows them to maintain their presence in positions of responsibility. This is in addition to internal elections conducted by these projects to nominate individuals as leaders.

Furthermore, members of these projects are originally from the target group which engages in different activities and training conducted by the NGO in question, especially on issues related to youth leadership, communication, team building, democracy, lobbying and advocacy, and others. Therefore, we find that some projects are fully interested in involving these young people in leadership and decision-making positions, as failing to do so would be a contradiction to the training and education they are providing to these young people.

II. Youth participation in decision-making and regular meetings

The different types of youth institutions would appear similar in terms of the extent to which youth participate in decision-making, and with regards their regular meetings. In terms of youth participation in decision-making, the different researched institutions share the same characteristics, known as 'participation by being notified.'²⁶ Thus, these institutions have not yet reached the principle of democratic participation among their members in

24 Ibrahim Khreisheh, op. cit.

25 Yasser Malaysheh, Personal interview on 20/10/2000, Ramallah. Also: Khaldoun Qweis, Coordinator of Youth Unit, Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Personal interview on 26/9/2000, Al-Bireh.

26 Walid Salem. Training course titled "Participation and its relation to development", Ramallah, Mid August 2000.

making decisions in relation to the different activities, whether targeted at youth or general activities. Youth participation in decision-making and regular meetings in their institutions can be summarized as follows:

1. Youth clubs: In reviewing clubs' bylaws, we can note that there are two bodies through which youth can participate in decision-making in a practical manner: the Administrative Committee and the General Assembly.
 - a. Administrative Committee: According to article 28 of clubs' bylaws, the Administrative Committee assumes the management of daily affairs of the club in financial, administrative, sports or cultural aspects, in addition to other powers vested in it. Usually, the Administrative Committee is composed of 7-13 members. This means that the participation of youth from the General Assembly is almost non-existent as long as the different decisions are left to the discretion of the Administrative Committee as stipulated in the bylaws.
 - b. General Assembly: The bylaws indicate that youth participation in decision-making has an annual character, as they participate in decision-making when the General Assembly convenes for its annual meeting. Naturally, there would not be room for youth participation in decision-making regarding daily affairs, although the Administrative Committees' powers have some limits. For example, if the latter takes a decision to terminate the membership of a member of the club, it cannot accept him/her back until obtaining the approval of the General Assembly first.²⁷ This is the first instance of youth participation in decision-making, although it is not clear if this should take place in the annual meeting of the General Assembly, or if an extraordinary meeting should be held.²⁸

In general, youth participation is limited to the annual meeting of the General Assembly, which has the right to discuss the financial and administrative reports and elect the Administrative Committee in addition to discussing any other issues as proposed by the Administrative Committee or the General Assembly.²⁹ The General Assembly cannot discuss or get involved in any issues other than those listed in the agenda except those approved by the absolute majority of the General Assembly. This system is likely to limit the participation of youth in decision-making in view of such administrative constraints, leaving the floor for the Administrative Committee to make decisions without the active participation of the General Assembly, thus undermining the potentials for youth participation in decision-making.

27 Club's bylaws, article 11, para b.

28 Op. cit, article 42.

29 Op. cit, article 39.

2. Youth structures: By reviewing the literature of the different youth structures, it is clear that they share the same situation regarding youth participation in decision-making. Although their baseline, intermediate and higher bodies have different names, they all serve the same purpose. However, youth participation in decision-making in such youth structures is different than that in youth clubs for instance, as youth structures have an intermediate body between the General Assembly and the Administrative Committee, allowing youth a wider chance for participation in the decision-making process. The following is a brief description of these bodies and the ways in which they provide for youth participation.

- a. General conference: This is the highest legislative structure in addition to being the general representative body for all branches of youth structures. The conference is elected by the General Assembly and convenes either annually or every three years, as stipulated in their bylaws. Thus, grassroots youth participation is limited to the election of members to the General Conference. The participation of members of the General Conference is also limited to discussing programs and regulations, in addition to developing the different plans and directions and discussing the previous cycle. Finally, the general conference elects the intermediate leadership body, which has different names from one youth structure to another, such as the Central Committee, the Conference, the General Council or the Movement Council, although they have similar duties and powers.
- b. Intermediate body: As mentioned above, these bodies have different names but comparable capacities from one youth structure to another. They are elected by the General Conference and represent the highest authority second to the meeting of the General Conference. They directly oversee the implementation of the Conference's decisions, develop plans necessary to implement these decisions, and elect the Executive Committee of the structures. This means that the decision-making process is limited to a number of youth elected by the General Conference. Usually, their number ranges from 33 to 100, reflecting the wider participation of youth, although this participation is limited to these members only. All youth structures set out the same 6-month interval for meetings of their intermediate bodies.
- c. Administrative Committee: It may have a different name, such as the higher committee, the secretariat, or the executive bureau. Usually this body is composed of 7-15 members, who meet weekly or biweekly. This the primary executive body charged with the management of the daily affairs of the youth structure and daily supervision on the processes, in addition to monitoring the implementation of the decisions of the aforementioned higher bodies.

In a nutshell, youth participation in the decision-making process in the different youth structures is limited to the participation in the above organizational bodies.³⁰ There is no daily participation in the decision-making process. Participation reaches its highest level in meetings that are conducted for the General Assembly in the different localities. These meetings take place at different times from one locality to another depending on how easy it is to call members of the General Assembly for a meeting. In universities, for examples, student-based structures can hold meetings for their grassroots bodies on a monthly basis or as the need arises. However, youth participation at the national level remains annual in nature, which is illustrative of the extent and effectiveness of such participation. As such, youth participation in these structures resembles the form of an equilateral triangle – wide participation at the base and narrow participation at the top.

3. Youth institutions and projects: Youth participation in the decision-making process in youth institutions is similar to that in youth clubs.³¹ See Point 1 above.

With respect to youth projects, the participation of youth in the decision-making process takes two forms. First, some projects leave all the details to the discretion of their members, meaning that the planning, implementation and decision-making processes are in the hands of youth themselves. This usually applies to all kinds of activities. In such projects, we find that youth meet, decide and implement all their activities and the institution acts only as an observer. Furthermore, the institution provides the conducive environment and different resources to facilitate the work and activities, thus ensuring that youth play a greater and more active role in the decision-making process.

Youth groups also participate in the decision-making process but to a lesser degree. They meet and make decisions, but their decisions become effective only after the approval of the coordinator of youth programs and the management of the institution in question. In these institutions too, youth are the ones who decide on the nature of their different activities, and their decisions are most often approved by the institution. Briefly, the extent of youth participation in this second form remains somewhat limited, especially taking into consideration that youth cannot make decisions in certain areas, such as financial and administrative issues.

Finally, the participation process is clearly delineated by the bylaws and regulations of the different youth institutions. However, in practice this is not the case for a number of external and internal reasons. The impact of external factors surrounding the ongoing Occupation, are clear. However, it is difficult

30 Progressive Youth Union, Independence Youth Union and Democratic Youth Union.

31 For more details, please refer to: the draft bylaws of Friends without Borders, especially articles 8-12 and the bylaws of the Palestinian Youth Movement – Juzoor, chapter one, article 2 and chapter two, articles 4 and 5.

to justify the continuation of internal circumstances that deprive youth from enjoying the minimal level of their basic rights in these institutions. Hence, youth institutions are required to refer to their bylaws and regulations and put them into practice both in terms of content and principles.

III. Mechanisms for promoting the role of youth in decision-making and in influencing decisions made without their participation

Promoting the role of youth in decision-making in the institutions that represent them will primarily depend on the presence and practice of genuine democracy within these institutions, and the space actually granted to youth in terms of freedom of opinion and expression, ensuring equal opportunities for all young people to participate in building a democratic civil society, based on equality and justice. Statistics indicate that only 21.2% of youth participate in decision-making within their communities.³²

By reviewing the bylaws and regulations of youth structures, institutions, projects and clubs, it is clear that, in theory, these institutions consider that it is the right and duty of their members to participate in decision-making, and in discussing and formulating the institutional policies and plans.

In practice however, there is still a large gap in this regard. Many important decisions are made by a limited number of young people at the top of the institutional hierarchy. This means that participation is restricted to its minimum, which at best does not go beyond informing other young people about the decision made. In other words, this approach does not involve the democratic principle of actual participation through means of voting or consultation in a democratic climate that offers youth the opportunity to freely express their opinions. Nevertheless, it is difficult to expect that youth are guaranteed the chance of participation, interaction, free opinion and expression if these institutions lack democratic traditions.³³ The presence of such democratic traditions in a given institution is the outcome of a long-term cumulative process that is a matter of a behavior and conviction in such freedoms and traditions that allows youth to participate in, and influence the decision-making process. Mechanisms that would promote the role of youth in the decision-making process include the following:

1. As indicated earlier, the different youth institutions have leadership bodies named differently from one institution to another. Members of these bodies are charged with the management and implementation of daily tasks. Consequently, each member is assigned a certain responsibility according to the bylaws. One approach could be to create a committee in support of each one of these positions, which is formed by a group of young people and chaired by the leadership member who is assigned the task of developing plans, programs and activities in their respective field. This

32 www.palyouth.net/members/fadi2.htm

33 Hasan Al-Khatib, Director General of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Personal interview on 17/9/2000, Ramallah.

approach would activate the role of youth from the General Assembly by involving them in the decision-making process, increasing their self-esteem, and allowing them the chance to assume responsibility. Such measures would upgrade and strengthen the relationship between youth and the different leadership bodies.

2. Questionnaires can serve as a way to promote the role of youth in the decision-making process for institutions that strive to advance and progress- This process usually involves members when there is a need to take important and crucial decisions.
3. Keeping youth posted about different developments and outcomes. This is not meant to be limited to the abovementioned notion of participation by means of being notified, i.e. making decisions and then informing youth about them. On the contrary, youth should be updated and informed about the different issues on the basis of participation and consultation.
4. Regular consultations with members of the General Assembly and soliciting their opinions on different issues in the work of their institutions.
5. Periodic meetings should be held for the General Assembly in order to keep its members abreast of the situation. Clearly, such general meetings would promote youth participation in decision-making at all levels.
6. Maintaining a special box for suggestions in the different institutions may allow at least for partial degree of youth participation by providing their suggestions.
7. Regular meetings for higher management bodies with youth can be organized under various titles, such as an open day, or monthly meeting for example. Such meetings are expected to promote youth participation.
8. Special sessions or meetings can be organized to evaluate certain types of work done by the institutions, whereby members are invited to discuss the work from all its aspects in order to draw out the different lessons learned, whether positive or negative. This would allow ample opportunity for different views to be heard and for youth to participate in conducting an effective evaluation that would help improve performance in the future.
9. Partial delegation of authority and powers. The centralization of power can often act as a restraining factor, as members cannot function without reporting to those in charge and there is little democracy in the decision-making process. The delegation of some powers means involving others the decision-making, which would have positive consequences for, and which would add more vivacity and dynamism to the work of the organization.
10. Promoting democratic values and adopting the approach of constructive dialogue with youth, which would ultimately promote their role in decision-making.

11. Referendum. Youth institutions can resort to referendums in the case of crucial issues. This helps promote the role of youth in the decision-making process within their institutions. Such an approach can be used in institutions with large and extended memberships.

Topic Three: Youth membership and programs in youth institutions, structures, projects and clubs

I. Mechanisms for increasing youth membership in youth institutions

When talking about increasing the membership or expanding the base of youth institutions, we are referring to the recruitment of new members. Although all, or a large majority of these institutions seek to increase their bases among youth, and consequently among the general public, some of these institutions do not prioritize increasing their membership base or recruiting new members in their General Assembly as an aim or goal in itself. This reflects a certain level of discrepancy in how youth institutions view the matter of increasing the number of their members.

Youth structures, which are regarded as an extension of Palestinian factions and political parties, give great importance to increasing their membership levels. They even require their members to recruit others. Some of these organizations focus on the number of members, while others focus more on the nature of their members. However, all seek to recruit the largest possible number of young people regardless of some other conditions for membership. With regards to other youth institutions such as NGOs that work with youth either as a youth NGO or as an NGO with youth projects, they focus on recruiting specific age groups and usually they offer these young people certain activities, such as training and others, to be entitled to become members in these institutions. Usually, member numbers are limited as these institutions, contrary to youth structures, do not seek to expand their membership. In turn, youth clubs have open membership and are similar to youth structures in terms of their keen interest in recruitment.

A third type of youth institution, although they are NGOs, focus on selective elite members and their membership is limited to certain individuals with very strict conditions for membership. This is known as closed membership.

This brief description of the three recruitment models raises an important question: What are the mechanisms for increasing membership in youth institutions and structures?

Certainly, the discourse itself is a mechanism for expanding their membership, in addition to programs that respond to youth needs and priorities. Youth are not expected to approach an institution with programs that do not respond to their needs. Therefore, the right selection of programs

and activities is of utmost importance. The more the programs seek to meet the real needs of youth, the more likely they are to approach the institution.

In interviews conducted for the purpose of this research, officials in the field of youth activism³⁴ stressed that youth are less likely to join youth institutions. They see this problem becoming a trend. Although such a situation is evident in certain places, there are opposite trends that are worth consideration in order to benefit the work of the youth sector. An example is Arrabah Sports Club, which has a membership of over 1153³⁵ out of a population of 11,000.

In such a context, where the membership of many youth institutions is limited to a small number of young people, the following proposed mechanisms could help to increase the membership of youth institutions:

1. Provide activities and programs that interest young people, such as artistic, cultural, media, social, political and economic programs. Since wants and needs may differ from one youth group to another, it becomes imperative to work with these groups in identifying the activities and programs that would respond to their needs and priorities.
2. Provide clubs with technical resources and equipment, such as swimming pools, different sports equipment, playgrounds, and so on.
3. Ensure that the elected bodies adhere to the implementation of their electoral agenda in order to promote their credibility.
4. Seek to increase the number of females in the General Assemblies of youth clubs and structures with open membership by providing special programs aimed at young women.
5. Ensure that administrative and senior bodies keep the General Assembly updated on new developments on a regular basis, and through various channels such as newsletters, meetings and other means that would promote active participation.
6. Diversify activities and programs offered by youth institutions, whether they are sports, arts, cultural, social or political activities, while ensuring that such programs and activities are inclusive of a wide range of youth rather than being limited to a specific age group or one sex but not the other.
7. Seek to work with young boys and girls to encourage them to join youth institutions either as supporting or active members (as per the respective bylaws) in order to prepare them for future roles through programs tailored to their needs and by involving them in different activities.
8. Conduct exchange visits between members of General Assemblies or Administrative Committees at the district, and wider levels.
9. Provide members with material or moral incentives and privileges in order to encourage non-members to apply for membership.
10. Delegate certain roles to young people from the General Assembly.

34 Kamal Abur-Rub, Director of Club Department in the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Personal interview on 17/9/2000, and Hasan Al-Khatib, op. cit.

35 Anwar Lahlouh, Member of the Administrative Committee of Arrabah Club, Personal interview on 3/4/2006.

11. Enable General Assembly members to meet with leading figures for dialogue or as open meetings.
12. Create a democratic culture and traditions in youth institutions in order to encourage youth to join their membership.

The above list may apply to all type of youth institutions. The current phase young people are undergoing is different than previous ones. Therefore, a new vision of how these institutions should work is needed. Continuing with the same programs and approaches from the past may only make things more complicated. Youth institutions are required to offer programs and activities that meet to the real needs of youth and that correspond to the prevailing conditions. Programs should be of quality, based on suggestions by youth themselves. Youth should take part in the development of these programs, starting with planning, continuing throughout implementation and ending with evaluation. The more young peoples' feelings of self-esteem are developed, the more likely they will be motivated to join the institution. The more they feel themselves marginalized, the more they will try to keep themselves away.

The discourse used by youth institutions is in need of being renewed and upgraded in order to respond to the present realities. The previous discourse cannot be acceptable in an era of rapid changes and developments at all levels. Therefore, serious efforts should be exerted to combat all adverse traditions and practices that prevent youth institutions and structures from increasing their membership. Maintaining this status quo will serve to make such cultures more deeply rooted among youth themselves and will deprive institutions from expanding their bases. Risks associated with the present situation may even cause institutions to lose their current members. Institutions should reflect on their past in order to identify any structural disorders they are experiencing. Youth used to compete to join the different institutions, structures and clubs in the past, and membership at that time was a source of pride. Why is it that youth are no longer motivated to join these institutions when membership is open to everyone? Thus, youth institutions need to carry out a comprehensive review of their history and current programs and activities. They should not remain captive to political or factional goals, but should rather be more open in their approach, as such openness has become a vital element for increasing membership.

In addition to the above, members of youth institutions have the responsibility to seek to increase the membership of their institutions through peer education campaigns. It would appear that youth institutions have become alienated and that their programs and activities are no longer require their current members to recruit new members, and to explain the importance of joining these institutions to youth themselves. It is worth noting that, when asked about their views with regards to increasing membership, all researched institutions stated that they have annual increases in their membership. However, public opinion polls conducted by specialized institutions often point to a continuous increase in the proportion of people unconnected to institutions. Declines in the membership of youth institutions is also apparent in universities and youth clubs and structures. The lack of

accountability and democratic life within youth institutions, clubs, structures and projects has created a state of carelessness among members. While working towards increasing membership levels used to be one of the major duties of a member, such duties have now become a burden. Efforts should be made to reactivate this duty and help members understand its importance.

II. Institutions' programs and activities targeting youth

It is no secret that most youth programs and activities, both formal and informal, have been based on reactive and unplanned approaches, responding to immediate issues. They have been mostly dependent on current donors' priorities and agendas rather than on clear indicators and priorities stemming from the situation on the ground. Although millions of dollars have been spent by dozens of institutions on youth programs and activities, a legitimate and important question remains: Have these programs and activities been able to make a difference? Have they had a tangible impact? What is their impact on youth's culture, directions and intellectual setup? Have youth been helped to be active participants in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in the different aspects of the public sphere? Could young people feel that they are assuming a role that corresponds to their numerical proportion in society, as well as to their capacity, potentials, needs and priorities? Or, have their roles been most often limited to protocols only?

This situation has led to a state of confusion in the field, as well as the wastage of funds, efforts and time, unjustified competition, lack of institutionalization, lack of transparency, credibility and accountability and the disruption of democratic life. The resulting failures have been associated with serious consequences, the echo of which has gone beyond the officials of youth institutions to reach donors as well.

Programs targeting youth by most NGOs overlap, as most of these institutions offer similar programs and only a handful can be distinguished from the rest. One can observe such new distinguished and effective programs offered by Sharek Youth Forum, which seeks to empower youth with knowledge, as well as empowering them economically through a number of projects with a significant impact on youth. Major examples are the Bridges, Information Technology, and Step Forward projects implemented by the Sharek in cooperation with a large group of NGOs and private sector institutions. Such distinguished emerging and growing programs have been met with resentment by some people, as they offer practical solutions to youth problems, which in turn, exposes the failures of others and affects their personal plans. Critics of Sharek claim that what the organization is offering falls within the mandate of the Ministry of Labor and not that of an NGO. However, project critics prefer to talk about economic empowerment only as a means to obtaining funding. Hence, when some youth institutions, including Sharek, appear serious in offering programs that provide practical solutions to youth problems, such positive attitudes appear as a threat to those who seek to obtain personal gains from working in the youth sector.

The activities of many institutions' civic education programs overlap, such as courses, workshops, lectures and seminars on the issues of democracy, human rights, voluntary work and others. As such, it would appear that these institutions are competing rather than cooperating in their programs targeting youth. Few youth institutions offer unconventional future-oriented programs. Rather, most focus on issues of awareness-raising only. This could be attributed to the lack of proper planning, as well as lack of systematic and cumulative work, which would make quality additions to conventional programs.

Programs designed with the future in mind should offer empowering programs with a strong developmental focus. Insisting on the implementation of conventional non-productive programs will only reduce the motivation of youth to join the activities and programs of these institutions. For example, although some institutions address the issue of the environment in their literature as a focus for youth programs and activities, stressing the importance of preserving the environment and educating youth in this regard, the number of institutions working on this issue is negligible, and the environment is rarely the specific subject of projects aimed at youth. A focus on environmental issues can also be maintained through unconventional youth programs and activities. In addition, institutions seldom address the issue of ongoing technology developments and their impact on youth for example. The advancements in the different media channels and the effect of globalization require youth institutions to tackle such phenomena with seriousness in order to keep up with global developments for the benefit of youth. However, youth institutions rarely offer programs seeking to familiarize youth with information technology and help them make use of it in developing their goals and programs and working towards achieving them. Thus, youth institutions should consider developing new programs that respond to current youth needs.

For example, youth institutions could include vocational programs within their activities in addition to other practical programs, such as information technology, which can benefit youth in the future. Current programs are often limited to awareness-raising and can be regarded as non-productive. Although important for ensuring youth's positive socialization, these programs cannot empower youth in the future. Programs towards this end include those which assist and prepare youth to confront their future. On the other hand, in many instances, these awareness raising and educational programs present findings and recommendations for the purpose of institutional learning. However, institutions rarely follow such findings and recommendations, which often simply remain on the shelves.

In summary, many institutions should acknowledge that their programs do not largely respond to youth needs. Most institutions, if not all of them, work with young people within the so called 'young leadership' program. It is unrealistic to think that all Palestinian youth should be trained as leaders. What of those young people who do not possess the traits of a young leader?

Within this context, it is important to briefly describe major activities and programs offered to youth by youth institutions. As stated above, most youth institutions offer similar activities and programs aimed at activating the youth sector and promoting its role in the process of community building. Major activities and programs include:

1. Summer camps: Youth institutions often organize summer camps on a regular basis, which yield positive outcomes for participants behaviorally and culturally in terms of education, creativity and morality. In addition, they fill up the participants' free time and expose them to different programs and contests in general culture and literature.
2. Courses, lectures, workshops and seminars: All youth institutions offer such educational and awareness-raising activities to youth, And such activities form the core and main pillar of their work. Although topics addressed vary from democracy, to human rights, communication skills, and leadership skills for example, they remain conventional and lack any significant new changes in the way these topics are presented.
3. Sports activities: Youth institutions, particularly clubs and youth structures affiliated to political organizations, run sports teams. Some of these teams are professional and participate in local and regional competitions. Such activities enhance the abilities of youth, especially their physical and team working abilities.
4. Voluntary work camps: Youth institutions organize many voluntary work camps, both locally and internationally based on a belief that such camps help strengthen links and cooperation between Palestinian and international youth, while also exchanging experience in voluntary work and learning from the experiences of others.
5. Youth exchange visits: A large number of youth institutions work on creating cooperation links and friendships with youth unions and institutions around the world. Exchange visits are usually conducted with the aim of establishing relations and coordinating joint activities.
6. Special activities and programs: There are specific programs and activities carried out by certain institutions according to their objectives and philosophy, focusing on specific issues such as the environment, cultural heritage, and specific social problems.

Finally, it should be reiterated that the large majority of youth institutions select their youth programs and activities without consulting with young people themselves. One experience worthy of praise however was carried out by the Palestinian Youth Council, in which several workshops were carried out in 2000 under a project of Participatory Needs Assessment for Palestinian Youth. The project aimed at involving youth in assessing their needs, and the role the Council will play in responding to these needs. While the needs assessment was carried out and the pioneering experience was praised, it did not live for a long time as was the case with the Youth Council itself.

Based on the above elaboration on the youth programs of different youth institutions, chapter three will present some thoughts and suggestions for future programs and activities that can be adopted by youth institutions.

III. Status, programs and mechanisms of work of young women's institutions

First: The situation of girls and women in Palestinian society

The latest statistics issued by PCBS in mid 2005³⁶ indicated that the proportion of women in Palestinian society was about 49.3%, with 49.3% in the West Bank and 49.4% in Gaza Strip. In 2005, the percentage of girls and women aged 15 years old and above enrolled in education was 22.2%. Data also indicated that 11.1% of Palestinian females aged 15 years and over are illiterate, 34.8% have middle school education and 5.7% hold a BA or a higher degree as illustrated by the 2005 labor force survey.³⁷

Women' participation in the labor force is regarded an important indicator of the progress of the development process. The proportion of women aged 15 years and older participating in the labor force during 2005 was 13.4% for the Palestinian Territories as a whole, ranging from 15.8% in the West Bank to 9.0% in Gaza Strip. The participation of females aged 15 years and older in the labor force was highest in rural areas, reaching 16.8%, followed by urban areas at 12.5% and finally, refugee camps at 10.3%.

On the other hand, the proportion of unemployed females aged 15 years and older in 2005 was 22.3%. This is a significant increase from the 14.7% figure for 2004. The participation of women aged 15 years and older engaged in economic activities was the highest in the agricultural sector, reaching 32.5%. In the area of services, the highest participation was noted in education at 28.4%, followed by health at 8.7% as indicated in the labor force survey of 2005.

Women' participation in public and political life does not reflect the actual weight of women's participation in the building of society, since men still occupy the majority of ministerial and non-ministerial senior posts. Palestinian women hold 12% of seats in the Legislative Council following elections that took place in January 2006.

Specific obstacles and challenges exist that hinder women's involvement in the technology and information market. Data from a survey on women's empowerment in the area of information technology revealed that 30.4% of females aged 15 years and older use computers in the Palestinian territories. This figure stands at 32.3% for the West Bank and 27.0% for the Gaza Strip.

Data also indicated that enrolment in education increases the possibility of computer use among women, as 74.9% of women currently enrolled in education use computers, compared to only 18.3% among those not enrolled. Likewise, 52.1% of working women use computers, compared to 38.8% of unemployed women.

³⁶ www.mic.pal-info

³⁷ www.mic.pal-info

The percentage of internet use among women was 11.2% for the Palestinian Territories, reaching 12.5% in the West Bank and declining to 8.7% in Gaza Strip. A statistically significant relation was found between internet use and education, as 27.9% of women currently enrolled in education use the internet, compared to a low 6.6% of those not enrolled.

On the other hand, findings indicate that 9.0% of females aged 15 years or over think of setting up a project or working as part of a project related to information technology. This percentage increases among the younger age groups, reaching 14.6% for females aged 15-18 and 15.8% for women aged 19-24 years.

Second: Programs and activities targeting young women

At the beginning of the study, a substantial space was allocated to addressing the status, programs and mechanisms of work of the different youth institutions. It is also important however to allow for a brief description of activities and programs specifically targeting young women. The study findings reveal that the activities and programs of women's institutions working with youth are primarily targeted at females, and that these activities are largely similar to those of youth institutions in that they mostly have a social, cultural and awareness raising character. On the other hand, the different arts and sports activities rank low, as youth institutions were regarded as having an exclusive interest in these activities for social and cultural considerations.

One should not overlook the empowerment and counseling programs aimed at achieving gender equality in all aspects. In addition, the support women's institutions give to women is not limited to the moral aspect, but also include material support, such as offering loans and grants and assisting in the setting up of income generating projects. The purpose of such support is to help empower women in society, as well as to change the stereotypical perception of women as non-productive and solely concerned with domestic issues due to the prevailing patriarchal culture in Palestinian society.

Additionally, women's institutions working with youth seek to help young women get involved in and influence local policies through their intensive programs and activities in marginalized and rural areas. This is in addition to awareness raising programs, especially in the area of women's rights, early marriage and gender-based violence.

One can conclude from the above that women's institutions working with youth primarily focus their activities on women, since they were originally established with a mission to defend women's rights and to promote the role of women in general. These institutions believe that gender issues are not limited to the social roles and activities of men and women, but also address relations pertinent to work and decision-making, since both men and women have experience and potentials that should be invested in.³⁸

38 Samia Al-Liftawi, Gender, working paper. March 1998.

Women's institutions perceive their programs as a mechanism to advance women's status in order to prevent the further marginalization of women. In a nutshell, women's institutions offer programs similar to those of youth institutions, but their programs are directed at women in general and young women in particular.

Work mechanisms and methodologies adopted by women's institutions working with youth can be summarized as follows:

1. Offering counseling programs to women in social, psychological and legal areas.
2. Forming and training women's groups in skills such as communication and leadership.
3. Forming lobbying groups to work on enacting legislations that ensures the protection of women.
4. Disseminating information through educational brochures, newspapers and other circulars.
5. Networking and coordinating among women's institutions and civil society organizations in general.
6. Making use of the different media channels (print and audiovisual) in order to mobilize public opinion on women's rights.
7. Organizing social, cultural, political and awareness raising activities aimed at empowering women and effecting change in the social and cultural perceptions prevailing in the society.

Chapter Three: A vision for the Future

Topic One: Youth empowerment

I. Directions of youth empowerment³⁹

There are three different schools of thought on youth empowerment, which are detailed below.

1) Idealistic school:

Believes that youth problems are those of the society and, hence, youth empowerment can be achieved through community empowerment. For this school, poor youth participation is a symptom of the low level of development of political institutions. The weakness of institutions concerned with establishing and maintaining 'the rule of the law', i.e., the low level of rationality in the structure of the authority and the process of policy development and decision-making, is also to blame

According to this view, youth potential has not been fully realized and youth can prosper and lead the development process if a change takes place in the surrounding environment that shapes their behavior and capacities. This view is often adopted by both the governing and opposing elites, but for different purposes. The latter maintains that the 'internal' environment is the problem (such as the political will, laws, policies), whereas the former refers to the 'external' environment as the problem (i.e., the shortage of national natural resources, economic and strategic regional challenges, external threats to the national security and so on).

This school believes it is not necessary for democracy to depend on using a quota system, including 'affirmative actions' for the benefit of women, religious minorities or the working class for example. More importantly, government institutions should be reformed in order to ensure good governance by respecting the rule of law and the principles of transparency.

2) Utilitarian school:

Believes that youth problems are different than the society's problems and are not directly linked to the level of good governance. This view gives priority to services offered to youth, such as recreational and sports activities and

39 Ali Al-Sawi, Youth, Good Governance and Freedoms. A working paper submitted to the second regional workshop, Sana'a, Yemen (21-23/6/2005), sponsored by UNDP-UNDESA, pp. 3-5.

providing youth with housing opportunities, based on the notion that youth want to join the labor market not political parties.

This utilitarian approach towards youth empowerment creates a scientific and political dilemma, forcing the need to choose between priorities for public policies regarding youth, whether in favor of addressing unemployment as an economic problem, or of reforming the mechanisms of the labor market, which is a problem of policy and management.

In this case, a 'narrow' margin of freedoms and participation can be accepted, believing that this margin will expand after the economic problem becomes less acute and financial resources required to meet the needs of youth for services become available. This promotes a culture that justifies inadequate freedoms under the pretext of providing services.

3) Elitist school:

Believes that we have adequate democracy and that 'change should take place prior to empowerment.' From this perspective, we first need to change the culture of youth in order to help them absorb the increased room for democracy and freedoms, and prepare them to become 'empowered' before having the opportunity to assume leadership positions.

This elitist view is also often technocratic. It equates 'empowerment' with 'appointment', redefining the concept of youth empowerment by qualitative indicators that often are not illustrative of quality, such as claiming that appointing a few young ministers is an adequate and decisive indication of the political empowerment of youth in general; claiming that "our political position supports youth participation but society does not comprehend this position", or "since a youth council was created, nobody will have the right to talk on behalf of youth anymore."

4) A "proposed" realistic view:

We suggest dealing with youth empowerment through the following principles:

1. Avoid generalizations that are not based on facts and scientific thinking. Therefore, we need to make significant investment in data collection and research activities on youth before making decisions with regards to youth empowerment (from the points of view of political activism, economic conditions, prevailing culture and actual and potential capacities) or before jumping to make judgments about youth abilities if they were to assume influential positions.
2. Let the groups concerned speak for themselves in order to realize the idea of legitimate fairness. This also applies to women's rights as well. To this end, we need to allow youth an opportunity to enter the decision-making sphere and maintain two-way communication. This also requires having

independent public opinion polling centers that are in direct contact with youth.

3. Recognize the difference between empowerment and participation. Empowerment is "a right for youth and a duty for the state". This also includes, but is not limited to being "a duty for youth and a right for the state from them". In other words, this view accepts diversity among the young generation, with some youth more inclined to participate than others or other youth not accepting to assume certain positions. Nevertheless, it is important that they are given the choice in formal terms and in terms of capacity and potential, i.e., being empowered to make the choice. The reciprocal relation between the right and the duty is reflected in the proportional interaction between practice and awareness.
4. The gradualness and comprehensiveness of empowerment policies, meaning that outcomes should not be determined before identifying the needs. Empowerment as a qualitative phenomenon should not be reduced to reflecting the space (quota) designated to youth in the political and administrative structures in numerical terms in order to jump over the predispositions by claiming that empowerment has been achieved by designating a number of ministerial posts to certain cadres from the youth sector (irrespective of the mechanism used to select these young cadres). It is equally inaccurate to say that empowerment has not been achieved at all as long as youth are not occupying half of the total posts since they constitute "half of the present population"

Within this view, gradualness is limited only to the area of coping with the discrepancy in individuals' level of achievement (one young person being ambitious and another one being lazy) and upgrading their level of achievement through social development methods (awareness-raising, training). However, gradualness in terms of legal empowerment may become an ideological or even partisan issue, as this paper views empowerment as ensuring all people the ability to take action rather than as the outcomes of individual actions.

Comprehensiveness in empowerment policies refers to the inclusion of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and public and private structures in the empowerment process, although the state has the responsibility leading this process as it possesses the necessary instruments to take action. Referring to the role of the state does not conflict with the notion of starting from the grassroots level. However, grassroots movements in Arab societies often do not enjoy the required independence – due to state's interference – in order to be an active partner with the state. This was emphasized by the Arab Human Development Reports within their elaboration on the crisis of civil society in Arab countries.

II. Suggestions regarding youth empowerment⁴⁰

1. Are we talking about services for youth or a policy for youth?

It is important for us today to have a national policy for youth. Certainly, governments play a pivotal role in developing a national policy for youth labor, including:

1. The expansion of job creation and employment opportunities
2. vocational training activities
3. Equality in providing job opportunities that suit and improve the current potentials of everyone
4. The development of creativity among small-scale entrepreneurs
5. Environmental preservation
6. Making use of opportunities offered by the revolution in information technology for meeting the needs of marginalized groups and reaching marginalized groups with empowerment by upgrading their knowledge and skills.

2. Is the target the Ministry of Youth and Sports or the state?

Some perceive that the world is moving in the direction of allowing greater space for public freedoms and eliminating inflated governmental ministries (such as media, economy and youth). Others maintain that ministries are key organizational bodies for implementing public policies, although they are not the only means. A national council can act as a coordinating body and there can be joint structures with the involvement of the government and society in implementing policies (like the environment protection policy, women's empowerment, etc). Such youth policy is also needed to address a national problem. Thus, the composition of state institutions would be interim and of a changing nature.

The demand for supporting the role of youth institutions is an important element for developing a national youth policy. This would include improving the performance of youth institutions, upgrading the level of their leaderships and staff, updating the mechanisms of their work and ensuring their accountability. A youth national policy should stem from a sincere desire to respond to youth needs and aspirations, which should be done by working with youth rather than working *for* them. Major features of such a policy would include the following:

1. It is important for the youth national policy to promote effective partnerships among all stakeholders, especially youth networks, youth NGOs and other institutions.
2. It should facilitate youth access to legislative and decision-making bodies.
3. Priority should be given to establishing communication channels with youth to make their voice heard at the national, regional and international levels.

40 Ibid, pp. 19-21.

4. The national youth policy needs to be in harmony with the cultural values of Palestinian society.
5. It should pay special attention to disadvantaged social groups.
6. It should promote all forms of education.
7. It should allow a chance for interaction between generations by facilitating the participation and cooperation of all.

Certainly, achieving this task is linked to developing policies and programs that provide the material and human resources required to realize it through the following:

- 1) Revising educational programs on the basis of combining theoretical study with practical and technical aspects, so upon completing secondary school education, students are equipped with the essential theoretical and cognitive skills.
- 2) Revising methods used for the qualification of professionals working in the youth sector, including teachers, educators and leaders, in order to make sure that they have the ability to educate youth in a manner that promotes Arab cultures and values.
- 3) Developing a unified official and NGO media plan and realistic programs to encourage youth adherence to their values.
- 4) Educating youth on the principles of democracy and human rights and providing them with the opportunity for broad participation in the different representative institutions in order that they can play an active role in the decision-making process.
- 5) Encouraging youth to be appropriately open to other cultures and civilizations, directing them towards practicing constructive and objective criticism and encouraging youth dialogue with peers within both Arab and international forums.

Topic Two: Argument on priority between awareness raising, and youth empowerment and capacity building programs

I. Democratic culture among youth in Palestine

Promoting a culture of democracy lays the genuine groundwork for ensuring some of the conditions for democratic change. It is an important tool for the creation of civil society activism and social forces believing in democracy and human rights. A democratic culture is a tool to ensuring democratic change and broadening the scope of dialogue among the different groups concerned with democracy, as well as a tool for making an impact on society.

Palestinian youth face multiple constraints, which has at times restricted their freedom of movement and prevented them from actively participating in community development. Therefore, disseminating and promoting a democratic culture among youth essentially seeks to enable them to acquire the basic knowledge needed for emancipation from all forms of oppression and develop a sense of responsibility towards the rights of others. Hence, a

democratic culture encompasses a set of values that helps youth to be aware of such principles as justice, acceptance of others, equality, civil society and women's rights.

Factionalism and extremism are among the major threats facing young males and females. The combination of difficult socioeconomic conditions, poverty and low awareness in rural areas, refugee camps and certain cities, has created a conducive environment for increased resentment and protests among marginalized youth, who suffer from social exclusion and poverty. This comes in addition to narratives targeted at youth by some fundamentalist groups, offering them salvation if they adhere to their principles and values, and adopt their references. This might explain why young people have served as the impetus of such movements for several decades.

All of the above have created two prevailing trends of values, one belonging to the traditional culture with its absolutisms, hierarchy and reliance on obsolete cultural heritage, and the another belonging to a modern Arab and international culture combining genuine values from our heritage and history with contemporary philosophy, techniques and lifestyles. Conflict between these two directions is still ongoing in spite of the seeming prevalence of traditional values. These traditional values are inclined towards determinism, coercive obedience, feeling of shame, and respect for authority. On the contrary, the culture of change seeks to promote the values of freedom of choice, creativity, individuality, self accountability, openness to others, and justice. At the same time, this culture of change and enlightenment seeks to overcome the aforementioned dualities and ensure balance of mind and heart, form and content, and genuineness and modernity.

Dissemination and promotion of a democratic culture is a pressing need for these young people in view of their marginalization and the associated limitation of social relations and lack of cultural, recreational and other facilities in their communities. Such conditions predispose youth to a sense of indifference, withdrawal, lack of interaction, and unawareness of others and inability to interact with them. If these young people remain excluded from the focus of programs and activities of local and international NGOs, the situation may become more complicated and extremism may become stronger, creating a society that rejects many of the conventions related to democracy and human rights. Therefore, the issue of promoting a democratic culture requires holding a frank and open discourse among all social actors, as a democratic culture cannot thrive on an extreme model of culture based on rejecting any other available models. A democratic culture adopts values of tolerance, coexistence and participation in decision-making. It is also based on values of equality and acknowledging cultural pluralism within the same society, especially when such society is already made up of diverse ethnic and ideological groups. The democratic culture, in its essence, entails protecting freedom of thought, belief, expression and conscience.

From this perspective, we should work with these young groups from the beginning in order to effect positive social change and introduce them to the

international conventions related to the key issues of democracy, human rights, civil society, tolerance, accepting others, and promoting women's rights. Continuing to work with such youth represents an investment in the sustainable developmental process. Any change can be effected by combining theory with practice. Therefore, the awareness raising process contributes to the elimination of traditional, obsolete philosophies based on a 'banking-style' education, which fully and solely relies on listening and didactic teaching.

The dissemination and promotion of such a democratic culture is basically a mechanism for social change. By working with others, we will be able to change the efforts promoting a democratic culture among youth in Palestine from a limited, elitist effort, to a widespread, grassroots initiative involving different stakeholders. This is in addition to effecting change in young men and women by helping them acquire a number of new values, attitudes and norms. This will enable the youth movement and youth organizations, clubs and societies and civil society organizations to assume their role in influencing the public sphere, not as charitable societies prohibited from practicing political activities by virtue of law but rather as civil society organizations that can have a major role as influential lobbying and advocacy groups that cannot be overlooked or underestimated. This can be done while developing programs and proposing policies to effect a real change in the different structures of the society.

Based on the above, the effects of a democratic culture include the following:

- 1) Creating a nucleus of self-reliant young men and women by supporting their social and political empowerment and eliminating restrictive cultural, social and legal constraints..
- 2) Establishing infrastructures for the development and building of human capacity for supporting ongoing, steady, and sustainable community development in the poorer villages.
- 3) Supporting young males and females to become active partners in community development.
- 4) Supporting youth and women institutions, clubs and centers in the poorer villages in order to help them take the initiative to implement community education projects.
- 5) Promoting openness to others.
- 6) Communication among young males and females in order to positively influence their mutual understanding.
- 7) Increasing youth involvement in the shaping of public opinion, decision-making and local community activities.
- 8) Promoting social inclusion through diversity, democracy, and tolerance by broadening youth opportunities for self-expression and contribution to identifying public priorities.
- 9) Eliminating moral-social problems resulting from the value conflict between the young generation and the older generation, as well as among youth themselves, and those resulting from religious extremism, improper use of free time and lack of recreational activities and other such problems.

II. Proposed activities: Future programs and activities to further develop institutions' working with youth

1. Educational and recreational youth activities: Opportunities should be offered to young people to engage in such activities in order to help improve their capacities and competencies in various fields, whether educational or extracurricular; promote a spirit of voluntarism; and provide youth with skills that enable them to play an active and positive role in the process of community development. In terms of educational and recreational activities. An annual youth festival should also be organized on a regular basis, consisting of cultural, recreational, sports, art and other activities.
2. Media programs: These refer to all media channels in print and audiovisual formats. Both private and public media channels are required to provide space for youth topics⁴¹ and even create new programs concerned with youth to shed light on their needs and priorities with direct participation by youth themselves. Although some media channels try from time to time to address youth issues, these efforts remain sporadic. Otherwise, youth institutions will have the responsibility of creating such programs even if for a fee. Furthermore, we aspire to having periodical bulletins and radio and TV programs affiliated to individual youth institutions or a group of institutions.
3. Activities and programs targeting young females: When talking about youth, we refer to both genders. Youth institutions are required to offer programs and activities specifically targeting young females in addition to their common programs that cater to both genders. Such programs should not necessarily be limited to educational topics, such as lectures and workshops for young women, but should also include many other forms of activities targeting females in particular, such as vocational programs promoting women's productive roles as a means to empowerment. Objectively speaking, youth institutions are quite similar to international donors in that they require funds to be disbursed on projects of consumptive character⁴² or non-productive ones that are not conducive to sustainable development. Youth institutions act in the same way by focusing on awareness raising issues more than on programs that can help empower young women in the future. Funds spent on such issues are too large and could be invested in productive projects, yielding much better outcomes. This is not to underestimate the importance of awareness raising activities offered by these institutions but a suggestion that such activities have reached the level of saturation.
4. Health programs and activities: There would appear to be an apparent neglect with regards to the activities of youth institutions in programs

41 Center for Development in Primary Health Care, The Palestinian Conference of Youth and Adolescents, Psychosocial Aspect, 22-24 October 1997, Al-Bireh, p. 13.

42 Development Studies Center and UNICEF, Challenges and Priorities from the Perspective of Palestinian Youth, Ramallah, Birzeit University, 1999, p. 37.

related to youth health topics,⁴³ such as sex education and reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, family planning and other vital issues. Before being introduced to the rights and basics of civic education and democracy, one should first know his/her body. A significant proportion of young people lack knowledge of their bodies. This lack of knowledge will go on to affect their children, as when parents are not aware of the physiological and physical developments, they may face certain problems in educating their own children in the future.

In addition, this issue is addressed from perspectives other than scientific ones. The majority address topics of reproductive or sexual health from a sexual point of view rather than a scientific one. Statistics indicate that 83.7% of youth aged 10-24 years in the Palestinian Territories have never heard of HIV/AIDS, (87.2% in the West Bank and 77.8% in Gaza Strip). Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among youth increases with age, as 50.7% of 10-11-year-olds had heard of HIV/AIDS compared to 96.6% of 20-24-year-olds. On the other hand, only 29.3% of respondents were able to name two correct methods of preventing HIV/AIDS (32.2% in the West Bank and 23.8% in Gaza Strip).⁴⁴

Failure to pay attention to this issue could potentially leave youth captive to obsolete norms and traditions that promote risky behavior. We cannot, and should not always assume that parents should take on the role educating their children on sexual and reproductive health, particularly within Palestinian society where open discussion surrounding sexual practices remains taboo. This taboo also sometimes prevents such topics from being discussed in schools, and students may only be asked to read up on the issue. Even when some teachers address these topics, they tend only to offer a brief overview to avoid embarrassment that may arise when addressing the issue in-depth.

5. Voluntary work: It is of utmost importance to promote youth voluntary work in view of its role in improving young people's potentials and abilities, as well as in promoting the community development process⁴⁵ and maintaining links between youth and their communities. Voluntary work is a process of participation in the community building process, which also promotes positive values in youth. Being an old Palestinian tradition, voluntary work can serve as a means for advancing communities and as such, it can act as tool for community development.⁴⁶

Moreover, such activities serve as a constructive way in which for youth to spend their free time. In this regard, 47.3% of youth stated that they have

43 Palestinian Youth Union, Future Builders Workshop for the Age Group 14-19, 30/4-1/5/1998, Ramallah.

44 PCBS, 2005, Youth Survey Database, 2003, Ramallah, Palestine

45 Ali Za'al and Issam Zawawi. Youth and Community Security, Arab Center for Security Studies and Training, Al-Riyadh, 1988, from p. 178.

46 Khaled Al-Ghoul, Voluntary Work and the Broom of Volunteers, Al-Quds, 10/12/2002, p. 15.

adequate free time, while 27.2% thought they have too much free time.⁴⁷ The issue does not require further support, as many studies and institutions have been calling for, or giving consideration to voluntary work. Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance to have practical programs based on voluntary work that have an ongoing, rather than a seasonal or factional character. Voluntary work should be regarded as an integral part of institutions' activities and programs.

6. Information technology program: After the information revolution occurred in traditional media channels, the world is now often described as a small village. These media channels have gone beyond political borders and affected all social groups, including youth. Nowadays, youth perceive these developments, particularly the internet, as a form of entertainment. Their effect on youth is obvious, as we find large numbers of young people spending long hours using these channels in adverse ways. Therefore, programs and activities dealing with information technology have become a necessity not only because of such improper use of these channels, but also to explain their importance in building young people's personalities and capacities, and in encouraging their use in aspects of study and professional life. Such programs would open broad perspectives for youth, enabling them to learn about various issues and get to know the experiences of other people. Although some consider these developments as a means of cultural invasion, youth institutions, nevertheless, are required to make the best use of the positive aspects of such resources related to information technology.
7. Economic-social programs: It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the social and economic problems facing youth. However, the paper seeks to stress that youth institutions are required to provide programs that limit, and attempt to solve these problems and help eliminate the state of anxiety experienced by young people resulting from social and economic difficulties. Issues of marriage and having a family; employment; and the high cost of living in a context of low income levels: all these issues add to young people's concerns about the future. Therefore, the question is how can youth institutions help limit this anxiety and at the same time prepare youth to address their problems?

Youth institutions alone will never be adequate to provide a solution to such problems. However, cooperation should be sought with the public sector to find adequate support to help these programs make a difference. Programs should have a long-term character. This is not a simple process, as it will require changes to be made to the social and economic structures of the society.

8. Youth creativity programs: There are large amounts of unrealized potentials within the youth sector. However, much of such potentials are wasted on unbeneficial activities in the absence of adequate institutions and centers to make constructive use of, and develop these potentials,

47 PCBS, 2005, Youth in the Palestinian Territories: Facts and Figures, op. cit., p. 31.

creativities and talents. Another problems facing youth is lack of participation in the different activities of the existing institutions for several reasons. The problem is that such programs, if they exist at all, are scarce. Therefore, youth institutions are required to offer different programs and activities that seek to develop such creativities. Examples include, but are not limited to, arts and musical programs, theater activities, arts exhibits demonstrating the talents and achievements of youth, regular cultural and social contests, in addition to the creation of sports teams composed of talented youth. Such potentials and creativities are in need institutions that seek to adopt and nurture these diverse skills. Otherwise, youth potentials and talents will remain undeveloped, and youth will be unable to benefit the community in the absence of such institutions and expertise that can identify and upgrade their potentials and talents for the benefit of youth themselves and their society.

9. Environmental programs and activities: The majority of activities and programs offered by youth institutions lack any kind of environmental focus, except for a few institutions that aim to increase youth interaction with environmental issues.⁴⁸ An obvious gap is noted in the environmental awareness among youth in general. There are certain environmental projects conducted by some youth institutions, most notably, the project "For the Sake of Tomorrow" implemented by Sharek Youth Forum in order to control smoking. However, there remains a large need for concerted efforts in creating youth programs and activities on the environment and environmental protection from pollution and hazards resulting from a lack of awareness. A healthy and clean environment would certainly act as a major factor in preventing illnesses and public health risks. Finally it should be noted that 23.1% of Palestinian youth in the West Bank are smokers, compared to only 6.5% in Gaza Strip.⁴⁹

Although a governmental directorate concerned with environmental issues exists in Palestine, youth institutions nonetheless have the responsibility of working with youth and raising their awareness. Nurturing positive values among youth towards environmental protection is the responsibility of all Palestinians.⁵⁰ Youth interaction in environmental concerns can be promoted through cooperation between all youth, and other NGOs and public institutions concerned with this issue. It is not adequate to simply issue booklets and brochures on these topics. Involving youth in the preservation of the environment requires the creation of sustainable programs and activities addressing this concerns and targeting youth specifically.

10. Inventions, achievements and youth intellectual patents: It is of the utmost importance for youth institutions to pay attention to youth inventions and

48 Naseef Al-Dik, Community Youth Center, Personal interview on 19/10/2000, Ramallah.

49 PCBS, 2005, Youth in the Palestinian Territories, op. cit., p. 14.

50 Thafer Tayseer, Palestinian Youth Council, Personal interview, 16/10/2000, Ramallah.

creativities at the national level. There are many youth inventions that lack sponsorship or support, and that are awaiting an initiative from youth institutions. Some are in the field of engineering, others in computers, energy, communications, transportation and other fields. Although important, limiting the issues of capacity building and empowerment to civic education and young leadership is inadequate. Youth creativities, achievements and inventions also need to be identified and sponsored in order to help them advance forward and yield positive returns for the benefit of all.

11. Graduation projects: There are many graduation projects completed by Palestinian students in the different universities and colleges. These are genuine projects that can be used as a basis for further development. Youth institutions are required to maintain communication with Palestinian universities and colleges on issues beyond the organization of awareness raising activities, to include communication with students who develop exceptional and pioneering graduation projects. Universities usually organize an annual job hunting fair, where they introduce their students to local firms and institutions. However, this is often inadequate. Universities and youth institutions are equally required to create a permanent committee charged with organizing an annual conference to discuss students' achievements, including theoretical and applied research and graduation projects
12. Research programs: In spite of the large number of youth institutions and multitude of their programs and activities, scientific research programs tend to be absent from their agendas. There is a need for youth research projects that can provide the opportunity to distinguished young people who seek to contribute to the different aspects of the development process in Palestine. They should be encouraged to conduct research and studies with a high level of objectivity and accuracy in their analysis and criticism. Youth should be encouraged to employ their creativity in enriching local life by seeking to deeply analyze the issues that concern their society and develop solutions and mechanisms which would help youth activism to move from theory, to practice and action. There is an increasing number of youth researchers, whose growing numbers should be marched by a rise in the number of institutions that sponsor and support their cultural and scientific activities, invest in their intellectual capacity and promote their cognitive productivity. This approach would help provide an academic reference for youth activism in Palestine, offer a database of scientific information and data for decision-makers and create an academic forum to defend and promote youth rights.
13. Supporting and upgrading traditional and popular industries and handicrafts: Popular heritage is not limited to the different forms of folklore. Although attention has been paid to certain aspects of heritage, the economic aspect has been neglected. Many Palestinian traditional and popular professions have disappeared and can now only be seen in posters issued by international agencies concerned with these aspects. In addition to their heritage and aesthetic value, these heritages have an

economic and developmental dimension. Therefore, traditional and popular industries and professions should be revived and supported in order to preserve Palestinian national heritage. This task can also help reduce unemployment among young people, as these professions have proved sustainable and can be passed to the next generations, thus helping them to maintain the links between tradition and modernity.

This requires the provision of appropriate training to upgrade and preserve these resources. Traditional products also need to be promoted and marketed for affordable prices to ensure their sustainability. Such products can also be supported by special tax and customs exemptions, and by offering them a grace period, as well as giving them protection and priority in terms of marketing, organizing promotional campaigns at the local and international levels through media channels, brochures and posters, and establishing local and international exhibits through Palestinian embassies and consulates.

All programs suggested above to be carried out by youth institutions require cooperation and coordination among all institutions working in the youth sector. Such cooperation and coordination should have an advanced and dynamic form, with professional aspects prevailing over all narrow political and partisan objectives.⁵¹ The significance of the above proposed programs lies in the fact that they are almost non-existent on the agendas of these institutions. Adopting these programs, in addition to the already existing ones would certainly widen the scope of youth institutions to cover all aspects related to youth.

Topic Three: Any other step forward?

I. General recommendations

1. Continuous coordination and networking should exist among youth institutions, with a focus on the issue of specialization in their respective fields, and on activating their role in the educational, social, health, sports, vocational and cultural sectors.⁵² Maintaining the current status quo will only mean wasting extra time and efforts without yielding greater and better results.
2. Infrastructure, services and equipment should be provided in order to facilitate the organization of the different activities and programs. These facilities should be distributed to areas in need. In other words, there is a pressing need to establish youth centers and clubs to fill the gap in areas where they are lacking, based on a thorough needs assessment. The establishment and upgrading of such centers will help provide youth with proper preparation in all cultural, social, sports and other aspects.

⁵¹ Youth Voice Journal, Issue 3, August 1995, p. 9.

⁵² Aref Jaffal, Director, Civil Forum, Personal interview, 10/10/2000, Ramallah.

3. Existing youth centers and clubs need to be supported by providing the required funds.⁵³ A higher committee can be created to oversee the identification of needs as a first step towards meeting them. Many institutions are unable to carry out certain activities because of the lack of adequate budgets, in addition to the fact that their facilities and infrastructure often require rehabilitation.
4. There is a need to establish a youth studies center.⁵⁴ Data, information and research on youth is much needed. All discussions on the situation of youth stress the importance of this group in all spheres of society. However, efforts targeted at this group are unsystematic and uncoordinated. During the preparation of this study, information on youth was found to be scattered among the different institutions. The importance of establishing youth research centers lies primarily in helping to assess youth needs and priorities, and in developing programs and activities for youth. This is in addition to providing decision-makers with the required data for developing appropriate youth policies, as well as providing general and private libraries with literature addressing youth issues.
5. At the legal and legislative level, no laws or regulations exist to regulate youth work and there are no specific youth laws to address the social, economic, political, cultural and other aspects of youth to provide the framework for their rights and duties. No draft laws exist, except for the draft Palestinian Youth Care Law of 1998, whose current status is unknown.⁵⁵ Therefore, youth institutions are more than ever required to work towards the enactment of a special law for youth.
6. There is an obvious shortage in the number of specialized trainers for the different youth programs and activities.⁵⁶ As a result, trainers experienced topic areas cannot bridge the gap and reach the targeted groups in a timely manner. Therefore, more attention should be paid to this aspect by training and building the capacity of new trainers in order to partly fulfill these needs.
7. Attention should be paid to young women on an equal level with young men⁵⁷ in terms of organizing the different programs and activities that can help change prejudiced and stereotyped attitudes towards women in general. The 1079 UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) should be the starting point of such a strategy.

53 Kamal Abur-Rub, op. cit.

54 Farhat Ass'ad, op. cit.

55 Ministry of Youth and Sports, files of the General Directorate of Youth Affairs.

56 Suheir Al-Rantisi, Executive Director, Baladna Cultural Center, Personal interview, 6/10/2000 Ramallah.

57 Samia Taha, Coordinator of Counseling Department, Working Women Society, Personal interview, 13/10/2000. Ramallah.

8. Working for the unification of youth bodies in the West bank and Gaza Strip on a democratic basis.⁵⁸
9. A youth council or body should be established in each district formed by youth institutions functioning in the respective district,⁵⁹ in addition to municipalities and a representative from the youth and sports district office. This body would be charged with the task of developing youth work, preparing plans and strategies, and assisting youth institutions in the district, among others.
10. An institute of a department focusing on youth issues should be established in a Palestinian college or university side by side with other institutes and departments. Universities are major contributors to the development process and active participants in community development. Therefore, it is time to establish such an academic body in response to a pressing need in Palestinian society.
11. There is a need to establish more women centers, as the number of these centers relative to the number of women is very small. Creating such centers will be beneficial in several ways: (1) by involving young women in sports activities; (2) by involving them in other programs and activities; and (3) ensuring women wider membership in such centers. This is especially important in view of the very low proportion of women in general and young women in particular joining youth institutions, clubs and structures, compared to young men.
12. A national strategy for youth should be formulated by a concerted effort from formal and informal actors. Youth constitute more than half of the current population, which means that they have great potential as a force for effecting positive change. Hence, a national strategy for youth should be established similar to those of other sectors. There are dozens of youth institutions and several formal youth bodies which have their own programs, plans and goals, but which do not all represent a definite strategy.
13. Attention should be paid to the role of young women in society at an equal level with that of young men.
14. Youth participation in the decision-making process should be sought and they should be allowed a space to participate in the different institutions and directorates and express their demands in order to promote their role.
15. Efforts should seek to raise youth awareness about the principles of democracy and human rights.

58 Thafer Tayseer, op. cit.

59 Moharram Al-Barghouthi, Director, Palestinian Youth Union, Personal interview, 27/10/2000, Ramallah.

16. Press and media should assume their role and act in an influential manner to apply and consolidate the concept of democracy in public life and to highlight the role of young people in community building and development.
17. At the educational level, Palestinian youth should be empowered through the provision of educational curricula that promote the Palestinian heritage and Arab civilization, and that includes the values of democracy, human rights and civic education. Efforts should be exerted to develop a unified Palestinian curriculum, build new schools and expand existing ones, to respond to schools' needs, make primary and secondary education mandatory throughout Palestine, to reduce school dropout rates, to reduce university tuition fees, to expand university facilities, and to develop vocational education centers and institutes.
18. At the social level, efforts should seek to raise community awareness in order to protect Palestinian youth from increasing social problems such as substance abuse, violence, HIV/AIDS and other problems threatening the wellbeing of youth. Such efforts should be made in addition to disseminating positive social attitudes and values that provide youth with a sense of stability, promoting self-reliance and a sense of responsibility and public interest among youth, as well as educating them on different sexual and reproductive health issues, and finally, eliminating negative values as such egoism, selfishness, self-interest and other values that are regarded as negative by society.
19. At the economic level, economic assistance should be provided to young people by creating job opportunities for them to reduce unemployment, by absorbing graduates in governmental institutions, and by considering youth as an integral part of the development process in addition to supporting young people by providing them with educational scholarships.
20. At the cultural level, efforts should work towards raising and upgrading the intellectual and cultural levels of youth in the face of a policy of blackout, distortion and falsification aimed at the Palestinian national culture. On the other hand, efforts should seek to revive and preserve the Palestinian popular heritage, as well as to preserve and consolidate long standing traditions and values and reject negative values, practices and attitudes.
21. At the arts and sports level, different arts and sports activities should be organized, along with forming artistic, sports and scout groups and committees, such as music, theater, singing and traditional Dabkeh dance committees.
22. Community and voluntary work should be consolidated in order constructively channel youth energies into community development. This can be achieved by encouraging youth initiatives that help expand their role and increase their solidarity with social groups in view of the positive economic, social, moral and national implications of such activism.

23. A lobbying and advocacy committee should be established by youth and the different youth institutions to support the endorsement of the Youth Care Law by the Legislative Council and to follow up on different youth issues.
24. The organization of courses, lectures, workshops, and discussion and dialogue sessions for youth on political, social, cultural and legal issues should continue.
25. Follow up of the findings and recommendations of studies, research, conferences and workshops held by youth institutions in particular, and NGOs and official agencies in general.
26. Activating the role of young people in Palestinian parties and organizations in order to allow them to assume a role in decision-making proportional to their numerical presence in Palestinian society.
27. Promoting cultural exchanges between Palestinian youth and their peers at the Arab, regional and international levels, and ensuring ongoing communication with them in order to learn from their experiences and promote self-reliance in achieving their goals.
28. Encouraging and developing youth-led economic projects.
29. Advancing the process of establishing the Higher Council for Youth.
30. Establishing a youth credit bank, or youth lending institutions.
31. Carrying out a survey to identify and list all institutions, clubs and centers working with youth.
32. Creating specialized evaluation committees within institutions or through networks and other coordination bodies, in order to evaluate programs and activities during and upon the completion of projects, and draw out lessons learned.
33. Building the capacities of youth institutions: Practically speaking, youth institutions are still in a great need of capacity building initiative, and technical and logistical support especially in the administrative and financial fields. Some NGOs have already sought to help youth institutions build their capacity, but these attempts were unsuccessful for different objective and subjective reasons. The experience of Sharek Youth Forum through its "Partners" project is worth being objectively evaluated in terms of efforts exerted to make the project a success and scale up its experience. The Forum solicited applications from youth institutions to make use of the project and carried out an analysis of the application forms to use the information in the development of training courses, so that these courses would reflect the needs and priorities of applicant institutions. Thus, the courses implemented were developed through a comprehensive planning process rather than through addressing the

different topics in a haphazard manner. This is set to increase the efficacy of these institutions in building their programs and activities, and in introducing effective administrative and financial systems in line with the technological developments, with an aim of advancing and upgrading the functioning of the Palestinian youth sector.⁶⁰

Analysis of institutional data conducted by Sharek Youth Forum on the applications submitted to join the “Partners” project reveals discouraging findings, indicating the haphazard management of work and a lack of institutional planning. A total of 245 applications were analyzed out of 267 applications submitted, as 6 applications were incomplete and 17 applications were submitted late after the set deadline had expired. Analyses revealed that about 28% of the applicant institutions have branch offices, about 18% have a full-time accountant, 18% do not have an accountant at all, and 64% use the services of a part-time accountant. Furthermore, 72% of the applicant institutions manage their accounting systems manually, about 31% do not have any local source of income, 58% stated that they have a local income that does not exceed USD 10,000 per year, and 11% have local funding sources exceeding USD 10,000 per year. With regards to external funding, analysis indicated that 66% of the institutions do not receive any external grants, 29% receive external grants not exceeding USD 100,000 per year and only 5% receive external grants that exceed USD 100,000 per year.⁶¹

This analysis of about 245 youth institutions clearly indicates that youth institutions are in great need for help in building their financial and administrative capacities and systems in the way adopted by the “Partners” project. This project has outstanding developmental goals, especially in that target institutions are small and disadvantaged in terms of funding and training. Hence, the experience of the “Partners” project should be disseminated and should become sustainable in order assist youth institutions in remaining abreast of new developments, while observing local and international standards of administrative and financial management.

II. Legitimate questions and awaited answers

Youth institutions now stand at a crossroads. Tremendous changes are taking place in the Palestinian political sphere and the agenda of the Palestinian youth sector may undergo some changes and developments as a result. This is an opportunity to examine the problem and its resulting characteristics in order to reach conclusions that accurately reflect the real situation. Therefore, events and situations experienced by youth activism and youth institutions should be studied by referring to the actual underlying causes and factors contributing to the prevailing problems. This would help youth institutions and individuals understand the present situation and predict the future. This is not

60 Bader Zamareh, Executive Director, Sharek Youth Forum, Personal interview on 11/4/2006, Ramallah.

61 For more details, see: Annex 4 – Analysis of the level of institutions applying to Sharek Youth Forum in order to benefit from the services of Partners Project.

meant to say that the problem should be described and that a conventional, descriptive diagnosis of the situation should be made. Rather, we seek to carry out an analysis of the crisis of youth work in Palestine in order to assess the extent to which the Palestinian legal, social, economic and cultural system hinders youth work and youth institutions, and to identify the underlying causes that prevent this significant and dynamic yet at the same time marginalized social group from assuming its active role. To closely assess the overall situation, a comprehensive evaluation should be carried out of the overall programs and activities in the youth sector, in addition to presenting a set of questions that could provide a basis for dialogue and debate, but that can act as a real starting point towards developing appropriate and practical solutions for youth institutions and youth work in Palestine.

1. Evaluating youth programs and activities over a 10-year period on the basis of whether the programs achieved their goals, whether programs and activities were built on the basis of youth needs, if the agenda of the funding agency was met, which evaluation mechanisms were applied, means of ensuring the accountability and transparency of youth institutions, what methods of institutional planning were adopted.
2. The current situation of youth institutions and youth work (problems and difficulties).
3. Reading the future (relations with the government, and with parliament, mechanisms to influence the government's agenda and public policy, lobbying and advocacy, networking and coordination among institutions working in the youth sector, youth programs and activities; the funding agenda of both the donor and the youth institution; modifying and upgrading working methods; attempting to create real partnerships among youth institutions; developing plans, programs and practical and feasible solutions; future visions, activating the internal democratic life through the internal institutional structures – the board of trustees, the Administrative Committee, staff members, volunteers, and the General Assembly; translating visions into objectives to be sought by youth; reaching a national policy that reflects youth aspirations and hopes for a better future, and having a body to draw together the different youth institutions by establishing the Higher Council for Youth).

Therefore, we should not go deeply into details but should seek to be practical. There is no need for self-blame. What is needed is to learn from the previous experiences in a spirit of looking towards the future with optimism and readiness to move ahead in all kinds of situations.

Based on the above, we as youth institutions in particular, civil society organizations in general, and individuals, should raise the following questions in order to be able to provide an adequate description and diagnosis, and most importantly, to develop programs and plans based on realistic objectives:

1. How does society learn about youth ideas, visions and abilities?

2. What channels and techniques should be provided and supported in schools, universities, youth centers, clubs, trade unions and all other kinds of NGOs?
3. Should periodical polls be carried out to assess youth views on certain issues and events?
4. How can we encourage young people to enter the field of entrepreneurship?
5. How can we encourage youth to set up small-scale projects?
6. How can we consolidate the experience of political parties in identifying the thoughts and aspirations of their young constituents?
7. How can we encourage youth to participate in the public sphere and develop a spirit of public service and voluntarism?
8. How can we encourage youth to engage in NGO activities, especially youth NGOs?
9. How can we nurture a spirit of teamwork and group work among youth?
10. What obstacles do youth find or perceive when they seek to participate? How can we address these obstacles?
11. How can we help identify youth leaders and outstanding individuals in different fields?
12. How can we provide opportunities to those who deserve them and are able to make use of them?
13. How can we provide young people with wider opportunities for training and assuming responsibility?
14. Do youth institutions reach poor and marginalized areas?
15. What is the role of parties and factions in influencing youth institutions?
16. Was the establishment of such a large number of youth institutions a response to a pressing local need or did external factors play a role in this?
17. Why has there been little cooperation and sharing of experience between the majority of youth institutions?
18. Why was the work of youth institutions of mostly a seasonal character?
19. Were projects and proposals submitted thoroughly and adequately thought out?
20. What strengths do youth institutions have and what are the weaknesses that prevent them from advancing and offering the expected services?
21. Have youth been a tool used by institutions working with them?
22. Do we trust youth and are we adequately patient with them?
23. Do we consider innovation an opportunity or a challenge?
24. How do we perceive the role of youth in development: as a burden or a benefit?
25. Is youth political and economic empowerment a priority in the building of good governance institutions and democracy?
26. Do we have a policy for youth empowerment and, if yes, how do we evaluate it?
27. What have youth done for other youth?
28. What is the definition of youth in Palestine in political terms?
29. What is the percentage of youth participation in elections (parliamentary, local and presidential)?
30. What is the size of youth membership in parties, trade unions NGOs and social clubs?

31. What are the accurate statistics on unemployment among youth?
32. What is the proportion of youth wishing to emigrate abroad?
33. What are gender indicators among youth? What are the similarities and discrepancies between young males and females?
34. Will youth remain on the margin in terms of action?
35. Who represents youth: young people or the government?
36. What is required from youth institutions in the short term?
37. Is there a possibility to build partnerships among youth institutions?
38. Are we well-prepared to develop a youth network with future visions and aspirations?
39. How can we maintain our work, build programs and carry out activities without external funding?
40. Is it reasonable that some large youth institutions maintain their monopoly on funding, while some other institutions cannot find enough funds to pay their electricity and water bills?
41. Do large youth institutions and donors have the right to refrain from dealing with other youth institutions because they lack systems and rules to regulate their work?
42. Which body should represent youth? If such body exists, where does it draw its legitimacy from?
43. Why do large youth institutions refuse to, and refrain from supporting and empowering nascent youth institutions?
44. Why are we required, as a nascent youth institution, to reject funding from certain sources, while some other large youth institutions enjoy an abundance of funding?
45. Do youth have the right to demand that the institutions representing them create youth study centers with the aim of researching youth issues rather than the funding agenda?
46. Why do large youth institutions refuse to, and refrain from supporting and empowering nascent youth institutions?
47. Why are we required, as a nascent youth institution, to reject funding from certain sources, while some other large youth institutions enjoy an abundance of funding?
48. Do youth have the right to demand that the institutions representing them create youth study centers with the aim of researching youth issues rather than the funding agenda?

Annex 1: Institutions visited within this research

1. Palestinian Center for Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development
2. Women Affairs Technical Committee
3. Baladna Cultural Center
4. Friends Without Borders Association
5. Palestinian Youth Union
6. General Union of Palestinian Students
7. Fateh Youth Organization
8. Palestinian Progressive Youth Union
9. Palestinian Progressive Youth Organization
10. Palestinian Democratic Workers Union
11. Independence Youth Union
12. Trade Union
13. Islamic Bloc Youth Union
14. Islamic Group
15. Orthodox Club
16. First Ramallah Group
17. Tamer Institute
18. Working Women Society
19. Palestinian Group for Amnesty International
20. Palestinian Youth Program (Quakers) Palestine Section
21. Community Development Center
22. Law Society
23. Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy
24. Palestinian Prisoners' Club
25. YMCA
26. Young Men Muslim Association
27. Civil Forum
28. Community Youth Center
29. Palestinian Youth Council
30. People's Party Youth Organization
31. Palestinian Council of Young Political Leaders
32. General Union of Palestinian Women
33. Palestinian Red Crescent Society
34. General Union of Disabled Palestinians
35. Educational network Center
36. In'ash Al-Usra Society
37. Ministry of Youth and Sports
38. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
39. National Institution Office
40. Popular Arts Center
41. Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
42. Legislative Council
43. Secretariat for the National Plan of Action for Palestinian Children
44. Youth Resource center
45. Ministry of Women's Affairs
46. Development Studies Center

47. Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute – MAS
48. Sharek Youth Forum
49. Health, Development, Information and Policy Institute