



# We invest in the future

strategy for the years 2017-2022



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SHAREK YOUTH FORUM



## Strategy Introduction

"The Future knocks at the door" - this phrase, or one of its many variations, opens nearly every report on the situation of the Palestinian youth. Although brief, it is infused with a bitter sense of rejection, for the "future", whatever it entails, is narrowing down day by day for those who live in occupied Palestine and in the exile. In the dire circumstances, the hope of the better requires a solid will fortified by hard work, struggle, effort, and initiative - all of that necessary to incite a change. True that the excess of hope can also be a way to dodge the reality, but, nonetheless, we continue to put our bet on the Palestinian youth, who up to this day begin every morning by looking towards Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa - and inhale whatever memory is carried back to them, imagining that there's a key to every tomorrow and a future to look forward to, where freedom, dignity, and justice are tangible and close.

The preparation of this strategy took three years of posing questions, reflecting on the past years' experience, observing Arab youth's movements, and, most of all, witnessing their everyday struggle with the reality. Our questions revolved around the matters of perspective: how do we define youth? Who are, actually, the young people of Palestine? How can we accomplish our goals within the given reality and not by escaping it? How to face the circumstances created by the occupation and emigration without despairing about their effects?

We had to formulate answers that are bold: despite our limited capabilities, we chose to step forward, even if it sometimes means trying to reach beyond our capacity. Our answers are rooted in the vision of the tomorrow that we aspire to. To us, youth are not an age category, but rather a way of thinking and an attitude that respects and absorbs the past, but, nonetheless, lives for the present while being courageous enough to challenge it and fight for a better future. We also came to the understanding that Palestine's youth comprises of all Palestinians, regardless of whether they live in the 1948 or the 1967 lands, in the homeland or in the diaspora and exile. All these young men and women are Palestinians, and we cannot possibly limit our scope of work to the West Bank and Gaza. We agreed that our role as a youth organization is to stand face to face with the occupation's practices, in particular in places where youth are most exposed: in refugee camps, behind the separation wall, and in remote villages.

In order to add substance to our answers, we went to refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria and talked with hundreds of youth who live there. We also initiated the cooperation with youth organizations operating in the occupied 1948 land. Both these occasions taught us a tremendous lot on the youth's experience, as we could deeply understand their circumstances, problems, and the challenges that they face.

Having these and other answers at heart, we are set to continue working both with the youth and with the society as a whole, in order to realise our vision of development and in faith that the Palestinian people can unite in spite of the categorisations imposed on them. Sharek Youth Forum will keep on building on its numerous well-established programmes to continuously provide trainings, employment empowerment, advocacy, and raise awareness of youth-related issues. We are determined to encourage volunteerism and, in order to guarantee the success of our programmes, to formulate more and more partnerships with local, governmental, private, and civil society institutions, as well as various international organisations.

Today, while we are launching our strategy for the years 2017-2022 and once we've reached our 18th year, we put ourselves in front of the youth of Palestine, to say to them: "Here in Sharek, we put ourselves into your hands. We learn from you, we grow with you, and we will face all the challenges with you. We are determined to continue to put our faith in your confidence and efforts."



## Foreword

Since the moment of its inception, Sharek Youth Forum has embodied a youthful soul, rooting all its ideas in the reality that the youth is facing and devoting all its efforts to help them voice their ambitions and hopes.

In order to continue fulfilling this vision, our new strategy focuses on securing a better future for the youth: ensuring their wide participation in various fields of the public life and the sustainability of the resources they need to achieve their goals. That is why Sharek Youth Forum has built numerous strategic partnerships both on the official governmental level and with the private sector, as well as with academic institutions. We employ those relations to strive for a change, to find a better future for the youth, widen their participation in the public space, and improve the policies that affect their lives. We work on the political, social, and economical levels in order to be able to offer young people a decent life. We aim to enrich young people's experiences, but also and to increase society's ethical and political commitment to lighten the conditions in which they live.

We will continue working to broaden youth's recognition, so that they can raise their voices and be heard. We will employ all our efforts to develop youth's life and leadership skills in order to allow them to fully participate in the lives of their communities and, eventually, become the power that drives the positive change on a global scale.

Ms. Ratebe Abu Ghoush  
Chairwoman of Sharek Youth Forum







## The Context. Palestine in numbers:



Population **4,8** million (PCBS 2016)



Population growth **2.8%** (PCBS 2016)



Gross domestic product **8** billion



Unemployment **27%**



Poverty rate **25.8 %**  
(PCBS most recent)



Literacy rate **96.7 %**  
(PCBS most recent)



## Palestinian youth (aged 15-29) in numbers:



Percentage of Youth of the total population **30%**

(37.4% aged 15-19; 62.6% aged 20-29)



**7 Out of 10** households at least one young person



Economically active **41%** (2016 PCBS)



Unemployment rate **39%** (PCBS 2016)  
(55% For youth that has not completed any grade level)



Want to migrate **24%** (PCBS)



Dropped out of school **34%** (PCBS)





## Palestinian youth (aged 15-29) in numbers:

Interested in participating in elections event **40%**  
(29 in WB - 57% in Gaza strip) (Palestinian Youth Survey 2015)



Participated in volunteer work in the year 2014  
(PCBS 2016)

**20%**

Females married (15-29) **41%**





## The organization Background

Sharek Youth Forum is a youth initiative that tackles development issues from a unique perspective. It is built by committed and dynamic young people, whose primary philosophy is anchored in the principle of involving youth as active participants within the civil society. Its main aim is to provide space for Palestinian young people to come together, develop their distinctive ideas, display their creativity and implement community development projects. According to Sharek's shared belief, the empowerment of young people through strengthening their personal and practical skills, as well as bolstering their resources, is a principal basis for the development of a future democratic society.

Originally, Sharek Youth Forum was launched as an initiative of the United Nations Development Program/ Program of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) in 1996. The success of the initiative led to its institutionalization as a private, non-partisan, non-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) by status. Nowadays, the organization works largely in cooperation with international and regional donors from the public and private sector.

We are managed solely by young people, while additionally profiting from the experience of professionals who assist the organisation in giving advice on a needs basis in specific sectors. The Forum also works closely with Palestinian municipal councils, various Palestinian Ministries, Palestinian civil society, Palestinian educational institutions, as well as local and international NGOs.

Sharek's primary philosophy centres on the principle of involving youth as active participants within the civil society. The name Sharek, the Arabic word for 'participation', reflects this fundamental approach to the organization's work. Our main aim is to provide a space for Palestinian youth to meet, develop ideas, think creatively, implement community development projects, and become better organised in order to meet the needs of the community and to experience participatory group processes within the civil society.

Since its inception, the organization has been focused on three main areas of activity: economic empowerment, active citizenship and working towards broadly understood change. Sharek strategically cross-cuts advocacy into all of its programs.





## **Mission Statement**

As an independent Palestinian organization, Sharek Youth Forum seeks to contribute to the development of youth through designing, supporting and implementing youth initiatives, program, and projects in Palestine. We focus on the development of young people into engaged, employable and active citizens, and we strive to amplify the voices of Palestinian youth in order to reach those with the power to introduce legal changes.

## **Vision Statement**

At Sharek Youth Forum, we envision Palestine where youth have opportunities realize their potential. We envisage youth as leaders in state-building and as active participants in the economic, social, cultural and political life in Palestine. .





## Key Organizational Objectives

- Involve Palestinian youth as active, dynamic and responsible participants in the development processes in Palestine.
- Encourage volunteerism among youth.
- Develop political, economic, social and cultural capacities of Palestinian youth, so that they tackle youth issues in the most effective ways.
- Enhance the exchange of knowledge and experience between Palestinian children, adolescents and youth.
- Provide opportunities for youth to participate in the economy either by enhancing their employability and their integration in the labor market or through the establishment of new businesses.
- Focus on the development of rural and disadvantaged areas by giving Palestinian youth a chance to participate and to be involved in the activities of their local communities.
- Foster partnership between civil society organizations, private-sector, government and international stakeholders towards the creation of opportunities for youth.
- Support youth cultural participation.
- Promote social innovation and entrepreneurship among Palestinian youth.
- Assist in strengthening the institutional capacity of other youth organizations.
- Raise awareness locally and internationally on the specific needs and issues affecting youth in Palestine.
- Transfer best-practices to partner organizations and ensure community ownership of programs and activities.
- Develop national models of operational and programming best practices to be replicated locally, regionally and internationally.





## Guiding Principles

**Innovation.** Youth is naturally innovative. Since they represent the future, it is important to provide them with opportunities to channel their innovation towards developing ideas, experimenting, learning and leading.

**Challenge.** Young people are by nature eager to question the reality bestowed upon them. Sharek encourages them to do so, to challenge the status quo, and to break the boundaries of what they have been told must be.

**Independence.** Young people are naturally independent, and their independence is the key to their critical thinking. To break the political boundaries imposed upon youth, Sharek encourages the development of critical thinking skills and alternative approaches to the solution of the problems they face by working together, not apart.

**Community.** Palestinian society is young, and the problems faced by youth are Palestinian problems. Sharek aims to showcase that it is possible for communities to identify these problems and confront them. Success depends on our strength in engaging youth in their community towards making a difference.

**Action.** Actions mean more than words. Young people find themselves limited in what they believe they can do. By providing opportunities and platforms for youth to express their opinions and work on their issues, Sharek opens new the possibilities of introducing and realizing their innovative ideas.

**Awareness raising.** Making the voice of the youth heard and raising awareness is critical towards introducing a positive change. Sharek wants young people to become aware of the intricacies of the social problems surrounding them and come up with their own ways to resolve them. Sharek tries to build awareness among youth of the issues facing them in their own communities, both on the national and international levels.





## Management & Governance Structures

As an independent Palestinian organization, Sharek has a General Assembly and a Board of Directors tasked with significant duties. It has mechanisms and structures that create a dynamic style of leadership and decision-making. The Board of Directors comprises of young, yet experienced professionals who do not only play a supervisory role, but also continuously add value to the organization's programs and activities.

The General Assembly of the Forum exercises its powers in controlling the Board of Directors by studying its annual and monthly reports and electing the Board of Directors regularly in accordance with its bylaws. The Board of Directors follow up the affairs of the Forum, monitor the activities of the management and the coordinators, prepare periodical reports and submit them to the General Assembly.





## The approach

### Youth for Youth

In realization that only youth can fully understand and tackle youth-related issues, Sharek largely believes that an executive team consisting of young Palestinians can contribute to better programming and management of developmental initiatives.

Working in a vibrant environment, the team of Sharek Youth Forum has accumulated experience and know-how in working with youth and children. The high quality of services provided results in the organization's growth and integration within various national and international programs. Sharek fosters innovation. No youth-related idea is neglected, and every suggested initiative takes its fair share of time and thought. Every beneficiary, volunteer and staff member can contribute to program development, and every young individual in Palestine has the right to pave new ways for development through our organization.

### Working together, not apart

Sharek Youth Forum bases its actions on the principle of "Working together, not apart", believing that partnership is the best way to achieve genuine results.

Through partnerships with the private-sector, the organization assures that economic opportunities presented to youth are well aligned with the needs of the labor market. By getting financial institutions, technology and telecommunication companies, industrial, and commercial enterprises all on board to work voluntarily in youth economic empowerment programs, the organization revitalizes corporate social responsibility and assures that services provided are well aligned to market needs.

Through partnerships with academic institutions, the organization expands its outreach to school, college, and university students all over Palestine. Accessing education facilities is imperative to reach the organization's target group at their learning place. In addition, through these partnerships, academic institutions have been able to integrate new elements (developed through the different Sharek programs) into their curricula and add new dimensions to the traditionally monotonous educational system in Palestine.





Through partnerships with national and international developmental institutions, the organization is able to create synergies in development and work towards maximizing utility of all developmental efforts exerted. Avoiding duplication and building on the strongholds of each player in development, is key in the organization's partnership modality. The various Sharek centers are always open for partnership and serve as access points to reach of youth and children throughout Palestine.

Through partnerships with local authorities, Sharek has been able to create community ownership, acceptance of its programs and institutionalization of a number of its initiatives. By activating municipal youth and cultural centers, the organization was able to revitalize existing structures for local community benefits. Contributing only towards implemented activities' costs, the partnership modality with municipalities proved to be financially sustainable, and assured that program costs would go directly towards community's benefit.

Through maintaining good relationships with the Palestinian government, the organization assures that its programs and activities are well-aligned with national strategies. Moreover, Sharek believes that the role of civil society organizations and the government are complementary, and thus high coordination levels are imperative. From a policy-making standpoint, good linkages with the government allows for the perspectives of youth to be portrayed in front of decision makers - a vital step towards youth-sensitive policy making in Palestine.

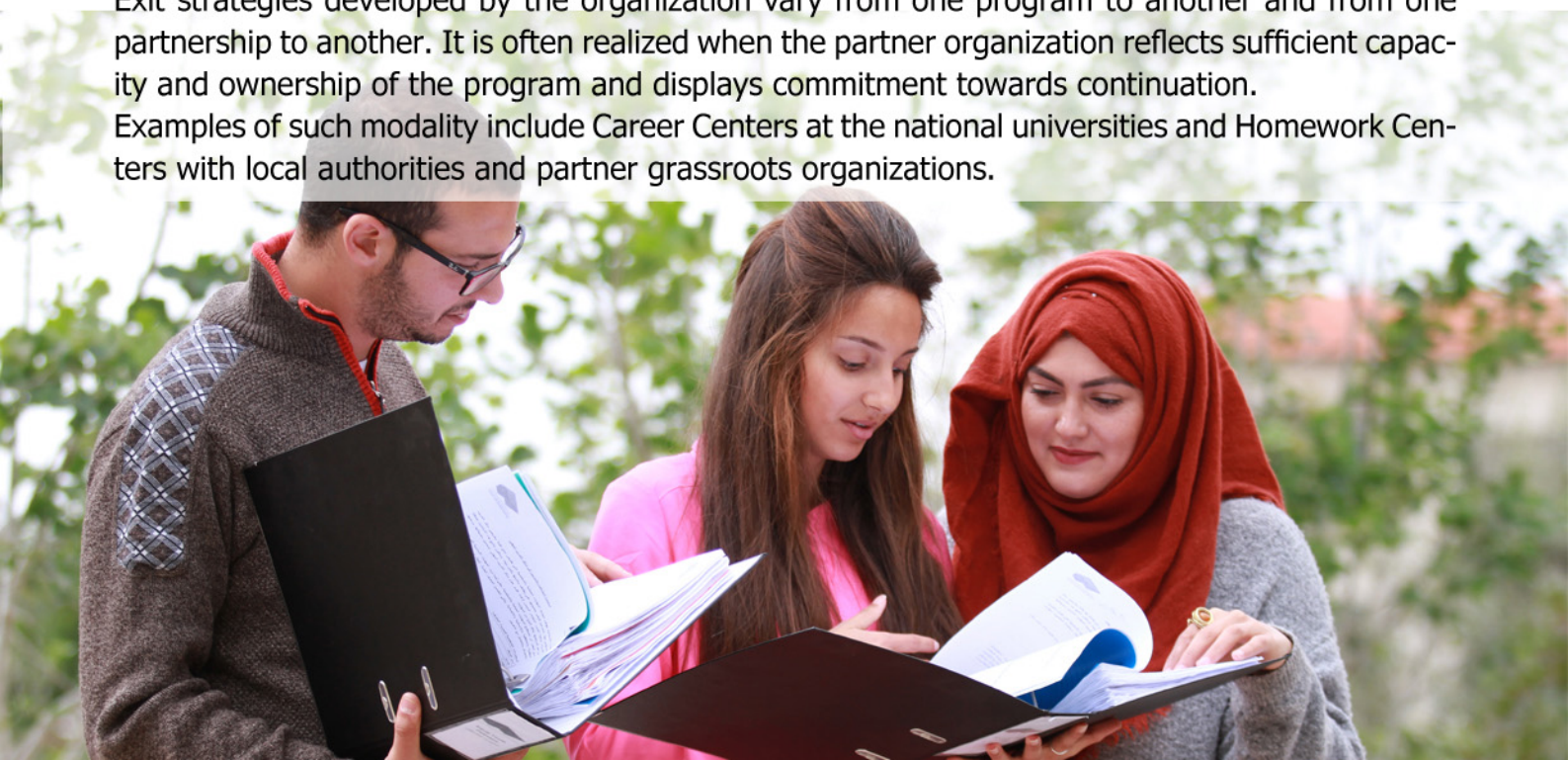
### **Transferring Know-How, Building Capacities, and Creating Ownership**

Through investing in local institutions and communities, Sharek Youth Forum aims at transferring knowledge and know-how developed amidst its various programs to partner organizations. Such a model creates ownership of programs and assures they can be sustained after Sharek's direct intervention ceases.

Building the capacities and transferring know-how is a thorough process. It often includes establishing partnership agreements, equipping physical structures, creation of manuals and guides, training of volunteers on service delivery, operating the centers for a few months or years until it is fully independent and an exit strategy can be realized.

Exit strategies developed by the organization vary from one program to another and from one partnership to another. It is often realized when the partner organization reflects sufficient capacity and ownership of the program and displays commitment towards continuation.

Examples of such modality include Career Centers at the national universities and Homework Centers with local authorities and partner grassroots organizations.





## Voluntarism

Being a youth-spirited organization, Sharek Youth Forum identifies voluntarism as a key component of its operations. Sharek's volunteers are the driving force behind the organization's success in serving communities of Palestine.

And indeed, most programs are designed to foster the spirit of voluntarism among youth. The leadership roles that volunteers play in program design and implementation assure that a youthful touch is perceptible in each activity. We believe that providing voluntary opportunities is essential towards youth empowerment. Giving young people the space and tools to participate in their community's development can help them capture their vast potential.

At Sharek, voluntarism is not restricted only to youth. Fostering voluntarism among private-sector professionals has also proven fruitful and effective. Inviting CEOs, managers and industry executives to volunteer with us has had a great impact on the overall quality of our projects.

Voluntarism at Sharek is as much as a guiding principle as it is an approach. The young team of Sharek volunteers to build the capacities of other organizations, the professional volunteers from partner organizations enrich the various programs, and the young volunteers are the driving force towards positive change in Palestine.

## Look Young, Feel Young

Sharek is an organization with a young twist. The Sharek name, logo and publications are designed to appeal to young Palestinians and contributed largely to our prior success.

The youthful image of Sharek is indeed effective in attracting young people. Whether it is the beautifully designed premises or the young team members, Sharek always seeks to continuously readapt as a comfortable and welcoming space for the youth. Funky logos and mottos, colorful brochures, publications, interactive workshops and meetings, websites and electronic media are tools that are constantly activated at Sharek to assure its continuing appeal.

We are aware that young people are dynamic and ever-changing. Dynamism and creativity in the Sharek Youth Forum's outlook and the relevance of our youthfully oriented programs is vital to cater and relate to the Palestinian youth.





## Geographical Outreach

Aware that some of the most talented young people will be found in marginalized and under-served communities, Sharek Youth Forum aims at expanding its outreach strategy to reach every young person in Palestine.

By building numerous partnerships and an extensive network of contacts that facilitate access to most diverse communities, Sharek Youth Forum was able to position itself as one of the most geographically spread organizations in Palestine. The variety of approaches to intervene with the communities, whether by establishing an office, partnering with a local entity on program implementation, or setting up infrastructure for community benefit, allows Sharek Youth Forum to be active in all West Bank and Gaza Strip governorates.

Nonetheless, the geographical outreach needs to be constantly furthered. With solid programming and planning, Sharek Youth Forum hopes to be providing services for youth, adolescents, and children in every single location in Palestine.

## The Challenges

### Keeping the Right Balance

Keeping the right balance between the freeform of young spirit that drives the and the administrative burdens associated with institutionalization is a key to success. Sharek Youth Forum realizes that effective and efficient programming and operations are associated with rigorous M&E, financial and administrative systems. That is why the organization continues to enhance its existing structures to be more proficient.

On the other hand, Sharek realizes that flexibility in its operations and programming are essential when working with the dynamic youth sector. Hence, we are always ready to incorporate youth's feedback and suggestions into our actions, so as to ensure we are answering their needs in a truly effective way.

Thus, we believe that the junction of the two approaches, a proper institutionalization and flexible programming, is the most efficient way to cater for Palestinian youth.





## Sustainability

It is always a challenge to sustain non-profit institutions. Over the past 21 years, Sharek Youth Forum has been largely funded by donors, with core organizational funding coming from the UNDP/PAPP and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation. Sharek also formed partnerships with various entities towards cost-cutting and financial and program sustainability.

We intend to continue fundraising for financial contributions that will enhance our mission and provide financial support for our operations. However, in order to increase our independence, we also seek new ways to generate income. Currently, Sharek Youth Forum owns two income-generating facilities: the Girls Guest House and the Youth Village in Kufr Ne'mah. The Girls Guest House is a part of Sharek's Headquarters and Activities Center. This space is open for international volunteers and local female youth taking part in Sharek's projects. The Youth Village KufurNe'mah has been opened recently and in future will be utilized by organizations, companies and groups for events, conferences, workshops and weekend retreats.

Although the overall amount of international aid for Palestine is shrinking, Sharek Youth Forum remains committed to its value and purpose, and will continuously search for new, reliable sources of financing in line with its operations. The organization will refuse any conditional financing with hidden agendas or which does not favor the overall benefit of the Palestinian people.

## Development in Times of Adversity

Palestinian reality poses countless challenges. With geographical and authoritative fragmentation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and with the continuous infringement of international and humanitarian laws by the Israeli occupation, Palestinian people experience difficult social, political and economic conditions, which, overall, makes it particularly hard to pave pathways for development in Palestine.

However, as the War on Gaza exemplified, there are ways to develop voluntarism and community responsiveness even in times of extreme humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, the development of new businesses for impoverished youth, contributes greatly to the basic needs of their households.

Having this at heart, Sharek Youth Forum aims at empowering Palestinian youth to be responsive to the humanitarian needs of their communities, so that they can stand together even in the most dire circumstances.





## Areas of Intervention

Sharek Youth Forum's actions directly address the National Youth Strategy in Palestine, issued on the 8th of June 2017 by the Higher Council for Youth and Sports. The Strategy has set the focus on education, training, skills building, economic empowerment and poverty reduction, media and information technology, social and political participation, positive health and environment behaviours, culture and sport.

## Economic Empowerment

Since 2004, Sharek Youth Forum has assumed a pioneering role in the design and implementation of programs to enrich youth skills and experiences and to increase their competitive advantage in the labor market. The successes of Sharek's initiatives in this field led to the establishment of the now independent Palestinian Center for Youth Economic Empowerment (CYEE) in 2011. Its mission directly reflects the National Employment Strategy developed by the Ministry of Labor and aims to reverse perspectives for youth – from high unemployment and low paid jobs to financial security and wide career opportunities.

Currently, 2 in 5 young Palestinians remain unemployed. Sharek believes that gainful employment is a basic human right and underpins all other socio-economic rights; therefore, we take a human rights-based approach to our interventions, aiming for long-term structural change.

We work closely with the private sector and higher education institutions to bridge the gap between academic curricula and the actual needs of the market. At the same time, we encourage youth to consider non-traditional economic options, such as pursuing vocational training or establishing their own business. We give a special attention to young women, knowing that they are the group that are most marginalised in the labor force.

Through our economic empowerment programs, we:

- Develop the capacity of Palestinian youth, providing them with technical skills and life skills;
- Help them to access gainful employment;
- Support new start-ups and enterprises;
- Expose youth to new ideas and opportunities.

We do this through a mixture of employability and entrepreneurship trainings, experiential learning and career guidance.

We are committed to approach young people holistically: taking into account their interests, experience, skills and ambitions to assist them in developing a long-term career plan. We do not see young people as insignificant in the economic structure, but, on the very contrary, as absolutely essential proponents to the growth and development of the Palestinian economy.





# **Economic Empowerment with emphasis on employability and entrepreneurship**

## **1. Employability**

High unemployment as a result of the closure of borders and limited availability of jobs are not the only problems young Palestinians face. They often also lack hard and soft skills needed to succeed in a job market that is already so difficult to access. The unemployment rate in the oPT is 27% overall, but reaches 40% among youth, especially young university graduates. Nonetheless, local business owners have been expressing a concern about their inability to find qualified workers, needed to fill specialized positions within their companies. Observing this phenomenon, we have identified its chief reason: the skills gap is perpetuated by inadequate educational curricula, in terms of general, technical, and vocational education. Therefore, we believe our role is to address the mismatch and provide youth with relevant knowledge, skills and experience in order to answer the needs of the labor market better. All of our trainings integrate elements of personal development and guided learning, including guest speaker sessions and field visits. Furthermore, we wish to provide our youth with networking opportunities with prospective employers and educational institutions. Over the years, we have developed solid relationships with local universities and Vocational Training Centers, through which we can reach a tremendous number of youth from various backgrounds. Moreover, thanks to these partnerships, some of our programs have been incorporated into the national curricula and are now implemented on a large scale throughout all the oPT.







## **Interventions related to Employability:**

### **Capacity-Building**

In order to empower youth to fully participate in every-day life and increase their competitiveness in the labor market, we provide training them with life skills trainings. These include leadership, communication, debating, dialogue and negotiation, public speaking and self-confidence building. Sharek is certified to conduct life skills trainings based on the Passport to Success curriculum, developed by the International Youth Foundation and successfully implemented around the globe. The PTS equips youth with confidence, reliability and teamwork skills, necessary to succeed in school, work and other aspects of life. We also provide youth with CV/cover letter writing training in order to increase their chances of entering the labor market. Based on regular needs assessments, we also provide other specialized courses required to obtain specific careers.

### **Digital Tools Trainings**

Digital tools are needed in every workplace and allow youth to reach and deliver their concerns to a wider audience. For this purpose, we provide trainings in the use of WordPress, Adobe Suite, blogging, video editing, podcasts and infographics.

### **Career Guidance**

With thousands of young Palestinians striving to enter the highly saturated labor market, enhancing the networking opportunities of young job-seekers is essential. The provisioning of Career Services is done mainly through Career Centers, which are present at the Palestinian universities. They are hubs providing students with space, information, expertise, and guidance to facilitate their transition into the labor market. These Centers provide a set of services to students that are tailored towards their needs as students as well as the needs of their future employers. They act as "matchmakers" between the graduates and employers, and create a path for business owners to access universities in search for young, qualified workers.

We offer career counselling on one-to-one basis, in groups and remotely. The availability of online resources, CV check, and a comprehensive, up-to-date online portal with a database of current vacancies contribute to the effectiveness of the process. Through job fairs, career days, and networking events, we create a space for the meeting between the employee and the employer.



## 2. Entrepreneurship

Due to the ongoing political crisis, livelihood deterioration, high poverty rates and the low involvement in nascent businesses, Palestine has not undergone any substantial improvements in the field of entrepreneurship. Currently, there are more graduates entering the job market each year than there are jobs, and when the job market is bloated, starting one's own business and becoming a job creator may be the only opportunity to make one's living. However, young entrepreneurs face a variety of challenges: lack of relevant skills and knowledge, legal barriers, financial shortages to name merely a few.

Therefore, Sharek strategically incorporates and encourages entrepreneurship in its programs.

### **Interventions related to Entrepreneurship: Training Programs**

Through a comprehensive training program addressed to different groups of young entrepreneurs, we aim at building the capacities of Palestinian youth in managing successful business ventures. These programs cover a set of essential topics, such as generating business ideas, business planning, bookkeeping, marketing management, information technology and communications. All this significantly raises the possibility for the success of a newly founded business.

### **Counselling and Consulting**

The success of business start-ups depends largely on the ability of entrepreneurs behind it in utilizing expertise available in the business environment. Therefore, by setting up pools of local and international consultants and business counsellors, we provide young people with much needed mentoring and coaching to help them out in early stages of developing their start-ups





## Networking and Strategizing

Setting up solid networks and accessing strategic partners are fundamental to the success of the business incubation process. Through establishing links with public and private sector organizations, business incubators will be able to provide client businesses with markets for products and services, as well as with a capital for additional financing - both necessary for growth and development of start-up businesses.

## Providing Youth-Sensitive Business Financing

Access to finance remains a major problem for young entrepreneurs in Palestine. Innovating new schemes and building on existing ones is a key to allow the creation of new businesses. Schemes such as peer-to-peer financing, equity financing, start-up granting, seed-funding, business

leasing and less restrictive microfinance are essential for comprehensive business start-up programs. Therefore, through our programs, we connect youth with financing institutions, enabling them to secure the resources for launching their start-ups.





## Active Citizenship

Although naturally active, involved and engaged in leadership roles in their communities, many young people are currently idle, disenchanted and disengaged. Strictures of occupation restrain their opportunities for political activity, and they are often left uninspired to conduct their own initiatives. Youth aged 15-29 constitute as much as 30% of the population, and this force must be mobilized to build a democratic, sustainable, socially active and forward-thinking Palestinian society.

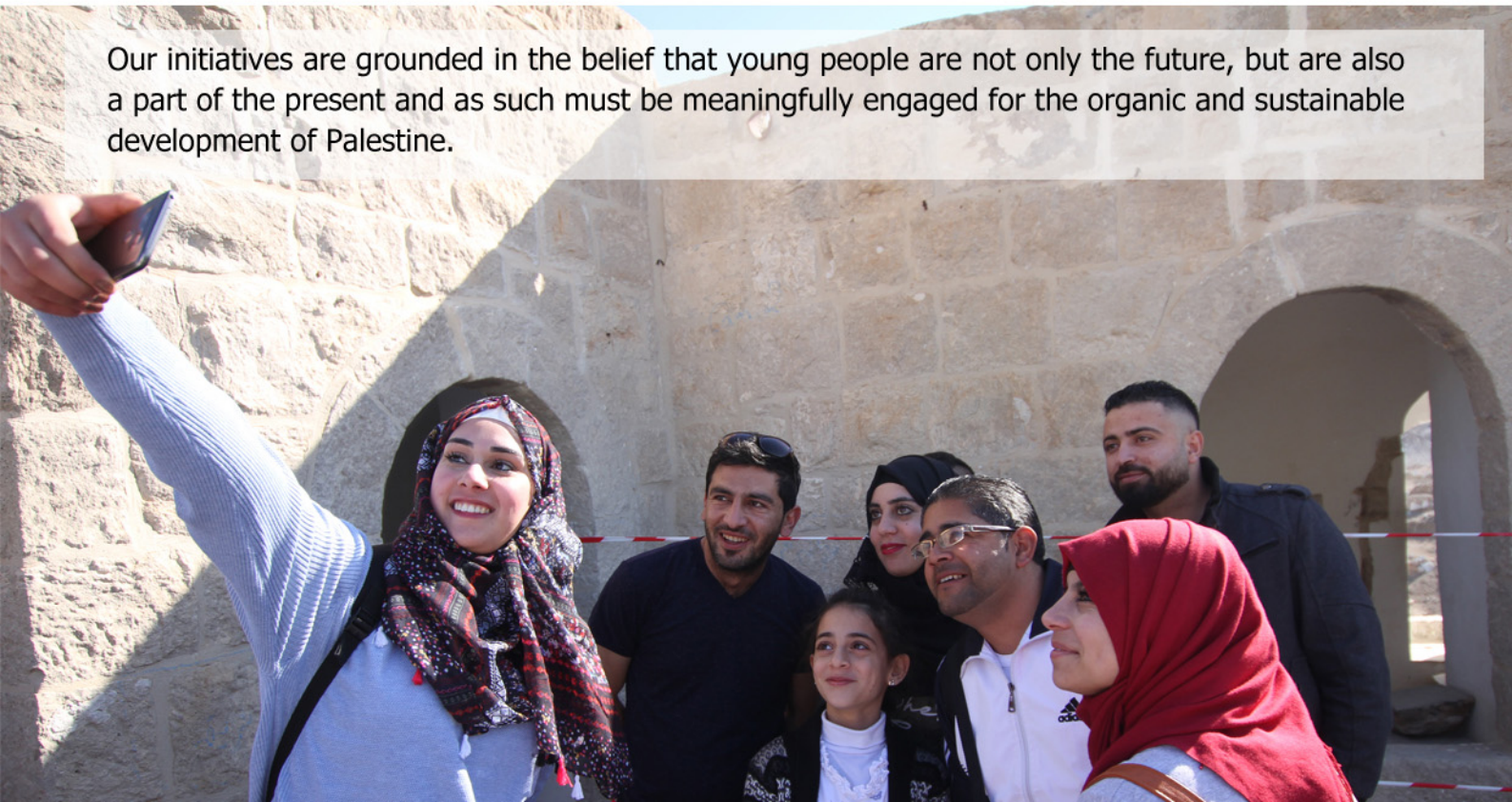
By "active citizens" we understand those who are involved in their local communities and participate in democratic processes at all levels. We are committed to encouraging young people to become active through engagement in both formal and informal political processes and, eventually, effectuate real change at the local and national levels in a manner that will benefit the entire society. At all times, we place a special emphasis on young women, aware that Palestine has one of the lowest rates of representation of women in decision-making roles in the entire Arab world (reaching only 18%).

Sharek offers young people a place where they can meet their peers from different areas, religions, beliefs, classes. They are given an opportunity to exchange ideas, discover new ways of solving problems and break down internal differences between Palestinian communities. All our initiatives are underscored by a strong belief in volunteerism and the important role it may play in Palestine's eventual transition into an independent, democratic, autonomous state.

Through our active citizenship programs, we:

- raise youth's awareness of democratic processes, human rights, and participation;
- build their capacity to become leaders and frontrunners of Palestine's development;
- encourage and support youth-led, community-based activities that benefit both youth and those around them.

Our initiatives are grounded in the belief that young people are not only the future, but are also a part of the present and as such must be meaningfully engaged for the organic and sustainable development of Palestine.





## **Active Citizenship with emphasis on Educational Programs, Capacity-Building and Youth-Led, Community-Based Initiatives**

### **1. Educational Programs**

The educational system in Palestine fails to foster critical thinking and socio-political awareness among students. Youth are overflowed with information that is detached from their daily realities and needs and that reinforces, through top-down and non-participatory models of teaching, a passive, submissive approach to life. We believe, however, in education that strengthens individuality and independent thinking, one that allows students to become emancipated citizens seeking for change on the basis of human rights, democratic processes and participation. It is of utmost importance that especially for Palestinian youth, who face infringements of their basic rights due to occupation, frozen democracy and a patriarchal, conservative society.

Our educational programs focus directly on critical thinking and self-directed learning. We strive to provide youth with deep knowledge about human rights, democratic processes and participation and how to furnish them with tools to apply this knowledge practically in order to create a rights-based environment and contribute to positive social change in their communities.

#### **Interventions related to Educational Programs: Gender Equality**



The gender equality trainings are addressed to both women and men. Their participants learn about women's rights, the status of gender equality in Palestine with a particular focus on gender-based violence, and the ways the Palestinian Justice System offers to ensure the enforcement of women's rights. The trainings feature guest speaker sessions, debates and discussions, various methods of self-reflection and field visits.



## Bedouin's Rights

Bedouin communities are among the most heavily marginalized in Palestine. Their members suffer from social, economic, and political exclusion, and their physical isolation, as well as long-standing community practices, limit their access to the justice and education systems. It comes as no surprise that Bedouin women are particularly vulnerable to abuse and rights infringement. Sharek has been developing relationships with a number of Bedouin communities over the recent years, building up trust and gaining a better, first-hand understanding of the challenges they face. This led us to develop an educational program that provides Bedouin youth with essential knowledge of how to utilise the formal justice system in Palestine with a special emphasis on gender-based violence and biased educational practices.

## Youth Local Councils

The representation of youth in Local Councils does not reflect their rate of the society by far. In order to empower them to get engaged in decision-making, policy setting and democratic processes, we established Youth Shadow Local Councils in which youth through experiential learning gain knowledge and understanding of the work of local councils.

## Transparency and Accountability

A major challenge that prevents the youth from exercising their rights and opportunities for participation are the corruption and nepotism within the public and private sectors in Palestine. In order to empower youth to take things in their hands and monitor the accountability of local institutions, we provide trainings in which they receive knowledge of legal stance, proper ways of documentation, basics of local governance and best practices to increase accountability and transparency.





## 2. Capacity-Building

The involvement of young people within the society and their active engagement as participants and problem solvers is a key element in the process of youth development. The importance of supporting Palestinian youth and providing them with the opportunity to advocate for their own case cannot be overstated. We want to see them engaged in community development and civil work, as this will contribute to changes both within their communities and within themselves and, eventually, pave the way to democracy. Since the current educational system does not deliver sufficient participatory and bottom-up opportunities, we see our role as an independent provider of these.

### **Interventions related to Capacity-Building: Leadership Trainings**

Leadership skills are crucial when one is about to launch her own initiative and instigate change. They are the basis to success in identifying and recruiting allies. We present youth with leadership trainings through which they learn how to be a change agent, build teams, motivate others and solve problems in a creative way.

### **Debate & Dialogue Trainings**

Public speaking, debate and dialoguing are extremely powerful communication tools. Knowing this, Sharek Youth Forum is committed to promote a culture of dialogue, reconciliation and national unity among Palestinian youth. Thanks to the improvement of their communication skills, students can assume an active role in the society and increase their social and political consciousness. Having these skills is fundamental to express ideas without misunderstandings, actively listen to others, and to contribute to the development of revitalised, youthful media.

That is why we conduct numerous debate trainings in which youth learn how to construct and deconstruct arguments, respond constructively, negotiate and presentation their case.





## Advocacy Training

Advocacy is an effective tool to enforce respect for human rights and initiate change on an individual and structural levels. As Sharek, we perform advocacy not only as an organisation on behalf of youth, but we also aspire to empower youth to become themselves advocates for long-lasting social change.

Through our programs, youth can learn different methods of advocacy, such as social media advocacy and theatre-based advocacy.





### 3. Youth-Led Community-Based Initiatives

All of our trainings are supplemented by concrete, youth-led actions. We arrange opportunities for youth to lead own community-based initiatives and offer guidance and required for that. Thus, young people are given an excellent chance to apply their skills, experiment and gain experience, and their communities benefit from new activities.

#### **Interventions related to Youth-Led Community-Based Initiatives: Student Initiatives**

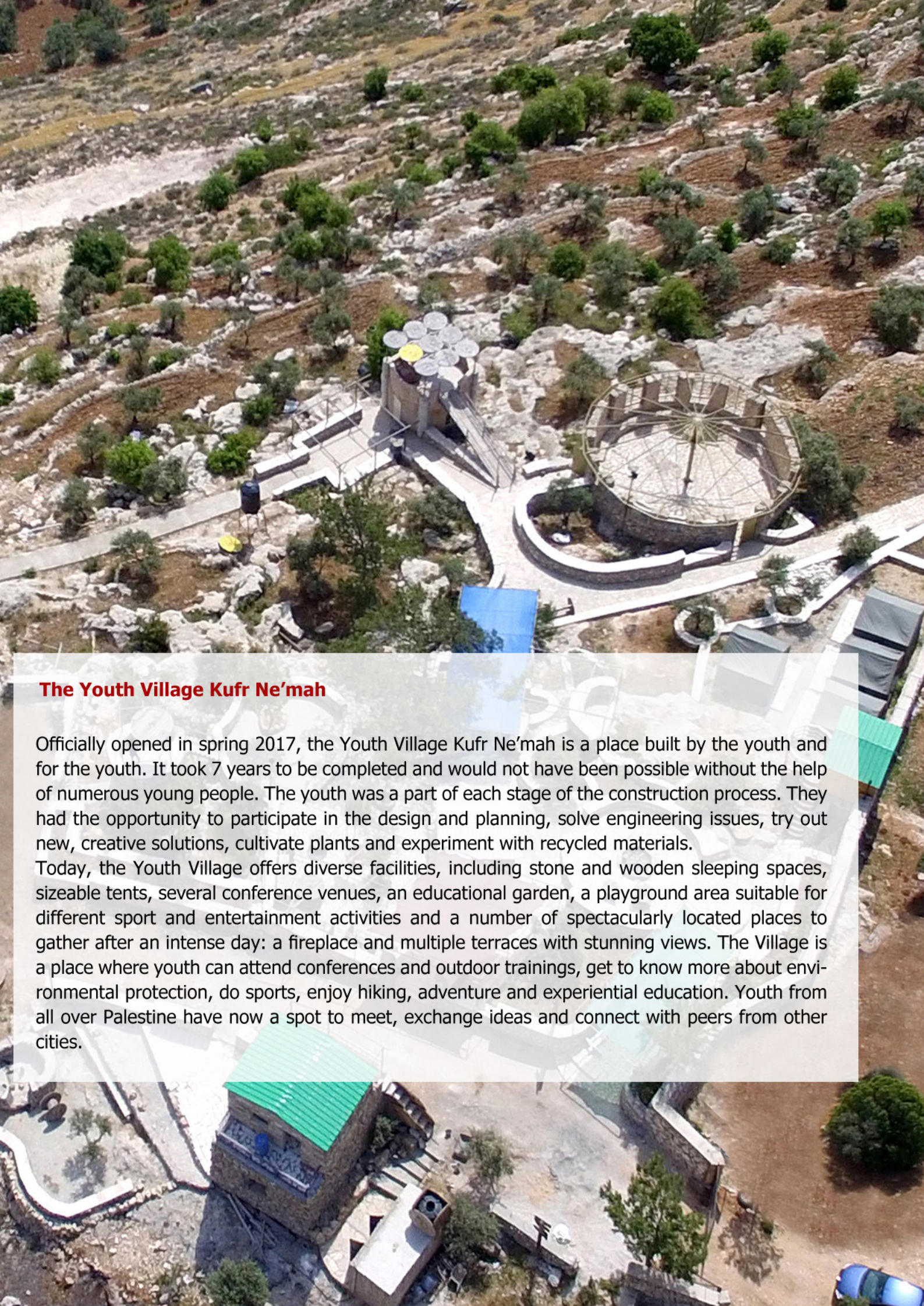
Universities in Palestine lack accountability, as many services the students are entitled to are not delivered by those who are responsible. In order to address this and improve the studying conditions for everyone, students launch their own initiatives. These can take a form of an advocacy campaign for the inclusion of minorities (in particular students with disabilities), a discussion with a political leader or university responsible, or debates to discuss student-related issues.

#### **Y-Peer**

One of Sharek's ongoing initiatives is the Y-Peer Network, which is a part of the international Y-Peer Network established by the UNFPA. In order to implement it, Sharek works in partnership with ministries and municipalities, in particular, with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. We provide peer-to-peer workshops and training sessions for young people in every Palestinian governorate, during which they discuss sexual and reproductive health, STDs, HIV/AIDS, reproductive rights, as well as gender-based violence. By raising awareness and fostering an atmosphere of inclusiveness and tolerance, the Network helps young people overcome societal views towards SRHR-related issues and break down the silence on these topics.







### **The Youth Village Kufr Ne'mah**

Officially opened in spring 2017, the Youth Village Kufr Ne'mah is a place built by the youth and for the youth. It took 7 years to be completed and would not have been possible without the help of numerous young people. The youth was a part of each stage of the construction process. They had the opportunity to participate in the design and planning, solve engineering issues, try out new, creative solutions, cultivate plants and experiment with recycled materials.

Today, the Youth Village offers diverse facilities, including stone and wooden sleeping spaces, sizeable tents, several conference venues, an educational garden, a playground area suitable for different sport and entertainment activities and a number of spectacularly located places to gather after an intense day: a fireplace and multiple terraces with stunning views. The Village is a place where youth can attend conferences and outdoor trainings, get to know more about environmental protection, do sports, enjoy hiking, adventure and experiential education. Youth from all over Palestine have now a spot to meet, exchange ideas and connect with peers from other cities.



## Mobile Theater

Sharek's Mobile Theater came to be as the result of a project that utilised theater to combat gender-based violence. The youth wrote and staged a theater play, which was then performed for several communities, initiating discussions on the issue. After the successful completion of the project, the participants decided to continue their theater adventure and launch new initiatives, aiming to raise awareness of social issues and advocating for change. Now, Mobile Theater has a solid core team, is developing new performances and continues to recruit new members.





## Working Toward Change

We envision Palestine as a country where young people have a right to make their own decisions, have choices, and be proactive members of the society. We embed advocacy into all of our programs, seeking long-term changes in action.

As Sharek, we act as a platform to amplify the voices of young people, train them to advocate for themselves and seek positive change in the political, economic and social structures in Palestine. By working with government institutions, civil society organisations and international stakeholders, Sharek aims to help young Palestinians gain the skills they need to advocate effectively and have a sense ownership and pride of the path towards reclaiming their rights.

Through our "Working Towards Change" programs, we:

- partner with government institutions, other civil society organisations and international stakeholders in order to effectively advocate for the youth;
- conduct local, national and international campaigns advocating for the rights of young people addressed to relevant stakeholders who have the power to make;
- conduct electronic polls and surveys to better understand young people's views on important issues and to collect verified data on youth in Palestine;
- publish an annual Status of Youth Report, detailing the results of our latest electronic polls and surveys, summarizing youth's beliefs, views, and the improvements in their situation (or lack thereof).

Advocacy component is present in all our activities, as we take a rights-based approach that seeks to redress the rights violations against young people. We always ensure a particular emphasis is placed on young women, who are doubly oppressed: as Palestinians under the Israeli occupation and as women in a patriarchal Palestinian society. We believe that such approach is vital to see a long-lasting and sustainable change in Palestine.

