

Building networks and connecting people in protracted conflict

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How (digital) spaces allow actors to enhance their influence

Background

Following the 1948 Israeli-Palestinian conflict, around 750.000 Palestinians became refugees. Today, approximately 6.3 million people are registered as refugees, a quarter of them live in 58 official refugee camps across Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Refugee camps are plots of land leased to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) by the Host Governments (Jordan, Lebanon and in the West Bank/Gaza) to accommodate Palestinian refugees. This means that refugees do not own the land but are allowed to live on it.

The Host Government Institutions play an important governance role in the refugee camps. Each host country has a department dedicated to (re)present and deal with Palestinian refugees' affairs as well as to serve as the link between refugee community and (inter)national stakeholders. In Palestine there is the Department of Refugee Affairs (DORA), in Lebanon the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) and in Jordan the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA).

The GIZ programme “Strengthening the Influence of Palestinian Refugees on their Living Conditions (PART)”, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), works closely with Palestinian refugees in the region. The project improves psycho-social support and enhances social participation. In other words, when Palestinian refugees have better possibilities of influencing and shaping their own living

conditions, it can have a positive effect on their psycho-social well-being (and vice versa).

The multi-level approach...

As no one activity and no one level will be able to deliver and sustain change on its own, PART works with different actors (from communities to decision makers and civil society) and brings them together in exchange of knowledge, networking, strategic coordination and communication. This requires above all spaces and platforms where this exchange can happen.

...in practice

One example of this is the Technical Exchange Committee of Host Governments (LPDC, DPA, DORA). This platform of exchange and cooperation was established in 2019 with the financial and technical support of PART. The Committee is composed mostly by technical staff working in the Host Government Institutions. It convenes bi-weekly to exchange on specific technical challenges that vary from one context to the other, to share lessons learnt and experiences, capacity development as well as to develop a common regional vision.

As such, the platform itself is already a vital structural framework condition for change. It facilitates the bridging and connecting of issues on the ground and refugee communities with decision makers within the Host Governments as well as with UNRWA and/or the Arab League.

Having said that, the interaction and exchange within the platform also brought around other changes that are crucial for the partners and the project on other levels. On one hand, it spurred

trustful relationships that are now the basis for deeper and sustainable exchange and cooperation between the institutions and also extended to an increased readiness for dialogue with Civil Society. On the other, the platform allowed the institutions to closely coordinate and enter into informed and constructive dialogue with UNRWA, thus ultimately strengthening their position towards the agency.

Due to movement restrictions on the geo-political level, exacerbated by Covid-19, the Committee meets currently mostly through digital platforms. Thanks to today's technology, a multi-level approach that bridges different actors is possible in spite of conflict, distance and difficulties. For this Technical Committee, more achievements towards the improvement of Palestinian refugees' living conditions are yet to come!



Picture: Technical exchange committee meeting of the host government via MS Teams, 2021

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