UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees

Exploring the evolution of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), this book fills a lacuna in literature on the agency. *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees* employs recent fieldwork in order to analyse challenges in programmes and service delivery, protection, camp governance, community participation, and camp improvement and reconstruction. The chapters examine the way UNRWA is adapting to a changing social, political and economic context, mostly within urban settings – a paradigmatic shift from understanding the Agency’s role as simply a provider of relief and services to one comprehensively supporting the human development of Palestinian refugees.

Examining the refugee debate using new disciplines and research frameworks, this collection aims to emphasise the centrality of the Palestinian refugee issue for Middle East peace-making and to contribute to a better understanding of a unique agency. This book will be a useful aid for students and researchers with an interest in Middle East Studies, Politics and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.
Sari Hanafi is Professor of Sociology at the American University of Beirut and editor of *Idafat: the Arab Journal of Sociology* (Arabic). He is a member of the Executive Bureau of the International Association of Sociology and the Arab Council of Social Science. He is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters on the political and economic sociology of the Palestinian diaspora and refugees; sociology of migration; politics of scientific research; and transitional justice.

Leila Hilal is Director of the Middle East Task Force at the New America Foundation. She focuses on Syria, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and issues related to US foreign policy, community-based change, constitution-making, and transitional justice in the broader Middle East and North Africa. Prior to joining New America Hilal served as Senior Policy Adviser to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and as a legal adviser to Palestinian negotiators during 2002–8.

Lex Takkenberg has worked in various field and headquarters positions with UNRWA since 1989, and is currently based in Amman where he occupies the post of Chief, Ethics Office at UNRWA Headquarters. Before joining UNRWA, he was the Legal Officer of the Dutch Refugee Council.
Routledge studies on the Arab-Israeli conflict
Series Editor: Mick Dumper, University of Exeter

The Arab-Israeli conflict continues to be the centre of academic and popular attention. This series brings together the best of the cutting-edge work now being undertaken by predominantly new and young scholars. Although largely falling within the field of political science the series also includes interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary contributions.

International Assistance to the Palestinians after Oslo
Political guilt, wasted money
Anne Le More

Palestinian Political Prisoners
Identity and community
Esmail Nashif

Understanding the Middle East Peace Process
 Israeli academia and the struggle for identity
Asima A. Ghazi-Bouillon

Palestinian Civil Society
Foreign donors and the power to promote and exclude
Benoît Challand

The Jewish-Arab City
Spatio-politics in a mixed community
Haim Yacobi

Zionist Israel and Apartheid South Africa
Civil society and peace building in ethnic-national states
Amneh Daoud Badran
The Political Right in Israel
Different faces of Jewish populism
Dani Filc

Reparations to Palestinian Refugees
A comparative perspective
Shahira Samy

Palestinian Refugees
Identity, space and place in the Levant
Edited by Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafî

The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem
Palestinian politics and the city since 1967
Hillel Cohen

Trans-Colonial Urban Space in Palestine
Politics and development
Maha Samman

Zionism and Land Tenure in Mandate Palestine
Aida Asim Essaid

Women, Reconciliation and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
The road not yet taken
Giulia Daniele

UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees
From relief and works to human development
Edited by Sari Hanafî, Leila Hilal and Lex Takkenberg
UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees
From relief and works to human development

Edited by
Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal and
Lex Takkenberg
Contents

List of figures
List of tables
Notes on contributors

Introduction
SARI HANAFI, LEILA HILAL AND LEX TAKKENBERG

PART I
Meeting challenges in programmes and service delivery
Can the subaltern pay? Realizing self-reliance through microfinance
ALEX POLLOCK
UNRWA’s ‘traditional’ programmes as a catalyst for human development
TJITSKE DE JONG AND MIRIAM ACED

PART II
Protection: from concept to practice
Incorporating protection into UNRWA operations
MARK BRAILSFORD
Advancing child protection in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory and Syria
LAURENT CHAPUIS
PART III
Governance: the camps and UNRWA

From chaos to order and back: the construction of UNRWA shelters and camps, 1950–1970

KJERSTI GRAVELSÆTER BERG

UNRWA as a “phantom sovereign”: governance practices in Lebanon

SARI HANAFI

PART IV
Civic participation and community engagement

From beneficiary to stakeholder: an overview of UNRWA’s approach to refugee participation

TERRY REMPEL

Community participation and human rights advocacy: questions arising from the campaign about the right to work of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

SERGIO BIANCHI

PART V
Camp improvement/reconstruction and community development

Dynamics of space, temporariness, development and rights in Palestine refugees’ camps

MUNA BUDEIRI

Talbiyeh camp improvement project and the challenges of community participation: between empowerment and conflict

FATIMA AL-NAMMARI
Implementing the Neirab Rehabilitation Project: UNRWA’s approach to development in Syria’s Palestinian refugee camps

NELL GABIAM

The urban planning strategy in Al-Hussein Palestinian refugee camp in Amman: heterogeneous practices, homogeneous landscape

LUCAS OESCH

PART VI
Palestinian refugees and durable solutions: a role for UNRWA

UNRWA as avatar: current debates on the agency – and their implications

REX BRYNEN

Business as usual? The role of UNRWA in resolving the Palestinian refugee issue

LEILA HILAL

Index
Figures

Global financial crisis: losses and bailouts for US and European countries in context
Annual outreach, 1994–2011
1.2 The four components of UNRWA’s protection framework
3.1 Key sectors contributing to child protection
4.1 Key child protection systems’ components
4.2 Community-driven strategic planning methodology
9.1 Work Group urban planning workshop
10.2 multi-use urban space
Tables

Estimate of microfinance market in UNRWA’s areas of operation, 1997
Estimate of microfinance market in UNRWA’s areas of operation, 1999
Basic microfinance outreach indicators in the region, end December 2009
Basic microfinance outreach indicators in Jordan
Basic microfinance outreach indicators in Palestine
Basic microfinance outreach indicators in Lebanon
Basic microfinance outreach indicators in the Syrian Arab republic
Child protection in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria: a snapshot
Old and new approaches to improving refugee camps
Miriam Aced is a PhD candidate and Research Associate to the Franz Haniel Chair at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy (University of Erfurt), Germany. Her doctoral research focuses on refugee identity formation of Palestine refugees in the Near East and the role of international organisations, in particular UNRWA, in shaping group identity. Her research interests include citizenship, migration, identity and gender studies.

Fatima Al-Nammari is Assistant Professor at the College of Architecture, Petra University, Jordan, as well as Honorary Research Associate at University College, London, investigating refugee heritage. With support of a Fulbright grant she earned a PhD in the USA in 2006 based on research focusing on heritage conservation in post disaster situations. Dr. Al-Nammari is interested in integrated studies of the built environment including disasters, heritage, and bottom-up urban development. She has a rich and diverse experience spanning several countries and through varied capacities with local, international, and UN organizations in USA, Iraq, France, and Jordan. Her research focuses on refugee camps in Jordan addressing gender, challenges of bottom-up planning and development, power conflicts, and heritage and identity constructions. Al-Nammari served as a member of the Administrative Board of the Jordan Architects Society, in
addition to her membership in professional organizations in Jordan, Canada and USA. She participated in numerous conferences and received several awards and honors.

Kjersti Gravelsæter Berg is a PhD candidate at the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion at the University of Bergen, Norway. She is currently finalising her dissertation about UNRWA and Palestinian refugee camps between 1950 and 2012. Her work is based on unique access to UNRWA archives. The work explores UNRWA’s practices and policies towards camps and shelters, and how and why these have changed over time. The thesis shows how tensions between UNRWA’s humanitarian mandate, politics and powers have become visible through its relation to camps. She is the author of ‘Gendering Refugees: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Politics of Relief’, in Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East (N. Naguib and I.M. Okkenhaug, eds) (Leiden: Brill 2008).

Sergio Bianchi is a researcher at the Research Unit on Humanitarian Stakes and Practices (UREPH) of Doctors Without Borders – Switzerland. Having conducted an ethnographic study on how the symbolic and discursive productions of local NGOs affect the political representation of Palestinians in Lebanon, he recently obtained a PhD in Anthropology and Sociology of Development at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies of Geneva. Drawing upon the data collected during 15 months of fieldwork in Lebanon, he authored several journal articles and book chapters on the leading role of local NGOs in the reproduction of Palestinian nationalist symbolism. He is currently involved in comparative research on the
contemporary mechanisms of refugees’ government and their impact on the provision of humanitarian relief.

**Mark Brailsford** is the Senior Protection Coordinator with UNRWA. He is responsible for coordinating UNRWA’s protection activities in its five fields of operation. He joined UNRWA in March 2009. Prior to that he worked for 18 years in the field of protection with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). His last posting with ICRC was as Protection Coordinator for the Regional Delegation for USA and Canada based in Washington, DC where he was responsible for the ICRC visits to detainees held at Guantanamo Bay as well as addressing protection issues arising from US deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Prior to that he served as the ICRC Protection Coordinator based in Tel Aviv and has also worked on protection with the ICRC in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

el-Rifai) (London: Pluto, 2013). In addition he has served as a consultant on conflict, refugee and development issues to several governments, United Nations agencies and the World Bank.

**Muna Budeiri** is an architect and currently working as Deputy Director of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme and Head of the Housing and Camp Improvement Unit at UNRWA’s Headquarters in Amman. She is an expert in the reconstruction, rehabilitation and improvement of Palestine refugee camps with a particular emphasis on partnering with local communities. Her work included reconstruction after demolitions due to armed conflicts, rehabilitation and improvement of some of the densest refugee camps, as well as re-housing projects outside camps. She has been involved in the reconstruction of Jenin Camp, the rehabilitation of Neirab camp and the reconstruction of Nahr el Bared camp and is currently working on a number of camp improvement projects throughout UNRWA’s area of operations.

**Laurent Chapuis** works on child protection issues at the UNICEF regional office for the Middle East and North Africa region. He focuses on equity, system building and knowledge management. He has more than 15 years of experience in various political, security and economic contexts with UNICEF and a range of international and non-governmental organizations in the Africa Great Lakes region, South-East Asia and the Middle East. Originally managing social service provision and capacity building programmes, he has gradually moved into the provision of quality assurance and leadership. Postgraduate studies and field research (MA on Social Policy and Social Development with the University of Manchester, MSc on Disability Studies with University College London)
have enabled him to further inform and strengthen his practice as a development and humanitarian practitioner.

**Tjitske de Jong** works for UNRWA as Associate Ethics Officer with the Agency’s Ethics Office based at Headquarters Amman. Previously she worked for several relief and developmental NGOs as a Research and Programme Officer. In these capacities, her region of focus was West and Central Africa. She holds a Masters Degree in French Culture from the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, and has an advanced university diploma in conflict resolution from the Institute of International Humanitarian Studies, University Paul Cézanne, Aix-en-Provence, France.


**Sari Hanafi** is Professor of Sociology at the American University of Beirut and editor of *Idafat: the Arab Journal of*
Sociology (Arabic). He is also a member of the Executive Bureau of the International Association of Sociology and the Arab Council of Social Science. He is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters on the political and economic sociology of the Palestinian diaspora and refugees; sociology of migration; politics of scientific research; and transitional justice. Among his recent books are: The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (edited with A. Ophir and M. Givoni, 2009) (English and Arabic) (New York: Zone Book; Beirut: CAUS), The Emergence of a Palestinian Globalized Elite: Donors, International Organizations and Local NGOs (edited with L. Taber, 2005) (Arabic and English) (Ramallah: Muwatin and Center for Jerusalem Studies) and Pouvoir et associations dans le monde arabe (edited with S. Bennéfissa, 2002) (Paris: CNRS).

Leila Hilal is Director of the Middle East Task Force at the New America Foundation. She focuses on Syria, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and issues related to US foreign policy, community-based change, constitutionmaking, and transitional justice in the broader Middle East and North Africa. Prior to joining New America Hilal served as Senior Policy Adviser to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and as a legal adviser to Palestinian negotiators during 2002–8. She has led numerous research missions on human rights and post-conflict scenario building and transitional justice in the Middle East, including for Chatham House, the International Center for Transitional Justice and the Euro-Med Human Rights Network for Human Rights. She clerked for Justice Yvonne Mokgoro at the South African Constitutional Court in 2000. She received her JD from the State University of New
York at Buffalo Law School and her LLM from Harvard Law School.

**Lucas Oesch** is a post-doctorate fellow at the Institute of Geography at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. He earned a PhD in Development Studies from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies of Geneva, with a doctoral thesis entitled ‘Governing Temporariness: The Urban Planning Apparatus of Palestinian Refugee Camps and Informal Settlements in Amman’. He was awarded fellowships from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE). In addition, he has worked for several years as a teaching assistant at the Graduate Institute of Geneva. He is also an associate researcher at the French Institute for the Near East (Ifpo). His main themes of research and academic publications are urbanisation and migrations in the Middle East.

**Alex Pollock** has a doctorate in sociology and is Director of Microfinance at UNRWA. He is a long-time resident in Palestine, living in Ramallah, Gaza and Jerusalem since 1982. Over the past 20 years he has worked as a microfinance practitioner in Palestine, Jordan and Syria where he is responsible for UNRWA’s microfinance programme. He also serves on the boards of directors of the National Microfinance Bank in Jordan, Ibdaa Bank in Syria and Ibdaa Bank Lebanon.

**Terry Rempel** is a research consultant and Honorary University Fellow (Politics) at the University of Exeter, UK. He is the author of a range of articles, book chapters and edited collections on protection and durable solutions for Palestinian refugees including ‘Temporary Protection as an

Lex Takkenberg has worked in various field and headquarters positions with UNRWA since 1989, and is currently based in Amman where he occupies the post of Chief, Ethics Office at UNRWA Headquarters. Before joining UNRWA, he was the Legal Officer of the Dutch Refugee Council for six years. A law graduate from the University of Amsterdam, he obtained a Doctorate in International Law from the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands, after having successfully defended his doctoral dissertation entitled ‘The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law’. Oxford University Press published a commercial edition of the dissertation in 1998; an integral Arabic translation was published by the Institute for Palestine Studies in 2003.
Introduction

Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal and Lex Takkenberg

Sixty-five years have passed since the Nakba, the Palestinian reference to the events and war of 1948 that resulted in the displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinians. Once it became clear that the plight of these refugees could not be rapidly resolved, the United Nations General Assembly in December 1949 created the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to take over initial relief efforts by local authorities and international non-governmental agencies. From then on, the plight of the Palestinian refugees and UNRWA has been intrinsically linked.

To mark the 60th anniversary of UNRWA, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and UNRWA co-hosted a two-day international conference on 8 and 9 October 2010. The conference explored a number of themes high on the Agency’s agenda as it prepared itself for its seventh decade of operations in a situation where a solution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees remained elusive, with little prospect for progress. The substantive and strategic impetus of the conference’s focus was a review of some of the main themes being studied by UNRWA at the time relating to the future of the refugee question and the Agency. The conference programme was developed around those
aspects of UNRWA’s activities that most heavily bear on the Agency’s standing to contribute to durable solutions for the refugees – developmental services, protection, governance, participation, camp improvement and the political horizon. Not surprisingly, a number of these themes also feature prominently in the Agency’s Medium-Term Strategy for 2010–15 (UNRWA, 2010).

The chapters in this book are updated versions of many of the papers presented during the conference, complemented with several others. The book is divided in six parts: I: Meeting Challenges in Programmes and Service Delivery; II: Protection: from Concept to Practice; III: Governance: the Camps and UNRWA; IV: Civic Participation and Community Engagement; V: Camp Improvement/ Reconstruction and Community Development; and VI: Palestinian Refugees and Durable Solutions: a Role for UNRWA. Together they explore how UNRWA has been adapting since the turn of the century, when the outbreak of the second Intifada led to the realization that the optimism and subsequent planning for a wind-down of the Agency generated by the Oslo peace process had been premature, and that the Agency’s continued existence would be required for the years to come. A number of innovations and reforms discussed in the book were triggered at an earlier conference in Geneva in 2004, co-hosted by the Swiss Government and UNRWA.

The book highlights the many and varied challenges that UNRWA faces. Some of these are internal to the organization, such as the persistent budget deficits, which hamper the Agency’s drive to raise the quality of its services, and the challenge to sustain the momentum for reform. Other impediments relate to the context of occupation, conflict, and
an absence of human rights for Palestinians. These include uncertainties about the peace process, the blockade in Gaza, the closure regime in the West Bank and, most recently, the outbreak of conflict in Syria.

The latter is a stark reminder of the vulnerability of the Palestinian refugees and UNRWA in the face of external developments. At the time of the 2010 conference, no one could predict that six months later the decades-long stable and favourable living conditions that Palestinian refugees had enjoyed in Syria would radically change, not only dramatically affecting their safety and security, but also causing a renewed displacement of both Syrians and Palestinians at an unprecedented scale. With these latest developments, Palestinian refugees in all of UNRWA’s five ‘Fields’ of operations – the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria – have had to cope with armed conflict and secondary displacement at some point in time during their exile, in addition to the challenges associated with their original flight, including dispossession and statelessness.

UNRWA and its relationship with the Palestinian refugees is a rich source for academic enquiry and yet the literature on the Agency is very limited. Aside from a special edition of *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (Bocco and Takkenberg, 2009) and the catalogue of a recent exhibition on camp improvement (Misselwitz, 2012) most literature on the Agency is dated. The only specific studies on UNRWA look at its history (Altamemi 1974; Prittie 1975; Pilon 1985; Schiff 1995), administrative structure (Buehrig 1971; Dale 1974; Lindsay 2009; Rosenfeld 2009), core programmes (Tamari and Zureik 1996; Blome Jacobsen 2003), and contribution to peace and stability in the Middle East (Forsythe 1971; Perlmutter 1971;
Stebbing 1985; Viorst 1989; Schiff 1989; Besson 1997; Husseini 2000; Gottheil 2006). Focusing on some of the key challenges facing the longest lasting case of forced migration in modern history, this book aims to help significantly filling this void. It is hoped that it will contribute to a better understanding of a unique agency and of the centrality of the Palestinian refugee issue for peace-making in the Middle East.

Part I: meeting challenges in programmes and service delivery

UNRWA was created with the dual mandate to continue the direct relief operation initiated by its predecessors and to initiate a process of socio-economic development through public works schemes with the purpose to integrate the refugees into the economic life of the Near East. The works programmes were met with significant suspicion and scepticism on the part of the host countries and the refugees and never really took off. By the time the Suez Crisis broke out in 1956, the ambitious development effort was shelved (Schiff 1995). At the same time, the refugees remained in need of international support and hence UNRWA’s mandate was repeatedly extended. From the mid-1950s onwards, UNRWA’s relief mandate shifted from the emergency assistance it initially provided – food, shelter, clothing and basic health care – to more comprehensive support for social development of the refugee population. Education rapidly replaced relief as UNRWA’s central programme, with the Agency establishing a strategic partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), adopting the host
country curriculum to its schools and successfully introducing vocational and technical training in addition to its basic education programme. A similar partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) formed the basis for UNRWA’s highly cost-effective primary health-care programme. As the refugees gradually attained self-sufficiency, dependence on direct relief dropped so drastically that, by the mid-1980s, UNRWA was able to replace its general ration programme with a much more selective programme targeting families in special hardship.

UNRWA’s pioneering strategy turned out to be a success story. Some 1.6 million pupils graduated from UNRWA’s basic nine- or ten-year education cycle, paving the way to economic self-sufficiency for the vast majority of the refugees. Literacy rates among Palestine refugees compare well with regional and global levels and there has been gender equity in enrolment since the 1960s. At present, the Agency operates some 700 schools in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with an enrolment of nearly 500,000 children. More than 60,000 students graduated from technical and vocational training offered by the Agency’s ten vocational and technical training centres. Approximately two-thirds of the registered refugees (some three million persons) obtain health services from 139 primary healthcare centres. Responding to high rates of infant mortality, one of UNRWA’s innovations was the introduction in 1957 of a special oral rehydration formula for treating mildly dehydrated diarrheic infants. The results were spectacular and the principle of oral dehydration therapy was later adopted globally by WHO and UNICEF. As a result of these and other approaches, infant, child and maternal mortality rates are amongst the lowest in the region and
nearly 100 per cent of refugee households are connected to water networks. And with the exception of recent emergencies, dependence on direct relief assistance reduced dramatically, from nearly 100 per cent at UNRWA’s inception to 6 per cent at present. The Relief and Social Services Programme has also been the catalyst for the development of a strong, community-based network of social services, comprising 62 women programme centres, 36 community-based rehabilitation centres for persons with disabilities and 30 community development centres.

The outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987 and broader regional developments, including a growing acceptance within refugee communities that improving living conditions does not mean relinquishing the right of return, provided an opportunity for a gradual shift towards more developmental approaches resulting in a number of programmatic innovations that were introduced from the early 1990s onwards. These include the introduction of a highly successful microfinance programme that since its establishment in 1991/92 has issued some 300,000 loans for a total value of $340 million, making it the largest non-bank financial intermediary in the region.

UNRWA strives to reach full self-reliance and financial self-sufficiency for the programme as soon as possible, and aims to achieve transformation to full independence before the end of the current decade, in line with international best practice. Another innovation related to a more sustained and systematic effort on improving the physical infrastructure inside refugee camps. Since the early 1990s, some 13,500 refugee shelters were rehabilitated. From the turn of the century, UNRWA also developed and a participatory camp improvement methodology which is being rolled out throughout the Agency’s area of operations. A new
infrastructure and camp improvement department was created within UNRWA to increase capacity and develop efforts in this domain.

These two new approaches in UNRWA’s work are prominently discussed in this book: microfinance in the essay of Alex Pollock in this part of the book and camp improvement in the four essays that make up Part V. Pollock’s essay presents the subaltern context of microfinance that is increasingly overlooked by the ‘financialisation’ of the sector. He explains how the subaltern clients of microfinance are interpolated from the margins and hinterlands of social life through the interstices of the modern and pre-modern economy in underdeveloped social formations. In doing so it looks at the comparative development of contemporary microfinance in the context of microenterprise economies and explores the gaps in the microfinance sector and market in the countries aligned along the coast and uplands of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin. It ends with a short reflection of the experience and future of UNRWA’s microfinance programme.

Whereas expansion of the microfinance programme’s capital base as well as the camp improvement programmes are financed from project funding, UNRWA’s traditional core programmes – education, health and relief and social services – are funded from the Agency’s human development budget, also referred to as the General Fund. Almost all funding comes from voluntary contributions, and mostly from donor states. The United Nations finances over 100 international staff posts each year from its regular budget. UNESCO and WHO also fund on average ten posts in the education and health programmes. The United States and the European Union are the Agency’s largest donors with total
contributions of over USD 239 million and USD 175 million respectively in 2011. These contributions made up about 42 per cent of the total income UNRWA received for its core programme budget.

Over the years, UNRWA has faced regular funding crises (Schiff 1995) forcing it to introduce austerity measures and respond to donor calls for efficiency gains that have made the Agency one of the leanest organizations in the United Nations system. Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency’s General Fund has begun each year with a large projected deficit. In 2013, the deficit stood at 67.2 million.

As a result of these financial and other pressures, the decline in the conditions for Palestinian refugees and in the Agency’s ability to deliver quality services became increasingly evident in recent years. This was recognized at a major international conference in Geneva in 2004. The Geneva Conference paved the way for a major reform effort that was carried out in two stages, referred to as the Organizational Development process and Sustaining Change.

The Organizational Development (OD) process has laid the foundations of a transformation in UNRWA’s management, of which decentralisation and innovation are core themes. UNRWA has reviewed its approach to resource mobilization in response to the Agency’s funding constraints, comprehensively overhauled its approach to programme management, and established sound strategic planning processes resulting in a Medium Term Strategy (MTS) which is being translated into action through three cycles of Field
Implementation Plans, Headquarters Implementation Plans and two-year Programme Budgets based on the strategy (UNRWA, 2010). Other elements of OD include the implementation of results-based budgeting by which resources will be linked to the MTS; improved arrangements for knowledge management, in particular the need to build better capacity to gather and use data on refugees; more robust arrangements for evaluation; human resource management reforms; and stronger risk management and accountability.

Sustaining Change, the second reform initiative, aims at invigorating UNRWA’s core programmes, ensuring quality and effectiveness are improved where this is needed most, at the point of delivery. These reforms are discussed in the essay of Tjitske de Jong and Miriam Aced. The authors highlight the different approaches to reform adopted by the different programmes: a comprehensive overhaul of almost every aspect of the education programme, a more pointed and modest restructuring of delivery of primary health care through the introduction of the so-called family health team approach, and efforts towards better targeting of the poor and a move away from food to cash transfers that is meeting significant resistance from beneficiaries and, to a lesser extent, host authorities.

One may argue, as de Jong and Aced suggest, that UNRWA’s funding structure – primary reliance on voluntary contributions – may not be appropriate to the Agency’s mandate of delivering public services, requiring a budget that is able to grow as a function of population growth and inflation. Exacerbated by the global financial crisis, the funding outlook is extremely bleak.
and the Agency and its key stakeholders face stark choices as they commence reflections on the next MTS.

**Part II: protection: from concept to practice**

The focus of the second set of essays is the protection of Palestinians and Palestinian refugees, a subject that has attracted significant attention in recent years. Unlike UNHCR, UNRWA’s creation was not by a statute with express reference to “protection”. Nevertheless, as the contribution of Mark Brailsford in this part of the book highlights, protection is an integral part of UNRWA’s mandate and, in view of the human rights challenges faced by many Palestinian refugees, this aspect of the work has gained greater importance over the past two decades. Protection is defined by the UN’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), as “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (human rights law, international humanitarian law, refugee law)”. United Nations General Assembly resolutions referring to UNRWA have consistently affirmed UNRWA’s protection role, by referring to the “valuable work done by the Agency in providing protection to the Palestinian people, in particular Palestine refugees” and by encouraging the Agency to “make further progress” in addressing the needs and rights of children and women in its operations, in accordance with, respectively, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Building on these foundations, UNRWA has since the turn of the century developed a more explicit focus on protection. The importance currently attached to protection within UNRWA is clear from the central place human rights
and protection occupy, as one of four human development goals in the Agency’s MTS for 2010–15, cutting across all programmes (UNRWA, 2010).

Brailsford’s chapter discusses UNRWA’s approach to protection and examines some of the ways the Agency is currently incorporating protection to its operations. It begins by examining what protection means to UNRWA and how protection has been incorporated into UNRWA’s strategic planning. It goes on to outline the components of UNRWA’s protection role and provides a range of examples of how UNRWA is in practice providing protection to Palestine refugees. It finishes by looking at some of the challenges and lessons learned.

More than 40 per cent of Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA are below the age of 18. Laurent Chapuis’s chapter explores UNICEF’s challenges and opportunities in operationalizing child protection in the MENA region. It suggests areas for cooperation between UNRWA and UNICEF in view of strengthening the protection of Palestinian children from violence, neglect and abuse. It starts by giving an overview of UNICEF’s approach to child protection. In line with the agency’s global child protection strategy, the three main pillars of its approach in the MENA region, improving knowledge management, strengthening child-protection systems and promoting protective social change are then defined. Non-exhaustive examples of cooperation between UNRWA and UNICEF in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory and Syria (before the conflict) under these domains are provided, and used as a basis to point at ways to advance the protection of Palestinian children from violence in the
region. The piece concludes by highlighting UNRWA’s potential to mainstream child protection into its operations and reviews some of the issues the agency might want to consider with regards to an organization-wide child protection policy and the impact this would have on the way it is operating.

The protection needs of Palestinian refugees are substantial. The effort to incorporate protection into UNRWA operations is still very much an ongoing process. Building on its experience thus far and taking up some of the suggestions by Chapuis for closer alignment with UNICEF’s approach to protection, UNRWA is currently elaborating a child protection strategy. The two chapters in this book, as well as those included in the RSQ special issue on UNRWA (Bocco and Takkenberg 2009) and others are part of an ongoing debate on protection of Palestinian refugees that includes a range of questions still awaiting definite answers. These include whether there is a protection gap (within UNRWA’s area of operations and/or beyond), in what ways is UNRWA obliged to intervene with responsible states to carry out its protection mandate and in what ways is it authorized to carry this out that have not yet been advanced, and to which Palestinian refugees does UNRWA owe international protection. The related question of whether UNRWA does have a protection mandate that extends to the search for durable solutions will be discussed in Part VI.

**Part III: governance: the camps and UNRWA**

Approximately one-third of Palestinian refugees live in 58 “official” refugee camps and this number has been more or less stable throughout UNRWA’s existence. The camps were constructed in two main waves, in the aftermath of the wars
of 1948–49 and 1967. Most of the camps initially consisted of
tents which were gradually replaced by huts and subsequently
evolved into a situation where most of the camps today are
extensions of the urban fabric in which they are located.

Kjersti Gravelsæter Berg’s chapter provides a
ground-breaking and fascinating insight into the evolution of
UNRWA camp and shelter policies during the initial
formative years and following the 1967 war. Berg’s research,
based on the UNRWA Central Registry archive in Amman as
well as interviews, explores questions related to UNRWA
camp and shelter construction policies and practices over
time. This includes inquiries into what an UNRWA camp and
shelter was, how it was planned, built and discussed. For how
long was it envisioned to exist and why did it deteriorate so
quickly? The study of shelter and camp construction as a form
of humanitarian temporary relief elucidates
how time affects humanitarian solutions in the absence of
political solutions. The first part of the essay looks into
shelter construction from 1950 to 1966 with the second part
focusing on the period of intense construction of emergency
camps in the aftermath of the 1967 war.

Sari Hanafi’s chapter investigates the role that UNRWA plays
in camp governance. Because of its mandate, a humanitarian
organization like UNRWA has historically understood its role
as a temporary relief provider to a temporary group of
victims, carefully avoiding taking on a wider governing role.
At the same time, most refugees have effectively assigned
UNRWA a key role, holding it responsible for problems in
the camps that go well beyond its mandate. This generates a
lot of misunderstandings that characterize the current status
quo. Hanafi argues that the resulting “phantom sovereignty”
of UNRWA is based on this fundamental misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities, which leaves a problematic void, contributes to the sense of permanent emergency and exception, and fuels mistrust and suspicion. Decades of internal and international outmigration of the most educated and capable among the camp dwellers – keen to escape the trap of passivity and over-reliance on relief – has left camp communities in vulnerable conditions. While UNRWA theoretically tends to present itself as just a service provider, in many ways it is much more than that.

UNRWA’s engagement in more recent years with the improvement of camp living conditions will be discussed in Part V.

**Part IV: civic participation and community engagement**

Palestinian refugees are at the heart of UNRWA. They constitute its raison d’être and are the Agency’s principal stakeholders, alongside hosts and donors. More than 95 per cent of its staff are Palestinian refugees themselves. Whereas the Agency has well-established mechanisms, policies and practices in place that inform and structure its relationship with donors, host authorities, the media, vendors and other external parties, its relationship with Palestinian refugees, and in particular those refugees that are beneficiaries of its services, is more fragmented and less strategic in nature. Beneficiary relations are an integral part of the Agency’s operations and as such involve more than 25,000 UNRWA front-line staff on a daily basis. Yet, the Agency has no overarching policy on beneficiary relations and accountability.
Recent developments in the humanitarian and human development sectors are suggesting a more systematic approach to issues such as refugee participation and beneficiary complaints handling mechanisms, amongst others. The work of the Inter Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (IASC) is of particular relevance in this domain. At its meeting in December 2011, IASC Principals adopted five Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) which are: (1) leadership/governance; (2) transparency; (3) feedback and complaints; (4) participation; and (5) design, monitoring and evaluation. This section of the book explores some of those themes, in particular that of refugee participation.

Terry Rempel’s contribution traces the evolution of UNRWA’s approach to refugee participation over the past 60 years through a discussion of the Agency’s programmes and its relationship with the refugees it serves. The chapter looks at UNRWA and refugee participation through four different periods: participation in economic reintegration (1950s); participation in the management and delivery of Agency services (1960s–1970s); from participation in the project cycle to political participation (1980s–1990s); mainstreaming stakeholder participation (2000s–present day). Rempel illustrates how the evolution in UNRWA’s approach to participation represents a significant shift in the Agency’s relationship with the Palestinian refugees. While UNRWA traditionally viewed participation as a means of programme implementation, the new approach acknowledges participation as a human right with the primary objective of empowering refugees to realize their rights and improve social equity within the framework of the Agency’s mandate,
values and other UN principles. The author concludes that the fundamental challenge for stakeholder participation will be to find ways to facilitate the participation of refugees in the search for and realization of durable solutions to their long-standing plight.

Sergio Bianchi applies Rempel’s framework to a case study of the campaign about the right to work of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The main aim of his paper is to contribute to the understanding of the interplay between humanitarian action and political considerations in Lebanon, by examining the reform process related to the legal regime regulating Palestinian employment in the country and the advocacy campaign that preceded it. This campaign, in which UNRWA played an active role, has been characterized by the emphasis that was placed on community involvement. In addition to describing the advocacy campaign, the article also highlights the complexities of community participation in a situation where the Palestinian community is significantly fragmented. Together with Lebanese resistance to change its representation of Palestinian refugees, this decreased the effectiveness of the campaign.

The issue of refugee participation arose prominently during the 2010 Conference, not only in the panel where the above papers were discussed, but in nearly every panel. For example, the chair of one of the panels remarked that it was very difficult to facilitate a discussion where practitioners and academics were present at the same time, requiring significant efforts to get an often heated discussion back on track. Whereas the participation panel saw the most in-depth discussion of the issue, speakers on the services panel and comments made in the governance, camp construction, and durable solutions panels showed the centrality of refugee
participation issues to UNRWA’s general credibility and effectiveness across sectors. Community participation is already a working theme in UNRWA’s MTS and there is clearly an Agency-wide commitment to this principle. Yet, suspicion amongst beneficiaries and the wider refugee community is persistent. Criticism of UNRWA often stems from misunderstanding and resentments – both of which are best mitigated through the early consultative involvement of beneficiaries. While mistrust is a long-standing dilemma and suspicions are in part driven by sub-text over which UNRWA has little or no control (e.g. geo-politics, divisions between the “international” and the “local”), by increasing a sense of ownership in decisions trust can be increased. The inherent political dimensions of UNRWA cannot easily be overcome but improving trust and security through better participation practices should be within the Agency’s control.

**Part V: camp improvement/reconstruction and community development**

As Kjersti Gravelsæter Berg’s chapter in Part III made clear, UNRWA has been involved in housing refugees since it commenced its operations in 1950. Interventions in housing and camp infrastructure development have traditionally been limited to four areas: (1) provision of shelter in response to emergencies; (2) rehabilitation of shelters, which do not meet minimal acceptable standards; (3) environmental and social infrastructure development and upgrading; and (4) camp rehabilitation undertaken in response to emergencies.

Despite intervention in shelter, housing and infrastructure, for a long time there had not been a coherent strategy for
improving the living conditions of the refugees to acceptable standards. Urban planning and holistic infrastructure development were largely inexistent due to reasons such as the notion of the temporary nature of refugee camps. The Geneva Conference of 2004 changed this by concluding that improving housing and infrastructure in refugee camps should be given higher priority and that this would not compromise the Palestinian refugees’ right of return. UNRWA responded by introducing “a new, holistic, integrated, developmental and participatory approach based on urban planning to improve the built environment in Palestinian refugee camps” (see Budeiri’s chapter in this part of the book). In 2006, this development culminated in the establishment of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP).

ICIP’s new approach is at various stages of being rolled out across UNRWA’s area of operations. It has attracted significant attention (Bocco and Takkenberg 2009; Misselwitz 2012) and is also prominently discussed here. The four chapters in Part V explore UNRWA’s camp improvement experience from different angles. Mona Budeiri, Head of UNRWA’s Camp Improvement Unit, sheds light on the thinking behind the new approach and discusses some of the challenges facing its introduction. Two other chapters represent case studies of the application of the new approach in Palestinian camps in Jordan (Fatima Al-Nammari) and Syria (Nell Gabiam). The fourth chapter discussed camp improvement in another camp in Jordan that has so far not benefited from ICIP’s new approach (Lucas Oesch).

Budeiri’s essay provides an overview of the development of the refugee camps from their establishment through the process of urbanization and community dynamics. It goes on to discuss the changing role of UNRWA, from its traditional...
intervention in the camps towards a more developmental approach that eventually culminated in the establishment of the Camp Improvement Programme. The chapter then describes the new approach in some detail and ends with a discussion of a number of the challenges which the programme faces in pursuing its new direction.

Al Nammari’s contribution investigates the challenges of the new approach to camp improvement in a case study on Talbiyeh camp in Jordan. It draws heavily on the author’s experience as the project manager and urban planner in the camp. The Talbiyeh Camp Improvement Project was launched in 2008 through the creation of a local assembly referred to as the Work Group, responsible for strategic planning and decision making in relation to the project in partnership with UNRWA. The Work Group identified a number of priority needs including shelter upgrading, education and health improvement, creation of open recreational spaces, income-generating projects and employment. The chapter then zooms in on a case study focusing on the assessment, diagnosis and design in respect of a multi-use urban pocket. It reveals the complexities and challenges of employing a truly participatory process and the intricacies of the application of agency by underprivileged groups.

Gabiam’s essay provides an analysis of the implementation and outcomes of the Neirab Rehabilitation Project, an UNRWA-sponsored camp improvement project in the Palestinian refugee camps of Ein el Tal and Neirab in northern Syria. This project, predating the establishment of ICIP, has become a pilot for UNRWA’s attempt to incorporate sustainable development into its operations in Palestinian camps. Based on fieldwork conducted by the
author in Ein el Tal and Neirab, she concludes that the project has achieved some measure of success as far as infrastructural enhancement and improved access to services. On the other hand, the project’s social development component, targeting the long-term socio-economic well-being of refugees by setting in place structures through which refugees would be able to actively participate in reaching these long-term goals, has, so far, not generated much change on the ground. In order to remedy the obstacles it faces in this area, UNRWA will have to come up with ways of better communicating with refugees and involving them in its decision-making process. UNRWA will also have to do more to overcome the trust barrier that separates it from the refugees it assists.

Oesch’s chapter deals with the issue of camp improvement in respect of a refugee camp in Jordan that thus far did not contribute from UNRWA’s new approach but nevertheless went through a remarkable development process. It aims at assessing the different improvement practices and strategies which have taken place in al-Hussein camp in Amman over the past decades. Oesch shows that, albeit particular in its forms and actions, over the years al-Hussein witnessed a genuine urban development process. He explains that management and “planning” are characterized by what he calls a “heterogeneous ensemble of rationality and practices” contributing to the creation of new planning strategies responding to the special conditions of the camp. Whilst not arguing that the urban planning process is undermining the specific characteristics of the camp, he suggests that such characteristics are evolving over time, resulting in planning strategies that whilst maintaining the character of the camp also allows for change. He concludes
by advocating for a more coherent urban planning process appropriate to the above-mentioned framework.

UNRWA is currently carrying out an evaluation of its camp improvement programme, which will assess the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustain-ability and relevance of the programme holistically with a specific focus on the new approach to service delivery. Furthermore the evaluation is proposed to provide an assessment of the added value of the new approach to UNRWA as an Agency. The evaluation employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including interviews with randomly selected camp inhabitants both in camps that benefited from the new camp improvement methodology and in camps that did not. The evaluation report will be publicly made available and the organization of a public dissemination workshop is under consideration.

**Part VI: Palestinian refugees and durable solutions: a role for UNRWA**

The refugee issue is unique amongst the so-called permanent status issues in that it is not a bilateral issue but involves a number of other stakeholders, including host countries, donor countries and the wider international community. Although UNRWA has no direct role in the political efforts towards a negotiated end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as a key element of its protection mandate the Agency frequently highlights the need for a solution, stressing that the rights and interest of the refugees must be duly reflected in any arrangement that seeks to end their plight. The fact that the refugee issue has remained unresolved for 65 years is leading to profound frustrations among different stakeholders. Refugees’ criticism of UNRWA is partly fuelled by
perceptions that the Agency is not advocating strongly enough for their right of return. On the other side of the spectrum, the Agency is being accused of perpetuating the refugee problem and standing in the way of a solution.

Rex Brynen’s essay provides an insight into some of the ongoing controversies surrounding UNRWA by examining the many different ways in which the Agency is perceived. He identifies four main “avatars of UNRWA”: UNRWA as the avatar of international responsibility, UNRWA as the avatar of muddling through, UNRWA as the avatar of perpetuating conflict and UNRWA as the avatar of refugee advocacy. The implications of each of these representations of the Agency – for refugees, the Agency and the peace process – are highlighted. The chapter concludes by suggesting that while many of the avatars rest on weak factual foundations, they nonetheless assume considerable importance (especially in the internet era) in shaping the political environment around the Agency, and cannot be ignored.

UNRWA may be in a position to advise and support where possible, necessary efforts by other actors toward achieving and implementing a solution. Realizing that this constitutes another aspect of its protection mandate, UNRWA’s Commissioner-General and other senior staff have been contributing their experience and insights on related matters as appropriate. And while the strategic framework for the next six years, embodied in the MTS, is based on the status quo prevailing, the Agency has also recognized that it must be ready to respond to changes in political and economic contexts, including more fundamental change, leading to a
significantly different scenario, should a just solution to the refugee issue emerge.

Leila Hilal’s chapter elaborates the impediments and constraints on UNRWA playing a meaningful role in resolving the Palestinian refugee issue in the medium-term. In the absence of an effective body with a mandate of securing durable solutions for Palestinian refugees – such as UNHCR in respect of other refugees – or political process, the author argues that a “protection gap” exists for Palestinian refugees, in spite of UNRWA’s extensive durable solutions advocacy and increased emphasis on protection, as discussed in Part II. She concludes that pushing UNRWA into the political arena is not a viable option at this juncture. The chapter does not end here, however. Should a political settlement be reached on Palestinian refugee rights, the author argues that UNRWA may have a significant role to play. She examines what roles UNRWA may be suited to fulfil in a post-conflict transition and peace-building scenario for Palestinian refugees. She argues that the Agency’s decades-long relationship with the refugees and host authorities, its long-standing development activities with refugee communities and recent institutional reforms could aid the implementation of durable solutions for Palestinian refugees. Rather than a precipitous winding-down, a targeted transformation of the Agency should be considered for the day when a just resolution is achieved, taking into account its suitable role as a leading implementing partner in a transitional period.

Note

1
The views expressed in this Introduction are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or by UNRWA.

References


Part I

Meeting challenges in programmes and service delivery
1 Can the subaltern pay?
Realizing self-reliance through microfinance

Alex Pollock

Introduction
The first clause in the title of this chapter – ‘Can the subaltern pay?’ – is merely rhetorical, since it is widely acknowledged that each year tens of millions of poor and low-income clients across the globe repay loans to thousands of microfinance institutions, most often with lower default rates and less risk than wealthier clients with access to formal banking services. In the context of the diverse global setting of the microfinance industry, most microfinance practitioners and stakeholders habitually refer to microfinance clients as poor and/or low-income people and households. Although largely true, such consumption and income type descriptors give little indication of the economic, social, status, class or ethnic identifiers of the typical clients of microfinance institutions, who are very often from the subaltern segments of society in social formations where market relations are asymmetric, unevenly developed and often very shallow.

As subalterns, they are most often from poor and low-income communities, composed of a multiplicity of economic actors in societies with specific social and cultural cleavages, whether they be peasant farmers, smallholders or animal herders; itinerant hawkers or market traders; artisans or
self-employed tradespersons; women home-workers or microentrepreneurs; microenterprise owners with family businesses, sole-proprietorships or employees. They also include refugees, immigrants, women, youth and the aged, as well as workers and low-paid salaried employees in the private sector and in government service.

Ethnographically and sociologically diverse, subaltern microentrepreneurs are more likely to be part of an impoverished sub-proletariat than a mushrooming class of aspiring capitalists (Nevin 1982). Many, if not most, eke out a living from informal enterprises on the marginal pole of the economy trying to keep their families above the breadline. The microentrepreneur’s household is more strategically linked and integrated into the business than formally regulated enterprises where the market and the household are more distinct, although the formal family-owned small businesses often employ unpaid or low-paid family workers.

But while the son or sons in the family business will inherit the formalised family enterprise, trans-generational ownership of subaltern enterprise is less common as they are often shortlived, with the owners changing businesses between bouts of employment and unemployment.

While very different from each other, with diverse subjectivities, they typically live and work in the hinterland and margins of economic and social life, where they are excluded from access to the formal financial system and participation in the modern economic sector. Those engaged in manufacturing enterprises often work in unregulated and highly competitive informal sectors of the economy, maintaining pre-Taylorist enterprises of low asset value, utilising aged factors of production that require low-skilled,
labour-intensive manpower. Many women home-workers are engaged in self-regulated and self-paced subsidiary income-generating activities such as food-processing, small animal husbandry and craftwork that brings in supplementary income to households, but many others work under highly extractive semi-industrial regimes in their homes that demand long working hours and intensive productivity that links them to global markets for cheap consumer goods. In some regions, such home-workers may be engaged in decades-old pre-modern putting-out systems controlled by local merchants.

While microenterprises involved in commerce and trade often face intense competition in conditions of market saturation from an abundance of identical businesses in restricted markets, where absolute value is finely whittled and spread among traders and enterprises. Women microentrepreneurs are often particularly vulnerable in such markets due to a lack of social and economic bargaining power, although they often make up for this through networks of solidarity and collective action with each other. Such subalterns remain caught in the economic interstices of modernity where they are bypassed by its economic opportunity, alienated from financial markets and trapped in low income and poverty. They are even more unfortunate if they are caught in the web of civil war, ethnic or colonial conflict which makes their subaltern state even more economically tenuous and their lives precarious.

Unlike many humanitarian, human development and other pro-poor interventions, the ethos of microfinance puts subaltern economic agency, self-determination and self-help at the core of its vision, which requires understanding and recognition of the divergent and marginal character of subaltern economies. This has enabled microfinance to
develop successful credit methodologies, loan products and other services that treat subaltern economies as distinct market segments requiring specific financial interventions with products capable of creating inclusive financial services that can help the subaltern become self-reliant. This is achieved by giving them financial resources that they can use to run their own small enterprise or create self-employment that enables them to feed and clothe their families.\textsuperscript{4}

Microfinance is a sustainable – operationally and financially self-sufficient – market-based approach to providing financial resources to subalterns to assist them realise their own self-reliance.\textsuperscript{5} As market-based microfinance has grown, an increasing number of best practice institutions have developed economies of scale that enabled them to become sustainable and profitable undertakings, with many submitting their financial data and audited financial statements to the Microfinance Information Exchange (MIX Market) – an international project that benchmarks financial performance of microfinance institutions against a series of financial performance and efficiency ratios. Thus, by December 2009, the 1,873 microfinance institutions participating in MIX had 90.2 million clients with a gross loan portfolio of USD 64.8 billion, deposits of USD 26.7 billion and an average loan balance of just USD 527 per borrower.\textsuperscript{6}

Since its inception, the global microfinance industry has been built by financing from local philanthropists, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government donors and multilateral agencies. But it has also been financed by social investors and specialised ethical investment funds interested in helping the poor and poorest through sustainable
and self-reliant institutions. With a burgeoning reputation for financial effectiveness, the more profitable segments of the industry are now being conceived by some in the regular international finance sector as an emerging market able to offer asset class investments capable of producing significant returns for individual and institutional investors (Rosenberg, 2007).

In a world replete with development assistance failures, despite its many detractors, microfinance has been a global success story. Yet despite its remarkable growth across the globe, in most regions of the world, national bankers and the formal finance sector still habitually view microfinance clients as high-risk borrowers whose hazard is best mitigated by their exclusion from the credit services of the formal financial system. As far as the traditional banking sector is concerned, subalterns are a classic sub-prime market segment engaged in insecure and unstable economic activities that is best left to pawnbrokers, money-lenders and other informal and non-formal financial intermediaries.

In this context, it is interesting to contrast the ongoing predicament of the global finance system with the increasing vitality of the international microfinance industry. While the global activity of the international microfinance sector goes from strength to strength, the global finance system continues to reel from the aftershock of calamitous financial overreach into sub-prime real estate markets through a variety of opaque investment instruments by senior commercial banks and financial institutions in the USA, UK and northern Europe that resulted in a collapse of major financial conglomerates, which necessitated western governments digging deep into the pockets of their taxpayers to finance bailouts valued at USD 9.7 trillion in the USA and USD 2 trillion in Europe.
According to Bloomberg some 33 per cent of the value (or USD 14.5 trillion) of the world companies were wiped out as a result of the crisis. The US government financed rescue package was almost equivalent to the total value of home mortgages in the USA, while the UK package was equivalent to over a third of British GDP.

**Figure 1.1 Global financial crisis: losses and bailouts for US and European countries in context**

While the complex institutional interconnectedness of banks, stock markets, investment companies and brokers and the multiple failures that led to this financial crisis – including the misperceptions and myopia of investors, rating agencies and regulators – should caution against any simple comparison between international high finance and microfinance. However, the simple fact remains that many grand financial institutions have been ruined and public finances wrecked by financial overstretch into high risk sub-prime markets, while the global microfinance industry has grown exponentially over the past decades by focusing specifically on such markets. The key difference being those microfinance
institutions and their staff know their subaltern customers personally and are knowledgeable of their markets, finances, businesses, families and communities. This is based on close individual relationships where risk is assessed palpably and directly, not packaged through instruments and procedures that may hide rather than disclose risk.  

9

The development of microfinance

Different forms of what is now called ‘microfinance’ have been around for centuries, often organised by subalterns themselves, whether in the form of mutual funds collected by artisans and workers through guilds and trade associations for their members; in the form of cooperative marketing or bulk procurement of farm inputs by peasant farmers and smallholders; or through rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAS). 10  Such informally contracted alliances are not primarily based on law but on the principles of solidarity, fraternity, mutuality and trust.

While subaltern finance initiatives are ubiquitous, it was only as a result of breakthroughs achieved in credit lending methodologies in Latin America and South East Asia in the 1970s that microfinance has gradually assumed a prominent role in development assistance, where it is perceived as a large-scale, high-impact development tool contributing to mitigating poverty, promoting self-reliance and encouraging economic growth through financing the smallest and most marginal businesses and households (Otero and Rhyne 1994). 11  The popularisation of subaltern microcredit owes much of its reputation to the inspirational work of Muhammad Yunis and the Grameen Bank, which each year provides millions of
loans to the Bangladeshi poor. The Grameen Bank offered one of the first models of large-scale credit delivery to the very poor that is still being copied in many of the poorest regions of the world today. Equally significant were innovations developed through the pioneering methodologies designed by key microfinance practitioners such as Bank Rakyat Indonesia and Prodem/BancoSol in Bolivia that paved the way to delivering the fruits of commercially based microfinance to the rural and urban subalterns on a sustainable basis (Robinson 2001). All three institutions have provided business models that many microfinance practitioners and apex institutions are attempting to imitate in various regions today, including the Middle East.

The success of pioneering institutions in parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia resulted in a call to broaden the impact of microfinance by extending it to other regions. In the 1990s, the Microcredit Summit Campaign – the movement to represent the microfinance community worldwide – established the goal of providing credit to 100 million of the world’s poorest families by 2005. With 1.2 billion persons in the world living on less than a dollar a day, the provision of credit for self-employment was seen as one of the most viable long-term instruments to address the living conditions of the very poor. The Microcredit Summit goal of providing microloans to 100 million poor people was achieved in 2005, but it was not until 2007 that it reached the objective financing 100 million loans to persons living on less than one dollar a day. By the end of 2007, some 3,352 microfinance institutions from 137 countries that were affiliated with the Microcredit Summit Campaign had provided loans to 155 million clients (Daley-Harris 2009). Some 107 million of these clients survived on a dollar a day or less, with women accounting for
almost 83 per cent of the poorest borrowers. Despite the remarkable success of the campaign, this represented less than 10 per cent of the number of poor people who could use credit. In 2009, as the campaign achieved its earlier target, it recalibrated its goal, setting a new target to reach 175 million of the world’s poorest families with credit for self-employment and other business and financial services, and to raise 100 million families above the US one-dollar-a-day threshold as the UN Millennium Development Goals conclude in 2015.

The potency of microfinance as a sustainable, cost-effective and efficient business model for economic empowerment of poor people has now largely been grasped, if somewhat belatedly, by most governments, financial institutions and NGOs in the Middle East and North Africa, although the same claim – with a few notable exceptions – can be made of the donor and development assistance programmes operating in the region. Among the countries lying along the coast and uplands of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin 7–9 million persons from the population of 34.60 million live in economic insecurity and poverty, while increasing credit facilities to hundreds of thousands of self-employed subalterns would assist many poor and dis-advantaged households to reach self-reliance and create tens of thousands of new economic opportunities.

**Microenterprise economies and microenterprise cultures**

Notwithstanding Muhammad Yunus’s desire to see poverty housed in a museum to mankind’s follies; despite its
significant transformative power through its ability to create economic self-reliance, microfinance should not be treated as universal remedy for poverty. Microfinance is merely an instrument: an institutional framework and a business model that can be used to good effect to finance productive resources and household assets for subalterns to create the financial conditions for their own self-reliance and household needs.

At best, microfinance is a medium-term model to help the poor and low-incomed, but in the long term it is not a substitute to improved fiscal, macroeconomic and governance polices or a new political economy that can create sustainable jobs, provide decent work and decrease unemployed through economic growth, and spread wealth through economic modernisation. But in situations of endemic poverty, underdevelopment and conflict, the United Nations, governments and donors are increasingly financing microfinance as a means to support political stability, mitigate poverty, create jobs and promote economic growth. The promotion of microenterprise activity is frequently seen as a way of lifting the enterprising poor out of poverty through their own endeavour, while simultaneously stimulating economic growth. In this context, most governments and donors consider microfinance to be a relatively cost-effective and sustainable means of boot-strapping stressed economies.

The experience of microfinance worldwide indicates that it works most effectively in low to middle-income countries where subalternity and poverty is generalised. There are now major success stories in developing sustainable microfinance in Latin America, Asia, South East Asia, and, lately, the Middle East and North Africa. The two most common
environmental conditions for successful MFIs are credit operations in regions with a high level of urban poverty and a large density of microenterprise activity.

However, the interrelation and dynamics of these elements are often not particularly well understood. The most optimistic visions of microfinance consider microentrepreneurs to be nascent or proto capitalists who can expand and develop the private sector, increase effective demand and open markets for the good of all. In this idealised view, enterprise and the market is seen in one long continuum with poorly remunerated informal micro-enterprises at the low end of the scale and incorporated national enterprises at the top. Moreover, despite the pervasiveness of globalisation, it is disjuncture rather than continuity that links the quite discrete formal and informal economic systems of each country. In such formations, the labour market is largely dominated by the microenterprise sector in which each enterprise provides work for fewer than five workers including the owners of the enterprise.\textsuperscript{21}

Within the microenterprise economy two types of microentrepreneurs coexist. On the one hand, there is the formal microentrepreneur who comes under the regulatory regime of the state at the national and local government levels.\textsuperscript{22} The best performing enterprises are more likely to fit the ideal type of the rational capitalist enterprise calculating ways to improve profits, accumulate business assets, develop their workforce, introduce new technology and grow business activity through market development and the continuous renewal of the factors and forces of production. Such businesses contribute significantly to capital formation, employment and economic growth, despite being constrained
by their small scale. The owners of such businesses are less likely to be poor than informal microentrepreneurs, and some may be relatively wealthy, although many will be relatively poor.

But also common within the microenterprise economy is the informal micro-business that is established as a coping or survival strategy by distressed families. The subaltern segment tends to expand significantly when labour markets contract or when labour markets are structurally unable to absorb the growing workforce. Throughout the MENA region, there are high concentrations of such subaltern enterprises crowded in popular street markets and industrial areas in urban conurbations, where people work for low income and live in substandard housing conditions with limited household assets.

Both types of microenterprise, the formal and informal, share many basic characteristics, but are often sociologically, if not economically, quite distinct (Brandsma and Chaoulia 1997). Yet the lives of informal subaltern micro-entrepreneurs and the business cycles of their enterprises remain an enigma to most economists and policy-makers. What distinguishes subaltern microenterprise from other businesses is that they are:

- usually financed from household savings or loans from families and friends;
- commonly low skilled and dependent on the labour of the owner and their immediate family;
- short of assets, with very low asset value invested in the business; often less than a few hundred US dollars in the tiniest and poorest businesses;
often subject to very insecure tenure;
subject to irregular supplies with inputs of low quality and value;
often produce a relatively low volume of low-quality outputs;
subject to unstable markets that are dependent upon individual customers who may buy irregularly;
usually low in profits due to low trade turnover, although the individual mark-ups can be quite high.

A typical subaltern microentrepreneur may be a mother in Gaza who has lost her husband, or a housewife whose husband has lost his livelihood through unemployment who decides to borrow money from friends and relatives to set up a small street-trading stall to meet her family’s basic needs. Alternatively, he may be a Syrian police officer who retired at 45 years of age with a government pension of USD 120 per month who decides to invest his savings in a tiny grocery business to stabilize his household income because his pension is insufficient to keep his young family from poverty. He may be a Jordanian returnee from the Gulf or an Iraqi refugee in Jordan who has invested his savings in an apartment, but because he has been unable to find work decides to invest his remaining savings in a small grocery store to reduce the insecurity of his family before his income declines any further.

The sociological profile of a typical microentrepreneur in Jordan – from a USAID-funded AMIR study in 2000 – indicates that they are mostly poor. She or he is responsible for a family of seven with household living expenses of JOD 237 (or USD 335) per month and resides in low-value rented accommodation. Most live only on the income of their
business. In 30 per cent of cases, business income is insufficient to meet family expenses, such that 45 per cent are dependent upon income from other family members to bridge this gap. Women business owners are more dependent on family income support to meet household expenses, with 73 per cent of women compared to 22 per cent of men requiring such support. Women’s businesses are commonly not the primary bread-winning activity within the family but an enterprise that provides income support to the family.

In an internal 1997 impact study of clients receiving credit through its women-only solidarity group lending product in Gaza, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) found that the average age of women microentrepreneurs was 41 years. Some 81 per cent were married, 31 per cent were illiterate and their household had an average of 7.4 dependents. Some 95 per cent of women’s businesses were informal and unregistered, 93 per cent were sole proprietors and 86 per cent employed no workers. Most businesses were in the commercial sector (59 per cent), with 22 per cent engaged in industry, 14 per cent in agriculture, usually small animal husbandry, and 6 per cent worked in services. Some 40 per cent of women microentrepreneurs working in commerce worked as clothing traders, while 75 per cent of women in the industrial sector worked in the sewing trade, often working from home. In 75 per cent of cases, women micro-entrepreneurs provided more than half of the families’ monthly income, 45 per cent provided USD 23–143 per month to the household budget and 43 per cent provided USD 144–285 each month. Women most commonly (45 per cent) received income from their business on a daily basis. While almost half of all women enterprise owners had
savings, only 5 per cent had their own bank account (Pollock 1997).

A further sample study of UNRWA’s women clients in Gaza three years later showed that the average client was 44 years of age, 16 per cent were functionally illiterate, 73 per cent were married, 16 per cent widowed, 9 per cent single and 2 per cent divorced. The average household size was eight persons, composed of three adults and five children, where only one member on average worked and produced a regular income. These clients had received from one to 11 loans from UNRWA, with an average of four loans per client. The impact of this microfinance was that 50 per cent of households increased the amount they spent on schooling and school expenses. Some 16 per cent of clients had made investment in household assets and home improvement ranging from USD 100 to USD 12,000, with an average home investment of USD 837. In a one-year period, 39 per cent of households had medical expenses of more than USD 50, which were paid in 21 per cent of cases from the women’s business profit. However, in 58 per cent of instances, this was paid from other household income and in 10 per cent of cases financed by money the family had to borrow for this purpose.

In terms of their business activity, the average cost of the product cycle for these enterprises was USD 693, ranging from as low as seven US dollars to USD 4,888, while the average sales from the product cycle was USD 869, ranging from nine US dollars to USD 5,663. While young children under ten years of age seldom helped in women-run businesses, children between ten and 18 years of age frequently helped out with an average of two children assisting their mother with her business. The principal ways in which people used the profits from their enterprise was first
to buy food (87 per cent), to reinvest in the enterprise (42 per cent), to buy clothing (37 per cent), to pay school expenses (31 per cent), for savings (12 per cent) and for other household purchases (5 per cent).

A September 2006 Impact and Market Research Report on UNRWA’s microfinance activities in Palestine undertaken by Planet Finance found that average client was 37 years of age, with the median of age of 36 years (UNRWA, 2006). Almost 70 per cent of clients were between 18 and 40 years old, of whom 58 per cent were women and 42 per cent were men. Male microentrepreneurs were on average younger than women. Some 86 per cent of clients were married and 11 per cent were single. Only 3.4 per cent of clients had no education but 7.6 per cent were unable to read a letter. While the majority had gone to school, only 34 per cent completed their secondary education and just 11 per cent had a university degree. More than 50 per cent of clients were refugees. In terms of household budgets, on average 46 per cent of the monthly budget was spent on food. Sixty per cent of clients indicated that they were especially concerned about their economic situation.

Most business activities (75 per cent) were located outside home and just 40 per cent of businesses were formally registered, with 56 per cent established within the previous five years, 23 per cent were active for six-ten years and 21 per cent were more than ten years old. Typical of subaltern enterprise, the overwhelming majority of the UNRWA borrowers (82 per cent) sell their products and services without any intermediary, with 47 per cent selling their products and services in shops and 34 per cent selling them in the market. Again, characteristically, almost a third
(31 per cent) purchased their inputs on a daily basis, with 29 per cent purchasing them several times a week; while 20 per cent did this once a month. Such subalterns have insufficient working capital and resources, with 34 per cent claiming this as a reason for not buying more products; second, 26 per cent had insufficient customers which prevented them from buying more products. Additionally, in order of priority, clients cited ‘security reason’, ‘transport problems’ and ‘insufficient stock area’. The inflow of business cash is daily for most clients (52 per cent), monthly for 21 per cent and weekly for 20 per cent. This is mostly matched with their sales patterns, with client sales most commonly occurring daily for 56 per cent of enterprises and several times a week for 21 per cent. Some 43 per cent were unable to sell more because they could not afford enough inputs, while 19 per cent suggested that this was due to lack of demand. In order to increase revenues, 63 per cent of clients needed more liquidity, financing and capital to increase sales, while 11 per cent said only better economic conditions would improve sales. Another 7.3 per cent needed additional support for their business and 5.2 per cent believed their sales would rise if there were fewer Israeli checkpoints.

Clients used their business profits for many needs, but almost universally 91 per cent used part of their profits for family expenses, while 54 per cent used part of the profits for reinvestment and 26 per cent used some profits to improve their housing conditions. The study showed that profits are significantly correlated with the length of the clients’ participation in UNRWA’s micro-finance activities, with old clients having the highest monthly median profit at NIS 500 (USD 114).\textsuperscript{28} This median decreased to NIS 250 for medium-term clients and dropped to NIS 125 for the new
clients. While there was a positive correlation between microentrepreneurs’ profits and their length of participation in the programme, the median profits of all clients were very low. The study showed that 50 per cent of clients sold on average goods worth NIS 500 per month from which they gained NIS 250, while 25 per cent had average monthly sales of NIS 500–3,000 that garnered a profit ranging from NIS 250 to NIS 1,500. Only 25 per cent of the sample clients realised a monthly profit of more than NIS 1,500 (USD 342). An econometric analysis of the impact of the programme on the monthly sales and profit, found that there was a significant difference between male and female clients. On average, males realised about NIS 1,496 more profit and about NIS 4,611 more sales than females. However, since the variables related to duration (old, medium, new) are not statistically significant, the mean monthly profit for all clients was about the same.

A comparison between employment in the previous two-year period compared to the survey period showed little change, with almost 60 per cent of clients having no employees in either period. Moreover, the proportion of clients who had employees decreased with the increase of the number of employees. In other words, the number of microenterprises employing, for example, ten persons is less than the number of microenterprises employing one person. On average, more than 60 per cent of clients are self-employed with no employees, 15 per cent employed one paid full-time employee, and 5 per cent employed one paid part-time employee, while 18 per cent employed one unpaid employee. Ten per cent of clients employed two unpaid employees. Four per cent employed
two paid full-time employees and 2 per cent employed two paid part-time employees.

Among these clients, 57 per cent contributed 100 per cent of household expenditure, 7.1 per cent contributed up to 9 per cent and 5.5 per cent contributed up to 50 per cent of the expenses. There were more males than females financing up to 50 per cent of their households’ budgets. However, in contributions ranging from 51 to 100 per cent there were more females than males. Data regression results of age, gender, marital status, oldness of the client activity and the wealth of the client three years ago showed that when clients’ activities are old (more than ten years) their contribution to the household budget is important. The regression showed that males contributed 32 per cent less than females and non-married clients contributed 13 per cent less than married persons to the household budget.

A corresponding impact assessment study of UNRWA clients undertaken in Syria in October 2008 found that the average client age is 39 years old with the majority in the range between 31 to 40 years of age. 73 per cent are male, 80 per cent are married and 25 per cent are Palestine refugees (Sorrasal 2009). Nearly all persons interviewed considered themselves literate or able to read a letter. Four per cent received no formal schooling, 32 per cent had less than preparatory schooling, 16 per cent had a secondary education and 16 per cent completed higher education. On average, microentrepreneurs’ households in UNRWA’s programme in Syria were composed of 4.4 members, with 2.6 adults (18 years of age or older) and 1.8 dependants (under 18 years old) per household. More than a 28 per cent of the sample did not have any children, while 67 per cent of the respondents did
not pay rent on their homes, indicating that they either owned their homes or had other family arrangements.

Most clients indicated that the loan instalment was the second most important household expense (20 per cent) at a median value of SYP 5,225 per month, after the provision of food (40 per cent) at a median value of SYP 10,000 (approximately USD 215) per month, while general expenses was the third priority (10 per cent), followed by others, such as participation in a ROSCA, rent, transportation, health, educational services, etc. Some 33 per cent of microenterprises surveyed had formal tax cards, while the rest (67 per cent) were informal. The gender of the business owner affected registration status as only 15 per cent of businesses that were run by women were registered compared to 42 per cent for men. The level of registration is directly related to the level of wealth, with lower registration for clients in the poorest quintile. Some 20 per cent of microfinance clients ran home-based businesses and, as in other countries in the MENA region, these businesses were mainly run by women clients with 75 per cent of home-based enterprises run by women. The frequency of home-run businesses was also dependent on variables such as the level of asset ownership of the microentrepreneur, with the proportion of respondents working at home increasing significantly as the level of asset ownership decreased. In addition, some 50 per cent of clients sold on average SYP 50,000 per month and earned less than SYP 25,000 monthly, while 25 per cent had average monthly sales of between SYP 20,000 and 30,000 with profits between SYP 10,000 and 20,000. Only 25 per cent of the sample sold more than SYP 100,000 and earned over SYP 30,000 in monthly profit. In terms of gender, men made on average
SYP 13,404 more profit and conducted about SYP 102,565 more sales than women.

Thus, these various empirical studies from Palestine, Jordan and Syria indicate that subalterns are more likely to be poor people clinging to insecure economic activity as a form of hope and survival rather than a burgeoning class of small capitalists. Both types coexist, live and work in the same market environment, but the former are more numerous than the latter. Consequently, subaltern microentrepreneurship paradoxically forms both a reserve army of labour and a reservoir of capital. With the informal microenterprise capitalised for as little as a few hundred dollars, it is one of the most basic survival strategies of the subaltern, while the more formal microenterprise is often creating an enterprise that the owners see as offering a better future and inheritance for their children. By unlocking this enigma the microfinance practitioner is better able to design appropriate products that can create financial security and economic stability for the poorest, while offering the capitalisation that will allow the more economically ambitious to transform their lives beyond poverty and their subaltern state.

The microfinance market and financing gap

Less poor than sub-Saharan Africa, the spectre of subaltern poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment still haunts the MENA region. Poverty is rife across the North African arch from Mauritania on the Atlantic coast to Somalia on the Indian Ocean, winding across the Arabian Sea into Yemen. This arc of rural poverty contains the highest rates of hunger, infant mortality, illiteracy and infectious disease, and the lowest rates of primary education, gender equality, maternal health and access to safe water and environmental health in
the Arab world (UNDP 2003). These impoverished populations are largely composed of rural smallholders and peasant farmers that have limited access to economic, educational and health opportunities.

In contradistinction, subalterns in the societies of the Levantine countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin are predominantly urbanised, where the majority of the poor – with the exception of Syria – live in towns and cities rather than in the countryside. This is particularly true of Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon where the process of urbanisation and de-peasantization took place earlier and more rapidly. In the case of Palestine, this was due to economic alienation during the three-decade long British Mandate which culminated in rural displacement during the Nakba under conditions of war, flight and ethnic cleansing. The rising tide of urbanisation in Jordan and Lebanon – but especially in Jordan after both 1948 and 1967 – was in part driven by the large influx of banished Palestinian refugees who flocked to the large cities and major towns to form part of the ethno-urban fabric of the region. With a population that is larger than the combined populations of Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, Syria was less affected by the arrival of Palestinian refugees and urbanisation, while widespread, has developed at a slower pace, so that today rural poverty remains more extensive and deeper than urban poverty. The urban demographics and economic underdevelopment of the region has created a unique subaltern mosaic that has enabled the very rapid development of a significant microfinance sector in the region since the 1990s.
However, the microfinance industry in the region is still underfinanced and partial to microcredit. In order to progress, the sector needs to broaden its capacity by adding new services that will create inclusive financial services for the regions’ subalterns, including saving and insurance.

In a 1997 study of microfinance in the MENA region, the World Bank estimated that there was a potential regional microfinance market of 4.65 million borrowers, but this market faced a substantial financing gap of USD 1.44 billion that inhibited the prospects for sustained large-scale financial intermediation that could positively impact on the lives of the poorest. At that time, it was estimated that there were 54 microfinance institutions operating in seven MENA countries that were offering financial services to the poorest businesses. Between them these institutions had established credit outreach to just 2 per cent of potential borrowers in the region. Twenty-two of these institutions (or 41 per cent) operated in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, with none operating in Syria.  

The data for the counties where UNRWA operates showed that there was a market potential of 440,000 microentrepreneurs facing a financing gap of USD 182.82 million (Brandsma and Chaoualia 1997). The credit outreach of the 22 microfinance institutions in this region was generally more successful than in other regions with 26,603 active clients holding an outstanding portfolio of USD 31.46 million. However, although institutional development was stronger, the combined outreach of these institutions provided micro-finance to just 6 per cent of the potential borrowers who could benefit from such financial intermediation.
This study showed that the two smallest economies in the region – with the smallest microenterprise markets – both had the highest depth of client outreach. It indicated that Palestine and Lebanon each had a market of just 43,000 potential clients, yet microfinance in Palestine provided relatively more depth of outreach than elsewhere in the region, with credit being delivered to almost a quarter of potential clients who between them held loans worth USD 4.64 million. Outreach in Lebanon ranked second, relatively, with 17 per cent of potential borrowers holding loans worth USD 6.20 million.

*Table 1.1 Estimate of microfinance market in UNRWA’s areas of operation, 1997*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of potential borrowers</th>
<th>GDP per capita (US dollars)</th>
<th>Potential outstanding microfinance (US dollars)</th>
<th>Current outstanding microfinance (US dollars)</th>
<th>Financing gap (US dollars)</th>
<th>No. of active borrowers</th>
<th>Outreach gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>155,000</td>
<td>1,451</td>
<td>74,218,650</td>
<td>20,624,000</td>
<td>53,594,650</td>
<td>9,697</td>
<td>145,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>3,046</td>
<td>45,222,740</td>
<td>6,195,000</td>
<td>37,027,740</td>
<td>7,111</td>
<td>35,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>203,000</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>75,028,800</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75,028,800</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>203,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>21,810,030</td>
<td>4,640,000</td>
<td>17,170,030</td>
<td>9,795</td>
<td>33,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>444,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>216,280,220</td>
<td>31,459,000</td>
<td>182,821,220</td>
<td>26,603</td>
<td>417,397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brandsma and Chaoualia (1997: 37)

Syria and Jordan had the largest microfinance markets in the region, estimated at 203,000 and 155,000 potential borrowers, respectively. But at the time of the study there were no microfinance institutions operating in Syria and the microfinance institutions in Jordan provided outreach to just 6 per cent of the potential market with an outstanding portfolio of USD 20.64 million to fewer than 10,000 borrowers.

The World Bank conducted a follow-up study in 1999, which found that the number of microfinance institutions had grown by almost 60 per cent to 35 institutions, of which 16 were
classified as microfinance institutions and 19 as unemployment programmes (Brandsma and Hart 1999). The study indicated that unemployment programmes were not designed to provide sustainable microfinance services to the poor, but to reduce unemployment either through providing investment capital loans to small and medium size businesses or directly creating businesses through loans to the unemployed. (Brandsma and Hart 1999: 18) While some government-funded unemployment programmes provided a significant volume of financial intermediation, most programmes were considered unsustainable and unviable in the long term as they were unable to meet their basic costs and provided uneconomical loans with highly subsidised or zero interest.

Of the 16 microfinance institutions that it identified, the study considered just half of these (including UNRWA’s microfinance programme) to be best practice institutions capable of viably sustaining their operations (Brandsma and Hart 1999: 2–3). These eight best practice institutions served the bulk of clients in the region; ranging from 66 per cent of clients in Jordan to 96 per cent in Palestine.

In the two-year period between studies, the combined outreach capacity of all institutions in the region increased by 60 per cent as the portfolio grew from 26,603 to 42,666 active loans, while the outstanding portfolio grew over two-fold from USD 31.46 million to USD 67.22 million. However, a significant portion of this was accounted for by USD 25.56 million that was outstanding in just 5,320 active loans funded through the three Jordanian unemployment programmes. While the portfolio in Palestine was stagnant, the growing outreach in the region at this time was being led by significant
developments in the microfinance sector in Jordan that saw an increase in the number of best practice institutions.  

Table 1.2 Estimate of microfinance market in UNRWA’s areas of operation, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Palestine</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of microfinance programmes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of unemployment programmes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of active microfinance clients</td>
<td>17,777</td>
<td>4,438</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7,264</td>
<td>29,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of active unemployment clients</td>
<td>5,320</td>
<td>6,330</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>13,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding microfinance portfolio (US$)</td>
<td>17,599,098</td>
<td>2,018,103</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,136,267</td>
<td>21,753,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding Unemployment portfolio (US$)</td>
<td>25,599,098</td>
<td>8,676,971</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4,193,339</td>
<td>38,469,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. outstanding balance of microfinance loans (US$)</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. outstanding balance of unemployment loans (US$)</td>
<td>4,710</td>
<td>1,371</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,728</td>
<td>2,917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank

One decade later, in 2009, the microfinance market in MENA region had grown substantially with 69 microfinance institutions maintaining assets of USD 1.7 billion. These institutions served 2.5 million active borrowers with a gross loan portfolio of USD 1.2 billion. They also served 85,513 depositors who held deposits worth USD 134 million.  

At this time, 20 microfinance institutions Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria owned assets of almost USD 500 million, serving 324,016 borrowers with a gross loan portfolio of USD 324.8 million. In Palestine they also held deposits of USD 131.7 million for 29,302 savers. Thus, the outreach gap established by the World Bank in 1997 had been closed in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.
The most significant development in this later period was the opening of the microfinance frontier in Syria. Although still much smaller than elsewhere with just 6,778 active clients with a gross loan portfolio of just USD 3.10 million, it has the largest population and the greatest number of poor subalterns in the region. Syria has the region’s principal microfinance market and as barriers to the entry of new microfinance institutions had been effectively lifted through positive government legislation and policy, it may soon have larger microfinance institutions than elsewhere. ³⁸

But until today, the scale of microfinance is most developed in Jordan where seven primary institutions provide various forms of microfinance to the microenterprise sector. At the end of 2008, these institutions provided loans to 125,875 clients valued at USD 79 million, reaching approximately 81 per cent of potential borrowers and closing the previously established portfolio gap. ³⁹ The four largest microfinance institutions provided 84 per cent of outreach in the sector and shared 77 per cent of the total portfolio. Moreover, Jordan had a significantly higher proportion of women clients than elsewhere, with 80 per cent of loans financing the activities of subaltern women.

*Table 1.3 Basic microfinance outreach indicators in the region, end December 2009*
### Table 1.4 Basic microfinance outreach indicators in Jordan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outreach Indicators</th>
<th>Microfinance Institutions</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Palestine</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total assets</td>
<td></td>
<td>168,800,000</td>
<td>51,000,000</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
<td>265,900,000</td>
<td>489,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross loan portfolio</td>
<td></td>
<td>152,100,000</td>
<td>43,700,000</td>
<td>3,100,000</td>
<td>125,900,000</td>
<td>324,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of active borrowers</td>
<td></td>
<td>195,173</td>
<td>71,319</td>
<td>6,778</td>
<td>50,746</td>
<td>324,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. outstanding balance ($)</td>
<td></td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1,075</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>2,223</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposits</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>131,700,000</td>
<td>131,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of depositors</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>29,302</td>
<td>29,302</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MIX

### Table 1.4 Basic microfinance outreach indicators in Jordan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XNV</th>
<th>Portfolio (US dollars)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Active Loans</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMCO</td>
<td>15,922,428</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>11,552</td>
<td>9.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Watani</td>
<td>15,311,580</td>
<td>19.39</td>
<td>20,900</td>
<td>16.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFW</td>
<td>15,405,639</td>
<td>19.51</td>
<td>34,349</td>
<td>27.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamweelcom</td>
<td>14,537,114</td>
<td>18.41</td>
<td>39,352</td>
<td>31.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMC</td>
<td>4,647,175</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>2,946</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRWA</td>
<td>3,640,341</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>3,711</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINCA</td>
<td>2,394,709</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>9,062</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7,139,890</td>
<td>9.04</td>
<td>4,103</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78,998,876</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>125,875</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Planet Rating

Thus, if we take the 1997 market baseline established by the World Bank study, the Jordanian microfinance industry has been exceptionally successful in closing the outreach gap, with higher rates of market penetration than other countries in the region. But this has been achieved with relatively low
levels of product diversification and almost all institutions retailing identical credit products with a high concentration on women clients that is not wholly reflective of the subaltern market.\textsuperscript{40} Jordanian microfinance has developed a highly commercialised approach that has enabled the senior institutions to transition from grant-based financing to borrowing from local banks and other financial intermediaries to refinance portfolios. It is a significant success story for the commercial approach to microcredit. However, while the major institutions are financially self-sufficient and commercially profitable, the sector is marked by an under capacity that is limiting the creation of a more financially inclusive foundation for Jordanian microfinance.

Microfinance has an older history in Palestine than elsewhere in the region, but over the past decade its advance has been stymied by economic repression that has squeezed the microenterprise and subaltern community through a series of multiple economic crises since September 2000.\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, while its microfinance market is quite narrow, the informal pole of the microenterprise sector has increased considerably as a result of economic repression, rising unemployment and poverty. Thus, despite the negative affects of various economic crises the Palestinian microfinance sector was still able to project growth and development, but not as robustly as in Jordan where the economy was stable.

Thus, by 2008, more than eight institutions financed 33,637 loans worth USD 64.79 million, reaching 78 per cent of the potential borrower market estimated by the World Bank a decade earlier. Moreover, the combined portfolio of these institutions had closed the previously estimated financing gap
by a threefold increase on the previous market estimate. Over the past decade these microfinance institutions raised the client base by 240 per cent and the credit portfolio by almost 1,300 per cent.\(^{42}\)

In 2008, three leading institutions, UNRWA, FATEN and Ryada, jointly shared 55 per cent of customers and financed 50 per cent of the value of loans in the market. UNRWA alone held more than a quarter of these loans (27 per cent) and accounted for 17 per cent of the value of the portfolio.

With a similar size of population, the market potential for microfinance in Lebanon is comparable to that of Palestine, although the Lebanese per capita GDP is higher. Over the past decade the Lebanese microfinance market has remained quite narrow with few new best practice ventures being established. Although microfinance activity has grown over the past decade, it has yet to bridge the financing and outreach gaps established by the World Bank in 1997. Thus, by 2008, Lebanese microfinance reached 64 per cent of potential borrowers and financed 59 per cent of the potential outstanding portfolio, with a financing gap USD 18.54 million remaining\(^{43}\) (Abdel-Baki 2009).

**Table 1.5 Basic microfinance outreach indicators in Palestine**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MFI as of Dec. 2008</th>
<th>Portfolio (US dollars)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Active loans</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNRWA</td>
<td>10,857,705</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>9,194</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATEN</td>
<td>10,516,002</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>4,954</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryada (CHF)</td>
<td>10,986,624</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>4,374</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACAD</td>
<td>2,259,741</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2,542</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFI as of Dec. 2008</td>
<td>Portfolio (US dollars)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Active loans</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADR</td>
<td>1,683,481</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEP</td>
<td>1,785,000</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameen (CHF)</td>
<td>10,639,444</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>11,238</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makhzoumi</td>
<td>426,447</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRWA</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1,290</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Majmoua</td>
<td>9,320,446</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>12,017</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAWL</td>
<td>1,115,335</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26,680,153</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>27,579</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Abdel-Baki (2009)

Despite being unable to close the earlier gap, there was growth within the sector over the past decade as borrower outreach increased by 288 per cent and the portfolio grew by 330 per cent. However, this gap is unlikely to close completely unless the narrow institutional base of best practice Lebanese microfinance institutions is broadened.
through the entry and creation of new microfinance institutions. Until now the market is dominated by just two best practice institutions, Al-Majmoua and Ameen, which between them account for 84 per cent of the client base and 75 per cent of the market share. However, their relative weight diminishes significantly as recent studies indicate a market gap at 89 per cent in a potential microfinance market of USD 286 million (Abdel-Baki 2009).

The subaltern population and the microfinance market in Syria is the largest of any in the region. It is an open frontier where the vast majority of subaltern microenterprise owners have no access to either formal banking or microfinance services. The general market can be conservatively estimated at between 200,000 and 1,000,000 potential borrowers. While the World Bank’s estimated potential outstanding portfolio of USD 75 million may be too conservative, it is a useful indicator of the level of financing needed to begin to build an effective microfinance industry in Syria from its current low starting point.

When the World Bank undertook its first microfinance surveys in 1997 and 1999 there were no microfinance institutions operating in Syria. Subaltern microentrepreneurs depended on saving, family and the informal financing – including trader and money-lender credit – to finance business activity as the public banking sector provided little credit to them and private sector banks did not exist. Since then a number of new microfinance institutions have been established, but they still have limited market impact as they are very small with the majority facing significant capital limitations. All have limited infrastructure and there is a significant need to expand the number and geographical
location of their branch office networks if microfinance is to have any significant impact on the lives of subalterns in Syria.

Table 1.7 Basic microfinance outreach indicators in the Syrian Arab Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MFI as of Dec. 2008</th>
<th>Portfolio (US dollars)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Active loans</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FMFI</td>
<td>13,870,004</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>14,690</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRWA</td>
<td>2,066,986</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>4,588</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firdos</td>
<td>2,260,103</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP – Jabal al-Hoss</td>
<td>1,750,000</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19,947,093</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>22,778</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Planet Rating

The four small microfinance operations that were established during the past few years present the latent nucleus of the future microfinance industry in Syria. In 2008 these four institutions financed 22,778 loans with a portfolio of USD 19.79 million, reaching just 11 per cent of the potential borrower market that World Bank estimated decade earlier. The minimal financing gap in Syria is estimated USD 55 million although the extended gap is more likely to be USD 355 million.

By 2008, the only two best practice institutions, the First Micro Finance Institution (FMFI) and UNRWA, financed 85 per cent of loans and held 80 per cent of the portfolio. FMFI was the largest institution with almost 15,000 clients and a portfolio valued at USD 13.87 million.
Although it started later than other countries in the region, with the development of supportive microfinance policies and light regulation, the Syrian microfinance sector seems set to develop the biggest microfinance industry in Eastern Mediterranean area.

**UNRWA and microfinance** (UNRWA 2010)

Over the past two decades UNRWA’s microfinance programme has invested USD 338 million in loans to 298,500 clients, mostly in Palestine and most commonly to Palestine refugees. The microfinance department is run as a going concern that must fully meet its operating costs from its credit operations. Thus, the operating costs of the department are financed by the interest clients pay on loans. The operating expenses of USD 6.67 million in 2010 and USD 8.17 million in 2011 were fully funded from its operating revenues that generated a net income/profit of USD 1.11 million in 2010 and USD 0.78 million in 2011.

UNRWA’s microfinance programme is a unique within the United Nation system as it is the only operationally self-sufficient, best practice microfinance institution nested in a UN agency. As it expanded its microfinance programme from the West Bank and Gaza into Jordan and Syria in 2003, UNRWA created one of the few models of a multinational microfinance institution operating in numerous jurisdictions simultaneously. Despite short-term bouts of retrenchment in West Bank and Gaza since September 2000, and most recently Syria in 2011, this model has enabled it to become operationally self-sufficient, financially self-reliant and profitable, while continuing to increase its outreach to an increasing number of subaltern clients each year. It remains the premier microfinance operation in Palestine, the only
micro-finance in Syria to have reached full operations self-sufficiency and profitability. While still relatively small in Jordan, it continues to grow while covering its costs. Over the next half decade, UNRWA plans to develop the programme into one of the most prominent microfinance institutions in the region.

The historical development of the programme involved transforming it from a small-scale enterprise credit programme that was established in Gaza 1991 into a regular microfinance programme. Between 1994 and 2000 the programme grew rapidly and efficiently, such that in the four years from 1997 to 2000 it was able to cover its full operational costs. Until the start of the Intifada in September 2000, the programme’s outreach grew exponentially from a starting point of just 232 loans annually to 12,000 loans a year at the end of the period. During the same period its lending grew from USD 1.67 million to USD 13.75 million a year. However, like its clients and the business community in general, the programme had to withstand the maelstrom of economic repression, closure, insecurity and instability that disrupted business activity and compressed markets in Palestine, in some cases to the point of collapse.
During the two-year period 2001–2 the programme’s outreach fell to a low point of just 7,489 loans valued at only USD 5.16 million. As a result of reprioritisation of its lending activities, the programme made a significant recovery in 2003 when it exceeded its previous outreach level through the financing of 12,342 loans, although it was unable to restore its former portfolio, merely financing USD 8.22 million by the end of 2003.

However, despite the continuing violence, closure and frozen peace process within Palestine, the programme adapted to the conflict conditions and recovered steadily, such that by 2004 its outreach had increased beyond its pre-Intifada highpoint, reaching a new milestone in 2005 when it financed 22,000 loans valued at USD 20.5 million. However, the programme slumped again in 2006, due to the restriction imposed by Israel as a result of the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the

**Figure 1.2 Annual outreach, 1994–2011**

During the two-year period 2001–2 the programme’s outreach fell to a low point of just 7,489 loans valued at only USD 5.16 million. As a result of reprioritisation of its lending activities, the programme made a significant recovery in 2003 when it exceeded its previous outreach level through the financing of 12,342 loans, although it was unable to restore its former portfolio, merely financing USD 8.22 million by the end of 2003.

However, despite the continuing violence, closure and frozen peace process within Palestine, the programme adapted to the conflict conditions and recovered steadily, such that by 2004 its outreach had increased beyond its pre-Intifada highpoint, reaching a new milestone in 2005 when it financed 22,000 loans valued at USD 20.5 million. However, the programme slumped again in 2006, due to the restriction imposed by Israel as a result of the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the
outhing of the Palestinian Authority. This new crisis was deeply felt in Gaza, which had to write off and provision more than 2,000 bad debts worth USD 2.2 million. However, the West Bank was cushioned from this crisis, while the new operations that had been established in Jordan and Syria at the end of 2003 began to mature and provided additional growth capacity in the portfolio. Thus, from 2007 the portfolio again began to grow quite rapidly and by 2011 it financed 40,000 loans worth USD 44 million.

By 2011, the programme had an infrastructure of 21 branch offices, four regional/country offices and a headquarters that is more extensive than many banks. The programme’s credit outreach to subaltern communities is offered through a range of five business products that include two specialised women-only instruments. It also provides a home improvement and home loan product and a consumer loan product to the low-waged. With a cadre of almost 400 staff delivering profitable and self-sufficient microfinance services to microentrepreneurs, households and consumers across the region the programme is run as a going concern that is now a considerable business operation.

As one of the larger microfinance institutions in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin, UNRWA has reached a crossroads with its micro-finance programme. As a significant, but somewhat marginal operation in a large UN agency, it will continue to grow relatively slowly as it is drip-fed limited and scarce donor grants. Alternatively, if it follows the example of many other institutions and transforms into a separate and independent private microfinance company it will be freed from dependency of donor funding and will be able to access capital from investors and
depositors while refinancing its portfolio from loans from local and international banks,

international finance institutions and other institutional creditors that will enable it to grow more rapidly and serve thousands more subaltern clients than it is currently able to do within its current institutional form.\textsuperscript{56}

**Notes**

The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or by UNRWA.

It is an allegorical reference to Gayatari Chakravorty Spivak’s article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, which is often considered the founding text of post-colonial studies. While certainly not wishing to discuss microfinance within the narrative strategies of post-colonial studies, the notion of the ‘subaltern’ as developed through the Indian subaltern studies group is a more useful means of understanding who microfinance clients are rather than the standard generic reference to them as poor people and low-income households.

While much subaltern enterprise activity takes place on the margins of the economy, it is not necessarily economically marginal. In many low-income and developing counties the microenterprise sector (employing fewer than five workers) is often very significant, producing a substantial share of GDP and accounting for a high proportion of private-sector employment.

It should therefore be no surprise that many of the earliest promoters of micro-finance have been NGOs and civil society organisations driven by strong moral, social and political
visions to support and empower the subaltern. Since communities of the subaltern tend to mass, these organisations realised very early that to serve subaltern communities effectively this had to be done on a sustainable and scalable basis. As such the local leadership of the microfinance industry were quick to create programmes of national scale that adapted and built their service using financial tools and management resources from the finance, business and banking sectors with which to power their vision of working with subaltern communities. This brought them into alliance with western NGOs and the western development assistance industry to finance the growth and development of the microfinance sector, which was increasingly seen to be a relatively low-cost intervention based on its ability to be self-sustaining, self-reliant and profitable. With an increasing number of microfinance institutions achieving profitability, the end of the 1990s saw the entry of specialised microfinance investment vehicles together with an increasing number of consultants and professionals from the modern finance sector playing an increasing role in agenda setting for industry. While such relationships have helped to power the industry into a global community of practitioners, donors and investors financing tens of millions of clients each year with credits of tens of billions of US dollars, there is often an anxious undercurrent in such strategic alliances and instrumental partnerships, where profound differences of vision about the nature of microfinance are displaced and mediated through purely technical discourse of financialisation, financial performance and financial ratios. The neurotic aspect of this torsion was seen in the half-hearted and grudging endorsements with which many western stakeholders in the microfinance industry greeted the joint endowment of the 2006 Nobel
Peace Prize on Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank. A notable exception to such niggardliness was Jacques Attali who advanced the idea that the Peace Prize in this case would merit being combined with the Nobel Prize for Economics. For information of the NGO background to the Palestinian microfinance industry see (Pollock 2009).

While UNRWA is committed to building inclusive financial services for its clients, the maxim it uses to encapsulate its institutional mission and vision is ‘Realizing Self-Reliance’.


The two recent notable – not to say notorious – examples has been the issue of an initial public offering (IPO) of Compartamos in Mexico and SKS in India. In April 2007, Banco Compartamos, which began as a microfinance institution in 1990, became the first former microfinance institution to launch itself on the stock exchange. Its initial IPO was 13 times oversubscribed and caused the share price to increase 22 per cent in the first day of trading. This IPO may mark a significant move from conventional socially responsible investors and donors to mainstream commercial investors and fund managers among a tiny portion of the most profitable microfinance institutions. SKS (www.sksindia.com) is India’s largest micro-finance institution with 5.8 million clients. In July 2010, it became the first Indian microfinance institution to raise shares through an IPO. The offering was hugely successful as – like Compartamos – it was 13 times oversubscribed with a valuation of at USD 1.5 billion with investments by Morgan Stanley, JP Morgan and the George Soros Quantum Fund. Despite the initial high evaluation share prices continued to climb and just over a month after the initial float they had
increased by 42 per cent. See Rosenberg (2007). Also see Chen et al. (2010).

Uncritical bias, frequently coloured by elite haughtiness, middle-class prejudice and professional myopia, can blind bankers to the potential, capacity and security of banking with subalterns. The current situation in Palestine provides a useful case in point: In September 2009, UNRWA’s microfinance programme started to participate in the national credit bureau run by the Palestinian Monetary Authority, where 20 banks and three microfinance institutions, including UNRWA, submit lists of all new clients financed each month to the credit register. For the past two years UNRWA’s clients account for 10–13 per cent of all new credit facilities opened by the Palestinian finance system each month – although only accounting between 1–2 per cent of the value of such credits – which indicates the depth and scale that microfinance interventions can achieve when compared with standard bank credit.

The human capital of microfinance is a vital part of its success. The legions of loan officers in microfinance institutions do not spend their time in back offices calculating payment schedules and scoring client loan applications, they are in the field meeting clients and customers in their enterprises and homes, talking to their customers and suppliers, meeting their family and friends, talking to municipal officials and other service providers so that they have a deep knowledge of the customer, his/her community and networks, which is also invariably the community of the loan officer.

A ROSCA is a group of individuals who agree to combine for a defined period of time in order to save and borrow together,
normally through one individual receiving the lump sum from
the collective deposit that are paid into the fund at fixed
periods. ROSCAs are ever present phenomena across time
and place and are among the most elementary forms of
collective financial cooperation. They are found in every
country, in workshops, factories, offices, villages, schools,
hospitals and prisons.

See Otero and Rhyne (1994).

In 1996, the Grameen Bank was serving two million clients
through 1,050 branch offices located throughout Bangladesh.
Some 94 per cent of its clients were women, mainly landless
villagers. Over a three-year period between 1994 and 1996 it
disbursed loans valued at USD 0.75 billion at a rate of around
USD 30–40 million each month making it one of the largest
microfinance operations in the world. See Bornstein (1996).
By August 2010, it had over eight million members that were
served through 2,563 branch offices and it was financing
loans worth USD 130.74 million each month. See details on
www.grameen-info.org/
index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=453&Itemid=527.

The main criticism levelled at the early Grameen Bank was
that it operated with an unsustainable business model that
required an extremely high level of donor subsidy and
subvention to survive and cover its costs. Grameen’s response
to such criticism was to reform and re-engineer its business
model through the introduction of deposit and saving services
to the poor, which enabled it to become financially
sustainable. In August 2010, Grameen had an outstanding
portfolio of USD 909.64 million and held member and
non-member deposits valued at USD 1.35 billion. The scale
and inventiveness of Grameen is profound, since in addition
to its regular microfinance services, it has financed the construction of 685,000 homes and provides loans to over 90,000 beggars. The new model, Grameen II, is both financially self-sufficient and profitable and retains its commitment to serving the subaltern with poor women accounting for 96 per cent of its clients. Thus, Yunus is not only the world’s premier ‘banker to the poor’, he is also one of the few leaders of the microfinance industry who is unapologetic about his mission to serve the subaltern, not just as poor people but as people with political agency. Yunus’s latest ideas of creating social businesses should be seen as a continuation of the ethos of the Grameen Bank as a unique experiment in developing market-based enterprise to serve subaltern people. As such, he remains deeply sceptical and troubled with the financialisation of microfinance institutions, such as Compartamos and SKS, and the turn to share issue on the stock markets. He sees this as a twisting of the vision of microfinance to benefit investors rather than subalterns. See *Bloomberg Business Week*, 13 December 2007: www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_52/b4064045920958.htm.

The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation estimate that there are 500 million poor people in the world running profitable microenterprises. Many of these claim that lack of credit is the primary constraint on business growth. See ‘International Finance Corporation and Microfinance’, Washington, DC: IFC. www.ifc.org.

The earliest promoters of microfinance in the MENA region were USAID and Save the Children – USA. Both played significant early roles, often in partnership, in developing sustainable microfinance programmes in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt and Morocco. USAID has done this both
through early capitalisation and capacity building with emerging microfinance institutions, while Save the Children helped establish successful microfinance activities under its institutional umbrella and then spun them off into locally incorporated microfinance institutions. Surprisingly, the development assistance of the European Union has made almost no contribution to microfinance in the region; its financial assistance has tended to focus on high-cost employment-creation activities through small, medium and large business loans. While the potential economic impact may be significant, the evidence of successful SME interventions remains sparse. The results of SME interventions such as the Development Employment Fund (DEF) in Jordan have been disappointing. In the case of DEF, it only succeeded in creating positive results after it transformed itself into a national apex fund providing refinancing capital for the Jordanian microfinance sector. Similarly, the large-scale employment programme established in Syria through the Agency for Combating Unemployment produced limited economic impact on the SME sector. The characteristic limitations of such projects is that they are more concerned with establishing or supporting businesses in order to create jobs, rather than setting up sustainable finance operations. This often results in the non-payment and high defaults on SME loans.

Starting a microenterprise can be a significant survival strategy for the economically subaltern. Through small investments and self-employed entrepreneurship they can find ways to use their potential labour power – for which the formal economic sector often has no use – to generate income. It is very often the alienation of the
urban poor from the modern economic sector that forces them to utilise their labour in enterprises that pay much less than unskilled work in the formal economic sector. Many subalterns would instantly trade their low-reward entrepreneurialism for low-paid employment, as the later often brings more security than the former.

The UN through agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) have provided financial and technical assistance support to NGOs and government to establish local microfinance institutions, some which have become very successful, e.g. ECLEDA in Cambodia, which was established as a UNDP project developed to become the largest private bank in Cambodia that has now expanded its operations into Laos.

Few microfinance practitioners, or indeed academics dealing with subalterns, poverty and the informal sector, have explored the link connecting support for micro-finance with economic reform and structural adjustment programmes, while the Breton Woods institutions often seek to promote self-reliance through microfinance as a self-help alternative to nascent state welfarism.

US non-government organisations and USAID have been among the most avid supporters of microfinance development and the work of Gemini and Accion International in Latin America and the microfinance specialists affiliated with the Harvard Institute for Development in Indonesia have pioneered the recent advances in the former Soviet Union, the Balkans and the Middle East.

An increasing number of microfinance institutions from the MENA region are now on the top 100 rating of the MIX. In
its 2009 listing, Lead, Egypt was rated number 10, Ameen, Lebanon was rated 17, Enda, Tunisia was rated 21, Al Amana, Morocco was 24, ASBA, Egypt was 25, Al Tadamun, Egypt was 27, DBACD, Egypt was 47, ABA, Egypt was 56, Tamweelcom, Jordan was 60, CEOSS, Egypt was 74, Al Watani, Jordan was 88 and FONDEP, Morocco was 100. With huge populations of urban and rural poor and a spectacular range of informal and formal microenterprise activity, Egypt and Morocco (despite recent crisis) are still ahead or the rest of the region in developing appropriate models of sustainable microfinance. See MIX, ‘2009 MIX Global 100: Ranking of Microfinance Institutions’, www.themix.org/sites/default/files/2009%20MIX%20Global%20100.pdf.

Many economists consider this is an insidious trait of the private sector in the Middle East, which holds down the magnitude of each economy; constraining economies of scale, stifling innovation, squeezing profits and hampering productivity due to low technology and poorly divided labour. These are the types of enterprises that are quite readily enumerated in regular statistical surveys and censuses, which in Jordan and Palestine account for up to 90 per cent of private enterprises.

When not depending on family labour power to maintain the business, such enterprises often depend on low-paid low-skilled workers to maintain profits. It is quite common for such businesses in the clothing sector to use older child labour to sustain business activity.

For a useful classification drawing out the distinctions between microenterprises and small enterprises in terms of
their factors of product and reproduction, see Brandsma and Chaoualia (1997).

The base rate for Jordanian dinar (JOD) to the US dollar is USD 1 = JOD 0.708.

The market for these subaltern women’s economic activities has shrunk since the June 2007 embargo and closure of Gaza’s borders with Israel. The Gaza textile and clothing industry that was highly dependent on trade with Israel is now largely defunct as trade with Israel has ceased, while women cross-border traders no longer have easy access to Egypt where they purchased simple goods that they re-sold in Gaza.

This was undertaken soon after the second Intifada of September 2000 by a private company financed by a USAID grant.

At the time of the study in September 2008 the value of New Israeli Shekel (NIS) to the US dollar was: USD 1 = NIS 4.39.

At the time of the study in October 2008 the value of the Syria Pound (SYP) to the US dollar was: USD 1 = SYP 46.42.

At that time the World Bank considered that there were only two institutions meeting the best practices of the microfinance industry, which were termed the ‘large capables’ and four institutions including UNRWA’s microfinance department were designated as ‘small capables’ that were closest to 100 per cent costs recovery. The remainder of the programmes in the region were quite far from operational sustainability.

See Brandsma and Chaoualia (1997).
The methodology used to estimate the number of potential clients assumed that 50 per cent of people living on less than two US dollars per day were engaged in microenterprise. But this significantly underestimated the microenterprise sector in Palestine at that time, as the establishment census indicated there were 67,500 microenterprises employing less than five persons. According to UNCTAD some 90 per cent of all registered operating companies were micro-scale, family-owned enterprise that employed about 56 per cent of the Palestinian labour force in 1999. See UNCTAD, ‘Report on UNCTAD’s Assistance to the Palestine People’. 2003, Geneva: Trade and Development Board, Fiftieth Session, p. 10.

The bulk of this portfolio was held by the two emerging ’small capables’, UNRWA and FATEN, who between them held over 90 per cent of the portfolio.

The significant part of this growth came from USAID investments and capacity building activities taking place through the four institutions affiliated with the Jordanian microenterprise forum and the AMIR project.

See www.mixmarket.org/mfi/region/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa.

These deposits were held by al-Rafah Bank, which is technically not a microfinance institution. It has fewer borrowers than most other Palestinian microfinance institutions and with average loan sizes of USD 10,000 hardly serves subaltern clients. See Table 1.5.

In Palestine the market has been re-assessed and a recent publication by the Palestinian Monetary Authority estimates a market of 200,000 households that could benefit from
microfinance, i.e. an almost five-fold increase in the previous market estimate.

This data does not capture significant financing of USD 231 million that took place during 2002–3 through the state-based Agency for Combating Unemployment. Like similar programmes elsewhere, the bulk of this new investment was from a government-funded programme designed to create employment, and like most other such programmes it was not sustained.

This data does not include information on the Industrial Development Bank and Development Employment Fund which largely finance the SME sector. In 2003 these institutions held 11,240 loans with an outstanding balance of USD 34.88 million, accounting for 72 per cent of the value of the outstanding portfolio in the sector and 40 per cent of loans at that time.

For a critical consideration of the high level of hidden consumer lending shoring up this outreach, see UNRWA, Outreach, April 2010, issue no. 3, Jerusalem: UNRWA.

These include the political violence that emerged during the second Intifada in September 2000 in response to the critical failure of the peace process. This was followed by the Israeli military invasion of the West Bank in 2002 which led to the levelling of large part of Jenin refugee camp and the old city of Nablus, together with curfews and lockdown throughout the remainder of the West Bank for a significant period. This was succeeded in June 2007 by the siege and embargo of the Gaza economy, soon to be followed by the Gaza war of December 2008. The impact of the two later crises was to lay economic waste to Gaza, drive the self-reliant population into
poverty until they were increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance and food aid to survive. A number of microfinance institutions in Gaza stopped operations because of the restricted market and financial losses, while those that continue to operate did so in a highly constrained market.

Indeed, in 2008, the top three institutions each financed significantly more than double the financial output that the whole sector had produced in 1997.

Recent studies on the demand for microfinance services in Lebanon have revised the previous decade-old estimate of the World Bank. Thus, IFC and Grameen-Jameel Pan-Arab Microfinance Limited estimated the potential customer base at 190,699, while UNCDP places it at 76,131. See Abdel-Baki (2009).

Apart from Ameen and Al-Majmoua, the other five microfinance entities are currently unsustainable as they are unable to meet their operating costs from their credit operations and they remain some way short of industry best practices. The most significant new microfinance venture is Emkan, which was established in 2009 as an NGO backed by the Hariri Group and plans to transform into a financial institution. Since it has already employed some of the most experienced microfinance experts in Lebanon it may change the market position significantly.

There is limited reliable data available on the size and scale of private enterprises in Syria. However, a 1991 study on the informal sector defined it as sole-proprietorship, one-person or small family-owned businesses that employ family members either on an irregular or full-time basis. This study showed that 24 per cent of non-agricultural domestic production was produced by the informal sector. It also
estimated that more than 60 per cent of economically active men in the non-agricultural sector worked in the informal sector. In 1999 ESCWA estimated the labour force at 4.4 million (or 27 per cent of the population of 16.1 million). Thus, it estimated that 1,665,840 males were engaged in informal enterprises, either as proprietors, family workers or wage-workers. But this does not account for women engaged in the informal sector, who are estimated to constitute 41 per cent of women in the labour force (or approximately 221,892 women). Thus, there are just under two million persons working in the informal sector.

The first private-sector banks in Syria began operations in 2004, although the legislation authorising their activities had been passed some time previously as part of the government’s policy to open the banking sector to foreign banks.

A new microfinance institution, Ibdaa Bank was incorporated in 2010 as an additional microfinance institution that will begin operations by the end of the year.

If we consider the expanded estimate to be one million clients then current outreach covers less than 3 per cent of the potential market.

For further details on the strategic options for UNRWA’s Microfinance Department (MD), see ‘Headquarter Implementation Plan: UNRWA Microfinance Department, 2010–11’. 2010, Amman: UNRWA. In addition, see the earlier ‘The Medium-Term Plan for UNRWA’s Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme: Contributing to Regional Growth and Recovery through Microfinance’. 2004, Gaza: UNRWA. Also see the separately and independently audited financial statements of the department that are included on its annual reports. These are also posted on the Microfinance
Information Exchange web page (www.mix.org), which produces an interactive report on UNRWA’s microfinance activities.

In order to maintain a cost-effective, self-reliant and operationally self-sufficient operation, the department provides loans to Palestine refugees and other subaltern groups. Historically more than half its loans have been to Palestine refugees who form the significant majority of clients in both Gaza and Jordan where they have a high presence, but they are a minority of clients in both West Bank and Syria where they account for 25 per cent and 10 per cent of clients respectively.

UNRWA’s microfinance department receives no subsidy from UNRWA’s budget. Its profits enable it to invest in the establishment of new branch offices. However, it should be noted that the department is not fully self-reliant as it depends on donor grants to expand its loan capital to grow its loan portfolio. Unlike regulated microfinance banks in other regions, UNRWA is unable to mobilise voluntary savings that it can intermediate in the form of loans. Moreover, as part of a UN Agency, it is prohibited from borrowing from banks, international finance institutions or special microfinance funds. It therefore depends on scarce donor funds to expand its activities and grow its portfolio. With assets of USD 33 million, the department will have to increase these by almost USD 50 million over the next five years to achieve its business plan objectives of financing 110,000 loans valued at USD 145 million each year by 2015.

During 2011 the programme financed 7,654 loans in Jordan valued at USD 9.05 million, 17,717 loans in Syria valued at
USD 12.36 million and 14,627 loans in Palestine valued at USD 22.97 million.

During this time it covered all its staffing, running cost and loan provisioning expenses from its credit operations. In the two-year period from 2001–2 it faced substantial losses due to increasing loan provisioning and reduced income from loans as a result of economic repression, closure and the Intifada, but this financial crisis was largely overcome in 2003 when the programme again started to meet its costs from its credit operations.

This was initially spread across both the West Bank and Gaza for the nine months as Israel imposed movement restrictions in response to the Intifada, but this crisis bit deeper in April 2002 due to the Israeli invasion under Operation Defensive Shield that took the West Bank operations a period of two years from which to recover.

The programme is headquartered in East Jerusalem and has four regional/country offices in West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and Syria. There are eight branch offices in the West Bank in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm, Qalqilya and Jericho; three in Gaza in Gaza City, Khan Yunis and Nusseirat; five in Syria in Yarmouk, Saida Zeynab, al-Ameen, Douma (in urban suburbs of the city of Damascus) and Aleppo; and five in Jordan in Wehdat, al-Balad, Bayader (all in districts of Amman City), Zarqa and Irbid. By 2015 the branch office network will increase to 35 branch offices covering most major urban conurbations in the region.

UNRWA is already far advanced in this planning process, contracting a transformation scoping study in 2007 and a follow-up transformation plan and feasibility study in March 2010. But there are a number of legal, human capital,
ownership and valuation issues to be resolved to advance the process.

**Bibliography**


The Geneva Conference,\textsuperscript{2} organised by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Swiss Government in 2004, prompted an ambitious agenda for reform, including a comprehensive overhaul of the Agency’s management, which became known as the Organisational Development (OD) process. A strategic planning framework, based on the political status quo prevailing, was established for UNRWAs programme management to prepare for the challenges that lay ahead (Takkenberg 2010). This framework is embodied in the Medium Term Strategy (MTS) that guides three two-year cycles of field planning. UNRWAs first MTS was introduced in 2010.\textsuperscript{3} In addition, human development became the Agency’s focus for the twenty-first century and its role as a promoter of human development was explicitly recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 when it affirmed UNRWA’s responsibility to provide ‘services for the well-being and human development of the Palestine refugees’ (Bartholomeusz 2010: 465).

With no solution to the plight of Palestine refugees being near, the new planning framework aimed to improve ‘living
conditions of Palestine refugees to acceptable international standards’ (UNRWA, MTS 2010–15: 15). UNRWA articulated four human development goals that should guide all of its operations: 1) a long and healthy life; 2) acquired knowledge and skills; 3) a decent standard of living; and 4) human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent possible. Increasing demands and funding constraints had over the years led to a decline in quality of certain services. As stated in the MTS:

If services are substandard, UNRWA will fall short of achieving the human development goals that are its purpose … [Providing quality services is not only a necessity for human development, it is also fundamental to respect refugees’ rights and preserving their dignity.

(UNRWA, MTS 2010–15: 21)

In UNRWA’s view, low-quality services represent ‘a collective failure of responsibility towards refugees’ (UNRWA, MTS 2010–15: 21). UNRWA’s vision is therefore clear and enhancing quality of existing services has been identified as a key theme for the current MTS. Reviews of UNRWA’s core programmes were conducted in order to tailor reforms with the goal of bringing services to a higher standard, without expanding their range, coverage or quantity (UNRWA, MTS). This chapter provides an overview of these reforms and the challenges they represent in the three main programmes, namely, Education, Health, and Relief and Social Services. The developments in the Microfinance and the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programmes are the subject of other chapters in this book.
Education

Education is UNRWA’s largest programme both in terms of budgetary and staff allocation. With approximately 700 schools, 23,000 educational staff themselves Palestine refugees and 500,000 pupils, the education programme employs three-quarters of UNRWA’s staff and takes up almost 60 per cent of the Agency’s total regular budget (UNRWA, Education). UNRWA has been the main provider of education for Palestine refugees since 1950 and all Palestine refugee children living in UNRWA’s area of operation are eligible to receive free basic education (nine or ten years), with the exception of Lebanon, in which secondary education is also provided. UNRWA’s education services are deemed equal, if not better, than those offered by host governments. Literacy levels compete with those on the regional and global levels and gender equality has been achieved in enrolment statistics since the 1960s. With the support of UNESCO from the onset, UNRWA has trained more than 32,000 teachers since 1964 (UNRWA, Education Reform Strategy 2011–15). Some 1.5 million pupils graduated from UNRWA’s basic nine-year education cycle, and over 50,000 students have successfully graduated from one of the Agency’s ten vocational and technical training centres.

Despite these achievements, UNRWA’s education programme was compelled to embark on a significant reform effort. Maintaining quality while financial resources had declined and the number of students had increased had over time become a major challenge. Perceptions of declining quality prevailed both within the Agency and amongst the broader public.
A more substantive cause for the decline of the education programme’s performance was inherent to the Agency’s traditional education system. Much like many other education systems in UNRWA’s area of operation, the education programme focused largely on rote learning, that is, learning by memorisation, rather than the development of critical thinking skills. Results in Monitoring for Learning Achievements (MLA) tests conducted Agency-wide in 2009 further supported this observation. This fuelled the belief that outdated practices needed to be addressed if UNRWA were to continue offering quality education able to keep up with the demands of the twenty-first century.

Another important driver for the education reform was the realisation that it was necessary to bring back Agency-wide coherence in the way delivery of education services had evolved in the Fields. One of the pillars of OD had been to strengthen decentralisation, within an overall strategic context. As a result, Field Offices had become more autonomous and no longer looked to the Headquarters Education Department to provide guidance at the strategic and technical level (Pontefract 2013).

Encouraged by the OD process, Fields had sought to improve their own education programmes. As such, the West Bank Field established an Education Recovery Plan. Gaza Field also worked to significantly overhaul its education programme. Independent testing in 2007, by the Palestinian Authority Education Ministry’s Centre for Measurement and Evaluation, revealed a serious decline in educational achievements, especially when looking at results in Arabic and mathematics. Almost 90 per cent of schools in Gaza
operate on a double-shift basis, a direct consequence of lack of space and under-funding. The social and economic effects of the blockade also had a significant impact on educational achievement. To arrest this decline, in 2007 the Gaza Field Office launched a ten-point Schools of Excellence Action Plan. The Action Plan encompassed the provision of extra support to poor and under-performing students through offering additional in and out of school-hour teaching, focusing on special needs children, reducing class sizes, implementing unified testing in all Gaza UNRWA schools, involving the community (whether parents, Gazan academics, NGOs or others) in school-related issues, upgrading head teachers and assistant head teachers, changing hiring to a merit-based strategy (irrespective of gender), and rewarding high performance of students, teachers and schools through awards ceremonies (UNRWA Gaza Field Office, Schools of Excellence). In 2008/2009, this action plan was expanded to 12 points extending to all 221 schools in Gaza.

Although significant differences exist between the Gaza initiative and the Agency-wide education reform effort, particularly in respect of the underpinning philosophy with Gaza seeking to address underachievement and the Agency-wide reform looking for longer-term transformational enhancement, the Gaza Schools of Excellence Action Plan fed into the design of the Agency-wide reform effort.

In 2009, the Agency commissioned a series of external evaluations of its Education Programme carried out by the Universalia Group. Its findings served as a springboard for the development of the Education Reform Strategy. They revealed a need for ‘higher quality, greater effectiveness, increased efficiency and enhanced equity’ (UNRWA, Education Reform Strategy 2011–15: viii). Led by HQ, and
working together with education staff in the Fields, a definition of quality education was developed that looked at learning ‘as more than memorisation of knowledge, teaching as more than transfer of content and schools as more than a place where this knowledge transfer takes place’ (UNRWA, Education Reform Strategy 2011–15: 30).

From this shared definition an inclusive process began in which all five Fields cooperated in the design and development of the reform. This conceptualisation phase was complex and lengthy but with five Fields newly used to autonomy seen as very necessary (Pontefract 2012). The official launch of the reform took place on World Teacher Day in October 2011.

A comprehensive approach to educational reform, in line with international best practice, was subsequently adopted. This approach reflected the importance of systemic approach in accordance with the World Bank’s three components to guide educational reform: engineering (this includes amongst others strategies, policies, curricula and textbooks), incentives (motivation) and public accountability (which is the ability for different stakeholders to participate in and reflect on the design of the reform).  

The reform moved away from focusing mainly on teacher training in which the Agency had invested substantially over the years and achieved much. A comprehensive interrelated approach towards systemic change was adopted, whereby the classroom and the teacher were at its heart, with the goal to evolve from a didactic model of teaching to a teaching and learning approach which would support all children’s learning.

UNRWA’s Education Reform … seeks to change classroom practice, that is the way in which teachers teach and children
are given the opportunity to learn. It … [promotes] an ethos of the schooling which supports a holistic view of learning for all children, with strong links between the school parents and the local community. It … further [seeks] to ensure that the professional and administrative support structures in the field work together more cohesively to address and support the required changes. … The Reform … also [works] to ensure that all educational structures and systems from the school to the Headquarters operate within a strengthened overall environment as reflected in the UNRWA wide policies and strategies.  

(UNRWA, Education Reform Strategy 2011–15: 42)

Based on this vision, the education reform comprises eight key areas that together are expected to lead to systemic change. The eight interrelated areas comprise four substantive and four support components (UNRWA, Education Reform Strategy 2011–15: 30). The substantive components are: 1) teacher development and school empowerment; 2) inclusive education; 3) curriculum and student assessment; and 4) technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and youth. The support components are key to ensuring that the reform, and the education programme as a whole, is evidence-based. They are: 5) research, development and EMIS (education management information system); 6) governance; 7) strategic planning, management and projects; and 8) partnerships, communication and ICT (information communication technology). In the following paragraphs a short overview is given of each of the reform areas.
Teacher development and school empowerment

The keys to improving education quality are teachers. Teaching staff have always been a vital asset, as proven by the UNESCO-supported efforts to develop teacher qualifications over the years. The reform’s overall aim is to change classroom practices by improving the quality and motivation of teachers. The areas of focus in the reform are therefore professional development and continuous support and opportunities for career progression. For the latter, a Teacher Policy seeks to address the main areas of recruitment, training for incoming teachers, continuous professional development, professional support for teaching staff, accountability, and quality assurance and school empowerment.

Professional development within the reform adopts a multimedia learning *in situ* approach. In 2012 a School Based Teacher Development (SBTD): Transforming Classroom Practices programme was launched to provide *in situ* learning opportunities for teachers’ continuous development. This six-month programme is considered a crucial element of the reform initiative that addresses key focus areas to change classroom practices. It aims to support the teaching of all areas of the curriculum and promotes active pedagogical methods that support learners’ needs. Teachers are encouraged to try out the new approaches in their classrooms. The SBTD programme uses blended learning, which is the incorporation of the active use of multimedia, print, audio visual, and face to face support to support teachers’ development (UNRWA, SBTD).

School leadership is also a key determinant of effective schools and quality education. Head teachers and principals
will thus receive training to improve their management and leadership skills through the Leading for the Future initiative (L4F). Again a blended learning approach is adopted and head teachers and principals will work through the programme in their schools, trying out new approaches to leadership to better support their students’ needs and reflect the local context (UNRWA, Leading for the Future).

**Inclusive education**

To further ensure that all children’s needs are considered, UNRWA strives to make education inclusive. ‘Inclusive education is UNRWA’s approach for ensuring that all Palestine refugee children, regardless of gender, abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, health, and psychosocial needs have equal opportunity for learning … and are supported to develop their full potential’ (UNRWA, Inclusive Education). It aims to give special attention to children that suffer from marginalisation and exclusion. This includes children with special needs and those in need of remedial education, but also children affected by conflict and suffering trauma.

An inclusive education policy was developed articulating a common understanding of what inclusive education is and how to achieve it. Teachers first and foremost need to be trained to recognise the varying needs of students, so that they can respond accordingly, whether this means the use of different in-class strategies in order to reach all pupils with the relevant content, or to refer pupils to support systems which can cater to their additional needs. This approach sees the pupil rather than the curriculum being taught as the starting point.
**Curriculum and student assessment**

Whatever training is given to teachers or approaches adopted in the classroom, the curriculum is central to classroom learning. Since 1954, the curriculum taught in UNRWA schools is that of the host countries in order to secure a smooth transition to secondary education. The curriculum taught in UNRWA’s schools must also align with the Agency’s development goals as well as adhere to values and principles of the United Nations. The Curriculum and Student Assessment dimension of the reform therefore focuses on these aspects and this is anchored in a Curriculum Framework. This is a key tool to ensure quality at multiple levels, including alignment with UN policies and values. It serves as a basis to enrich host country curricula and textbooks and will also support teachers in their capacity to assess those materials at classroom level.

A particular example of curriculum enhancement is the Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Tolerance Education (HRCRT) Programme that has been taught for many years in UNRWA schools. To ensure coherence in understanding and approach an HRCRT Policy has been developed which articulates UNRWA’s strong commitment to HRCRT and the implications for teaching and learning. In addition a Teacher Toolkit was produced to enable teachers to integrate HRCRT into their teaching without dictating the overall approach (UNRWA, Human Rights Fact Sheet).

**TVET and youth**

The Universalia reviews initially focused on students in schools. However, the Agency acknowledges that TVET is a vital component of its education programme. A growing
youth bulge, prevalent in all Fields of operation, has a direct
effect on unemployment. UNRWA’s ten vocational training
centres provide technical and vocational education and
training to almost 7,000 youth offering over 100 trade and
semi-professional technical courses as well as a variety of
short-term courses for specialisations that are of particular
demand in the local labour market (UNRWA, TVET).
Reform in the TVET programme is needed to better
accommodate the increasing demand of applicants as well as
to respond better to local labour markets needs. Additional
courses will be developed and existing training courses
revised in collaboration with the business community. In
addition to reaching a larger number of students, the reform
will place particular focus on reaching vulnerable youth and
on the development of entrepreneurial skills.

As highlighted earlier, the reform support programmes will
equip the UNRWA education programme with the tools to
continue to provide evidence-based quality education in an
evolving and challenging context.

Towards this, research and development, which feeds into
strategic planning and management, is key. Research capacity
is being developed across all Fields. Monitoring and
evaluation will regularly be undertaken by the Agency’s
Headquarters and reporting to UNRWA stakeholders carried
out. The governance component of the reform will contribute
to promote effective programme management and coherence
across the system. Finally the reform addresses
communication and awareness amongst all stakeholders,
between and within Fields. ICTs will help strengthen
communication and reach a wider audience. ICTs to enhance
teaching and learning is another dimension of the reform
support areas.
Above all, the education reform aims to be holistic in nature. It focuses heavily on the continuous training of teaching staff, head teachers and principals. It seeks to empower schools and involve local communities by decentralising decision-making and allowing schools to cater to their own needs. Relevant technical and vocational training programmes are provided in order to better support Palestine refugee youth enter into working life. Finally, the reform has set up frameworks to make sure that United Nations values are reflected throughout the programme, whether through human rights teaching, curriculum implementation or quality management.

It is 2013 that will see the full implementation of the reform in the Fields. The main challenge for the short term is implementing the reform the way it has been designed. Though prioritisation is frequently demanded both by management and donors, UNRWA’s Education Department emphasises the interrelationship of the various components of the reform. They cannot be seen separately from each other and it is coherent interrelated implementation that will lead to transformational change. Therefore prioritisation or fragmented implementation is not considered an option (Pontefract 2012). In view of UNRWA’s precarious financial situation, this is also the biggest risk associated with the reform process. According to the Education Department, the reform should be implemented ‘fully and wholly’ (Pontefract 2012). It sees funding as an external constraint that can easily jeopardise the philosophy of the reform by implementing it in a piecemeal way. Central to the success of the reform is the political will to ‘understand the sum of the different parts of the reform and be committed to their implementation’ (Pontefract 2012).
According to UNRWA, if implemented as intended the reform will not only enhance quality, but will lead to greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness. An efficient educational system is imperative in optimising school performance and reducing costs. Donors are increasingly demanding UNRWA to demonstrate results, not just in terms of service delivery, but also in terms of value for money. The reform will need to demonstrate an overall improvement in the cost effectiveness of services (UNRWA 2013, Health and education efficiency in UNRWA).

An efficient system will also be a quality system as greater efficiency will mean less grade repetition, lower drop-out and higher student achievement. For example, a medium- to long-term goal of the reform is the reduction of wastage in terms of the number of years that students are enrolled in the Agency’s educational system before graduating. If implemented as conceptualised, estimates indicate that a decrease in wastage of approximately USD 10 M per annum by 2016 could be realised as well as a reduction of USD 3 M in costs (UNRWA 2012, Update on Education Reform).

Enhancing quality and effectiveness of the Agency’s services will also be served by increased collaboration between the various programmes and departments as highlighted in the MTS (UNRWA, MTS 2010–15). Inter-linkages are increasingly important in responding to the needs of beneficiaries and will support the Agency in delivering more efficiently. For example, Education and Health have been working together on the development of a School Health Strategy launched in May 2013.\textsuperscript{10} In promulgating this strategy the education and the health programmes

122
acknowledge their mutual interest in an integrated approach and the potential for cross-fertilisation. The Education Department also foresees working more closely with the Relief and Social Services (RSS) programme, with regard to vulnerable students, and in the Agency’s focus area of youth (Pontefract 2012).

Working across departments is also key. In developing and implementing the education reform, Education worked with Human Resources in the area of the teacher performance appraisal system, defining competencies which teachers’ performance would be measured against. The Department of Legal Affairs made valuable contributions to the HRCRT programme, the Inclusive Education Policy and the Curriculum Framework, ensuring they reflected UN values and principles. The cross-cutting issues of gender and disability were addressed in all areas of the reform through the active engagement of the UNRWA specialists in this area (Pontefract 2013).

To conclude, the education reform seeks to transform classroom practices so that the learning of all children is supported and their potential realised. It strives to achieve this through a systemic approach where all areas from policy to practices are addressed and where decisions are based on evidence, drawing on international knowledge and UNRWA specific context.

Health

Within the health programme, the desire to improve quality inevitably led to a modernisation of primary health care services. Until recent years, UNRWA’s health programme was based on and organised according to the delivery of
components of traditional primary health care, such as immunisation and short-term medical treatment for communicable diseases. Since its establishment, the health programme has achieved impressive results, in particular in relation to maternal and child health. Infant, child and maternal mortality rates are amongst the lowest in the region and nearly 100 per cent of refugee households are connected to water networks (Takkenberg 2010).

A changing context, characterised by a demographic transition of the refugee population and a predominance of non-communicable diseases (which have become the number one mortality cause in the region), prompted the need for a thorough transformation. Reform was also necessary to address weaknesses and constraints in the health programme, such as a continuing decline in health expenditure per capita, over-use of health facilities, a lack of health information analysis and poor coordination and collaboration, both within UNRWA as well as with external actors (UNRWA 2010, From Health Reviews to Health Reform). In short, a shift was necessary not only in the kind of primary health care services delivered but also in the way they are delivered to the refugee population.

Health reform primarily aims to transform UNRWA’s health services into a comprehensive, horizontal, population-focused primary health care system and to capacitate UNRWA as an active actor in the Fields’ overall health sector, comprising host countries, donors and other care providers (UNRWA 2011, Modern and Efficient UNRWA Health Services).

Though the challenges are multi-dimensional, UNRWA identified a single, yet multi-faceted, approach to improve and modernise its primary health care interventions. Following
international best practices, the Agency introduced the Family Health Team (FHT) approach, which represents a system of delivering quality primary health care through a multidisciplinary team of health professionals that work together to serve the comprehensive needs of an entire family across the life cycle, in a defined geographical location close to the client. Building long-term provider–patient relationships is the cornerstone of the FHT approach and is based on the values of modern primary health care, namely, person-centeredness, comprehensiveness and continuity of care.

The implementation of the FHT approach entails a drastic shift in organisational terms: from a hierarchical and disease-centred structure, with independently operating sections, to a horizontal holistic structure bringing various health professionals (doctors, nurses, midwives and other professionals if necessary) together in one team. Through this approach, UNRWA will be better equipped to provide promotive and preventative care in addition to curative care, manage non-communicable diseases and coordinate and follow the client’s referral to other care providers. The health reform will be supported by the introduction of the e-Health system that will consolidate all health records of a family in one family folder in a computerised format. The previous system had separate folders of patients suffering from non-communicable diseases, women of reproductive age and children under the age of five. The e-Health system is a critical support component that will not only provide comprehensive medical data about registered families but will also reduce time spent on administrative work. Accordingly, the benefits of the FHT approach cannot be fully realised without the e-Health system.
The reform of the health programme is redefining the role and responsibilities of UNRWA to that of a modern, proactive health care provider, able to better serve its beneficiaries in an increasingly complex context. In line with the MTS, the health reform will enhance collaboration with other health sector actors, such as referral facilities. A holistic approach to beneficiaries’ health will also underpin interdepartmental collaboration as set out in the MTS, for example in addressing societal – crosscutting – issues, such as healthy lifestyles, (child) protection, mental health, gender-based violence, poverty and community development (UNRWA 2011, Modern and Efficient UNRWA Health Services).

The Family Health Team implementation started in October 2011. By 2015, all 139 UNRWA health centres are expected to have implemented the FHT approach. One year after its implementation, the FHT approach already achieved remarkable results, in particular in terms of beneficiary and staff satisfaction. Positive results show an increased average doctor–patient consultation time, reduced waiting times and a reduction in antibiotics prescriptions (UNRWA 2012, Update on Health Reform). An appointment system, first introduced as a pilot, will eventually be implemented in all health centres. It will further ensure quality consultations by allocating a specific time slot to each patient and allow a better triage between emergencies and non-urgent cases. Appointments will be scheduled during part of the opening hours only. The remainder of the day the health centre will continue to provide services to walk-in patients (UNRWA 2011, Modern and Efficient UNRWA Health Services).
As mentioned above, the Agency-wide programme reform effort has set the foundations for increased interdepartmental collaboration. A practical example of this kind of collaboration is the Healthy Food Initiative at schools in the West Bank, which started as a pilot in Shufat refugee camp girls’ school. Promoting healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition is put into practice by ensuring that school canteens provide healthy food items. A school canteen survey conducted in the West Bank in 2011 revealed that 95.6 per cent of the schools offer unhealthy food and that 53.6 per cent of the school canteens did not have alternative healthy food products at all (Khammash and Habash 2011). In a context where being overweight and related non-communicable diseases are becoming a serious concern, it is essential that children learn how to develop healthy eating behaviours and lifestyles. The pilot that will be expanded to several other schools in the West Bank also aims to create income-generating activities for women at women’s training programmes centres in order to provide healthy alternatives for school canteens. Jointly implemented by the programmes of Health, Education and RSS it demonstrates that interdepartmental collaboration is an essential strategy in order to achieve sustainable change that will enhance the overall quality of UNRWA as a provider of public services.

Relief and social services

Today, more than 20 per cent of UNRWA’s refugee population is considered ‘poor’ – approximately 1.2 million refugees, among which an estimated 700,000 are categorised as ‘abject poor’. Growing and deepening poverty among the refugee population is both a constraint on UNRWA’s mission to
let refugees achieve their full potential in human development as well as an indicator that a shift in attitude was necessary to remain a meaningful provider of assistance, in particular to the most vulnerable refugees.

From the 1980s onwards, RSS has moved from universal services provision towards targeted assistance. First, the Special Hardship Assistance Programme (SHAP) was introduced in an attempt to provide services to the poorest. It replaced the general ration distribution programme that UNRWA had inherited from its predecessors. Between 2009 and 2013 SHAP was phased out and gradually replaced by the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP). ‘Those eligible for assistance are assessed based on identification of their poverty status using a poverty-based assessment methodology, which is both family and country specific, and depends on the local socio-economic context in each country’ (UNRWA, SSNP). In doing so, RSS moved from a status-based approach to a poverty-based approach, which was accompanied by the introduction of Proxy Means Test Formula (PMTF). In the SHAP system, eligibility was based primarily on the status of the household, available in the RSS records. In this system, female-headed households would for instance automatically be included in the programme. Therefore, it was clearer on which beneficiaries were eligible, having a smaller margin of error in the selection itself. The current system, focusing on targeting families living in poverty, conceptually poses a considerable step forward in providing services to the most vulnerable. However, the system is new and no definitive assessments on overall better targeting are available yet (Stryk 2013). As a result of funding constraints, a weakness imposed on both SHAP and SSNP resides in the fact that a
new household can only be included once another one exits the programme.

Despite these changes that took place over the years, the reviews conducted prior to the reform revealed a lack of understanding poverty and weakness in analysing and making evidence-based decisions as a shortcoming of the RSS programme (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change). A more analytical approach to addressing poverty and vulnerability was considered necessary if the Agency wants to contribute to the achievement of the human development goals. Therefore, the envisaged RSS reform promulgated poverty as the core, unifying theme of the RSS programme in all five Fields and UNRWA Headquarters. Notwithstanding its humanitarian responsibility, RSS identified the need to place greater effort upon catalysing lasting socio-economic development of Palestine refugees. The shift in attitude and focus is inter alia illustrated by the proposed establishment of a Poverty Unit at RSS Headquarters, the purpose of which is to support the Agency in identifying and classifying poverty (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change). The disability, gender and youth functions have recently been placed within the RSS Department in order to strengthen an integrated approach in supporting the most vulnerable amongst the Palestinian refugees.

The RSS reform seeks to further improve the ability to target and serve the abject poor. As such, utilisation – and consistent application – of the PMTF will be further pursued across all fields. Currently, targeting of beneficiaries is considered substandard. Too many abject poor are not included in the RSS records. Credible targeting can only be achieved by undertaking testing on an annual
basis. At the same time, beneficiaries need to have the option to appeal test results. This highlights the importance of a credible complaint system. Benefitting from emergency funding, Gaza and West Bank are the only fields that have been able to implement annual testing. Problems in the targeting of beneficiaries not only exist within RSS but equally exist in the Job Creation Programme (JCP), and when selecting families in need of rehousing and/or shelter rehabilitation (Stryk 2013).

In terms of service delivery, the RSS food distributions have become ‘synonymous with the plight of Palestine refugees’ and a ‘tangible demonstration of the commitment of the international community’ to the unresolved plight of the Palestinian refugees (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change: 9). However, in accordance with international best practices and upon publication of an RSS-commissioned report on delivery systems – known as the Cherrier Report, 2009 – the RSS reform initially proposed to gradually replace – by 2013 – food distributions that were no longer considered an appropriate means of social transfers for the SHAP/SNNP beneficiaries with support in cash. The Cherrier report supported the emerging evidence of the effectiveness of cash programmes in promoting economic growth and human development as well as contributing substantially to the reduction of monetary poverty, highlighting that social cash transfers have a greater potential than food transfers to tackle poverty.

(UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change: 14)

Growing pressure on the programme to reduce cost inefficiencies found in the existing system of in-kind
distribution further strengthened RSS’s vision that a cash-based model should become the reform’s main outcome (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change).

However, changes to the current system face considerable resistance from both beneficiaries and – to a lesser extent – host countries. Cash transfers are said to have a positive effect on the empowerment and dignity of beneficiaries by allowing them to define their own needs and tailor their expenditures and are much more cost-effective (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change). In UNRWA’s case, beneficiaries, whose views and perceptions were not included in the Cherrier study, did not support this assumption. Refugees demonstrate great apprehension to cash transfers, which they fear would not be sufficiently protected against inflation. Familiar with the distribution of food commodities they have always received, the defined package of food has over time also become a coping mechanism for many of the beneficiary families. Most beneficiaries are not ready to exchange food rations against cash. Another apprehension that, in particular, female beneficiaries have with regard to cash transfers is related to the traditional gender role division. Women are generally in charge of the way the food package is consumed while the spending of cash would fall under the responsibility of male heads of household (Stryk 2013).

Parallel to the shift from relief to development that took place from the 1980s onwards, food distributions had become project funded due to a change in donor realities. From its early days, several (Western) donor countries had donated their surplus food directly to the Agency. When donors stopped this practice, they continued to support UNRWA’s food assistance through project-funding. Now that donor
trends are shifting once more in favour of cash transfers, UNRWA’s management is faced with a critical choice as to how to take forward the in-kind direct relief programme, which is likely to be continued for the time being (Stryk 2013).

Another kind of cash transfer UNRWA already has positive experience with is cash for work through its Job Creation Programme, which is a component of UNRWA’s emergency programme. Funded through the emergency appeal, the JCP currently operates in Gaza and the West Bank only. The JCP contributes to alleviating poverty by offering cash-for-work projects to beneficiaries that meet the applicable selection criteria, which are based on applicants’ poverty level and available skills. Salaries are considerably higher than the value of in-kind or cash assistance otherwise received. Not in the last place because of a high overall beneficiary satisfaction, JCP has the ability to function as an important catalyst for empowerment and socio-economic development and could be replicated in other fields as well if the necessary funding would be available (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change).

With enhanced focus on poverty, the RSS programme has identified the need to redefine its relationship with the Community Based Organisations (CBOs) it has been associated with for many years in order to strengthen civil society and to help promote self-reliance of the most vulnerable. A recent evaluation has shown that despite positive contributions to the community, CBOs have had little impact in addressing the underlying causes of poverty. Many of the services provided are not considered compatible with the programme’s main goal to alleviate poverty (UNRWA 2011, Sustaining Change).
Difference realities, different challenges

The above sections have tried to give an overview of UNRWA’s ‘traditional’ programmes at a time when major reforms are taking place. Although all three programme reforms aspire to enhance quality, they show a large degree of variance in their approach, scope and feasibility, due to both internal and external factors.

The education reform was designed to be a holistic, large-scale systemic reform effort. As such, the support from frontline staff in implementing the reform is crucial but not less critical than that of management. As stated in the Education Reform Strategy: ‘Evidence has shown how large scale reform is the most “promising”, but that it should strive to be neither too tight, nor too loose, nor too top down, nor too bottom up.’ So far, internal stakeholders have shown different levels of appreciation for the reform initiative, which could compromise the underpinning reform philosophy. Implementation remains largely at the discretion of Fields, which are ultimately responsible and accountable for the manner in which available resources are spent.

In designing its reform strategy, Health adopted a more pragmatic approach and its implementation to date has been beyond anticipation. From that perspective, the health reform can be described as ‘demand-driven’. Positive results and an acknowledged potential for significant savings accelerated the reform’s broader implementation, which was intended as a gradual process from the start (Stryk 2013).

Pragmatism is further witnessed in the Health Department’s focus on primary health care, with the introduction of the FHT approach. The relatively costly hospitalisation
programme remains initially untouched by the reform. Shortcomings in accessing hospital care need to be addressed, in particular with regard to the most vulnerable that are currently excluded from this service.\textsuperscript{15} The health reviews recommended that UNRWA’s role change from being a provider of financial support into an advocate of users’ rights. The reviews also concluded that knowledge of hospital utilisation and costs as well as expertise on contract negotiation and management need to be secured first before changes can be considered in this domain (UNRWA 2010, From Health Reviews to Health Reform). Therefore, the health reform seems to have chosen to focus on what is feasible in the short term, both in terms of geographical coverage as well as substantive coverage, before further expanding its scope.

The challenges faced by the relief and social services programme are from a different nature as they are more closely associated with external stakeholders, namely, UNRWA’s beneficiaries and donors. With regard to the programme’s main component and one of UNRWA’s founding missions – Relief – the future is very much uncertain. The envisaged reform, which proposed to replace food distributions with cash transfers, has been indefinitely postponed with no alternatives available to replace it. Donors are less and less willing to support in-kind assistance such as food distributions. Beneficiaries – and host authorities – voice concerns over its abolition. Though one can question to what extent refugees have been properly consulted and informed about the proposed reform, the expected dead-lock over this issue reveals another more fundamental problem faced by the RSS programme as well as UNRWA as a whole.
First, food distributions have become project funded in recent years while still being considered an essential activity of the Agency. This in itself is a contradiction. Food distributions to the poor and the abject poor have always been considered part of UNRWA’s core programmes and not an optional service, and should therefore have had their spending assured through the Agency’s General Fund budget.

Considering the option of moving future social transfers, whether food or cash, into UNRWA’s General Fund, is closely linked to the second more structural part of the problem the Agency faces. As a UN Agency, UNRWA’s funding structure is based on voluntary contributions. One may argue that such a funding structure is not appropriate in view of the Agency’s mandate to deliver public services directly to Palestine refugees. In national public sectors, population growth together with inflation rates would naturally command a budget growth, while in UNRWA’s case the reality has been the opposite for many years: the population grows while donor contributions have been decreasing per capita, resulting in ever increasing constraints on the programmes. Within a sovereign country a rise in costs can in theory be offset by the generation of extra revenue (such as tax rises or redeploying finances). For UNRWA rises in costs can only be offset by increased grants from donor countries or by reprioritising services to its beneficiaries (UNRWA 2013, Health and Education Efficiency in UNRWA).
2015 and beyond: from human development to sustainable development?

Human development is likely to remain at the heart of UNRWA’s mandate for the years to come. The transition of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which will coincide with the ending of the current MTS, will provide an important opportunity to place greater emphasis on the necessity to fight poverty as a unifying theme for UNRWA. Globally, the MDGs have been criticised for not addressing structural causes of poverty. The Rio+20 outcome document acknowledges eradicating poverty as ‘the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development’. Poverty cannot be looked at separately from inequality. Entrenched socioeconomic inequality at the global level, between and within countries, is another major obstacle in achieving sustainable development. Addressing both poverty and inequality is something that UNRWA will need to take into consideration when planning for the upcoming MTS. UNRWA needs to acknowledge that it will not be able to optimise the contribution it makes to human development of Palestine refugees as long as a growing number falls below the poverty line.

Notes

The authors wish to thank Caroline Pontefract (Director of Education, UNRWA) for her extensive review of a draft of this chapter. Helpful comments were also provided by Robert Stryk (Chief Evaluation Division, UNRWA), Akihiro Seita (Director of Health, UNRWA) and Lex Takkenberg (Chief
The Geneva Conference was a major international conference organised on 7–8 June 2004 by UNRWA and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). More than 350 representatives from 67 countries and 34 inter-governmental organisations attended the conference to discuss the future of humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. See Geneva Conference Report, ‘Building Partnerships in support of UNRWA’, available at: www.unrwa.org/userfiles/con_report_april05(1).pdf

In its previous planning framework, the Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2005–9, UNRWA embraced the need to overhaul its planning processes more comprehensively. To achieve this, the 2008–9 biennium was a transitional period during which the foundations for the Medium Term Strategy were put in place (UNRWA, Medium Term Strategy 2010–15).

UNRWA’s understanding of human development is based on UNDP’s definition as set out in the Human Development Report:

Human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible. But human development does not end there. Additional choices,
highly valued by many people, range from political, economic and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying personal self-respect and guaranteed human rights. Human development has two sides: the formation of human capabilities – such as improved health, knowledge and skills – and the use people make of their acquired abilities – for leisure, productive purposes or being active in cultural, social and political affairs. If the scales of human development do not finely balance the two sides, considerable human frustration may result. According to this concept of human development, income is clearly only one option that people would like to have albeit an important one.

(Human Development Report 1990: 10)

Although all Palestine refugee children are eligible to receive primary education approximately one-third of them (some 240,000) attend governmental or private schools.

‘In Lebanon, most Palestine refugees lack access to public secondary schools and cannot afford the high cost of private tuition. Because of these special circumstances, UNRWA operates nine secondary schools in Lebanon’ (SDC and UNRWA 2004).

In 1964 UNRWA entered a strategic partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Senior education staff, including the Director of Education, are seconded by UNESCO and especially in the early decades, UNESCO’s ‘stamp’ on the education programme was very strong. The joint UNRWA-UNESCO Institute of Education (IE), based at UNRWA Headquarters Amman, was established and provides until now in-service training to UNRWA teaching staff.
The three-pronged approach identified by the World Bank that should be leading future education reforms is composed of the following elements:

Good engineering: The focus is on determining the right mix of inputs as schools, teachers, and equipment to produce a desired outcome to reach a certain level of enrollment.

  Incentives aligned with outcomes: Those incentives concern educational process actors’ motivations. It is important to devise mechanisms that link education outcomes with the rewards (or penalties) to teachers and school directors.

Public accountability: It focuses on the ability of parents, students, and other stakeholders to influence the formation of education objectives, policies, and resource allocation, either at the national or local levels. The premise is that if the majority of the beneficiaries can persuade policy makers to improve education policies, education outcomes will improve. Conversely, if education is designed to serve the interests of only a few, the benefits from investment in education will be narrowly distributed.

  (World Bank 2007)

In some Fields, refugees face additional hurdles, such as institutional discrimination when accessing the job market in Lebanon and restriction of movement in the occupied Palestinian territories. For refugees in these areas where chances of gaining employment are even lower, the TVET programmes are an important component of the Agency’s education services.
The School Health Strategy aims to strengthen the existing UNRWA School Health Programme in order to promote child-friendly, healthy and safe schools environments. It wants to impact on children’s knowledge, understanding and behaviours, thereby contributing towards achieving the universal human development goals of a long and healthy life, as well as acquiring knowledge and skills.

These values have been indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2008.

Most of the UNRWA West Bank school canteens are managed by the schools themselves, which use the canteen as a source of income to cover some school expenditure. Therefore, priority is given to profit over health considerations.

UNRWA considers ‘poor refugees’ as those who are not able to meet their basic food and non-food needs. ‘Abject poor’ are unable to satisfy even their daily nutritional needs in terms of required calorie intake.

The Job Creation Programme is an element of the Agency’s Emergency Programme in Gaza and the West Bank.

The hospitalization programme covers 70 per cent of the expenses for the non-poor and 90 per cent for the poor. Most of the poor, in particular the abject poor, cannot afford to pay the remaining 10 per cent’ (Stryk 2013).

Adopted by the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro (Rio+20 Summit) in June 2012 and endorsed by the UN General Assembly in its resolution 66/288 on 27 July 2012.
References


Pontefract, C. Director of Education, personal interview, 29 November 2012 and 6 May 2013.


Stryk, R. Chief Evaluation Division, UNRWA Headquarters, personal interview, 20 January and 6 June 2013.


——, *Human Rights Factsheet*, internal document.


Part II

Protection

From concept to practice
3 Incorporating protection into UNRWA operations

Mark Brailsford

Introduction

Serving a population of approximately 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and with a staff of approximately 30,000, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is one of the largest United Nations agencies (UNGA, 2013a). UNRWA is unusual compared to most other agencies in that through its five main programmes – education, health, relief and social services, micro-finance, and infrastructure and camp improvement – it is a direct provider of large-scale public services and therefore has responsibilities broadly analogous to those of equivalent governmental authorities (UNRWA, 2009a). This places a strong responsibility on the Agency to ensure that the manner in which it provides its services promotes and respects the rights, dignity and safety of its beneficiaries. It also means that the scope and depth of UNRWAs service delivery places it in a strong position to provide a holistic response to protection threats and vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2004).

In May 2012 UNRWA adopted an Agency-wide Protection Policy which lays out UNRWAs commitment to protection
and provides the framework within which UNRWA Fields and programmes build their operational plans for protection. This essay begins by providing a summary of the main elements of the UNRWA Protection Policy and will then go on to describe how this policy manifests itself in practice by using examples of protection initiatives from UNRWA Fields of operation.

Main elements of UNRWA’s Protection Policy

UNRWA’s commitment to protection

The UNRWA Protection Policy states the Agency definition of protection as being ‘what UNRWA does to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees’.  

UNRWA’s definition and approach to protection is in line with the definition of protection adopted by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (IASC, 1999). Indeed, given that the IASC definition includes activities aimed at ensuring respect for economic and social rights, and given the Agency’s long-standing mandate to provide education, health care and relief services, it is clear that UNRWA has been engaged in protection activities from the beginning and that protection is inherent in the nature of UNRWA’s work. However, UNRWAs work on protection today does not only encompass economic and social rights associated with its core areas of service delivery, but also addresses civil and political rights such as the rights to life, security of person, freedom from discrimination, freedom of movement and protection from arbitrary displacement. In situations of armed conflict these rights also include those
provided to protected persons under International Humanitarian Law.

While UNRWA’s commitment to protection is inherent in the nature of its work, UNRWA’s protection activities are also firmly grounded in its mandate (Bartholomeusz, 2009) from the General Assembly, the latest resolutions recognise the valuable work done by the Agency in providing protection to the Palestinian people, in particular Palestine refugees’, refer to UNRWA’s work to promote ‘the well-being, human development and protection of Palestine refugees’ and encourage UNRWA to ‘continue making progress in addressing the needs and rights of children, women and persons with disabilities in its operations’ in accordance with the relevant human rights conventions (UNGA, 2013b).

The importance of protection to the Agency’s work is recognised by the central place human rights and protection occupy as a key cross-cutting theme in the Agency’s Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2010–15. The protection strategy described in the MTS focuses ‘on achieving protection through quality service delivery… and action on international protection’. ‘This includes measures to promote respect for their [refugees] rights under international law through monitoring, reporting and intervening with relevant actors able to address them.’ Protection of the rights of Palestine refugees is, therefore, addressed both through UNRWA’s programming and service delivery as well as through advocacy. UNRWA’s programmes provide assistance to individuals and groups vulnerable to protection threats, thereby mitigating the consequences and strengthening local capacities to withstand those threats. UNRWA also engages, either directly or indirectly, with the concerned authorities in order to promote respect for the rights of the individuals.
affected. This approach to protection recognises UNRWA beneficiaries as persons holding rights and entitlements under international law as well as the corresponding obligations of duty-bearers. UNRWA’s approach to protection is, therefore, consistent with the UN-wide effort towards a human rights-based approach to programming and development (UNDP, 2003).

The UNRWA Protection Policy lays out a framework for its protection work. This framework was identified through consultation with Fields and programmes and consists of four components and is based on six principles. The four components of UNRWA’s protection framework are identified in Figure 3.1 (Morris, 2008). Components 1 and 2 in the figure represent the internal dimension of UNRWA’s protection work, which is centred on UNRWA’s programmes and staff, and for which the Agency is primarily responsible. Components 3 and 4 represent the external dimension, which is directed to entities external to UNRWA, and depend primarily on them for their realisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE FOUR COMPONENTS OF UNRWA’S PROTECTION FRAMEWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Dimension</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. PROTECTION PROGRAMMING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that protection needs are addressed in all aspects of UNRWA programme and project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PROTECTION IN AND THROUGH SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering services in a manner that promotes and respects the rights of beneficiaries and ensures the safety and dignity of beneficiaries and of UNRWA personnel. This is an</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
design, policies, protocols and procedures, as well as in staff training. integral part of ensuring the provision of quality services in accordance with internationally agreed standards.

### External Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION</th>
<th>4. A JUST AND DURABLE SOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting, in coordination with its partners, respect for the rights of Palestine refugees through monitoring, reporting and intervention. Interventions range from responses to specific problems, and preventive or remedial action when possible, to action to help create and consolidate an environment and practices in which rights are respected.</td>
<td>Highlighting to the international community, particularly through the statements of the Commissioner General, the urgent need for a just and durable solution to the plight of the Palestinian people and helping to ensure that, in its elaboration, the rights and interests of Palestine refugees are safeguarded. The responsibility for achieving this solution rests primarily with political actors and the international community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This component covers protection for which the primary responsibility lies with the host government, occupying power, or authority or entity exercising de facto control. Its content is determined by the specific problems faced by Palestine refugees as a result of neglect or deliberate undermining of their rights.
Mainstreaming protection

The UNRWA Protection Policy emphasises that, as major provider of public services, UNRWA has a particular responsibility to seek to ensure protection in the way it delivers its own services. This has meant incorporating minimum protection standards into all UNRWA programming and service delivery, including reform initiatives, with the aim of strengthening a ‘protection reflex’\textsuperscript{15} at all levels of the Agency.

To further this aim, UNRWA has developed internal guidance in the form of a ‘Tool for Incorporating Minimum Standards on Protection into UNRWA Programming and Service Delivery’, designed to help UNRWA personnel including managers, across all fields of operation, to ‘effectively incorporate protection analysis and response into the needs assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects’\textsuperscript{16} (UNRWA, 2010a). In addition, the tool helps all personnel to recognise protection concerns and understand their responsibility to react when they encounter situations where individuals and groups face protection threats. The tool was developed through extensive internal consultation and is based on accountability tools already endorsed and in use by the humanitarian community.\textsuperscript{17}

In addition to specific protection standards relevant to each sector of programming, UNRWA has defined six ‘common protection standards’ that are relevant to all UNRWA
programmes, and define its approach to protection mainstreaming: 18

Safety and dignity: UNRWA programmes should deliver services in a manner that ensures the safety and dignity of beneficiaries and staff and does not cause unintended harm or result in reduced protection 19.

Targeted service delivery: UNRWA programmes should analyse protection threats as part of the context analysis addressed throughout the programme management cycle so that, to the greatest extent possible, services are targeted to address specific protection needs in a manner that promotes and respects the rights of beneficiaries.

Accessibility, equity and impartiality: UNRWA services should be accessible and delivered equitably and impartially, with the rights, needs and capacities of beneficiaries, particularly vulnerable groups, reflected in all stages of programming.

Participation: the Palestine refugee population should be meaningfully engaged by UNRWA as partners to identify and respond to protection concerns 20

Coordination: UNRWA personnel should be able to react appropriately to incidences where the rights of Palestine refugees are threatened or violated by accessing internal reporting mechanisms that, to the greatest extent possible, maximise the Agency’s potential to respond through UNRWA programming options. Procedures should also be in place to govern external referral where appropriate.

Advocacy: UNRWA should engage directly and/or indirectly with relevant duty bearers to promote respect of Palestine refugee rights.
This chapter will use these six common protection standards as a lens through which to illustrate practical examples of UNRWA’s approach to protection (see the section below).

A challenge to any protection mainstreaming effort is how to monitor and evaluate progress. To assist in this regard, UNRWA has developed a methodology to assess the degree of alignment with its protection standards. The methodology consists of workshops with frontline staff and beneficiaries who provide their assessment, based on their own direct experiences, of the extent to which UNRWA programmes promote and respect the rights, safety and dignity of Palestine refugees. As well as establishing a baseline against which to measure progress, programmes use the result of their analysis as a tool to focus attention and support from within and outside the Agency in order to address the needs identified. Another important outcome of this process is to further develop an awareness of protection concepts and a protection way of thinking among staff and beneficiaries who participate in the assessment.

Protection in case of external threats

As well as protection mainstreaming, the UNRWA Protection Policy also describes UNRWA’s approach to addressing protection issues where the primary responsibility is external to UNRWA. As noted in the first section, this approach will usually consist of a combination of programmatic and advocacy responses.

UNRWA’s programmatic response to protection issues takes place through two possible modes of action:

Service delivery: through UNRWA’s regular programmes and/or targeted assistance to mitigate the humanitarian needs
arising as a consequence of protection concerns and to strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities to resist protection threats.

**Support**: through UNRWA’s cooperation with local partners and community based organisations in order to strengthen and/or maintain their capacity to respond to protection needs of individuals and groups.

UNRWA’s *advocacy* response involves direct and/or indirect engagement with the relevant authorities through three possible modes of action:

**Persuasion**: convincing the authorities, through direct bilateral dialogue, to take action, with a view to fulfilling their obligations to prevent or put a stop to violations, to pursue remedial or corrective action and to help create and consolidate an environment and practices in which rights are respected.

**Mobilisation**: generating awareness, interest and influence of selected third parties potentially able to affect protection outcomes, such as states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society institutions, donors, diplomatic community, regional or international organisations and relevant UN human rights mechanisms, e.g. treaty bodies, special rapporteurs\(^{21}\).

**Public advocacy**: raising awareness at all levels, including through the media when appropriate and in coordination with NGO and UN partners.

The appropriate combination of modes of action will depend on the nature and gravity of the protection threat identified and will be based on a thorough analysis of the situation, risks and the stakeholders involved. Indeed, protection in UNRWA
is not a separate element contained within the programmatic response or within the advocacy response. All the components of the UNRWA’s protection work are intrinsically linked and part of a whole approach. One of UNRWA’s significant strengths in this regard is the way, through its programmes, that it interacts with refugees, understands their situation and gathers the information on which it intervenes at the international protection level.

**Protection in Practice: examples of protection initiatives from UNRWA Fields of operation**

This section will illustrate UNRWA’s approach to protection by providing some examples of UNRWA protection initiatives through the lens of the aforementioned six common protection standards (see the section above).

**Safety and dignity of beneficiaries and staff**

At the most fundamental level, UNRWA has a strong responsibility to ensure that the manner in which it provides its own services respects the safety and dignity of beneficiaries. At a minimum, UNRWA has an obligation to avoid jeopardising people’s safety when providing assistance, to be aware of any unintended negative consequences of the provision of assistance and to take action to mitigate against those consequences (‘do no harm’). Measures taken by UNRWA to ensure safety and dignity in its service provision include increased efforts to ensure a violence-free environment in all its learning facilities; promoting knowledge of individual rights through a Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance Curriculum in its schools (UNRWA, 2012c), taking steps to prevent, identify and
respond to incidents of sexual harassment, abuse of power and other forms of exploitation and the recent introduction of compulsory ethics training for all staff.

Example of protecting children from sexual harassment in UNRWA facilities in Jordan

An issue that was identified as a major concern through the above mentioned protection workshops to assess the degree of alignment with UNRWA’s protection standards (see the section above) conducted with UNRWA programme staff in Jordan was the vulnerability of children to sexual harassment and abuse inside some UNRWA facilities. Several incidents had been recorded of young men climbing over the boundary walls of some UNRWA schools and abusing school children (boys and girls). This abuse often happened in the toilets, located away from the main school building. UNRWA staff recognised that children had little awareness of how to avoid and report on such incidents. UNRWA’s response to these challenges has included community outreach to sensitize community leaders, parents and youth to the gravity and impact of the issue on affected children and to call for attacks to cease. It has also focused on raising student awareness on how to avoid and react to sexual harassment and abuse, including reporting incidents that occur. Improvements to school practices have also been made, such as monitoring of toilets and corridors by parent volunteers, teacher recording of the time when children leave class for the toilet and children going in pairs to the toilet blocks. Improvements to school infrastructure, such as raising the height of perimeter walls and relocating toilets closer to the main school building are also being undertaken. Effort has also been placed on strengthening the capacity of front-line staff to detect, refer
and provide necessary support to survivors of child abuse, including sexual harassment and to improving coordination with existing national referral systems and local NGOs to ensure support for affected children. The combination of community outreach, security measures and capacity building initiatives has proved successful in providing a more safe and secure environment for children in the affected schools.

**Targeted service delivery to address specific protection vulnerabilities and rights issues**

Based on an analysis of protection threats and vulnerabilities, UNRWA is able to target assistance to address the protection needs identified. Examples include protection tailored job-creation programmes supporting communities under threat of forced displacement, the provision of micro-finance loans to women entrepreneurs, food and cash assistance to the poorest and psycho-social counselling to persons traumatised by exposure to violence.

**Example of addressing post-conflict trauma in Gaza**

UNRWA launched its Psychological Support Programme during the Second Intifada in 2002 to assist Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West

Bank who had lost their ability to cope with the deteriorating conditions characterised by high levels of violence and economic decline. As the depth of service provided by the programme increased, it was renamed the Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) in 2005.

In Gaza, research has indicated that the majority of Palestinian children report symptoms of distress. Children in Gaza are regularly exposed to violence, through Israel
Defence Forces operations, internal conflict, and community or household tensions. This situation is aggravated by the economic and psychological hardships caused by the ongoing blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. Children face persistent violations of their basic human rights, with a devastating psychological impact. These problems include: lack of motivation in school, fear, sleeplessness, difficulty in concentrating, memory loss and flashbacks. Following the eight-day conflict in November 2012, the number of people the CMHP was treating in Gaza doubled. Of those treated, 42 per cent were under the age of nine (UNRWA, 2013a).

The CMHP strives to mitigate the impact of trauma on refugee children in Gaza. UNRWA’s school-based counsellors focus on promoting the mental health of all students and involving the community, parents, teachers and children to address the trauma left by attacks. Psychological support and counselling is also provided to teachers, as they cannot be expected to effectively help the children in their care if they are still struggling to deal with their own trauma. Workshops are conducted for parents to teach them the techniques of post-conflict guidance and care for children, and to enable them to recognise when their child might be suffering from acute stress. Children are given space to express themselves and receive the support of counsellors as well as peers. Children are provided with mental health education classes, where they learn basic life skills, including appropriate forms of communication, stress coping mechanisms and self-confidence building exercises. These programmes help children in Gaza to cope with the difficult situation in which they live (UNRWA, 2008a).
Accessibility and impartiality of UNRWA service delivery

Barriers to access may be internal to UNRWA (e.g. eligibility criteria, lack of information on rights to services, programme coverage) as well as external, linked to social, economic or political restrictions (e.g. poverty, disability, gender, restrictions on movement). Vulnerable groups in particular may face economic, physical, cultural and social barriers in accessing the services and support to which they are entitled. By incorporating a protection analysis into programme cycle management, UNRWA programmes are trying to identify these barriers and find ways to diminishing them. Examples include the provision of quality educational opportunities for children with special needs (UNRWA, 2013b), inclusion in UNRWA job-creation programme activities for disabled persons and other specific vulnerable groups, design modifications to UNRWA infrastructure to ensure access for disabled persons (UNRWA, 2010b)

and interventions to relevant authorities to ease movement restrictions in order to allow access to services.

Example of providing access to health services in the West Bank

Ensuring access to health care can be particularly difficult in some of UNRWA’s areas of operation. This may be because of conflict, restrictions on movement and restricted entitlements of refugees in some host countries. In the 1950s, the Agency counted 91 health centres run by 75 doctors in its area of operations. Today, medical care services are provided through a network of 138 primary health care facilities, in which 450 physicians and 3500 other health-care staff work.
This significant presence on the ground has notably decreased the physical and economic barriers that preclude access to health care for Palestine refugees in most fields.

However, in the West Bank, conflict-related access restrictions on patients and on UNRWA health staff continue to be a major challenge to the provision of regular health care, including primary health services to Palestine refugees. These restrictions led to the activation, in 2003, of UNRWA Mobile Health Teams in the West Bank. These teams are composed of medical, nursing and laboratory staff, as well as a pharmacist, and offer a full range of essential medical services including immunisation, control of communicable and non-communicable diseases and first aid treatment for conflict-related injuries. The objective of these teams is essentially to facilitate access to health services in locations affected by closures. However, the Mobile Health Teams continue to face restrictions when trying to reach the enclave areas of the West Bank between the 1949 Armistice (Green) Line and West Bank Barrier. These restrictions often preclude the particularly vulnerable groups that live in these areas from regular access to primary health-care services. UNRWA continues to intervene with the relevant Israeli authorities on these issues and to strengthen its advocacy by improving its documentation of the overall impact of the West Bank Barrier on the access of Palestine refugee communities to land, livelihoods and services (UNRWA, 2013d).

**Participation of Palestine refugees**

UNRWA has long understood that Palestine refugees have the best knowledge and insight into their actual situation and that the involvement, to the greatest degree possible, of the
community in prioritising and planning activities, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of programme performance has obvious advantages in terms of quality of programme implementation (UNRWA 2008b). However, in recent years, as UNRWA has adopted a more protection-orientated approach to programming, it has increasingly recognised participation, including that of the most vulnerable, as a fundamental principle of human rights that has the main goal of empowering refugees to realise their rights and improve social equity (UNRWA, 2009a). UNRWA also understands that meaningful participation can also have a beneficial effect on staff security in that it may alleviate some of the frustrations or misunderstandings that might otherwise lead to threats or attacks against staff members (UNRWA, 2009c). Examples of participatory approaches include school parliaments and community involvement in educational reform, for example through the Gaza Field Office ‘Schools of Excellence Initiative’, community outreach linked to the Family Health Team approach (UNRWA, 2012d), the Neirab Rehabilitation Project in Syria, camp-improvement initiatives such as in Jerash refugee camp in Jordan and the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp in Lebanon.

Example of the participatory approach in the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp in Lebanon

The planning and design work for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp represents an impressive model of civic participation, which began with the community’s own initiative to formulate their vision for the reconstruction of their camp. Through workshops, public discussions and interviews with displaced refugees, community activists, experts and UNRWA’s Design Unit, the community was able
to take the lead in the decision-making on planning and reconstruction. This process included drawing up guidelines and street widths and community agreement to reduce the sizes of plots and the built area to allow for wider roads and pathways to improve light and ventilation. Each individual family was able to work with the architects to design their new homes based on their own specific needs and requirements, including for wheelchair access.\(^\text{32}\)

**Coordination: internally and externally**

Effective coordination is one of the key elements for ensuring successful protection mainstreaming throughout UNRWA programmes and is an important step towards achieving an Agency-wide ‘protection-reflex’.\(^\text{33}\) UNRWA is working to strengthen internal coordination mechanisms so that when personnel or beneficiaries report incidents of abuse or neglect of refugee rights, UNRWA programmes, in coordination with protection officers and focal points in each Field, use this information to design an appropriate response. Although UNRWA can do a lot with the breadth of service provision available, if it is not in a position to provide a comprehensive response, referral pathways to other specialist agencies with suitably qualified personnel are being established to ensure that individuals can access the most appropriate support available.

*Example of strengthening a coordinated response to violence against women*

The need for a more comprehensive response to violence against women has led UNRWA to adopt a multi-sectoral approach, building on existing services
and partnerships, based on UNRWA’s wider Protection Policy and linked to the UN conventions and the UNiTE campaign. This approach emphasises the need for flexibility and adaptation to the specific needs of different contexts.

Fields-specific approaches include:

**Lebanon**: a pilot project in Tyr area where UNRWA staff are involved in detection and follow-up while the case management is undertaken by external providers, is currently being expanded to other areas.

**Gaza Strip**: detection services and follow-up are mainly through 18 UNRWA ‘one-stop centres’, which provide health care, legal and psychological counselling.

**Syria**: prior to the ongoing conflict UNRWA had initiated a referral system through women programme centres to external providers, with social interventions and follow-up components such as legal aid, and a hotline. The project ceased to function temporarily during 2012 due to the situation in the country, but is currently being re-established with interventions adapted to the current Syrian context, including the building of capacities within UNRWA to address the psycho-social effects of gender based violence.

**West Bank**: the Family Protection initiative has initiated a community-based response to domestic and family violence through a participatory approach based on UNRWA’s services in 15 camps. The initiative is working in partnership with other parties in building a Palestinian referral system including both the public and private sectors. The approach is complementary to, and draws on lessons learnt from, a national child protection referral system developed by the
Ministry for Social Affairs together with UNICEF and BirZeit University.

Jordan: UNRWA frontline staff from the Health, Education, and Relief and Social Services programmes have been trained in detecting and referring survivors. The latter are accessing services through the partnerships established by UNRWA with the main actors and within the framework of the national and legal referral system in Jordan.35

Example of strengthening coordination on child protection36

UNRWA is the main provider of primary education to 500,000 children in its areas of operations and is the direct provider of a range of other services relevant to child protection. In addition to the psycho-social counselling in violence affected areas already mentioned (see the section above), UNRWA is also actively involved in reporting, monitoring and intervening on protection concerns of Palestine refugee children throughout its areas of operation. UNRWA is, therefore, well placed to engage directly on child protection issues as well as provide input and coordinate with other relevant actors of the United Nations on child protection. For example, in the West Bank and Gaza, UNRWA is an active participant in the 1612/Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)37 working group chaired by UNICEF. UNRWA reviews and provides input to the bi-monthly MRM Global Horizontal Notes as well as input to the annual reports of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict to the General Assembly and the Security Council. UNRWA has also used its legal capacity to provide regular feedback on matters of international law raised by the WG1612/MRM. UNRWA also collaborates, either

164
individually or in cooperation with other UN agencies, with relevant Treaty Bodies and Special Rapporteurs, such as the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, with a view to ensuring that human rights issues in relation to Palestine refugees, including children, are addressed.

UNRWA is currently undertaking a mapping of activities that intersect either directly or indirectly with the issue of child protection. The mapping involves a general stocktaking of the existing child protection systems, services and capacities within UNRWA. This includes internal policies, regulations, standards, services and monitoring and evaluation systems. It also examines external coordination mechanisms, interaction with other actors including relevant government departments. The aim of the mapping is to inform subsequent development of a child protection framework that will describe UNRWA’s commitment to child protection and strengthen linkages between existing child protection tools and mechanisms in the Agency to better prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of children.

Advocacy combined with programming on behalf of the rights of Palestine refugees

While UNRWA programmes and services work to mitigate the consequences arising from protection concerns, UNRWA also promotes respect of Palestine refugee rights by engaging directly or indirectly with the relevant authorities, through the framework of activities described in the previous section, titled ‘Protection in case of external threats’. These advocacy responses may be targeted for vulnerable groups or may address specific events or abuses committed against individuals.
The following examples describe some protection issues from all Fields on which UNRWA has engaged in advocacy while also mitigating the consequences arising from the issue through its service delivery and/or support modes of action, which have, in turn, informed the advocacy approach. Indeed, one of UNRWA’s main strengths in terms of protection compared to many other agencies is its ability to combine the direct delivery of substantial services adapted to the specific vulnerabilities of Palestine refugees, combined with advocacy activities aimed at preventing human rights abuses.

Example of combining advocacy and programmatic response during armed conflict in Gaza and Syria

In Gaza, during the conflict of December 2008 to January 2009, UNRWA provided shelter for approximately 50,000 people in UNRWA schools, and distributed food and other relief items to the affected population and provided first aid care to the wounded. Throughout the conflict, UNRWA also consistently and publicly called for restraint and for the respect of the civilian population. Following the conflict UNRWA supported 50,000 refugee families who had had their homes destroyed or damaged. The Agency continued to provide food assistance to 750,000 persons along with psychological support and counselling to those traumatised by the conflict. UNRWA also continued to call for accountability for violations of international law committed by either side and for a complete lifting of the ongoing blockade of Gaza.

In Syria, the escalation of violence since the start of the conflict in March 2011 has resulted in a rapidly rising death toll and significant displacement of both Syrians and Palestine
refugees. Despite the huge challenges, UNRWA has, throughout the conflict, continued to provide services to vulnerable Palestine refugees. As of February 2014 almost all of the total population of 540,000 Palestine refugees registered in Syria are in need of Humanitarian assistance. It is estimated that over half of Palestine refugees in Syria have been displaced, many of whom have sought refuge with host families and in government or UNRWA facilities. In addition to, wherever possible, the provision of its regular services, UNRWA has provided emergency assistance to refugee households, including food parcels, mattresses, blankets and cash assistance. Vulnerable groups such as female-headed households, children and the elderly have been prioritised for assistance, particularly to protect them during the cold winter season. In addition to its programmatic response, UNRWA has also regularly drawn the attention of the international community to incidents where Palestine refugees have been particularly affected and has consistently called for restrain and respect of the civilian population by all sides to the conflict.

Example of combining advocacy and programmatic response to prevent forced displacement in the West Bank

After their original displacement in 1948 many refugee communities in the West Bank remain at risk of displacement for a second time due to repeated acts of violence by settlers, continued home and infrastructure demolitions, restrictions on access to services, a discriminatory zoning and planning regime in East Jerusalem and Area C39 that favours settlement expansion and stifles Palestinian development and, as settlements expand, ever-increasing restrictions on access to grazing and water resources for herders in Area C that
particularly limit their ability to carry out their traditional livelihoods. Children in some communities particularly affected by settler violence and home demolitions present signs of psychological stress and trauma, including speech defects and difficulties with school work. These chronic stresses reduce the ability of communities and families to cope. Herding communities in Area C, communities affected by the West Bank Barrier and communities living close to settlements have been identified as particularly at risk of forced displacement.

UNRWA’s response has included tailored service provision through a crisis intervention model which, depending on the needs identified, may include health care, psycho-social counselling, educational support for affected children and emergency cash and food assistance, as well as ‘protection-tailored’ job-creation projects that target affected communities. It may also include referral to other agencies able to provide other specialised support, for example to the Norwegian Refugee Council for legal support and advice. UNRWA also provides support aimed at strengthening affected communities resilience and self-protection mechanisms through psycho-social interventions, legal, communication, media skills and self-advocacy coaching sessions as well as advice and support on self-representation for specific groups. This support is aimed at developing communities’ awareness, understanding, leadership and ability to advocate for their rights and ensure affected populations know how to access services. In addition UNRWA’s advocacy response is based on systematic monitoring and reporting of violations aimed at increasing the accountability of duty bearers to respect their responsibilities under international law. This includes through direct
interventions with Israeli authorities on behalf of threatened individuals, families and communities, numerous briefings and field visits provided to the diplomatic community and other stakeholders, as well as public advocacy messaging through the UNRWA website and through news media. UNRWA has also facilitated the participation of Palestine refugees to speak on their own behalf at various international forums, including in New York, Geneva and Brussels.

Example of combining advocacy and programmatic response to promote the right to work in Lebanon

Access to work for Palestine refugees in Lebanon has been severely restricted by both legal and administrative obstacles. Restrictions on the right to work limit livelihood options, exacerbate poverty and stifle hope for a better future. UNRWA provides direct and indirect credit to entrepreneurs to promote job opportunities, and promotes linkages with potential job providers through employment service centres and provides vocational training and scholarships for higher education. UNRWA has also engaged with the Lebanese authorities as an advocate on the right to work for Palestine refugees in coordination with the Committee for Employment of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon, the government-sponsored Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, UN agencies and NGO community.

In August 2010 legislative amendments to the law governing access of Palestine refugees in Lebanon to the right to work were passed through parliament. However, the legislation still requires implementation and issues such as provision for social security for working refugees and removal of demand for work permits for the refugees still need to be clarified. UNRWA continues
to monitor the situation in the labour market for Palestine refugees; provide refugees with information about the amended law and provide legal aid to refugees pursuing civil action through Lebanese courts. UNRWA will continue to coordinate with relevant bodies in order to ensure strong advocacy for right to work for the refugees.

*Example of combining advocacy and programmatic response for improved access to health care for ex-Gazan refugees in Jordan*

As in other fields, UNRWA provides primary health care to Palestine refugees, which in Jordan includes approximately 132,000 ex-Gazans. Unlike most other Palestine refugees in Jordan, ex-Gazans do not have citizenship and therefore do not have full access to all services provided by the state to citizens. Following discussions between UNRWA and the Jordanian authorities, this population were provided increased access to specialised hospitalisation care, including dialysis and cancer treatment, in state hospitals.

*UNRWA’s advocacy for a just and durable solution*40

The overarching protection concern facing Palestine refugees, as for all Palestinians, is the right to a just and durable solution to their plight41. This is the key to the enjoyment of national protection and the realisation of other rights. The Commissioner-General frequently reminds the international community of its role and the long overdue need in this regard (Bartholomeusz, 2009).

For example, in his keynote speech at the inauguration of the European Centre for Palestinian Studies at Exeter University in December 2010, the Commissioner General laid out
UNRWA’s views on a just and durable solution for the plight of Palestine refugees. He called ‘for decisive, courageous and just political action’ emphasising that ‘the refugee issue must be comprehensively addressed earlier rather than later in a peace process’ and that ‘the extent to which refugee rights and choices are addressed in a negotiated settlement will affect the credibility of the settlement itself’. He called for the voice of Palestine refugees to be heard in discussions to end the conflict, stating that ‘Palestine refugees are a reality whose role and significance genuine peacemaking efforts can no longer afford to neglect’ (UNRWA, 2010d).

While the elucidation of a solution is for political actors to achieve, UNRWA will continue in its role, as a humanitarian and human development agency, to highlight the urgent need for a solution and to help ensure that in its elaboration, the rights, views and interests of the refugees are heard and safeguarded.

**Concluding remarks**

The effort to incorporate protection into UNRWA operations is still very much an ongoing process. Significant progress has been made in providing the

Agency with the necessary framework and policy guidance to ensure a common understanding of what protection means to UNRWA and to UNRWA staff in terms of their role and responsibilities in their day-to-day work. Tools have also been developed to help managers incorporate protection into the way programmes are designed and services delivered. The recruitment of dedicated protection staffing at headquarters and field level has also been an important step forward.
Given UNRWA’s operational character and the nature of the challenges faced by Palestine refugees, the entry point for UNRWA’s approach to protection has often been through its programming. It is through its programmes that UNRWA interacts with refugees, understands their situation and gathers information on which it bases its advocacy. For the future, UNRWA will have to continue to work hard to ensure that protection becomes more deeply embedded in the way the Agency functions and the way UNRWA staff react to protection threats as well as how they interact with beneficiaries.

More needs to be done internally in the provision of protection training, both at the technical level for staff involved in the design and management of programmes, as well as awareness raising for all staff on their responsibilities with regard to protection, particularly those who come into contact with beneficiaries. The fact that UNRWA staff are already involved in protection activities in their day-to-day work has been an important message for staff to understand. This has helped smooth the way for a more systematic operationalisation of protection. Many UNRWA front-line staff, such as doctors, nurses and social workers, among others, already have a ‘protection reflex’ and it has been important internally to build on existing skills. This collaborative approach was also essential when developing and introducing the ‘Tool for Incorporating Minimum Standards into UNRWA Programming and Service Delivery’ as well as when dealing with the most sensitive protection issues.

The sensitive nature of the subject matter of protection inevitably means that some issues will be difficult to deal with, or even almost taboo to begin with. For example, the
subject of gender-based violence used to be a ‘no-go’ area for UNRWA in several fields, but is now being addressed by UNRWA across all fields. Of course, this change has come about not only because of changes internal to UNRWA, principally the appointment of a Gender Advisor and the development of an internal gender network, but also due to developments in host countries, changes in attitude of civil society and the focus of local NGOs. The issue of violence in schools and the use of corporal punishment is another example where UNRWA is engaged across all fields and will continue to assert a zero tolerance policy, whereby each allegation of misconduct (by staff or students) will be taken seriously, investigated and appropriate action taken.

UNRWA’s approach in the transition from taboo to action has been to build on the capacities already present within UNRWA, to strengthen internal reporting and coordination mechanisms as well as external referral pathways and to better engage with the community and local NGOs. Indeed, mapping protection partners and establishing good external networks has been key to the progress made so far. While the depth and scope of UNRWA service delivery means that UNRWA can do a lot, there are other actors who can be more effective, have specific expertise or are better placed to take certain types of action.

Coordination and mobilisation with partners is a crucial element of UNRWA’s approach to protection. For example, UNRWA’s interaction with the international human rights system represents an important avenue for UNRWA to raise awareness of the situation of Palestine refugees. UNRWA has, therefore, developed a specific strategy to guide this interaction, which includes a mapping of relevant treaty
bodies and special rapporteurs that may provided the most significant added value and has allowed UNRWA to target its interventions accordingly and provide a more predictable, timely and consistent intervention on protection priorities. UNRWA carries out this action in close consultation and coordination with other UN agencies, including OHCHR, OCHA, UNCTs and others.

Funding for protection activities remains a challenge, particularly in an organisation that suffers from a chronic budget deficit and has to continue to deliver essential public services to an ever growing population. Some of the protection initiatives referred to in this article do not require significant additional resources as they are addressed, to a large extent, by strengthening internal mechanisms to provide a comprehensive response from services that are already available (e.g. needs assessments that incorporate a protection analysis, internal coordination, external referral, participation). However, many of the protection needs identified by UNRWA do have significant budgetary consequences. For example, the provision of safe infrastructure at UNRWA installations and improved access to services for specific vulnerable groups requires financial resources. Also, further strengthening of the capacity of UNRWA staff to enable them to provide quality services that ensure the protection of Palestine refugees requires additional financial and technical support. UNRWA is largely dependent on voluntary funding and, for a number of years, has faced a severe budgetary crisis that poses a major challenge to the Agency’s ability to meet the protection needs identified. In order to draw the attention of interested donors to protection initiatives in need of funding UNRWA published the

It is to be hoped that donors will recognise the value of protection as a key element to ensuring UNRWA is more systematic and holistic in its approach and thus help to secure funding the Agency needs to achieve the best possible standards of human development for Palestine refugees, including protection. UNRWA will also continue to remind donors of the importance of not only providing their financial support to enable UNRWA to provide essential services on the ground, but of the need to also support the protection of Palestine refugees through much needed and long overdue political action.

The protection needs of Palestine refugees are substantial. UNRWA is responding to those needs in accordance with its mandate to deliver vital core services as well as through targeted assistance to address specific vulnerabilities of individuals and groups. These efforts go hand in hand with monitoring, reporting and intervening, either directly or indirectly, to the authorities that have the primary responsibility to protect refugees. The overarching protection need is for an end to the occupation and for a just and durable solution to the plight of the Palestinians that incorporates the rights and viewpoints of Palestine refugees. UNRWA will continue to advocate at the highest levels for that solution and will continue to serve the human development and protection of Palestine refugees until it is reached.

Notes

1
The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or by UNRWA.

Palestine refugees

are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. Palestine Refugees, and descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are eligible to register for UNRWA services. The Agency accepts new applications from persons who wish to be registered as Palestine Refugees. Once they are registered with UNRWA, persons in this category are referred to as Registered Refugees or as Registered Palestine Refugees.

The following additional groups are registered for the purposes of receiving UNRWA services, but are not counted as part of the official Registered Refugee population of the Agency: Jerusalem Poor and Gaza Poor; Frontier Villagers; Compromise Cases, Married to a Non-Refugee (MNR) family members; Non-refugee wives; and Kalafah children. In addition, several groups that are not registered in UNRWA’s registration system are categorised as eligible to receive UNRWA services, including: persons displaced as a result of the 1967 and subsequent hostilities; persons identified by the Commissioner General as eligible to receive services; beneficiaries under Emergency programmes; recipients of UNRWA’s microfinance programme; UNRWA staff family members; and non-registered persons living in refugee camps and communities (UNWRA, 2006).

The term ‘protection threat’ refers to any event or process that, if it occurs or continues to occur, may negatively impact
on the safety, dignity, rights or overall well-being of an individual or group.

UNDP defines vulnerability as ‘A human condition or process resulting from physical, social, economic and environmental factors, which determine the likelihood and scale of damage from the impact of a given [threat]’ (UNDP, 2004).


The IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) defines protection in the following terms: ‘The concept of protection encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (that is, human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law)’ (IASC, 1999, p. 4; and IASC (2002). It should be noted that this definition was first arrived at through a series of inter-agency workshops conducted under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at the end of 1990s (ICRC, 1999).

For a discussion of UNRWA’s protection mandate see Bartholomeusz (2009: 452–74).


UNRWA’s four goals for the human development of Palestine refugees are: 1) a long and healthy life; 2) acquired skills and knowledge; 3) a decent standard of living; and 4) human rights enjoyed to the fullest.

See UNRWA (2009a: para. 49).

Ibid., para. 16.

The UN Secretary General’s programme for reform launched in 1997 underscored that human rights are a concern that cuts across the entire UN system and called upon all UN agencies to mainstream human rights into their various activities and programmes. In a human rights-based approach (HRBA), human rights determine the relationship between individuals and groups with valid claims (rights-holders) and State and non-State actors with obligations (duty-bearers). A HRBA identifies rights-holders (and their entitlements) and corresponding duty-bearers (and their obligations) and works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims, and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations. See UNDP (2003).

These four dimensions to UNRWA’s protection activities were identified by Nicholas Morris in the consultancy report and have been endorsed by the Agency. See Morris (2008).

The term ‘protection reflex’ was used by Nicholas Morris to refer to staff being ‘alert to instances where the rights of individual refugees are threatened or violated, coupled with
competencies and mechanisms to address those violations wherever possible’ (Morris, 2008: para. 1.2 and 9.2).

UNWRA (2010a: 1).

In particular UNRWA drew on the ‘Minimum Agency Standards for Incorporating Protection into Humanitarian Response’, developed by an inter-agency group comprising Caritas Australia, CARE Australia, Oxfam Australia and World Vision Australia. Other accountability tools drawn on include the Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) Principles of Accountability, the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, the Red Cross Code of Conduct and the Good Enough Guide. Other sector-specific resources were utilised such as the IASC Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings, Interaction Protection in Practice: A Guidebook for incorporating Protection into Humanitarian Operations and Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations.

See UNRWA (2009a).

UNRWA sees security of staff as complementary to its protection activities (UNWRA, 2009c, 2011a).

As well as the crucial role that participation plays in identifying protection needs the UNRWA protection standards also emphasise the importance of refugee participation as means to prevent threats and violence against staff from occurring.

See UNRWA (2011b).
For further information on UNRWA’s work and priorities within protection for the period 2012–13, see UNWRA (2012b).

Adapted from UNRWA (2008a) and (2012a).

To read about the commitments to access to education in UNWRA, see UNWRA (2013b).

UNWRA adopted a policy for disability in September 2010; see UNWRA (2010b).

On July 2004, the International Court of Justice issued their ‘Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory’. The Court found the construction of the Wall on occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regime, to be contrary to international law. International Court of Justice, ‘Reports of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders: Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory’, Advisory opinion, July. Netherlands: International Court of Justice, 2004.

For an overview of the impact of the West Bank Barrier see UNRWA (2013c).

The UNRWA Programme Cycle Management Handbook provides a detailed description of the management of participatory methodologies, see UNRWA (2008b, Section 4).


The *Schools of Excellence* initiative in Gaza is working to increase academic standards, improve behaviour and promote
universal values in UNRWA’s schools. Through *Schools of Excellence*, UNRWA implements a summer learning programme for those failing in Arabic and Mathematics; teaches a dedicated Human Rights curriculum; promotes *Respect and Discipline* in its schools; provides additional assistance to students most in need through its *Special Children, Special Needs* and *Over-aged Student* initiatives and enhances the quality of teacher training in Gaza.

For a more in-depth analysis of the challenges of reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp see Sheikh Hassan and Hanafi (2010).

Excerpt taken from UNWRA (2009b). For an update on the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp, see UNWRA (2012e).

See note 15.

In 2008, the UN Secretary General launched the Campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women, 2008–15 with the overall objective to raise public awareness and increase the political will and resources for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in all parts of the world. Online. Available: [http://endviolence.un.org/](http://endviolence.un.org/) (accessed 15 May 2013).

Adapted from UNRWA (2010c).

For a more in-depth analysis of the challenges of advancing child protection in the region and the role of UNRWA in that effort, see the essay by Chapuis in this book.

For the purposes of this mapping UNRWA will examine all activities, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures to protect children from both intentional and unintentional harm (including abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence).

Area C refers to the over 60 per cent of the West Bank where Israel retains control over security and administrative issues, including the planning and building sphere.

For a more in-depth analysis of the possible role of UNRWA in resolving the Palestinian refugee issue, see the chapter by Leila Hilal in this book.

As noted by Bartholomeusz ‘the role of UNRWA in relation to durable solutions is different from that of UNHCR relative to refugees within its mandate (Palestine refugees within UNRWA’s fields of operation do not fall within UNHCR’s mandate and are excluded from the operation of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees under Article 1D)’ (Bartholomeusz, 2009). With regards Palestinians outside of UNRWA’s areas of operation, according to UNHCR’s Revised Note on the Applicability of Article 1D of the 1951 Convention (2009), if a person is outside UNRWA’s area of operations, he or she is not ‘at present receiving from organs or agencies other than [UNHCR] protection and assistance’ within the meaning of paragraph 1 of Article 1D, and therefore ‘such protection or assistance has ceased’ within the meaning of paragraph 2 of Article 1D. The person is ‘ipso facto entitled to the benefits of the [1951] Convention’, provided of course that Articles 1C, 1E and 1F of the 1951 Convention do not apply.

(UNHCR, 2009: para. 8)
It is important to note that being registered by UNHCR and receiving UNHCR protection or assistance services does not in any way affect registration status with UNRWA or the individual’s status as a Palestine refugee. Equally, relevant provisions regarding their rights, including GA resolution 194 (para. 11) continue to apply regardless of UNHCR registration or assistance (see UNGA, 1948). See also Goddard (2009: 475–511). In recent years an annual high-level meeting between UNRWA and UNHCR, as well as technical-level exchanges, has helped to strengthen cooperation between the two agencies, in particular on protection issues.

Bibliography


UNRWA (2006) *UNRWA Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions* (CERI), Department of Relief and Social Services, Amman: UNRWA.


—— (2010c) ‘Community of Practice in Building Referral Systems for Women Victims of Violence’, UNRWA Gender Series No. 1, 1 July, Amman: UNRWA.


Advancing child protection in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory and Syria

Laurent Chapuis

Introduction

The United Nations Children’s fund (UNICEF) considers that the overarching aim of child protection is that all children, girls and boys, grow up in a protective environment where they are assured their rights to protection particularly protection from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from family as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols and CRC General Comment 13. Under this definition, child protection contributes to the broader protection agenda as adopted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other UN agencies (see Brailsford in this volume), whereby economic and social rights associated with the agency core areas of service delivery, as well as civil and political rights, are defined.

UNICEF’s vision is to create a protective environment, where laws, policies, services, behaviours and practices minimize children’s vulnerability, address known risk factors, and
strengthen children’s resilience. Others have highlighted the need for governments to take a systems approach to child protection, including policy/legislation, information-based programs and social services, as well as professional training and public awareness raising (Svevo-Cianci et al. 2010). Child protection provides a barrier against the web of risks and vulnerabilities underlying many issues: sexual abuse and exploitation; trafficking; hazardous labour; violence; living or working on the streets; the impact of armed conflict, including children’s use by armed forces and groups; harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage; lack of access to justice; and unnecessary institutionalization, among others.

The protective environment is a human rights-based approach emphasizing prevention as well as the accountability of governments. It enhances aid effectiveness by supporting sustained national capacity for child protection. Finally, it reflects children’s own roles and resilience as agents of change and actors in strengthening the protective environment. This approach differs from earlier child protection efforts, which have traditionally focused on single issues, such as street children, orphans, disability. Although such efforts have produced substantial benefits, this diffused approach often results in a fragmented child protection response, marked by numerous inefficiencies and pockets of unmet needs.

Table 4.1 Child protection in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria: a snapshot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon (Palestinians in Lebanon)</th>
<th>Palestine</th>
<th>Syria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

189
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>21.8%</th>
<th>–</th>
<th>–</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of domestic violence</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent child discipline</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child marriage among girls</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child labour</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment ratio in education</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>90% (overall)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries reporting to UN Secretary General on grave child rights violations</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated number of social workers per 100,000 persons</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

1 Non-refugee specific country-wide data, unless indicated otherwise. Childinfo.org data updated by UNICEF offices
2 Child Rights Situation Analysis in MENA. Save the Children Sweden, 2011
In Jordan, 35 per cent of the two million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA are children. All but 140,000 have Jordanian nationality. The country has progressed in aligning its policy and legal framework with international standards. A draft Juvenile Justice Law incorporating restorative justice principles is waiting to be enacted. The adoption of a Protection from Domestic Violence Law in 2008 represents an important step in protecting women and children. Yet the age of criminal responsibility remains at seven years of age. Despite criminalizing violence against children, the Penal Code, as often in the region, allows parents to discipline their children as per public customs. Although corporal punishment is prohibited in schools, 29.3 per cent of children of grade 4–9 reported physical violence in 2010 (UNICEF, 2011). While promising steps have been taken towards the establishment of a comprehensive child protection system (police, schools, health sector), violence remains significant and goes mostly under-reported whether it affects boys or girls, including when of a sexual nature. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including refugee families, are disproportionately exposed to child labour, the majority of them in car repair, trade, and agriculture. Child marriage remains prevalent (Euro-Med Gender Equality Programme, 2010) and the Shariah judges’ can authorize the marriages of girls between the ages of 15 and 18.

An estimated 427,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, out of which 226,000 live in camps. Forty-five per cent of refugees are under the age of 18, of which 9 per cent live in extreme poverty (American University of Beirut, 2010). Additional 17,000 Palestinian
refugees from Syria would have crossed the border fleeing the ongoing conflict after experiencing extreme levels of violence. Lebanon is one of the few countries in MENA that ratified the CRC without any reservations. However, past recommendations of the Committee on the minimum age for marriage, the low age of criminal responsibility, the right to a nationality, and the right to be protected against violence, including sexual exploitation and the protection of refugee children, had not been fully addressed. Law 422 meant as a child protection law is not systematically applied, and corrective amendments are still being reviewed at the Parliament. Physical and psychological violence seems widespread in homes with more than 54 per cent of young people reporting physical violence at home during a one-year period (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2010). Violence is under-reported due to social factors, dependence on the family, and fear of reprisal. The situation in schools is of concern too. Forty per cent of students in private, public and UNRWA schools experience corporal punishment (University Center for Family and Community Health, St. Joseph University, Beirut, Lebanon, 2006). As to child labour, reports indicate it affects mostly vulnerable families, including Iraqi and Palestinian refugee children (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2010). Institutionalization is dis-proportionally high with an estimated 32,000 children placed in residential care institutions contracted by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Lebanon’s political and security environment remains fragile and its stability threatened by the ongoing crisis in Syria. The 2011 UN SG report on Children and Armed Conflict points at acute socio-economic inequities among Palestinian refugees in comparison to the host population. These are seen
as major risk factors for the association of children with political armed violence.

The West Bank, part of the Palestine, has an estimated population of 2.58 million, and Gaza an estimated population of 1.59 million. Fifty-two per cent are under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2010a), 788,000 are registered with UNRWA in the West Bank, and 1.1 million in Gaza. Twenty-five per cent of the population resides in camps in the West Bank and forty-six per cent in Gaza. The adoption of the Palestinian Child Law in 2013 provided a framework that guarantees the rights of children although several elements of the legislation need to be fully operationalized. Palestinian children are vulnerable to violence in their homes, schools, and their communities. In spite of Ministerial and UNRWA directives in that respect, twenty-two per cent of children are exposed to violence in schools (PCBS, 2012). Child protection mechanisms such as helplines, decentralized child protection networks, and psycho-social services are being established, contributing to a comprehensive system. Yet early marriage remains high, in spite of its penalization under the Penal Code. As to justice for children, a new Juvenile Justice Law that incorporates restorative justice principles is pending enactment by the President or the Parliament. There are foundations to set up alternatives to imprisonment, including community service, alternative families, and restorative justice, but the allocation of resources and adoption of reform policies are lacking (Qafisheh, 2011). In addition, the CRC Committee noted Israel’s practices towards Palestinian children in violation of standards on juvenile justice and the right to a fair trial (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2010). A UNICEF review of children coming into contact with the Israeli
military detention system found ill-treatment to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized throughout the process, from the moment of arrest until the sentencing (UNICEF, 2013). From 2002 to 2010, 1,145 children were killed and 7,223 were injured in conflict related incidents, either at the hands of the Israeli Army, settlers, Palestinian forces, or armed groups. In 2010, the Committee expressed grave concerns regarding the violations suffered by Gaza children during Operation Cast Lead (December 2008–January 2009) (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2010). In Gaza in particular, armed conflict and blockade has led to a severe psychosocial impact on children (UNICEF, 2010a).

In Syria, over 478,000 Palestinians are registered with UNRWA, out of which 129,000 live in camps. More than 200,000 are under 18 years of age. Palestinian refugees are entitled to social services and to work as Syrian nationals, but do not have Syrian citizenship. Although legislation offers some degree of protection, for example the Criminal Code on sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking, a comprehensive legal framework in line with international standards has yet to be enacted, and reliable information systems established. This gap results in children being exposed to a range of issues that include child labour, child marriage, violence (including sexual exploitation) at home, at school, and in communities. The outbreak of the conflict in March 2011 has dramatically increased risks for all children, leaving two million in need of assistance (UNICEF, 2010b). Palestinian refugee camps and other areas where refugees live have seen intense conflict. This is particularly true of Homs, Dera’a, Yarmouk Camp in Damascus, and Aleppo. As documented in the UN Secretary-General’s 2012 report on children and armed
conflict, some abuses in Syria are so heinous that they represent grave violations of children’s rights under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (UN Secretary-General, 2012).\textsuperscript{13} Children are being killed and maimed every day in Syria. The conflict has claimed the lives of some 70,000 people and an estimated 300,000 are believed to have been injured (Pillay, 2013).\textsuperscript{14}

**UNICEF Child Protection Strategy (UNICEF, 2008)**

Successful child protection begins with prevention. The priority given to education, health and addressing gender discrimination in the Millennium Development Goals underpins this preventive strategy, including in emergencies. The emphasis of UNICEF on policy advocacy, combined with its work in child protection, aims to intensify attention paid to children within national social protection systems and among international development actors. UNICEF strategy builds on the extensive international normative framework for child protection.\textsuperscript{15} As per UNICEF strategy, the protective environment’s elements together describe two pillars, national protection systems and social change. The former comprises elements for which the state bears primary responsibility for action: government commitment, legislation, service provision, monitoring, and building human capacity. On the other hand, open discussion, social norms and the engagement of children themselves require strong support from communities and civil society, and are referred to as social change. In the MENA region, a third pillar to the strategy around knowledge management was found helpful. In practice, these approaches are intertwined. Legislation contributes to changes in social norms, and regulations aiming to reduce violence in schools
are more effective when backed by data. As to humanitarian acute and protracted contexts, UNICEF Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) (UNICEF, 2010c) promote predictable, effective, and timely collective humanitarian action from preparedness to recovery.

The following sections on knowledge management, child protection systems and protective social change describe how UNICEF strategy is currently operationalized in the five fields where UNRWA operates in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank and Gaza), and Syria. This document is not an attempt to systematically review cooperation between the two agencies or to explore in-depth child protection opportunities within UNRWA work. Each section simply provides promising examples of cooperation between the two agencies and therefore suggests ways to advance child protection through their work.

**Improving knowledge management**

Information on child protection is scarce, and disparities exist within countries (urban/rural/camps, geographical, male/female, age, etc.) that are not evident from available data. Building the evidence base on child protection is vital to the design and the strengthening of child protection systems.

**Mainstreaming child protection in broad information systems**

One of UNICEF’s approaches to knowledge management is the inclusion of child protection indicators within multiple indicators surveys. UNICEF and UNRWA, together with government counterparts are carrying out such exercises in the Palestine (2012), Jordan (2013), Syria (2012), and
Lebanon (2012). It is essential UNRWA personnel expend its participation to the design, the planning, and the implementation of future household surveys in concerned countries.

National Human/Child Rights Institutions\textsuperscript{18} promoting the implementation of the CRC by state parties are instrumental in ensuring governments and civil society periodic reporting to the CRC and CEDAW Committees. Building on existing sectoral information systems, they collect and disseminate data, monitor policies and promote participation. Initiatives in that respect are at an embryonic stage in Lebanon and Jordan.

Social sectors, such as health and education, whether governmental or UNRWA run, operate comprehensive information systems generating information on child protection, for example cases of violence or neglect, and school drop-out rates. In Jordan, the two agencies are addressing data gaps regarding school drop-outs through a larger initiative on youth employability. Actors have here an opportunity to incorporate child protection indicators into existing systems through sensitization and capacity building thus ensuring these two sectors are mobilized in preventing, detecting, and referring cases of violence. The size of the populations served by UNRWA in the region would make the data generated extremely powerful.

United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks\textsuperscript{19} (UNDAF) are processes through which the national development situation and key development issues are analysed, and that provide a collective, coherent, and integrated UN response to national priorities. Repeated every five years, they offer an opportunity to review information available on child protection, and ensure information gaps are
being addressed by governmental, civil society actors, and UN agencies.

**Strengthening child protection specific information systems**

On juvenile justice, UNICEF works within the framework of the ‘Inter-Agency Panel on Juvenile Justice’ to coordinate monitoring efforts. Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria have worked on strengthening a juvenile justice information system using standard indicators (UNIDOC and UNICEF, 2006) meant to improve protection of children in conflict with the law. Indeed the availability of such data is enabling child protection actors to understand the scope of the problem, to document experiences with the judiciary system, and to evaluate the extent to which the sectors’ principles are applied, for example prevention, child-friendly environment, detention as a measure of last resort, diversion, and alternative measures.

With regards to children and armed conflict, monitoring and reporting efforts in the region are guided by the UN Security Council Resolutions 1612, 1882, and 1998, focusing on the six most common child rights violations. 20 Palestine, Lebanon and Syria are under scrutiny of the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. UNRWA actively cooperates with UNICEF and other actors in Lebanon and in Palestine. As such UNRWA has provided substantial input to the different reporting channels on grave violations against children in Palestine. At country level, information on violations is also being used for programming (provision of legal aid,
educational and psycho-social support), advocacy, and prevention purposes. As such, protection and education actors in the West Bank, including UNRWA, are monitoring checkpoints where children are facing harassment.

**Topical child protection studies and research**

Knowledge gaps also need to be tackled through focused studies. Indeed a number of child protection issues, such as street children and children in contact with the law, cannot be documented through household surveys. Specific studies aiming at measuring such issues, at assessing the responses offered or understanding root causes are usually required. In Palestine, UNICEF is working with Defense for Children International on a comprehensive and analytical study of Israeli detention of Palestinian children. The study is meant to inform both programming and advocacy by documenting lack of due process. In 2011, UNICEF was contracted by UNRWA to evaluate the psycho-social dimension of its Gaza summer games. This provided an opportunity to review their impact on children’s well-being and generated evidence in favour of its continuation in spite the financial challenges the initiative is facing.

**Strengthening child protection systems**

Child protection systems consist of laws, policies, and services across social sectors. These interconnected elements of the protective environment for which the state bears the primary responsibility, work individually and collectively to strengthen child protection. One should note the complexity of the situation of Palestinian refugees in that respect as these elements are placed under the authority of several entities.
across the region, for example UNRWA; national governments in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan; the Palestinian Authority, the Gaza Authorities and Israel.

**Policy and legal frameworks**

With respect to political commitment at the highest level, UNICEF advocates for child protection to be included on national development agendas. UNICEF and its partners have highlighted links between child protection and poverty when it comes to education, health, social protection, youth planning and budgeting. These efforts help monitor the cost-efficiency of investments in child protection and provide the evidence for advocating for adequate budget allocations and effective child sensitive planning.

All MENA countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Of the three concerned countries, all but only Lebanon have ratified its protocol on Children and Armed Conflict, all have ratified its protocol on the Sale of Children, and none have signed the third protocol on a Communications Procedure. UNICEF engages government counterparts and civil society on the issue of national legislation compliance and reservations to the CRC, the CEDAW, as well as the CRC Committee concluding observations. MENA countries’ reservations mostly relate to articles perceived to conflict with Islamic Law on issues of adoption (including on Kafala), freedom of religion and of expression. UNICEF has mobilized the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Conference towards lifting their member states’ reservations.
Figure 4.1 Key sectors contributing to child protection

At country level, the CRC’s concluding observations guide UNICEF’s efforts towards the establishment of legal frameworks compliant with the Convention. Two broad options are generally discussed with government counterparts, academia and civil society, including religious leaders: an all-encompassing Child Protection Law or, alternatively, two pieces of legislation that respectively focus on defining both children’s rights and principles governing services to be provided to children as victims and witnesses, and specific juvenile justice legislation for alleged offenders. The extent to which national legal frameworks apply to Palestinian children in the four countries differs greatly and can be source of inequities. In Lebanon for instance, statutory agencies are reluctant to intervene within Palestinian refugee camps, a serious issue that should be on all UN agencies’
agenda. Following UNICEF-led consultative processes, both Jordan and Palestine are now awaiting their draft Juvenile Law in line with international standards\textsuperscript{24} to be enacted by the authorities. Beyond the traditional approach to justice for children, the legal empowerment of children and their caregivers to improve access to justice with regards to birth registration, family name, inheritance, nationality, or refugee status for instance should also be promoted. The two agencies cooperate on a youth policy in Syria, while a discussion along the same lines was initiated in Jordan. In Palestine, UNRWA and UNICEF have been cooperating on the development of a policy that promotes a national non-violence in school policy.

\textit{Essential services: child welfare and justice for children}

UNICEF assists government counterparts in ensuring legal and policy framework’s provisions are translated into service provision. As rights holders, children with health, educational and child protection problems (victims, witnesses, and alleged offenders) are entitled to preventive and protective measures that require cooperation between all UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Ministries of Health, Education, Interior, Justice, and Social Affairs’ most decentralized echelons. UNICEF programmes initiate and evaluate these responses, thus informing policy reform in terms of protocols of cooperation, range of services offered, target populations, budgetary allocations, effectiveness and efficiency (including cost-efficiency), and capacity of the local mechanisms including in emergency situations.
With regards to child welfare, UNICEF and the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) have established seven decentralized Child Protection Networks (five in West Bank; and two in Gaza) providing detection, referral, and case management services to children at risk of violence, both at community and domestic levels. The networks involve social workers, school counsellors, police officers from the Ministry of Social Affairs and other relevant ministries, UNRWA, and NGOs. The model tested is destined to be scaled-up once the necessary adjustments have been made. UNRWA in the West Bank has expanded its work in this field by setting up similar networks linked with statutory agencies in refugee camps, in cooperation with MoSA and UNICEF. Discussions on a similar approach are under way in Jordan and Lebanon. Indeed, the ongoing conflict causes acute levels of stress, fear and insecurity amongst children and their care-givers. While children are at the heart of the intervention, professionals and volunteers, including adolescents and youth, target both children and parents through group and individual psycho-social sessions and a toll-free line. Parents acquire a better understanding of their children’s stress and anxiety, as well as the skills to protect them from the consequences.
UNRWA and UNICEF Jordan and Syria cooperate in view of strengthening schools’ capacity to prevent and manage cases of violence. These efforts can be strengthened through the development and implementation of policies and models (e.g. child-friendly schools) in both host and refugee communities. In Lebanon, children with learning difficulties benefit from the intervention of specialized educators and remedial classes in UNRWA schools. UNICEF also introduced a revised teaching curriculum for kindergartens’ staff, including in UNRWA-run facilities. In the Jordanian health sector, UNRWA and the Ministry of Health workers are equipped with the knowledge and the skills required responding to protection cases including early diagnosis and referral.

Improving employability of Palestinian youth in Lebanon, an initiative brings together ILO, UNRWA and UNICEF under
the peace-building trust fund. The project is run by UNICEF and UNRWA and involves vocational training, the establishment of a youth empowerment and job-creation programme, and micro-credit facilities targeting mainly out of school and working adolescent and youth. In Palestine, out of the 93 UNICEF-supported Adolescent-Friendly Spaces (AFS), 14 are implemented within UNRWA camps. Through these facilities the two agencies further adolescent participation, improve secondary school retention, reduce violence, and improve knowledge on healthy lifestyles among adolescents and young people.

In the field of justice for children, in partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Justice, the police and civil society organizations, UNICEF pilots juvenile justice alternative measures. However, due to the complexities of the situation in Lebanon, these do not benefit to Palestinian children in conflict with the law. These measures are intended to reduce the risks of abuse, of re-offending, to decrease costs and to promote reintegration through the provision of alternatives to detention, including community work, health, and education services and job placement. In Palestine (West Bank), seven family child-protection units within the police are being established, with police officers trained on social and legal aspects of child protection and child rights. In parallel, prosecutors strengthen their knowledge of child-friendly legal processes. In Jordan, family and child protection units have been established and are handling cases of children victims and witnesses. Formalizing the cooperation between these statutory units and UNRWA social workers operating within the camps, building the capacity of the latter are some of the objectives of the two UN agencies. Furthering the legal protection of refugee children and
women, lawyers have been trained on child protection, child rights and women refugees’ rights under UN conventions.

While social protection has emerged as a priority for governments, donors, UN agencies and partners, social welfare ministries tend to suffer from a lack of qualified human resources. A few universities only, such as Birzeit in Palestine, University of Jordan, and Universite Saint Joseph of Beirut, are offering advanced social work training; and issues of status within the civil service, the role of the civil society in this sector, and coverage have yet to be resolved. UNICEF encourages government and civil society partners to improve coverage in the areas with the most vulnerable children through outreach social services, governmental/civil society institutions, education/health/justice sectors. Child protection management capacity is also looked at through organizational development, planning, evaluation, and budgeting skills. In some rare cases, capacity needs are tackled through secondments, mentoring, study tours, thematic training, as relevant. Addressing government partners needs in respect of social policy and institutional strengthening, UNICEF Palestine posted consultants within the Ministry of Social Affairs, working on a range of issues including ministerial reform and psychosocial programming. The early involvement of government counterparts in designing terms of reference, recruitment, and a clear definition of roles, responsibilities and reporting channels, time-frames, and exit strategy appear to have played a role in the success of these initiatives.

Promoting protective social change

Beyond formal systems, for the protective environment to be effective there needs to be a social consensus against the
norms that underpin the violence children are confronted with. These often find their roots in economic, cultural, political and gender dynamics one needs to untangle in order to address them effectively. Emergencies are known to erode protective norms and to exacerbate children’s vulnerability. In a highly politicized region where youth participation can lead children to radicalism, offering positive models of civic engagement is critical. Responses build on home-grown positive behaviours make reference to child-friendly principles, and secure the support of agents of change.

For UNICEF and partners to tackle effectively what is probably the most challenging dimension of child protection, it appears essential to increase anthropological knowledge at family, community and national levels. Such efforts need to examine the dynamics of the production of social norms, as well as the role played by the different stakeholders. Outcomes should then be fed into multi-layered, staggered, behaviour change initiatives aiming at, for example, reducing corporal punishment, child marriage or child labour, to name a few prevailing issues. Participation is to be encouraged from the inception to the implementation in terms of definition of priorities, tools, approach, children’s and parents’ roles, in both conflict affected and non-conflict affected countries. The protective role of children themselves, families, communities, and society should be built upon, as children cannot be seen as stand-alone objects but as agents of change.

The sub-regional programme “Palestinian Adolescents: Agents of Positive Change – towards an Environment Promoting Peace and Reconciliation” illustrates how UNICEF and UNRWA cooperate on adolescents programming. The initiative rolled out simultaneously in the
Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria focuses on four pillars: improving knowledge management on adolescents; creating safe spaces for adolescent development and participation; supporting adolescent-led initiatives; and enhancing networking among Palestinian adolescents and partner organizations.

Acting upon the results of a national study on violence against children in Jordan, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education together with a wide range of partners embarked on a campaign (Ma’An) aiming at reducing violence in all public and UNRWA schools. The campaign launched in 2009 encourages teachers in adopting non-violent discipline methods. It already resulted in amendments to Ministry’s and UNRWA’s policies and a decrease in the rate of physical and verbal violence (UNICEF, 2011). In parallel, rules and regulations on school councils and student parliaments have been revised allowing greater participation. Youth facilitators have been trained to work with younger children helping them building self-esteem. Families and children are made aware of child rights issues, thus becoming actors of their own protection. UNRWA and UNICEF also promote safe spaces where adolescents acquire life skills through a participatory approach, including knowledge on child rights and better parenting.

Conclusion

Child protection concerns for Palestinian children across the region require urgent attention. The prevention and the response to ongoing risks need inter-sectoral efforts; in view of its mandate vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugee population, UNRWA is in a unique position to ensure child protection is mainstreamed. On the basis of this limited exercise, the
opportunities to advance child protection and to strengthen
synergies between UNRWA and UNICEF appear to be
numerous. Indeed, UNRWA has already taken significant
steps to position itself as a key child protection actor with
regard to knowledge management, the strengthening of child
protection systems, and the promotion of social change.
Through its five main programmes (education, health, relief
and social services, micro-finance, and infrastructure and
camp improvement), the agency provides services through
which specific child protection concerns can be effectively
prevented, monitored, and addressed. This demands issues to
be acknowledged, the personnel to be equipped and supported
in playing its part in coordination with other relevant
protection actors, and existing models to be taken to scale.
With regards to social norms, the agency’s efforts to respond
to violence in schools and to gender-based violence show a
willingness to tackle harmful behaviours, through community
mobilization, the establishment of referral mechanisms as
well as the development of policy frameworks.

However, for these efforts to bear fruits, the agency might
have to consider the following. As UNRWA has embarked in
operationalizing its protection mandate, it could be useful to
define an agency-wide framework ensuring child protection
concerns are systematically taken into account in all sectors.
This would be justified by the contribution of child protection
to the realization of economic and social rights on the one
hand, and civil and political rights on the other hand. In view
of the role social norms, policy, and legal frameworks play in
the protective environment, the organization will have to
carefully weigh the pros and cons of overarching and
country-specific approaches. Moreover, applying its advocacy
principle, UNRWA could also decide to engage with the
relevant national authorities on the review and the implementation of legal and policy frameworks pertaining to Palestinian children’s life in line with international standards. Finally, a renewed interest to sensitive child protection issues could impact on the relationship between the organization and the communities served. Concerns from a cultural, religious, or political nature might be expressed similar to reservations to the Convention of the Rights of the Child voiced by some governments in the region. However, the accumulated experience and regional expertise, the mutual understanding, the appreciation UNRWA benefits from the Palestinian refugees should allow potential challenges to be anticipated and addressed in a culturally appropriate and constructive manner.

Notes

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNICEF. The designations and terminology employed may not conform to United Nations practice and do not imply the expression of any official opinion whatsoever on the part of UNICEF.


CRC GC #13. For the purposes of the present general comment, “violence” is understood to mean “all forms of
physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” as listed in article 19, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

www.unrwa.org.

CRC General Comment #10. “States parties are encouraged to increase their lower Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility to the age of 12 years as the absolute minimum age and to continue to increase it to a higher age level.”

Since these studies, UNRWA has implemented policies across the fields, and has trained teachers in using alternative disciplinary techniques.


www.unrwa.org.

Children and armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General, April 2011.

www.unrwa.org.

Defence for Children International – Palestine Section (DCI-Palestine), www.dci-pal.org/.

The six grave violations of children’s rights are: recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access to children.

See also interview with officials in Amman.

15
UN CRC Committee country-specific concluding observations, CRC General Comments, UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children (2006).

Note that the crisis in Syria, ongoing since February 2011, has significantly affected UNICEF’s and partners’ capacity to implement programmes. Most examples refer to a situation prior to these events.

Birth registration, child labour, school attendance, violent discipline, child marriage, polygyny, spousal age difference, female genital mutilation, attitudes towards domestic violence and orphans (www.childinfo.org/protection.html).

As per Article 4, CRC and CRC General Comment #2.

As part of his 1997 reform agenda to make the United Nations an effective and efficient institution for world peace and development in the twenty-first century, the Secretary-General stressed the strong inter-linkages between peace and security, poverty reduction and sustainable human development, and the promotion and respect for human rights. In response to his call for the United Nations to articulate a coherent vision and strategy that allows for a unified approach towards common development goals, the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) guidelines were issued in April 1999.

MRM was established by Security Council Resolution 1612 in 2005 to collect information on abuses against children in an armed conflict and to report that information to the Security Council, which has the authority to take action against perpetrators. The Resolution builds on the 2005 annual Report of the Secretary-General (SG) on Children and Armed
Conflict, which lists the following six grave violations that should be monitored: (i) killing or maiming of children; (ii) recruiting or using child soldiers; (iii) attacks against schools or hospitals; (iv) rape or other grave sexual violence against children; (v) abduction of children; (vi) denial of humanitarian access for children. Initially, it was only the recruitment and use of children that triggered the “listing” of armed forces and armed groups in either Annex I or II of the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict” and subsequent establishment of country-level MRM task forces since 2005. However, with the adoption of Security Council Resolutions 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence against children, and attacks on schools and hospitals have been added as triggers for listing of parties to the conflict and for the establishment of the MRM at country level. In addition to monitoring of the six grave violations, verifying incidents and submitting reports to the Security Council, the MRM entails working

with parties to the armed conflict listed to develop and implement an action plan to address the violations for which the parties are listed.


Ibid.

The Palestinian Authority has expressed commitment for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) but is not yet eligible to ratify the CRC or report to the CRC Committee. Israel, as a state party to the CRC and recognised as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention, has
yet to report on the CRC in the Palestine (CRC observations, 2002)

Beijing, Riyadh rules, UN rules on Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, and the UNSG guidance note on Justice for Children.

Bibliography


Part III

Governance

The camps and UNRWA
5 From chaos to order and back

The construction of UNRWA shelters and camps, 1950–70

Kjersti Gravelsæter Berg

The construction of camps for Palestinian refugees started with war, disaster, and displacement. From late 1947 and throughout the year 1948, more than 750,000 Palestinians were displaced. The United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was set up in 1949 to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees, and about one third of the refugees wound up living in camps. Less than twenty years later, the war in 1967 resulted in a second large wave of displacement, and the establishment of ten more camps. Today there are fifty-eight recognised refugee camps in West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Anthropologists have documented refugees’ experiences in camps from “inside” or below. The archives of UNRWA, a more than sixty-year-old organisation, provide unique and understudied documentation. This chapter documents shelter and camp construction from the point of view of UNRWA, and highlights such policies and practices from a humanitarian management perspective.

This chapter explores questions related to UNRWA camps and shelter construction policies and practices over time. It explores what an UNRWA camp and shelter was, how it was
planned, built, and discussed. For how long was it envisioned to exist and why did it deteriorate so quickly? An inquiry into such questions highlights how difficult and politicised this field of relief has been, but also the role of pragmatism and unintended results of evolving practices. The study of shelter and camp construction as humanitarian, temporary relief elucidates how time affects humanitarian solutions in the absence of political solutions. The first part of the chapter inquires into shelter construction from 1950 to 1966, and the second part focuses on the period of intense emergency camp construction from 1967 until 1970.

Security, relief and the early UNWRA camp

Before UNRWA was established, camps had been located and set up through refugee settlement and building, and under non-governmental organisation (NGO) direction in multiple ways (Destremau 1995; Al-Husseini 2008; Jaber 1997; Peteet 2005; Plascov 1981; Sayigh 1979; Sfeyr 2008). Due to the failure of the envisioned resettlement schemes and the absence of return to their homes, the camps continued. The Jordanian and Lebanese governments thinned out the presence of tented camps near the border with Israel, and transferred refugees to new camps away from the borders in large numbers (Plascov 1981: 76–79). In the post-colonial set-up, the Arab host governments related the location and size of camps to their desire to control a possible destabilising segment within their borders.

In late 1950, after only five months of UNRWA operations, the first agency director described camps as “improvised quarters” – encampments, old mosques, schools, and
abandoned barracks. He referred to camp life as an advantage to that experienced in towns or villages because of UNRWA assistance. But at the same time, it was an “abnormal existence, crowded and uncomfortable”. Moreover, there was a concern that refugees would become dependent on aid. He wrote that the UN was seen as responsible for the refugee problem, and the sense of injustice, frustration, and disappointment made the refugee “irritable and unstable”. Furthermore, he reported strikes against making any improvements, such as school buildings in camps, in case this meant permanent resettlement.

According to early agency annual reports it was important to avoid the establishment of permanent or semi-permanent camps where there were “limited opportunities” for self-support. It was seen as difficult and inefficient to improve the refugees’ living conditions away from employment opportunities. At the same time the need for refugee movement to areas of economic opportunities was emphasised. Moreover, large central camps were easier to access, maintain, and administer than small, dispersed camps.

In the 1950s UNRWA aimed to reduce the number of camps, keep down the size of the camps, and integrate the refugees outside camps (Plascov 1981: 67). Shelter construction outside camps formed part of the Works programme – the W in UNRWA’s acronym – in line with the overall aim of the agency in the 1950s to make refugees self-supportive and relief superfluous by way of the resettlement projects (Schiff 1995). However, these small-scale housing schemes were more of a sidetrack. Contrary to what had been envisioned, UNRWA reported that refugees were “pressing” to enter camps, and that it had to turn most new applicants down.
While camps were seen as ambiguous, in 1952 due to winter storms “vigorous steps” were taken to ameliorate housing in camps. The lion’s share of UNRWA’s shelter provision was part of the “R”, the Relief programme. It started constructing “huts” in 1951 due to the lack of tents on the world market as well as cold winter storms. Now huts were presented as better accommodation than tents, and less expensive to build and maintain. Gaza was the field where most shelters were built to replace tents. Between 1951 and 1955 UNRWA built close to 30,000 one-room units here. In addition, UNRWA provided materials, roofing, grants, or staff to refugees who would replace their tents or shacks themselves. This approach was described as self-help.

Agency annual reports commented refugees’ refusal to accept “improved quarters” on the ground that this would be tantamount to permanent resettlement. In 1955 a change of refugee attitude was reported. Refugees now “better understood” that to live in improved shelter was not “prejudicial to their political rights but, on the contrary, that it is advantageous to themselves and their children”. However, the ambivalence between camps’ and shelters’ temporariness, and signs of permanency would not be solved easily. From the point of view of UNRWA, camps were unwanted, but necessary; UNRWA sought improvements, but had limited room to manoeuvre because of refugee sensitivities.

For operational reasons, UNRWA had to define camps more precisely. A working definition of an UNRWA camp referred to “a concentration of refugees and displaced persons which has been recognised by UNRWA as an official camp, which is operated by the Agency, and has in particular a camp leader
and environmental sanitation services provided by the Agency”. This definition would distinguish official camps from unofficial camps, and clarify UNRWA’s responsibilities toward the camps. The operation of a camp was closely related to the Agency Camp Regulations, which were also elaborated by UNRWA in the 1950s. On the one hand, these regulations established the rights of refugees in camps, for example access to camp facilities and centres. On the other hand, UNRWA’s regulatory tools were elaborated in considerable detail in terms of camp order, hygiene, use of land, and additional refugee construction in camps. The Camp Regulations were later characterised as “quasi-governmental” by an agency director, implying that UNRWA’s role in camps was seen as comparable to that of a government in a state.

From tent to cement: the UNWRA shelter programme 1955–67

By 1955 UNRWA had moved to an annual shelter programme. This signalled that UNRWA’s approach became more organised. Broadly speaking, the shelter programme had three objectives. First, the main action was to replace tents with shelters in existing camps. The second objective was to build new camps to replace unsatisfactory accommodation. The third objective of the new programme was to provide grants of materials or money to encourage camp inhabitants to construct their own shelters.

The actual scale of construction and assistance was reported each year. Between 1955 and 1964 a total of 470,000 persons were assisted through the shelter programme, at an amount of 6,000,000 US dollars. The bulk of this money was spent in
East and West Jordan and Gaza, which hosted most of the refugees. The process of construction was bureaucratic and time-consuming. In each country or area hosting the refugees – referred to as “Fields” in UNRWA parlance – the Engineering Division was part of the UNRWA Field Relief Department, which also was responsible for the general rations programme.

**The refugee shelter**

Some basic ideas about shelters were developed by the Technical Division at the Beirut Headquarters and presented in the “Huts Document” in 1957.

From the point of view of UNRWA, the huts formed the basic shelter unit to which the refugee family could add additional rooms and amenities as they found necessary and could afford. One small shelter on a relatively large plot of 7.5 × 14m was planned in anticipation of further occupant construction over time. According to the Huts-Document, “almost without exception” this was accomplished. From an early date refugees built a kitchen, latrine, and additional living room. Interestingly, this document presents UNRWA as adopting the refugees’ needs in the design of huts. The design accordingly accounted for the “refugees’ desire” for a central living area in privacy, i.e. an internal courtyard with the side of the dwelling facing the street presenting a blank wall to passers-by. A wall enclosing the plot was reportedly one of the first additions built to the basic shelter.

The shelter programme provided a frame, but the approaches to shelter construction differed greatly between the Fields. In Jordan and Gaza, construction was to a larger degree organised and carried out by the agency itself through local
contractors, but to some degree assistance was also provided to refugees building their own shelters. In Lebanon UNRWA built shelters for the “welfare cases” – the chronically ill, non-hospitalised tuberculosis patients – and “destitute cases”. The majority of refugees in Lebanon could receive roofing material distributed through the Roofing Programme in May and September of each year, and the refugees did the building themselves.\textsuperscript{21} In Syria the agency did not embark on camp construction, but distributed roofing grants only, later as cash grants.\textsuperscript{22} The Syrian government contributed a parallel cash grant, and this was one reason for the higher standard of camps here. According to the agency director in Syria, grants increased where the refugee would build with concrete blocks or other permanent material instead of mud bricks or straw walls. He wrote that the policy in Syria was based on the belief that most, “if not all”, had some means of support and should be encouraged to provide for at least part of their housing, in a view to encourage the “feeling of responsibility and their integration, temporarily if necessary, in the social life of the host country”.\textsuperscript{23}

Tent replacement finished first in Gaza. By 1959 most tents had been replaced with cement and concrete huts. Over time the lack of overall agency-wide uniformity in its shelter construction became an issue of some internal confusion within UNRWA. Some reasons were listed to explain the variation: the Field-based directors had reported different needs, and used different strategies locally. For example, thousands of shelters were built in Gaza at a time when the Field director there had insisted on only small one-room shelters. The regular size of the shelters also developed a considerably over time.\textsuperscript{24} Further, the annual shelter programmes were implemented over time with little
coordination, and related to different host countries and refugees.

Informal refugee building resulted in an organic evolution of the refugee camps. According to the Technical Division, in the 1950s and 1960s, the shelter programme actually emphasised refugee construction, to the degree that it was intrinsic to it. UNRWA referred to the provision of materials and location of camps near employment as self-help. Although not explicitly expressed, it is possible that at some point refugees perceived low-scaled self-construction as more acceptable, caught between a principled rejection of integration and dire needs for shelter. Refugees were already building from early on, and the shelter programme took advantage of this. In UNRWA during this time period, the notion of self-help was related to the aim of reducing the ration rolls, and in a wider sense to the rehabilitation of the refugee. Contrary to emerging ideas of self-help, it does not seem that the shelter assistance aimed to empower or give maximum autonomy to the refugees, but rather to be pragmatic and economic. When an UNWRA director by 1960 referred to refugees’ own construction in camps as “unhealthy” and “unsightly”, with buildings “mushrooming”, he was commenting on a loss or lack of control of camps due to the intrinsic refugee construction. Camps did not appear as the ordered UNRWA camps attempted through planning and regulation efforts, but had taken on a life of their own. As time went by refugees built and changed the camps and shelters through everyday building practices.
The good camp

The ABC of town planning can be encapsulated as the morphology of terrain, climate, accessibility to infrastructure, and proximity to employment (Tarmi-Tawil 2003: 152–61). In fact very similar factors made up a “good” or “proper” UNRWA camp, according to UNRWAs “Camp Site and Layout” document of 1956. The location, environment, accessibility, and topography and soil of the campsite were fundamentals that would determine the future operation of the camp with regards to avoiding overcrowding and slum development. This document emphasised that the location of the camp should be accessible, and within close distance to work opportunities and urban amenities. The refugees preference for centrally located camps was also mentioned in this document. Work nearby was considered “almost essential for refugee acceptance” of a camp. It was added, somewhat cautiously, that due to security reasons host countries “may not be of the same mind”. It is also interesting to see the reflections on the meaning of the environment. A camp was seen as exerting considerable influence on the surrounding environment. A campsite should neither be in a malarious area nor near slums or refuse dumps. Because according to this document, a camp was seen as “unattractive” and a “liability” to a neighbourhood, “and they sometimes are”. However, it is argued that more effort was often spent on finding reasons why it should not be placed in a good area, rather than why it should not be sited in a bad one.

From UNRWAs perspective, a crucial point in creating a good camp was to avoid overcrowding. While overcrowding would indeed become a headache for UNWRA in its operation of camps less than a decade later, at this point it was argued that an overcrowded, badly sited camp could turn
into a slum “without consistent and expensive care”. Contrary to this, a “properly organised camp” could readily be developed into an “adequate, low-cost housing project and even eventually evolve into a self-governing village”. To avoid overcrowding relatively large minimum plots of 7.5/14m were defined. The plots should, however, not be too large. It was noted that it had been experienced that where the plots allotted to the refugees were “too generous”, occupants would sublet portions of their plot. This was seen as a reason for the very overcrowding and loss of control the Agency originally meant to avoid.

Based on Michel Foucault’s notions of disciplining spaces and practices, refugee camps have been studied as orderly, hygienic sites for transforming the refugee (Malkki 1995; Hyndman 2000; Peteet 2005: 29). Palestinian camps have generally not been seen as complying with such descriptions of camps. However, the desirability of order, efficiency, and cleanliness was most visible in the cases where UNRWA planned and built camps from scratch, contrary to the more common shelter construction as tent-replacement. New camps often aimed to accommodate refugee squatters, and were built on a grid. There were specific zones for shelters, water, and latrines, and for installations like schools, clinics, and community centres. Ration distribution centres were planned for efficient and disciplined ration distribution “to control the line and the rowdy elements”. Police posts were built for the host county police and were closely related to camp operation. The results of UNRWA camps and relief were – when seen together with classification, census, rations, and so on – contradictory. As Julie Peteet points out, aid was both constraining and productive. In terms of camps she shows
how refugees crafted meaningful places, which in turn shaped refugee identity and subjectivity (2005: 31).

Camps: temporary or long-term

The British national John W. Tanner was a long-term employee in UNWRA. He was chief of the Technical Division at the Headquarters in Beirut from the mid-1950s until 1970. Looking back at the 1950s, he argued that the shelter programme had developed from the need to replace tents by buildings which would provide improved shelter, and be less expensive, even over a short time. He underscored that the temporary nature of “the problem” had contributed to a lack of planning in the early years. Low standards had been adopted. UNRWAs mandate was continually of a limited and short time duration, and shelter construction was carried out on an emergency basis. The shelter programme set standards that were adopted in large numbers. As time went on, departure from these standards was considered inadvisable in the “absence of any change in the main objects of the [shelter] programme”. Between 1955 and 1964, the programme was not adjusted to “the situation”. The programme thus had restrictive objectives, limited funds available, and a wide catchment of need. In hindsight, he sustained that the programme had to be like this due to “circumstances”, economy, and refugee and host country attitudes. Agency officials complained about several obstacles to camp construction: administrative, financial, and in finding appropriate sites. In 1957, the agency director added “local problems” involving host governments and refugees as obstacles.
Shelter construction and assistance was located within the relief programme, and throughout this decade relief was framed as a temporary task, while this programme was actually swelling. At the same time as relief was described as a “palliative”, the over-riding importance of such assistance was explicit. UNRWA was providing food, shelter, and medical care to a largely destitute and steadily increasing refugee population. In this undertaking, UNRWA played a “major role in reducing human suffering and alleviating the worst consequences of disaster”. The political function of relief was explicitly identified as related to the overall aim to stabilise the region.

While framing shelter provision as relief, and emphasising the temporary nature of the shelter programme, it is not obvious what temporary actually meant. In the view of several UNRWA directors, by 1960s the refugee camps were seen as potentially long term. In 1961 UNRWA directors referred that camps were by their “location and other factors, essentially permanent settlements”. There is evidence to support that camps were planned with possibilities for improvements over time. Obviously, the standard of the shelters was minimal. But the refugees were expected to add rooms over time, and the plots’ size was equal to the Technical Division’s definition of plot size in a permanent camp. The geographical location of sites, near employment opportunities and other amenities, meant that self-sufficiency was the goal.

From UNRWA’s point of view these factors would make the refugee to a lesser degree unemployed and isolated in camps. These same factors made long-term camps possible. This way temporary relief resulted in practical solutions that did not require immediate political solutions. Clearly, the agency did not build camps and shelters with an explicit aim to build
permanent villages. But the way these camps and shelters were set up held possibilities for a future even if at low standards. UNRWA had been established with the aim of “reintegrating” and rehabilitating refugees. When agency directors considered camps to be longer term in 1960, this was not an attempt to settle the refugees in the host countries. They did not link continued encampment to refugee rights, but to the physical and political reality as they saw it at the time. More than a decade had passed since the war, and no political solutions to the problem were on the horizon.

**Camps as urban slums**

By the early 1960s, it was reported that camps were growing overcrowded, run-down, and in need of repair and maintenance. In 1961, Tanner summarised the state of all the camps, and the picture he drew was rather bleak. Old established camps, where UNRWA had not embarked on construction, were described as haphazard, and, in general, badly planned. They had been in this state for the last decade, but now the continuation of construction by the refugees was “causing deterioration”. In the camps in Lebanon and Jordan, where the agency had replaced tents, reportedly fared better, but due to increased population growth and lack of control over unauthorized refugee building, these were also in danger of deteriorating. The same situation existed in the camps the agency specifically built.\(^{43}\)

In explaining this situation, Tanner illustrated the immensurable difficulties of planning by raising the case of the New Amman Camp. This camp had been built to accommodate refugee squatters, and it was finished in 1955.
But in five years only the population nearly tripled. Not much later, this entire camp was referred to as a mistake that should not be repeated. Tanner pointed at the lack of planning as a main reason for this serious decay, but also highlighted the low standards applied. These were shelters, not houses. Along with refugee construction, this caused the camps’ quick deterioration into slums. As a result of this, he asked for a review and upgrading of the shelter programme.

All shelter construction depended on allocations to shelter within the relief programme. Tanner’s suggestion to upgrade camps was not supported by Louis Gendron, who was chief of relief at the time. In his response to Tanner, Gendron acknowledged the “real-life issues” ahead of the agency: the imperative to balance the need for improved sanitary facilities and better planning, with the need for the largest number of shelters on the available land. He added that local authorities pressed for immediate construction once a new site was made available, and concluded that focus should be on controlling refugee construction.

Resulting from discussions, UNRWA shelter policy was rewritten. Now one central aim was defined as to strengthen housing through self-support, also by way of out-of-camp-housing-schemes. It was decided not to build more camps, and it was argued that camps would only encourage people to “persist in their refugee mentality”. However, when building shelters was necessary, the standard and infrastructure should be improved since these shelters would be permanent or semi-permanent. It also became clear during the ensuing discussions that improving education and expanding vocational training were UNRWA’s main priorities at the time, not camps and shelters. Indeed, one problem with the new approach was, not surprisingly, money.
For example, expenditures for shelters were weighed against what was perceived more valuable youth training. In practice, throughout the 1960s UNRWA attempted to close the shelter programme by way of increasing construction through refugee self-help. Schemes to eliminate sub-standard shelters in Gaza – "the field of indefinite Relief – and the construction of Shu’fat camp in Jerusalem in 1966 were mere exceptions. In line with the ongoing shelter revision, it had been considered to upgrade Shu’fat to an urban housing project. But, eventually, of the seventeen different types of UNRWA shelters at the time, in terms of price, size, and quality those built in Shu’fat were among the cheapest. Tanner had previously argued that the standard UNRWA shelters, when in or adjacent to an urban environment, “almost inevitably deteriorate into slums within short time”, simply because the accommodation was inadequate, and due to the standard of construction specifications. Moreover, he pointed out that there would “inevitably” be refugee construction since the shelters were so small. “Shu’fat camp”, he argued, “will look like Amman New camp within a short period of time.”

From 1950 and up until 1967, many camps and shelters had been built and assisted. In the eyes of UNRWA directors and planners, a number of camps were seen as urban slum. Refugee construction had been integrated in the shelter policy for economic and pragmatic reasons. This had led to an intrinsic ambivalence between UNRWA’s desire of order and the inherent refugee construction. The ambivalence between temporary relief and the temporari-ness of camps was becoming apparent with time passing. Camps set up to be temporary at low standards were now seen as more permanent. As tempor-ariness was blurred, it was argued that
Shelter standards should be much more elaborate to be able to sustain time, and that no more camps should be built. With the awareness of the large needs in the camps it appears as a contradiction that the shelter programme was phased out. Shelter assistance was explicitly becoming marginal in UNRWA compared to other programmes, only to be re-introduced in the early 1990s, after the start of the First Intifada.

**1967 Emergency Camps**

After increased tensions in the region and along the borders between Israel and its borders, war broke out again on 5 June 1967. After only six days, Israel had occupied vast areas of Arab territory – the West Bank including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. This was a devastating Arab defeat. The war and its aftermath led to a new large wave of displacement, for the most part into Jordan, but also into Syria.\(^56\) Previously registered Palestine refugees of the 1948 war were displaced for the second time, and West Bank and Gaza Strip residents were displaced for the first time, categorised as displaced persons.\(^57\) During the summer of 1967, a number of refugees were able to stay with relatives and friends; others went to the existing refugee camps of the 1948 war, some slept under trees, in the open air, or in mosques, and many were dwelling in government and UNRWA schools.\(^58\) In June the Jordanian government and UNRWA launched a humanitarian emergency operation, and donors were mobilised to contribute tents, foodstuff, and blankets.

This part of the chapter explores how camps and shelters were set up in the aftermath of the war. Contrary to agency camps and shelter construction in the 1950s and 1960s, this section
gives glimpses of an intense four-year emergency operation with negotiations between UNRWA, the Jordanian government, and refugee responses throughout the process. The past experiences of UNRWA in shelter construction and operation were often referred to, but turned out to be difficult to repeat coherently. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the location of camps and type of shelters would largely differ from the post-1948 camps, and refugees would reinterpret camps’ temporariness in terms of materials. Indeed camp construction did not happen in isolation from politics and ideology. In a wider sense the “UNRWA camp” was about to change, implying a change in UNRWA’s relation to the camps.

**Camps influx**

The Jordanian government greatly influenced the location of the early, tented camps. In the prospect of an early return to the West Bank, it was decided that further temporary accommodation should be located in the Jordan Valley along the East Bank of the Jordan River. At least 17 tented camps were set up in the autumn of 1967.\(^59\) These camps were moved around and refugees were distributed to different camps, and also moved down to the Valley on their own because of storms on the hills. By November 1967 Laurence Michelmore, then UNRWA Commissioner General commented that all camps had been moved to the Jordan Valley, except one, Zizia (later Talbieh). Here, the Iranians were building 800 concrete one-room permanent shelters.\(^60\) Contrary to the post-1948 removals from the borders, this time around tented camps appear to have been placed near the borders in a deliberate attempt to pressure Israel to accept return. Furthermore, the location of camps along the borders
can be considered as at attempt to avoid an increased number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, and thus to avoid the semi-permanent camps like many post-1948 camps that had been located near urban centres.

Moving camps around caused problems for UNRWA’s work. Michelmore complained that after every move it took weeks to get the camps into “proper working order” again. The “haphazard way” in which the refugees were distributed to the camps impeded progress in the camps. “Our staff”, he wrote, “are still getting families turning up with a… from some government authority or other requiring UNRWA to give them shelter.” The continuing flow of refugees from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip presented another difficulty, and prevented the camps from “settling down” and agency efforts to improve the conditions. In conclusion, the Commissioner General urged the Jordanian government to firmly settle the location of camps, involve the refugees in self-help, and to improve the registration of the displaced persons. UNRWA aimed at ordered camps, but this turned out to be complicated.

Throughout this process, a wish to homogenize camps was articulated. The Jordanian government wanted to create or keep distinctions by allocating separate camps for Palestine refugees, displaced persons, and for the ex-Gazans. It is possible that camps were categorised this way to make them more governable. As a result of such categorization, unofficial camps, and ex-Gazans would be rendered less recognised, more marginal (Feldman 2012). But in reality, UNRWA organised most of the camps, and displaced persons would locate in UNRWA camps too. The distinctions between groups thus became difficult for UNWRA to manage, and camps became unordered. This presented
dilemmas for UNRWA in deciding whom to assist and not, how to
regulate the entrance of refugees versus displaced persons into camps, and the allocation and withdrawal of tents.\textsuperscript{64}

Another sign of camps turning into chaos, once again from UNRWA perspective, was the increased militarisation of the camps. Palestinian fedayeen groups had been organising and operating military attacks along the borders with Israel since the mid-1950s. By November 1967 the militarisation of the tented camps in the Jordan Valley became an issue of concern for UNRWA. The old Karameh camp near the West Bank border was the headquarters of Fatah, and Israel was shelling refugee camps in the Jordan Valley to drive the fedayeen away from the border. To avoid the camps from becoming militarised was pivotal as UNRWA and the government discussed the future location of “final” emergency camps at this point.\textsuperscript{65} However, due to the Israeli shelling on 15 February 1968, all the tented camps and Old Karameh camp were evacuated.\textsuperscript{66} Many moved to highland camps, and the plans for the location of the camps had to be revised.

As a result of this, the negotiated plans for location of camps had to be revised. By late February – and it seems without further discussions with UNRWA officials – the committee determined the location of the six official emergency camps. Some of these camps had been tented camps in the early phase. Zizia camp, 35km south of Amman and Ain el Basha 20km north of Amman would continue. The former would be called Talbиеh, and the latter Baqa’a. The committee decided to re-establish the camp at Souf, in the town near Jerash. It would wait a decision on Marka, located 10km northeast of Amman.\textsuperscript{67} Lastly, the committee was seeking a site near
Jerash for ex-Gazans, and a site near Irbid for persons from camps in the northern end of the Jordan Valley. UNRWA was asked to build and operate these six camps. Agency-employed Palestinian sanitation workers from the old camps worked day and night to assist setting up tented camps.

Soon after, on 21 March, the Israelis attacked Karameh camp, a battle that was seen as a victory for the guerrillas. This would, however, also be a turning point for the Hashemite regime’s relation to the fedayeen. The King gradually felt more threatened by the militarised camps (Ashton 2006: 97). The Jordanian army Black September crackdown in 1970 left thousands of refugees killed and the Palestinian organisations relocated to Lebanon. Increasingly camps would be seen as spaces of militant resistance (Al-Husseini 2008; Peteet 2005; Sayigh 1979).

**The politics of shelter**

John Tanner headed the emergency camp planning process. Already during the summer of 1967, he had argued that as a result of the Agency’s experience in the past, consideration had to be given to the possibility of constructing standard agency shelters, as it had done since 1955. Now he argued that these concrete shelters were “extremely economical compared to tents”, and would “immensely” improve the living conditions. If a camp would exist for two or more years this should be considered, he argued, “irrespective” of the ability of the refugees to return to the West Bank. He realized that there would be objections to funds to permanent shelters – particularly at this time, with the “unclear duration of the problem”. Due to this,
he suggested two types of shelters that were “not necessarily permanent” based on a combination of UNRWA and refugee construction. Such prototypes were set up for refugees’ inspection in New Amman Camp.  

During the autumn of 1967 the issue of shelter became a contentious issue in relation to the prospects of early return. UNRWA and the Jordanian government had agreed to halt further shelter construction because of the envisaged return of the refugees.  

UNRWA directors at the time considered Israeli approval of the return of camp refugees unlikely, however. Indeed, return turned out to be, as Tom Segev found, mostly for the TV screens, and winter was approaching (2007: 18). The prospect of thousands of refugees living in tents in cold and wet weather conditions was seen as an imminent humanitarian crisis, and UNRWA was allowed to winterise tents and build temporary framework shelters. But in November, when the UN mission that was mandated to negotiate the implementation of Resolution 242 visited Jordan, the political value attached to shelter became apparent.  

At this point UNRWA was charged with building permanent shelters, and immediately had to cease construction. Only tents implied emergency. Agency directors interpreted the entire episode as an attempt by the refugees and the Jordanian government to convince the UN mission of the urgency of the matter of return. As such the view of a forest of tents would be much more convincing.

After this episode, the UNWRA Director in Jordan, P.K. Haycock commented that UNRWAs shelter programme had actually been brought to a halt by the attitude of the refugees who “refused” to allow the work to proceed. However, in January soon after the visit of the UN mission, there was a new turn. The Jordanian Minister of Development and
Reconstruction told Haycock that the refugee attitude had “changed” and shelters were being occupied “immediately” as soon as they were available. Without any more explanations the Minister was anxious to know to what extent the Agency would be able to meet this winter’s total shelter requirements.\footnote{77}

As a result of this turn of tides, a complete battery of central buildings for the camps now had to be built or developed for the final six 1968 emergency camps – except for Talbieh, which the Iranians had already built. UNRWA urgently needed donations from organisations and governments.\footnote{78}

Commenting on the rather long discussions of types of shelters, Haycock wrote that refugees’ opinions were seen to be changing from week to week, and that the Jordanian government tended to revise its position “as one or another [refugee] Mukhtar groups is heard from”. This meant that no shelter types could be said to be “surely and permanently” acceptable to both Mukhtars and government.\footnote{79} Although there had been protests against shelters built in the early 1950s, when Shu’fat camp was built by UNRWA in 1966 refugees and newspaper reports had complained that the quality of the standard UNRWA shelter was too low.\footnote{80} After the war in 1967 temporariness seems to have been defined as the opposite of UNRWA’s past shelter practice.

Tanner still preferred the standard shelters of the post-mid-1950s, implemented as self-help projects. But in a political sense this turned out to be very difficult. During the summer of 1968, UNRWA set up eight prototypes in Baqa’a camp, for inspection. As Director Haycock pointed out: the “major factor” is the response of the refugees and the attitude of the government. Only by erecting a type of shelter of purely temporary nature could the programme ever “get off
the ground”. In addition to the sensitivities to materials, refugee self-construction was considered too sensitive. In the end, UNRWA had to accommodate refugee concerns to be able to undertake any construction at all.

The degree to which temporality was attached to the specific materials and methods of construction is interesting. By August 1968, the accepted shelter type was asbestos shelter and imported Conport type pre-fabricated mobile shelter only. Now UNRWA had to order, provide, and build much more impractical and expensive units than prior to the 1967 war. This was against Tanner’s advice. Curiously, Haycock referred to the 1955 UNWRA shelter programme when he reasoned that more solid shelters would be built later. He assumed that the prefabs should last at least five, maybe ten, years, and argued that if the refugees were “unfortunately unable to return to their homes it would take about five years before the situation became ripe for the consideration of a proper shelter construction programme”.

The Jordanian government confirmed its policy position in August 1970: Only temporary types of shelters were permitted, even though refugee families “in some numbers” were building concrete block shelters and walls. While the temporality of the shelters and materials appears to have been imminent in Jordan, Haycock commented that Conport – a foreign company supplying prefabricated shelters – had been campaigning “hard with the government”, which may well have affected the government’s own preferences for this type of shelters. He also noted that some donors were more interested in temporary shelters than in tents.

The UNRWA Annual Reports of those years summarised the achievements of the shelter programmes. In less than two
years a total of about 16,500 family shelter units were built or set up in the emergency camps. In the summer of 1970 it was announced that no refugees were in tents. However, within a few years UNRWA would also see the new camps as deteriorated, expensive, and impractical to maintain.

**Camp order, operation and humanitarianism**

On the one hand, shelter construction was characterised by a pragmatic and economic approach to refugees as an aggregate. On the other hand, humanitarianism as sheltering refugees was saturated with politics. Politics is also visible from UNRWA’s view: after 1967, like in the 1950s, UNRWA argued for funds to refugees with reference to the “dire humanitarian needs”, but also to the “useful future of the refugee”, and to avoid a regional destabilisation – a “catastrophic worsening” of conditions in the area. Humanitarian assistance would thus help refugees to survive and become productive citizens that do not destabilise the region.

Ilana Feldman argues that while humanitarianism is “self-defined as an exceptional mode of intervention, it has been the normal order of things for Palestinians”. However much practitioners would try to avoid it, over time humanitarianism necessarily becomes something like government (2008: 175). UNRWA had defined camps as “UNRWA camps” in the 1950s, and this definition implied agency operation of camps. The Camp Regulations emphasised regulation of hygiene, use of land, and additional refugee construction in camps. As a constituent of the relief programme, shelter and camp construction formed part of a broader humanitarian management of refugees alongside the
education and health programmes. UNRWA would shelter refugees as part of its provision of relief assistance, but shelters were also thought of means through which a camp could be ordered.

In 1968, UNWRA directors found that the prefabricated units had some advantages, which connect to the issue of camp operation and camp order. The Field director in Jordan noted that as far as “camp administration goes”, these units were seen as “infinitely superior” to tents as they could be “properly set out in an organised pattern and numbered and the refugees would not be in a position to move then so rapidly as they do now from place to place within the camp or move them outside of the camp”. In 1968 the construction of this type of temporary shelter could be the first real step towards a “proper organisation” of the camps.88

In the “old” camps after the war in 1948 refugees in many cases had grouped according to village of origin, family, and clan (Peteet 2005; Sayigh 1979). In building the emergency camps in 1968, the Jordanian government suggested that UNRWA should re-site the tents in Baqa’a camp to accommodate the population by groups according to place of origin. In UNRWA’s reply, it was argued that if this significantly would contribute to “peace and good order” within the camp, then UNRWA should co-operate and provide funding for this.89 This echoes the ambivalent order of the post-1948 camps, with the “good” aim to provide efficient relief. However, it presented problems for UNRWA that refugees now, like in the past, were pressing to enter the camps. The situation was rather chaotic. Refugees were squatting in cities, and moving between camps. UNRWA staff described how families would often simply move into the fringes of a camp and pitch a tent, and then try to register
for a shelter or a new tent. Under these circumstances it became difficult for UNRWA to establish, maintain, and manage camps, and camps rapidly became disordered.

In 1970, UNRWA officially changed the overall definition of the camps for all the Fields. An UNRWA director commented that whereas in earlier years UNRWA had established and administered refugee camps and called them UNRWA camps with a “sense of achievement”, the situation in 1970 made it “politic to delimit” the agency responsibilities. The accepted term became “refugee camp”. The pretext referred for this redefinition was the signing of the Cairo Agreement in May 1969 between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese government. The armed elements of various member organisations of the PLO had assumed de facto control of those camps. For UNRWA camps were becoming unmanageable in other host countries too. When the camps turned into uncontrollable spaces of militant liberation, UNRWA disclaimed its responsibilities for the camps. Even though this point marks a change in UNRWA’s relation to the camps, after 1970 – with increasing ambivalence – attempts of camp operation would continue.

Constructing ambivalence

The history of camp construction concerns the emplacement of the unwanted and assistance to them within the confines of a benevolent humanitarian regime. The construction of camps signalled a development from chaos to order, through the administration of the refugees in a new system. At first sight, agency power through camp interventions appeared as strong. But this stance was not monolithic. On the ground, camps
were not becoming the neat villages that had been envisioned. The agency had based its shelter programme on an economic assumption that residents would add more rooms, and now refugees were adding rooms and building the camps themselves. Gradually this undermined the envisioned order in the camps and resulted in “unsightly” building and overcrowding. In a relatively short period of time camp construction turned into an ambivalent history of discipline lost. This can be seen as appropriation of the camp as Palestinian space, and not as UNRWA space. Building refugee camps was intended to solve problems, but it also created new ones.

With the shelter programme from 1955 shelters were built at low standards, and camps were not envisaged as being permanent. Nevertheless, some factors – like the idea of location near employment and size of plots for future refugee construction – provided the camps with a potential for becoming long term. Camps were built as sites of possible improvement, and can be considered as politics directly translated into physical space. The provision of shelters, which addressed the humanitarian effects of displacement, also reduced the political pressure of the emergency, and a possible destabilising segment of the population was assisted. UNRWAs approach was pragmatic, and there were few better options at hand in this context. Over time, the results of camp and shelter construction overwhelmed its pragmatic intentions.

It was also pragmatism and realism that led agency directors to see camps as permanent by 1960, as no political solution to exile was expected. When the camps were seen as semi-permanent sites, the aim to improve the living standards and the durability of the shelters made sense. Nevertheless,
despite such perspectives, the shelter programme was marginalised in UNRWA. This was not due to demands of keeping the temporariness of the camp; it was explicit that education had become the priority of UNRWA, not relief and shelters.

In 1967, UNRWA was pressed to build expensive temporary shelters, and this can be interpreted as a victory for the refugees or the Jordanian government. Actually, it was only an intermediate victory. One agency director at the time commented that these shelters should be seen as a temporary solution, awaiting refugee acceptance of more permanent cement shelters. Similar to the aftermath of 1948, the new exile would also be prolonged, and this was way beyond the scope of what UNRWA could affect. Not long after the war in 1967 the Palestinian movements had grown in strength within the camps. As soon as the last tent was erased in Jordan, UNRWA redefined the camps from “UNWRA camps” to “refugee camps”. It was clear that UNWRA could not afford to be closely associated with the increasingly politicised camps.

Camps were built in the tension between the humanitarian mandate and politics. This point to a core dilemma of refugee relief. On one hand, the refugees were sensitive to permanency; on the other hand, shelters were a necessary and basic need. The same factors that should protect the refugee from the elements over time implied some level of permanency. From an UNRWA perspective, constructing camps and shelters appears as an undertaking defined by limitations. Camps and shelters were a product of pragmatism and very basic necessities. At the same time, the shelter programme was explicitly marginalised in UNRWA
compared with other programmes. The establishment of the camps and shelters alleviated needs, but also implied the continuation of camps, and made long-term encampment possible.

Notes

I am grateful for the generous access to UNRWA’s Central Registry archives, Amman Headquarters, for my work on the PhD dissertation about UNRWA and Palestinian refugee camps, 1950–2012.

The Palestine Conciliation Commission was established by Resolution 194 and it created the Economic Survey Mission (ESM). This mission suggested resettlement schemes, and that the UN General Assembly establish UNRWA to promote temporary relief and works programmes. See Schiff 1995: 13–47.


5 UNRWA Annual Report 1952 Camps para. 18/19; d 2.

6 At the time when the large schemes failed, many small-scale UNRWA urban and rural outside camps rehabilitation housing were implemented as self-help schemes. The twin houses at Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem and at Jabal Nazif in Amman are examples. Review of Shelter Policy 1960–75, RE 410/2 (no. 331/60).


8
Tents would need repair and would not last for a long time.


Unofficial camps were mostly built without Agency assistance and coordination. The governments actually preferred official camps, as this would imply UNRWA responsibilities, funding, and operation.

Camp Directors and Regional Area Officers were intermediates for all inquiries and took part in the actual camp regulation. Camps and Buildings Construction Maintenance West Bank SHC 1982–85 Refugee Affairs, RE 410 (WB), part III (appendix to 1.1.1982).


This period UNRWA built 12,000 shelters in Jordan, 40,000 rooms in Gaza, and 5,000 in Lebanon. This number probably does not include new camps. Review of Shelter Policy 1960–75, RE 410/2 (20.4.1964).


Shelter Programme 1962, RE 410/3 (8.11.1962).
First shelters had been built in one single size, but were later extended to three different sizes to fit variations of family sizes, models of A, B, and C in different combinations. Review of Shelter policy 1960–75, RE 410/2 (appendix to 8.11.1962).

According to Julie Peteet rehabilitation was a pivotal concept in post-war refugee administration. This concept was also related to resettlement and reintegration. Peteet 2005: 48, 63.

Self-help was an emerging concept in architectural and development discourses in the 1950s and 1960s. It was the British architect John F. C. Turner who put self-help into mainstream architectural discourse (Gyger 2013).

This should be such as to protect, or at least not “unduly expose” the shelter to extreme weather. Other factors to consider in this category were drainage, foundation support, and available water resources, and encompassed for example cost of construction work. Review of Shelter Policy 1960–75, RE 410/2 (appendix to 8.11.1962).
After 1970s Tanner held the position Director of Operations in Jordan until at least 1980.


UNRWA Annual Report 1957.

The 1958 Annual Report points out the “obvious fact” that first and foremost the refugee must be fed and sheltered. This task was compared to the “long-term task” of assisting refugees to become self-supporting; this required conditions that had “so far not prevailed”, due to the political climate. UNRWA annual report 1958–59.


UNRWA Annual Report 1958–59. Similar reference to regional stability had also been made in the agency’s original mandate.


427m was the minimum plot for tents in temporary encampment and 10/8m was the minimum for permanent camps. UNRWA used 14/7.5m. Review of Shelter Policy 1960–75, RE 410/2. (appendix to 8.11.1962).


The total population planned for this camp had been approximately 12,500, while the population in 1961 was
reported at 18,330, but the real number was seen as nearer 30,000. Shelter Programme 1962, RE 410/3 (24.11.1961).


Usually, each field director defined the priorities for shelter needs in his respective field. In turn, this would guide the chief of relief to determine allocations within the framework of funds defined by headquarters. Shelter Programme 1961 RE 410/3 (17.10.1961).


Cost from 130 to 415 USD. Camps and Buildings Shu’fat camp Jordan, RE 400 (4) (appendix to 26.9.1962).


Camps and Buildings Shu’fat camp Jordan, RE 400 (4) (7.9.1964)

UNRWA refer to that approximately 162,500 “Palestine refugees” fled from West Bank and 15,000 from Gaza to East Jordan, and approximately 240,000 West Bank and Gaza residents fled for the first time. In addition, approximately 115,000 fled to Syria, including some 16,000 “Palestine refugees”. Takkenberg 1998: 81–82.
The newly displaced were West Bank and Gaza residents, who would be defined as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), as they had not crossed internationally recognised borders. However, during the emergency operations it appears that the Jordanian government did not differ between IDPs and refugees, but generally referred to “displaced”.


For each tented camp 2000 family tents (each for four persons) and large tents for classrooms, clinics and feeding centres were calculated. Emergency Camps Jordan 1967–68, RE 400 part I (25.6.1967).


The United Nations General Assembly endorsed (UNGA res. 2252 (ES-V), 4 July 1967) to provide assistance to other persons than the Palestine refugees on an emergency basis. But on an operational level these categories were important in distinguishing between the groups.


252

Often referred to as Hitten camp by the government or Schneller by the inhabitants.

Often referred to as the Martyr Azmi el-Mufti camp by inhabitants.


Interview with former camp director in New Amman Camp, sanitation officer, and later head of the environmental health unit in UNRWA, Jordan, Mahmoud Abdelfattah Abdullah.


The Mission was headed by Swedish diplomat Gunnar V. Jarring. He was special envoy under the terms of the UNSC Resolution 242 to negotiate the implementation of this resolution. Shlaim 2000: 260–62, 296–301.


254

On 9 August 1966, a very critical article concerning the new Shu‘fat camp appeared in *al-Manar* newspaper. The standard of the camp was criticised for being too low, with public latrines, small one-room shelters with wooden windows and thin walls, and no enclosure walls between neighbours. With only four water taps on site, this had resulted in fights over water. It ended by insisting on better camps. The refugees “usually have only one alternative. They resort to the government to intervene and force UNRWA to build comfortable camps.” *Al-Manar* quoted in Camps and Buildings Shu‘fat camp Jordan, RE 400 (4) (9.8.1966). Numerous interviews in March 2009 with current inhabitants of Shu‘fat who were moved from Mu‘askar camp emphasised the change from Mu‘askar where families had had several rooms, and dislike of moving into the simple one room shelters in Shu‘fat.


Wooden framework with flat asbestos walling and corrugates asbestos roofing.


Particularly attempts at building regulation would continue. Eventually the same mechanisms – increased refugee construction and violence related to camps – contributed to a more definite withdrawal from the camps. In the 1980s this issue was raised again, and camps’ redefinition was reconfirmed.

**Bibliography**


Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.

(Lenin speech at the Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, Moscow, 4 December 1920)\(^1\)

Following on from Lenin’s quote, I would say that a good governance system in a refugee camp should also be composed of power and service provision. Ideally power will stem from the community (such as political factions for the political issues and popular committees for administrative and municipal issues) with services provided by humanitarian organizations and host authorities because they are a refugee population. However, given that popular committees are often dysfunctional and host authorities can marginalise refugee populations, UNRWA cannot afford to become a mere service provider. During the past two decades, governing a nation or a city or a camp has been shown to require decentralization of the governance system and involvement of many actors. As Michel Foucault (1990) reminds us, what is important is not the formal power that stems from the exercise of sovereignty but rather the effects of power that a governmental technology generates. While UNRWA
generally presents itself as a mere provider of services, it is de facto much more than that. This constitutes the major hypothesis I formulate in this chapter.

The chapter investigates the role that UNRWA plays in camp governance, specifically in the administrative and municipal realm, not in the political domain. Because of its mandate, a humanitarian organization like UNRWA has historically understood its role as a temporary relief provider to a temporary group of victims, carefully avoiding taking on a governing role. At the same time, most refugees have effectively assigned UNRWA a key role, holding it responsible for problems in the camps that go well beyond the realm of its mandate. This generates frequent misunderstandings that characterize the current status quo (Misselwitz and Hanafi 2010). I shall begin by analyzing the complex reality of camp governance, which forms the point of departure for our analysis: who governs the camps? And why does UNRWA constitute a “phantom sovereignty”? 

**Camp governance: UNRWA as a “phantom sovereign”**

Similarly to other humanitarian organizations, as I will argue that in the next section, UNRWA traditionally considered refugees to be needy victims. In tandem with a lack of acknowledgement of the urbanization process that transformed tent cities into complex built environments is the failure of acknowledging that traumatized and voiceless victims desire to become emancipated subjects, especially after some sort of normalcy of life in the camps has set in. The paternalistic approach - a relief agency serving an anonymous crowd of beneficiaries - enters into crisis, unable
to cope with the ever more complex landscape of emerging community initiatives, local institutions and social mobilization.

Many actors are playing a role in the governance of Palestinian refugee camps. In Syria and Jordan, the state controls the camps closely and through their specific organs (the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) in Syria and the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DAP) in Jordan), which assign camp directors who play a major role in organizing the urban and political life inside the camps. In contrast to this classical state control over slum areas including camps, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and Lebanon is radically different. In these locations there is a web of complex power structures composed of one or two conflicting popular committees (in Lebanon), a security committee, notables (wujaha), political factions, Palestine Scholars’ League (imams’ coalition close to Hamas), Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)’s popular unions and organizations (workers, women, engineers, etc.), community-based organizations (CBOs), NGOs and UNRWA Camp Services Officers (CSOs). These forces vary in their importance from camp to camp and from area to area. In each camp, leaders have imposed measures, which are frequently changing as a consequence of a constantly shifting balance of power between these different groups. The popular committees, however, stand out as the most important local governing body in Lebanon and the oPt. It is worth noting that the label “popular” could be misleading because it is not based on a popular vote but it projects the strength of one group or party vis-à-vis others (in Gaza and the West Bank, the term “local committee” or “camp committee” is also frequently used) (Hanafi 2010).
Instead of one sovereign, camps in Lebanon and the oPt are ruled by a tapestry of multiple, partial sovereignties. This includes real sovereign bodies like the Lebanese government or the PLO/Palestinian National Authority (PNA)/State of Palestine and a patchwork of actors who contribute to the governance of the camp. The situation is made even more complex when UNRWA’s role is taken into account. Here, I would like to introduce the notion of “phantom sovereignty” in order to describe and analyze the critical position of the Agency.

As suggested in the introduction, we don’t understand the notion of power in a formal way but through the effects of power that different governmentalities generate. While UNRWA was not intended to, nor does it pretend to, govern the camps, it is ascribed the status of a sovereign by many camp dwellers. This is perhaps best exemplified by the ambiguous role of UNRWA’s CSOs, camp-based staff members who historically assumed a powerful position vis-à-vis the camp community. Their authority included in the past, for example, the ability to cut rations for an individual who did not obey UNRWA regulations (Feldman 2008). UNRWA historically appointed these officers from among the camp community, after consultation with and verbal approval from local tribal and village leaders however, CSOs are now appointed through a competitive and transparent recruitment process.

This policy is doubly accommodating. By appointing a representative of the camp’s elite to become an official staff member, UNRWA sought legitimization and acceptance. From the early 1990s, UNRWA increasingly appointed as CSOs members of new camp elites, such as well-educated
camp residents (engineers, teachers and pharmacists) who were sometimes known for their past political activism and good relations with the community. In interviews, camp dwellers often refer to the CSO as “camp director”, yet in reality his official function is merely to act as a facilitator of access to UNRWA services. Interviews clearly showed the gap between this perceived role and the staff member’s actual function. This confusion stems from the historical role played by UNRWA CSOs in not only providing services, but also in administering and coordinating many aspects of the refugees’ lives. As a result, the “camp directors” are perceived as occupying a ruling position without acting accordingly.

The confusion over the role of CSOs is symptomatic of the confusion over the role of UNRWA in general (see Brynen in this volume). Many camp residents, for instance, consider UNRWA and the popular committees responsible for the disorder in the camps. Expressing her anger at their perceived passivity, a resident posed the question: “Who can I complain to when my neighbor builds a second and third floor without leaving any proper space for my apartment?” Many interviewees indeed used words like “chaos”, “security”, “unruliness,” “lawlessness” (felatan amni), and "clanism" (al-asha’riya) to describe the situation in the camps and attribute UNRWA’s inaction as one of the major causes of it. This is why many interviewees’ testimonials showed that the relationship between them and UNRWA is characterized by frustration, mistrust, miscommunication and mutual misunderstandings. But this resentment toward UNRWA is not a rejection of aid, rather a rejection of aid as a substitute for political action, especially in terms of camp governance (Parry 2002). To explain this ambivalence of UNRWA’s position vis-à-vis camp governance, we argue that UNRWA
officers are in constant negotiation between the Agency’s mandate and the expectations of the community.

**Mandate vs. practices**

The bio-power (Foucault 1990) exercised by humanitarian organizations has created categories for those in need with the effect of depoliticizing them.

Refugees are transformed into bodies to be fed and sheltered while being deprived of their political existence. Humanitarian law is used to refer to “protected people” but current humanitarian practices focus mainly on “victims” or, at times, “survivors” in order to sound more positive. By classifying people as victims, the basis of humanitarian action is shifted from rights to welfare. In disaster areas - the space of exception - values of generosity and pragmatism obscure any references to the rights and responsibilities of the people concerned (refugees, humanitarian organizations, international community, etc.) that would endow them with their own agency.

However, throughout the years, the activities of refugee organizations (the list is long: the Nansen Bureau for Russian and Armenian Refugees in 1921; the High Commission for Refugees from Germany in 1936; the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees in 1938; the International Refugee Organization of the United Nations in 1946; UNRWA from 1950 onwards; and since 1951 up to the present, the UN High Commission for Refugees) have been limited according to their mandates to “humanitarian and social” issues while excluding political issues (Agamben 1997: 72). With refugees often stripped of their political existence and identities and reduced to their status as individuals in need of shelter and
food, as bare life, the entire refugee question has been transferred to the hands of the police and military forces, on the one hand, and to apolitical service organizations such as UNRWA, on the other. However, while refugees outside of camps have been able to transgress these different layers of power more effectively, the situation of refugees residing in camps is much more complex and deserves more consideration.

When reconsidering the emergence of the urban identity of the camp, it becomes clear that the identity and political status of camp dwellers is related to the very nature of the camp and to its segregation and isolation as a distinct and enclosed spatial unit. Refugees who are not camp dwellers tend to quickly establish good relationships with their host society and to escape the status of “victims”. In the area where the camp is a “closed” space, mainly in Lebanon (Hanafi 2008), the camp forms the conditions that facilitate the use of bio-politics by the host countries and to a lesser extent by UNRWA, because refugees are gathered in a centralized and controlled place where they can be monitored. This is also applicable in the oPt, but not to the same extent. This “care, cure, and control” system has transformed refugee camps into disciplinary spaces (Zureik 2003, Peteet 2005). In the pretext of facilitating the provision of services, the camp is conceived as the only workable possible form of space, as outside camps the distribution of food and other services to the refugees would become almost impossible. In the Palestinian context, however, the problem does not lie only with the spatial nature of the camp, but also with the mandate of UNRWA, the main provider of services in the camp.

UNRWA was created in December 1949 by virtue of resolution 302 of the UN GA (it started its operations in May
1950) as a refugee organization specifically dedicated to the Palestinian refugees. Its UN mandate included catering for the basic needs of refugees while promoting integration in the host country, but excluded *de jure* protection of refugees or advocating for their return to their homes (Bocco 2010; Khouri 2010). Over the past 25 years, UNRWA’s mandate has evolved, however, and is now understood to include the protection as well as assistance. For example, when it provided “passive protection” for Palestinian refugees during the First Intifada (1987–94). Since a multi-stakeholder conference in Geneva in 2004, the agency has started linking service provision to advocacy, and recently a rights-based approach to its humanitarian mandate has been emerging. One can notice relatively strong language used in UNRWA publications to attract the attention of the international community to the continuous plight of Palestinian refugees. However, taking into account housing, children’s and women’s rights, and other rights for that matter does not mean that the right of return has become part of UNRWA’s advocacy strategy. In spite of the importance of UNRWA publications for mobilizing the international community, the very concept of refugees as an artifact of victimization discourse obstructs the possibility of resistance that seeks to advance their return and statehood. However, some have argued that any engagement by UNRWA in issues such as durable solutions, such as settlement and return, would dangerously politicise the Agency, although UNHCR’s case has shown that being involved in the search for durable solutions does not have to conflict with an essentially humanitarian mandate (Takkenberg 2006). I was very interested in demystifying the de-politicization of humanitarianism ever since the beginning of the Second
Intifada. In 2003 in Jerusalem I co-organized with Adi Ophir a two-day workshop on “The Politics of Humanitarianism in the Occupied Territories” for international, Palestinian and Israeli human rights and humanitarian organizations. Scholars and practitioners presented their different visions, generating much discussion and even some tension. So absorbing was the debate that Peter Hansen, the Commissioner General of UNRWA at the time, who came to present a paper, stayed for the whole workshop. Pursuant this discussion Hansen argued with this non-political stance, UNRWA has often been caught up in politics in the region. Increased focus on protection could be seen as a politicising of UNRWA’s role.

As the new UNRWA discourse began to appear, Karen Koning AbuZayd, then Commissioner-General, subtly revealed the tension between what is political and what is humanitarian in her statement at the Hosts and Donors Meeting held in Amman on 11 December 11 2006:

This tension is manifested in a variety of ways. One of its most striking manifestations is the contrast between the readiness of states to fund emergency responses, compared to their failure to address the questions of international law and politics that cause these emergencies. That tension is clear in the way in which the urgency to resolve underlying questions of justice and peace for Palestinians is somehow divorced from the challenge of providing for their human needs.8

UNRWA has played a valuable role in empowering Palestinian refugees by providing primary and vocational/technical education, health services, relief and social services, sometimes job creation and other emergency support, and micro finance (since 1991), and more recently in being
engaged in public advocacy for the protection of the refugees. In spite of all these benign efforts, they have not been sufficient to get the majority of the Palestinian refugees beyond the threshold of poverty and isolation and to allow their social and economic integration into Lebanese society. While this cannot be attributed to UNRWA alone, I do believe that, due to its mandate, UNRWA has been unable to always seize the opportunity and promote some changes in the situation of the Palestinian refugees. The involvement of UNRWA in the reconstruction of the Jenin refugee camp after its partial destruction by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in 2002 is revealing in this sense. Instead of alleviating the crowdedness of the camps by advocating for the return of some refugees to their place of origin (a third of Jenin’s refugees come from the village of Zaraan, located some 17 kilometers west of the city), UNRWA was only able to pursue rebuilding the camp while respecting its boundaries and asking the Jenin municipality to allocate a piece of land to allow its expansion. Also only recently did UNRWA become more vocal on criticizing some Arab host countries’ policies towards the Palestinian refugees. Because UNRWAs mandate has never included the repatriation or resettlement of refugees, the agency’s “care and maintenance” activities have been widely interpreted by many interviewees as a failed attempt to appease a population with humanitarian action in lieu of durable political solutions (see also Parry 2002: 6; cited by Abu Zahra 2005). In addition to the temporary UNRWA mandate precluding long-term planning, and having always been financially vulnerable, UNRWA operates with different pressures on the Agency and is dependent on host-country cooperation.
In all its fields, and in spite of the relative dissatisfaction with UNRWA’s services (Al Husseini and Bocco 2010; see also the Palestinian Association for Human Rights – Shahed’s public opinion polls), UNRWA’s role is crucial to the social and economic support and relief activities, through its programmes running in the camp, and through its bodies such as the Camp Service Offices and the Women Programme Centres (WPCs). The Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme has the potential to chance to readdress the relationship between UNRWA and camp communities.

UNRWA camp governance: promising signs

As seen so far, ambivalence and negotiation has characterized the mandate of UNRWA, which in the last five years has gone in the right direction but not without some setbacks. In this section, I will highlight some promising signs that have appeared in Lebanon.

Reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared

In the past, insufficient emphasis was given to transparent communication, consideration of local feedback beyond technocratic surveys, or the constraints under which the Agency operates (including funding shortages). Due to the lack of direct communication based on partnership, bias and prejudice against UNRWA became widespread in the camps. This included accusations ranging from corruption and incompetence to political conspiracy. Although, mistrust is a general problem facing UNRWA, camp improvement was likely to fail entirely if the relationship between the Agency and the community could not be improved. The story of the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp is highly instructive
as it reveals not only of the relationship of UNRWA with the Palestinian community but also its role in defending the right of this community vis-à-vis the Lebanese authorities.

The yet to be completed reconstruction efforts have been broadly influenced by UNRWA’s new camp improvement approach. For the first time, UNRWA accepted working in full partnership with a grassroots, yet technocratic, organization, Nahr el-Bared Reconstruction Commission for Civil Action and Studies (NBRC). The significance of this group – of which I served as a member for few months in 2008 – is that its members understand the importance of empowering populations by organizing them. Composed of engineers and professionals, most of whom live in the camp, this organization has taken on the main responsibility of managing community participation and in partnership with UNRWA preparing a geographical information system (GIS) plan on the spatial situation of the camp before its destruction and the desired future plan (Sheikh Hassan and Hanafi 2010).

The process of community participation has never been easy. There have always been many difficulties brought about by the attitude of both the Lebanese government, which in the beginning wanted to deal only with international organizations like UNRWA, and PLO officials, who did not have such a strong emphasis on the role of civil society in community participation. UNRWA played a chief role in empowering community participation through the full participation of NBRC in the entire design process.

Initially, the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) refused any Palestinian interlocutor under the pretext that if it would call on the PLO, Hamas would be upset and vice versa. We asked LPDC to accept NBRC as an initiative
of civil society but they refused. In my capacity as an NBRC member, I called the Director of UNRWA to report that we would not cooperate with UNRWA unless NBRC was present. UNRWA called LPDC, but they continued to refuse our incorporation. They said that they would accept me alone as an individual but not as a representative of NBRC. I refused to go under this label. UNRWA threatened to withdraw from the process. Finally, I was invited as a representative of NBRC and after the first meeting a more technical delegation from NBRC continued to meet with the Lebanese authority in charge of the reconstruction. After overcoming this hurdle, protracted negotiations began between the various Lebanese actors, UNRWA and NBRC. Security-related issues raised by the military dictated all spatial and design considerations. Nonetheless, thanks to the UNRWA NBRC partnership, the planning process did incorporate some of the interests of the Palestinians. UNRWA started to accept the right to refugee participation in the shaping of the urban environment, and other parts of its programmes for that matter, as part of its approach to protection. It increasingly realized that participation constituted part of the civil rights of the refugees.

The Director of UNRWA Affairs, Lebanon 2008–12, spent a lot of his time negotiating with the Lebanese government about the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared but also, and this was very new in UNRWAs history, in respect of Palestinians’ right to work and to own property. UNRWA successfully negotiated with some Lebanese municipalities to be involved in the improvement of the camp’s infrastructure. Paradoxically and by populism, political fractions waged an unjustifiable campaign against the Director of Affairs in spite
of the outstanding innovation in empowering Palestinian refugees through advocating for their rights to the Lebanese authorities which the Agency was engaged in. A number of interviews we recently conducted with Palestinian leaders revealed the perception that this policy is not pursued in the same way more recently. One of them stated that in recent years, UNRWA had not been as “high profile” in its approach to advocacy on behalf of refugees. He argued that UNRWA had engaged with the Lebanese authorities more forcefully in the past, and attributed this change to a difference in the leadership styles between the past and current Director of UNRWA affairs. The interviewee also felt that this less forceful approach to relations with the Lebanese government - both in private and in public - had led to delays “of more than one month” to the progress of construction of new blocks in Nahr el Bared.10

I argue that this attitude demonstrates that UNRWA needs to develop a policy for the agency to be structurally more involved in defending refugee rights to host authorities and not to leave it to the initiative and discretion of individual UNRWA staff members.

**Mediation structure**

UNRWA has played an important role as mediator between popular committees, on the one hand, and the central government and the municipal authorities in the host country, on the other. During the last two years, UNRWA, in cooperation with UNDP, engaged in training programmes for the popular committees of Baddawi and Nahr el-Bared camps.
To increase the contact with the community on the ground, UNRWA has developed new job descriptions for its Chief Area Officers (CAOs), requiring broader qualifications while delegating to them more power on the ground, including inside the camps. Recently each CAO has been provided with an Operation Assistant to support them in their work.

Meeting with the Chief Area Officers, I realized that their time allocation is as follows: 30 percent of their time is occupied by dealing with individual cases, while 40 to 50 percent is meeting with popular committees, negotiating with the Army for entering reconstruction material, negotiating with the local municipality, with the relevant electricity company and with the phone company. Only a relatively small amount of time is set aside for internal UNRWA business (recruitment, development, etc.). A further interview confirmed this impression. A CAO declared: “More than three-quarters of their time is spent on governance matters: negotiating with various Palestinian factions, popular committee and Lebanese authorities’ concerning problems related to service delivery.”

According to my research, the major problem faced by UNRWA is the personal protection of their employees. Many employees are subject to threats, humiliation and even physical attacks. I argue that this is attributable to the lack of Palestinian central authority (marji’iyya siyasiya lli-tanzimat): Historically [CAOs] used to talk with the head of Fatah or PFLP to resolve an emerging problem inside camps … Now there is no central power … factions’ representatives are often in conflict with the Popular Committee members even if appointed by them.
Finally, UNRWA must not only engage with popular committee and host authorities but also between Palestinian and Lebanese NGOs. In March 2009, for the first time UNRWA established an NGO forum whose objective is to coordinate the activities of Palestinian and Lebanese NGOs working in the refugee camps. Sub-sectoral forums were also created: one for the education sector and another for the health sector.

**Conclusion: Lessons from UNHCR**

In this chapter I have argued that the resulting “phantom sovereignty” of UNRWA is based on this fundamental misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities, which leaves a problematic void, contributes to the sense of permanent emergency and exception, and fuels mistrust and suspicion. However, recently we have witnessed a tremendous change in the manner that UNRWA interprets its mandate concerning its involvement in camp governance.

It took UNHCR a long time, until the early 1990s, to be convinced that operating in a camp required a governance system with local participation. Prior to that, UNHCR played a very ambiguous role in terms of promoting or diminishing the influence of the notables in the camps. However, since the 1990s, UNHCR became more systematic, promoting community participation and organizing elections.

Emphasis on participation can be seen in Tanzania. Looking at UNHCR’s influence on the physical organization of camps in Tanzania, it is apparent that UNHCR is downplaying traditional authorities within camps. After the distasteful experience of locating Rwandan genocide participants in Benaco, and the disastrous situation of refugee camps being
used by various rebel groups as bases for operations in Rwanda, UNHCR attempts to mitigate the influence of former political parties and notables in these camps were striking. Simon Turner’s description of Burundian refugee camps in Tanzania and Shelley Dick’s description of Congolese camps both explained UNHCR’s implementation of a system by which UNHCR created an entirely new leadership in the refugee communities. In these camps, UNHCR insisted on setting up tents in controlled arbitrary grids, and assigning refugees to plots based on order of arrival as opposed to home community. In Burundi and the Congo, UNHCR also implemented this method of organization, basing community elections on this layout. Because each voting block was made up of people from many different villages, it was unlikely that former notables would be elected. Instead, camp committee representatives were often younger men, who were both competent and represented a change in the authority structure (Turner 2006: 321; Dick 2002: 9–12, cited by Tonge, 2009).

This model was a crucial improvement on the previous models of exclusion and segmentation. However, I would qualify the UNHCR approach as a top-down model where the role of participation and election is set from above. UNRWA should adopt UNHCR’s emphasis on governance within the camp, rather than avoiding the issue. UNRWA should not be merely a phantom sovereign. With more transparent governance system, the relationship between UNRWA and community could be fostered with a genuine partnership. In Lebanon, UNRWA help to the popular committees is crucial. Why?

First, PLO factions and coalition factions are so weak that they cannot negotiate alone with the Lebanese government,
as well as military and municipal authorities on issues pertaining to the Palestinian rights, camp improvement, etc. Second, there are more positive signs about some of the first steps towards redefining the roles of provider and passive recipient into a more genuine partnership between UNRWA and the community, such as the efforts towards reconstruction in urban planning that have been strongly approved by UNRWA’s new Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Department. This department advocated for a different approach and convinced UNRWA into taking on a full partnership with the NBRC.

Ultimately, the situation can be improved by developing effective, democratically endorsed camp governance structures that represent community interests and can lead to camp improvements. UNRWA may choose to accept and engage with existing representative structures, overcome its paternalistic approach and sometimes institutional blindness, and carefully assist and strengthen camp governance.

I conclude by offering two recommendations. First, the best way to be involved in camp governance is to foster community participation in prioritization in respect of service provision. As UNRWA has scarce resources, it should consider adopting the model of Porto Alegre’s municipality and discuss its proposed budget allocation with a forum in each camp (Hanafi 2010). These forums should not be composed by the popular committees but comprise a more representative audience, for example by inviting political factions and possibly NGOs and grassroots organizations to nominate educated youth and other representatives. Second, it is crucial that UNRWA gives
CAOs and CSOs more power and asks them to listen more closely to the refugee problem on the ground.

Notes

Lenin’s famous plan of electrification of Russia (GOELRO Plan) was born in 1920, under conditions of utter ruin and starvation.

For more details see Hanafi (2010).

UNRWA policy, which upholds the neutrality of the UN and the Agency, prohibits UNRWA staff members from engaging in partisan political activities.

One should note that UNRWA went much further during the First Intifada. It practised not only advocacy but also physical protection in the field (1988’s creation of the Refugee Affairs Officer programme and 1991’s human rights monitoring programme). These programmes were discontinued in 1994. Besides, UNRWA provided some support to the initial development of the PNA in the early days of the autonomy (see UNRWA annual reports 94–96) and developed the camps’ infrastructure in line with the UNGA resolution 48/40 of December 1993. Furthermore, through the Peace Implementation Programme which was launched in 1993 UNRWA attempted to ensure the safety and protection of Palestinians under occupation, on one hand, and to make the results of the peace process felt by the Palestinian refugee community, on the other.

UNRWA organizes host and donor meetings once or twice every year where ‘casual issues’ related to UNRWA’s budget and programmes and projects are discussed. The 2004 conference was of a different kind. Its aim was precisely to
reach out to non-traditional donors (rich Arab countries, Asian countries, etc.) and to spur further partnership between the host countries and UNRWA. Several seminars involving non-UNRWA experts were held. However, no refugee organization or committee was invited.

As a sign of this positive change in the discourse of the UNRWA, see, for example, the presentations of Lex Takkenberg and Anders Fange at the International Conference organized by Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, “The Palestinian Refugees: Conditions and Recent Developments”, on 25/26 November 2006. See also www.unrwa.org.

In this line see the highly ill-founded criticisms of James Lindsay (2009).

Her speech for the Hosts and Donors Meeting held in Amman on 11 December 2006.

UNRWA created a Committee for Employment of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon.

As an observer of the whole process of NBC reconstruction, I do believe the responsibility of the delay bears mainly on the shoulder of the Lebanese authorities.

In some cases, UNHCR actively supports the notables’ influence in the camps. In Kakuma, UNHCR cooperates with the SPLA as a legitimate source of authority, to the point where Verdirame and Harrell-Bond state that SPLA officials “were treated as the sole legitimate voice of the Dinka ‘community’,” (2005: 261). However, in many other situations, UNHCR actively downplays notables’ authority, and creates other sources of authority. In the Congolese refugee camps mentioned
above, the traditional justice system of punishments and trial is in conflict with the judiciary system that UNHCR supports. UNHCR attempts to implement the Tanzanian judiciary system, where the sentence for rape is 30 years in prison. Both UNHCR and the Tanzanian government have attempted to encourage refugees to report the rapes to their authorities as opposed to the community elders, with varying degrees of success (Dick 2002: 22; cited by Tonge 2009).

UNRWA played an active role in work campaign and establishing the CEP. See Bianchi in this volume.

UNHCR adopted a similar model during the past decade, with mixed results. It was prescribing mandatory consultation with refugee representatives before deciding on budget cuts and or other budgetary decisions at country level.

Bibliography


Part IV

Civic participation and community engagement
7 From beneficiary to stakeholder

An overview of UNRWA’s approach to refugee participation

Terry Rempel

Introduction

Participation has been a significant if not always explicit or clearly elaborated principle that has guided the efforts of UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to assist persons displaced as a result of the protracted conflict over Palestine-Israel.

Set up in December 1949, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly tasked UNRWA with providing emergency relief, and overseeing a works programme to prevent starvation and distress and further conditions of peace and stability in the region. UNRWA’s programmes complemented work already undertaken by another UN agency – the Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP). Set up one year earlier by the Assembly to facilitate a negotiated solution to the conflict, the Commission’s mandate included the repatriation, resettlement, compensation and rehabilitation of refugees uprooted by the conflict. The two agencies generally divided responsibilities for assistance and protection which for other refugees were subsequently consolidated in the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The lack of
governing statutes, inter-agency rivalries and practical considerations nevertheless resulted in a more complex albeit ill-defined division which for UNRWA included varying degrees of responsibility for refugee protection including solutions to their plight. While the UNCCP has been inactive for the better part of the last five decades, UNRWA continues to assist and protect millions of Palestinians uprooted by the ongoing conflict, of whom more than five million are currently registered to receive Agency services. With a mandate and responsibilities that have evolved over time, UNRWA describes its mission today as contributing to the human development of refugees by providing essential services within the framework of international human rights law and other relevant standards until a just and lasting solution is found.

Incidental to much of the literature on UNRWA, notwithstanding an emerging body of research on camp improvement and reconstruction, this chapter explores the Agency’s approach to refugee participation since its establishment more than six decades ago. Discussion of participation inevitably raises the problem of definition, a matter further complicated in UNRWA’s case by the absence until recent years of Agency policy governing the participation of refugees in the management and delivery of its programmes. The chapter thus relies in large part on a review of UNRWA practice tracing its evolution along a continuum with the degree of power in the decision-making process – from information to self-mobilization with consultation located at a mid-point between the two – as the fundamental variable defining the Agency’s approach to participation over time. Material is drawn primarily from UNRWA’s annual reports to

284
the General Assembly, secondary sources on the Agency and more recent unpublished documents, some of which are available from UNRWA’s website. Each of the following four sections identifies major shifts in approach rather than discrete periods of practice. Focused primarily on UNRWA’s education, health, social service, emergency, micro-finance/micro-enterprise and camp improvement/reconstruction programmes, each section also examines Agency approaches to participation in relation to refugee protection including the search for solutions to their situation. Detailed discussion of each approach is necessarily limited for reasons of brevity. The concluding section identifies and briefly examines major shifts and the corresponding factors that have shaped UNRWA’s approach to participation over the past six decades.

Participating refugees in economic development (1950s)

UNRWA’s initial approach to participation was largely a function of its mandate (GA Res. 302, Dec. 8, 1949: para. 7(a)) to carry out direct relief and works programmes to assist persons – Arabs and Jews – displaced by the conflict over Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel. Hiring refugees to staff its relief programme (rations, health, education, social welfare) supported several thousand families and complemented Agency efforts to promote self-reliance for the vast majority through employment in small-scale (weaving, garment-making, carpentry, shoe-making) and medium-scale works projects (road construction, forestation). Inspired by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a public works project that became a model for United States (US) overseas development, the UNCCP hoped that in addition to
meeting the basic needs of refugees and mitigating the burden on host states UNRWA’s programmes would also help transform the troubled region. With peace negotiations having reached a stalemate, the Commission viewed development cooperation, notwithstanding the need for a political solution to the conflict, as a way to promote peace and stability within and between states. The Commission further hoped that “the opportunity to work [would] increase the practical alternatives available to refugees, and thereby encourage a more realistic view of the kind of future they want[ed] and the kind they [could] achieve” (UNCCP 1949: 17). The hiring of refugees also enabled the Agency to lower administrative costs through a reduction of international staff by more than half to just over 100 during the first several months of operation. Similar to UNHCR’s top-down approach to refugee situations elsewhere, and much like the TVA which was criticized for “the disconnection between [its] grassroots ideology and the actual operation of the organization” (Ekbladh 2002: 337), however, it was UNRWA’s small coterie of international staff who designed and managed the Agency’s programmes with refugees expected to participate in their implementation.

UNRWA’s approach to participation nevertheless evolved as the Agency attempted to engage refugees in its programmes. Concerned that employment would lead to their permanent resettlement, few refugees (barely half a per cent of employable men and women) took part in UNRWA’s works programme. UNRWA further reported, moreover, that its first months of operations were characterized by “a campaign of bitter criticism of the Agency, its motives and personnel in a large section of the Arab press”, accompanied on the ground by food strikes, work stoppages, threats of violence against
Agency employees and an attack which destroyed its field office in Syria (UNRWA 1950: para. 27). Realizing the programme’s limitations and drawing lessons it seemed from the relative success of several small-scale projects which enhanced opportunities for self-support with fewer perceived implications regarding the right of return, UNRWA embarked on a “Fresh Start” to engage refugees in the construction of urban housing and rural villages to improve their living conditions along with the development of agricultural lands, skills training, job placement, small enterprise loans and financing of economic development to enhance their self-reliance. The Agency further reported that, in preparation for the eventual handover of its services to host states in the region, “Palestinian staff and nationals of the countries [were] increasingly assuming larger duties within the framework of UNRWA’s responsibility” (UNRWA 1952: para. 57). A parallel and ultimately unsuccessful effort to promote large-scale development in the region not only exposed the limited prospects for self-reliance under the Agency’s “readjusted” approach, but also illustrated ways in which UNRWA’s top-down management and refugee opposition to Agency programmes continued to shape UNRWA’s approach to participation. Acknowledging the “long-term” nature of the refugee crisis, in light of the failure of its works programme and the subsequent collapse of UNCCP-led negotiations to resolve the conflict, UNRWA increasingly focused on enhancing opportunities for refugees to take part in their own development with knowledge and skills acquired through the Agency’s expanding education and vocational training programme. Hiring additional refugees to replace international staff with a concomitant reduction in administrative costs and the promotion of self-help initiatives, including the use of volunteers to staff its literacy programme,
helped UNRWA to weather its first major financial crisis nearly a decade after it commenced operations. A new community development initiative, meanwhile, building on the Agency’s women’s sewing centres, further expanded participatory approaches to self-reliance primarily through the establishment of small co-operatives (e.g. poultry and livestock, carpentry, handicrafts, soap-making and agriculture).

Required to consult governments in the region regarding the implementation and eventual termination of its programmes (GA Res. 302, ibid.: para. 7(b)), UNRWA’s mandate was silent on consultation with refugees themselves. The various national bodies set up to oversee refugee affairs and UNRWA’s own Advisory Commission, which included representatives of major host states (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt), appeared to provide mechanisms for indirect consultation between the Agency and the refugees it aimed to serve. Initial resettlement offers by Jordan and Syria in 1949 followed by the signing of exploratory agreements between UNRWA, Egypt and Jordan in 1953 for large-scale development, both of which refugees opposed, nevertheless exposed the inherent limitations of such mechanisms when refugee demands and state interests failed to align. Aside from interactions between UNRWA’s international and local (refugee) staff, varying degrees of informal consultation also took place through Agency meetings with and petitions received from community leaders, camp committees and organizations. Held at a time when UNRWA was engaged in efforts to secure broad participation in its revised programme of services, a series of meetings involving Agency, government and refugee representatives in Jordan in the early 1950s provided a more formal albeit short-lived “experiment”
in consultation. Described in the local press as the first opportunity for refugees in Jordan or elsewhere “to voice their opinions even though they were the focus of all [of UNRWA’s] activities” (Plascov 1981: 56), divisions among refugees (some of whom opposed the meetings fearing loss of position) coupled with their ongoing demand for return, Jordan’s tepid support for participatory initiatives alongside its threat to cut rations to refugees refusing to take part in Agency programmes, and the fact that refugee input appeared to have little impact underscored early challenges (e.g. representation, cooperation) and limits (e.g., accountability) of participation.

UNRWA’s mandate also required the Agency to consult the UNCCP concerning their respective tasks in facilitating a solution to the refugee crisis (GA Res. 302, ibid.: para. 20). Neither agency, however, was required to consult refugees except with regard to an eventual solution – i.e. return, resettlement, compensation – to their situation (GA Res. 194, Dec. 11, 1948: para. 11). That UNRWA was engaged in some level of consultation (informal or otherwise) appears evident from Agency reports which regularly conveyed refugee views, in part it seems to explain the failure of its early programmes, but also to remind those responsible that UNRWA’s success depended on a solution to the conflict itself. Inter-agency discussions, moreover, suggest that senior UNRWA officials, much like their UNCCP counterparts, supported some degree of refugee consultation in the negotiation process. Explaining that its own “experiences with organizations claiming to represent fairly large groups of refugees had been disappointing” (UNCCP 1950: 1), however, UNRWA’s Director (later Commissioner-General), General Howard Kennedy, advised the Commission to follow
the Agency’s lead and request host governments to appoint committees to represent the refugees. Less amenable to the mobilization and self-organization of refugees, given its humanitarian identity and the problems that political activities might create with host states, UNRWA had fewer means to control or regulate such participation given the Agency’s limited responsibility for law and order in the camps where much of the action took place. UNRWA nevertheless appeared to acknowledge that such activities might well be instructive for future efforts to resolve the refugee crisis. Reflecting on its own experience and looking to the future following the collapse of UNCCP-led negotiations, the Agency observed that “the difficulties arising out of the refugees’ attitude towards rehabilitation must neither be overlooked nor underestimated” (UNRWA 1954: para. 10). In the meantime, UNRWA expressed hope that “[n]o matter what the future may be for the displaced Palestinians”, its programmes would “prove of essential value in preparing the refugees, and particularly the younger generation, for constructive and happier lives” (UNRWA 1957: para. 6).

**Empowering refugees through essential services (1960s–1970s)**

UNRWA’s evolving response to the unresolved conflict expanded opportunities for refugees to take part in the management and delivery of the Agency’s newly revised programme of “essential services” – education, health and welfare. With a local staff of around 10,000, a more than two-fold increase since 1950, the number of refugees employed by the Agency grew to more than 16,000 over the next two decades with around two-thirds employed in
UNRWA’s education and vocational training programme. In drawing a distinction between the Agency’s “direct (relief) and indirect (stability) products” (Davis 1960: 26), UNRWA’s Director, Dr John Davis, appeared to underscore the Agency’s shift in rationale for participation. Instead of trying to engage refugees in programmes that would transform the region and by consequence refugee views about solutions to their plight, as UNRWA had attempted during its first years of operation, facilitating their participation in Agency services essentially aimed to empower refugees to transform their own lives with the hope that this might have a positive impact on the region at large over time. As part of this effort Dr Laurence Michelmore, who succeeded Davis, further proposed “to advance [a larger number of] capable and experienced [refugees] to positions of greater responsibility in UNRWA [thereby] providing greater opportunities for refugees to obtain experience in serving their community” (UNRWA 1964: para. 35). As in the past UNRWA emphasized the added value of such participation through the reduction of its more costly international staff. Similar to community development, basic needs and self-reliance strategies of the period, notwithstanding the horizontal (programme staff) and vertical (management staff) expansion of participation, UNRWA’s approach nevertheless continued to focus largely on the involvement of refugees in the implementation of its programmes.

New initiatives to promote community development echoed the emerging shift in the Agency’s approach to participation already evident in its commitment to accord greater responsibility to its refugee staff. In 1960 UNRWA launched a Youth Leadership Training Programme in co-operation with the World Alliance
of Young Men’s Christian Associations with the aim of establishing youth activities centres in camps in all fields of Agency operation. In laying out the rationale for the initiative, UNRWA explained that in addition to “alleviating] the immediate problem of idleness”, one of the Agency’s early concerns, the youth programme would also “prove of value in the formation of responsible citizens of the future” (UNRWA 1960: para. 79). As UNRWA soon discovered, however, efforts to enhance civic responsibility among refugees would also pose significant challenges to the Agency’s humanitarian identity given the protracted nature of the conflict and the largely stateless population it served. It would also require as detailed below new ways of relating to refugees themselves as both individuals and as a people. In line with the advancement of UNRWA’s refugee staff, Michelmore also sought to “associate more closely” a greater number of refugees “with the administration of certain of their own communal affairs” making a commitment to explore the issue “with refugees and, where they show[ed] an interest in participating … to consult with the host Governments concerned with a view to establishing whatever legal basis might be required” (UNRWA 1964: para. 31). Meanwhile, participation through self-help initiatives – e.g. shelter rehabilitation and development of camp infrastructure – continued to play an important role in meeting refugee needs given ongoing funding challenges which threatened the viability of UNRWA’s community-based services. Much like his predecessors, Michelmore observed that if the Agency was forced to cut its social service programmes “it [was] to be hoped that, with increased participation by the refugees themselves and in consultation with voluntary agencies and others concerned, means may be found for the continuation of these valuable services” (ibid.: para. 37).
New mechanisms to manage staff relations further illustrated UNRWA’s evolving approach to participation. Necessitated in part by the Agency’s “quasi-governmental character” (UNRWA 1973: para. 3), which required some form of consultation with its predominantly refugee staff, introduction of new arrangements for staff representation and collective bargaining also stemmed from the apparent success of UNRWA programmes. Contrary to charges (from both allies and opponents) that Agency services had made refugees more dependent, the knowledge and skills, experiences and opportunities UNRWA provided appeared to have contributed to the empowerment of refugees with local staff increasingly challenging Agency policies and practices on a range of issues from employment conditions to the quality of services and the protection of refugees (Buehrig 1971; Husseini 2000; Shabaneh 2010). Much like its earlier experience, however, consultation seemed to contribute little to the improvement of Agency-staff relations in the absence of shared objectives, especially when UNRWA was unable or unwilling to respond effectively to staff demands (Schiff 1995). More significant was the Agency’s evolving relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) which by the early 1970s had won growing recognition as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people – refugees and non-refugees alike. Noting that refugees already exercised “an agreed right to consultation with Governments in the host countries”, UNRWA acknowledged that refugees “increasingly expected to be consulted [through the PLO] on Agency affairs in the same way that the Governments of host countries [were] consulted by the Agency, though not necessarily on the same subjects” (UNRWA 1970: para. 19). With a relationship largely
functional in character – i.e. assistance in facilitating access to refugee communities, resolution of staff disputes, securing financial support – it would be another two decades before the PLO (which also complicated the Agency’s work when it interfered in hiring practices or when its military organizations violated Agency privileges and immunities) (Schiff 1995) was invited to take part in UNRWAs Advisory Commission. Similar to Arab host states, moreover, the effectiveness of consultations between UNRWA and the PLO would be dependent on the latter’s ability and willingness to convey the interests and needs of the refugees it aimed to represent.

UNRWA assisted the UNCCP in a last effort to resolve the refugee crisis in the early 1960s; however, neither agency appeared to consult refugees on solutions to their plight. Recommendations drafted by the Commission’s Special Representative, moreover, appeared to place limitations on the exercise of refugee choice with no more than 10 per cent allowed to return to their places of origin inside Israel. A degree of indirect participation nevertheless took place through the engagement of refugees (described as a form of “peace-servicing”) (Forsythe 1971: 27) in UNRWA’s revised programme of essential services. Designed to “[alleviate] human suffering, [equip] young refugees to lead useful and productive lives irrespective of where they may live, and [support] the general stability of the Middle East”, UNRWA argued that its services would also help to create “a climate that [would] enable the forces that [would] shape the future of the Middle East to work in a more orderly manner” (UNRWA 1960: para. 14). John Davis, UNRWA’s Director, similarly quipped that the Agency was “one of the prices – and perhaps the cheapest – that the international community was paying
for not having to solve with equity the political problems of the refugees” (quoted in Khoury 1976: 142). As it had done in the past, UNRWA continued to point out that despite its limited mandate, the Agency’s experience was “pertinent to any general solution” including “its conclusion that any solution, if it [was] to be effective, must take adequately into account the deep feelings and aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East as a whole” (UNRWA 1961: para. 30). That participation should extend beyond consultation, moreover, appeared evident from Agency comments which attributed the “pessimistic mood” among refugees concerning US and Soviet efforts to restart talks to resolve the conflict in the early 1970s to the fact that they “[would] have little say … and would play a very minor role, if any” (UNRWA 1972: para. 2) in decisions relating to their future. In an apparent shift, however, Agency reports rarely addressed the issue of participation following the signing of an agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1978 setting out a framework for solution to the conflict. Negotiated in the absence of the PLO, the agreement also departed from emerging practice in which agreements negotiated by national liberation movements included provisions for the participation of refugees in plebiscites and elections marking transitions from colonial rule to independence.

**From project cycle to political participation (1980s–1990s)**

UNRWA’s response to armed conflict and military occupation in the 1980s and the peacemaking process that followed in the 1990s expanded upon existing approaches to
participation and entailed new ones that increasingly reflected emerging policy and practice governing the participation of refugees elsewhere. Emergency and expanded programmes of assistance, coupled with new partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), provided opportunities for refugees to take part in the delivery of emergency assistance, improvement and reconstruction of infrastructure, income-generation and other initiatives to sustain and enhance self-reliance. Set up to provide a degree of “passive protection”, interaction with UNRWA’s newly established Refugee Affairs Officers (RAOs) provided one of the first mechanisms, albeit informal in nature, for refugees to take part in the identification of their protection needs. The deterioration of living conditions and lack of security nevertheless limited the scope of refugee participation in the Agency’s self-help projects despite ongoing and widespread individual and community support for such initiatives. UNRWA subsequently credited the expansion of participation in its emergency programmes notwithstanding the difficulties encountered as among the factors that enabled the Agency’s “rapid response” to renewed efforts to resolve the conflict. Extending opportunities for refugees to take part in the improvement of socio-economic conditions and the upgrading of social and physical infrastructure, UNRWA also began to reactivate its youth centres, many of which had been closed during the 1980s, and promote local management of its community-based organizations exemplifying the Agency’s ongoing evolution “from that of ‘service provider’ to that of ‘facilitator’ with an emphasis on a community development approach that promoted participation, empowerment, self-reliance, organizational network-building, revenue generation, and competence in project planning, implementation and management skills” (UNRWA 2000:
As in the past, UNRWA explained that such participation “added value to the Agency’s output in excess of that funded by donors” and helped it to “ensure the sustainability of Agency programmes and services within a rapidly changing environment” (UNRWA 1996: para. 30). The prospect of a solution to the conflict, the transfer of UNRWA responsibilities to states in the region and the termination of its operations, however, also created new uncertainties for the Agency’s local staff which had grown to more than 20,000 over more than four decades of operations.

The emerging role of refugees in the assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of UNRWA projects further exemplified the Agency’s evolving approach to participation. UNRWA’s engagement of refugee women in the 1980s through surveys and workshops in the development of its women’s programme centres and the establishment of a Women’s Initiative Fund to provide financial assistance, training and technical support to women-owned enterprises comprised the first major opportunity for refugees to have substantive input in the assessment of their needs and design of projects to meet them (Schiff 1995). The large-scale improvement of Neirab refugee camp in Syria initiated in the late 1990s with rehabilitation works under way from the early 2000s onwards further extended opportunities for participation to needs assessment, project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Methodologies used included a participatory rapid appraisal, town hall-style meetings, focus group discussions, and participatory asset and business mapping exercises. These shifts in approach appeared to reflect the influence of emerging policies and practices governing refugee participation elsewhere catalysed by Agency reforms initiated in the late 1990s which aimed to
bring UNRWA’s management and delivery of services to Palestinian refugees in line with global standards. They can also be ascribed it seems to the evolving role of women in Palestinian society and renewed debate among refugees which began to reconsider and challenge long-held concerns about the implications of large-scale camp development in relation to both return and resettlement. Evaluations of the Neirab project highlighted both the benefits of refugee participation – e.g. improved project design, enhanced trust, greater transparency and efficiency – and some of its major challenges – e.g. inclusion and representation, effective communication (especially in relation to refugee concerns about the right to return), organizational capacity, resources and the time required for participatory approaches (Byrne 2005; Gabiam 2010; UNRWA 2007a). As UNRWA’s own evaluation of phase one of the project observed, moreover, the Neirab experience also underscored the need for a transformation in UNRWA’s top-down approach to the management and delivery of services and the development of Agency-wide policies and guidelines on stakeholder participation.

Consultations in the 1980s built on UNRWA’s long-standing partnership with NGOs serving Palestine refugees. Part and parcel of a broader expansion of civil society in national, regional and international affairs, the consultations also reflected the growing role of civil society in meeting the needs of Palestinian refugees following the departure of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 and Israel’s failure as an occupying power to meet refugee needs in the 1967 Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Co-sponsored by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) as part of an evaluation of UNRWA’s emergency operations in
Lebanon, the meetings aimed to enhance cooperation, complement and strengthen Agency interventions, especially in relation to refugee protection and self-reliance, and attract new resources to assist refugees (ICVA 1984). Not designed as a mechanism for refugee participation per se, the process nevertheless appeared to enable a greater degree of indirect participation by bringing together a broader array of stakeholders working with Palestinian refugees in UNRWA’s fields of operation. A decision to meet in the region, moreover, sought to facilitate greater participation by local/Palestinian/refugee organizations. Subsequent development of a computerized database to consolidate information on local organizations, training resources and institutions underscored the importance of Agency partnerships with NGOs and other civil society actors especially in light of the ongoing gap between UNRWA’s resources and refugee needs. In line with its mandate to consult host countries, UNRWA met with the PLO (along with major donors) to map out the Agency’s role following the launch of peace talks in early 1990s and subsequently formalized the long-standing relationship through an exchange of letters. Marking an apparent shift to a more strategic (i.e. policy-making and planning) relationship, the PLO had yet to be invited to participate in UNRWA’s Advisory Commission. Reactivation of the PLO’s Department of Refugee Affairs provided a “direct point of contact” with additional consultation through a newly established Palestinian Authority (PA) legislative council sub-committee on refugees and displaced persons and through newly created popular committees in West Bank and Gaza Strip camps. Set up in response to growing disenchantment among refugees who feared that the process agreed to by the
PLO and Israel had come at the expense of their basic rights, the effectiveness of these mechanisms, as in the past, depended in large part on their ability and willingness to represent the rights and interests of refugees.

The cessation of UNCCP activities coupled with the exclusion of Resolution 194 from US-led efforts to resolve the conflict appeared to raise questions about UNRWA’s mandate relating to a solution to the refugee crisis. Restrictions on choice in draft plans and proposals for a solution to the refugee crisis, moreover, suggested that few would be allowed to return in the context of a comprehensive solution to the conflict. The Agency’s “peace-servicing” function nevertheless acquired new urgency and meaning in the context of armed conflict and the peacemaking process that followed. Echoing the words of John Davis, UNRWA’s Commissioner-General, Giorgio Giacomelli, described the Agency’s programmes as “an inexpensive investment in peacekeeping” (UNRWA 1985: para. 6). Extending opportunities for refugees to take part in projects to meet immediate needs and enhance long-term self-reliance, UNRWA’s Director of Relief Services, Angela Williams, further explained that the Agency’s expanded programme of assistance “intended to be parallel with a credible effort towards a peace process, and in support of that peace process” (Williams 1989: 160). Replaced by a peace implementation programme following the launch of renewed talks to resolve the conflict, UNRWA explained that its new initiative aimed to “make the results of the peace process [between Israel and the PLO] felt at the local level” (UNRWA 1995: para. 10) and to “help the Palestine refugee community assume greater responsibility for its own future” (UNRWA 1996: para. 30). Throughout the
period UNRWA continued to remind parties of the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict and with the signing of peace agreements between Israel and the PLO the Agency both acknowledged the limitations of its mandate with regard to a political solution to the refugee crisis and emphasized UNRWA’s “close association with the process and [its] outcome” (UNRWA 1997: para. 12). The Agency’s annual reports to the General Assembly, in contrast to previous decades, however, no longer conveyed refugees’ views about solutions to their plight including the right to return. That UNRWA continued to recognize the need to involve refugees in decisions relating to their future nevertheless appeared evident in Agency warnings that the majority “had not seen any concrete benefits” from the peace process and were “caught between the hope for a better future and the fear that they might be neglected and even forgotten in the new political environment” (UNRWA 1995: para. 55). Civic education programmes offered through the Agency’s community-based organizations in advance of the first PA election followed by UNRWA’s decision to designate on a temporary basis one of its facilities a “non-UNRWA installation” to enable the holding of a popular refugee conference which recommended among others a role for refugees in the negotiation process, moreover, appeared to reflect growing recognition of the political rights of refugees in ways similar to emerging policy and practice in peace-building contexts elsewhere.

**Mainstreaming stakeholder participation (2000s–)**

UNRWA’s response to renewed armed conflict in the 1967 OPT and elsewhere in the region after the collapse of peacemaking efforts in 2000, including reforms which aimed
to improve the management, delivery and quality of Agency services, contributed to the development and mainstreaming of participatory policy and practice. An emergency programme extended opportunities for refugees to take part in various initiatives designed to meet basic needs and promote self-reliance in a period which saw a significant deterioration in their status throughout the Middle East. This included participation in Agency efforts to address declining academic standards through its Schools of Excellence programme, in its emergency response to Israel’s 2008–9 military assault (Operation Cast Lead) in the Gaza Strip, and in camp improvement and reconstruction in all fields of operation. Similar to its earlier RAO initiative, the hiring and deployment of Operational Support Officers (OSOs), while not a mechanism for participation per se, “reactivated” opportunities for refugees to identify protection needs through interaction with OSOs with participation central to the design and implementation of UNRWA’s evolving approach to refugee protection. Evaluation of Agency projects reiterated many of the various benefits and challenges first identified in the context of its Neirab rehabilitation project and highlighted relatively new ones (refugee mobilization, security concerns, host state co-operation) stemming in particular from efforts to facilitate participation in emergency contexts (Budeiri 2010; Sheikh Hassan and Hanafi 2010; Tabar 2012). Preceded by significant levels of refugee mobilization and organization, camp reconstruction projects in Jenin (West Bank) and Nahr al-Bared (Lebanon) appeared to underscore the growing importance of refugee initiatives and the evolving role of facilitation and partnership in UNRWA’s relationship with the refugees it aimed to serve.
Describing its mission as contributing to the human development of Palestine refugees, UNRWA’s Organizational Development Plan (2006–9) identified participation and consultation as “drivers of effective human development outcomes” (UNRWA 2006: 10). These include a long and healthy life, acquired knowledge and skills, a decent standard of living and human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent possible. Management reforms included the adoption of “participatory, evidence-based, and results-oriented plans and services” (ibid.: 108) to be achieved in part through a more flexible and decentralized approach to planning. Programme reforms included the introduction of Programme Cycle Management with participation central to all stages of the programme cycle. The development of policy and strategy guidelines on “stakeholder participation” – defined as “an active, free and meaningful participatory partnership between [the Agency] and its stakeholders, and in particular, [its] primary stakeholders, the Palestine refugees” (UNRWA 2008a: para. 5) – and the participatory approach employed underscored UNRWA’s commitment to mainstream participation throughout the Agency. Long focused on the instrumental benefits of participation, the Agency also began to emphasize, in line with international law and relevant standards, the intrinsic value of participation as a fundamental human right with the primary objective of empowering refugees, including under-represented and otherwise vulnerable groups, to realize their rights and improve social equity. Identifying participation as one of UNRWA’s ten commitments to refugee youth, discussions and conclusions from a stakeholder conference on engaging refugee youth also underscored one of the major challenges in translating Agency policy into practice. Similar to recent consultations and deliberations among refugees, along with evaluations of
UNRWA’s participatory approach to camp improvement and reconstruction, youth taking part in the conference repeatedly emphasized the lack of adequate structures and the concomitant needed for effective representation on a wide range of issues including solutions to their plight. UNRWA’s primary challenge, observed Filippo Grandi, the Agency’s Commissioner-General, was how to “structure a dialogue” with refugee youth recognizing both the Agency’s obligation and commitment to stakeholder participation and the limits of UNRWA’s mandate which did not include the representation of refugees (UNRWA 2012a, 48–49).

The reform of UNRWA’s governance structures and informal consultation mechanisms further illustrated the Agency’s commitment to mainstream stakeholder participation. Reforms designed to “build a revitalized Advisory Commission that reflected] on substantive issues and provid[ed] constructive advice and assistance to the Commissioner-General” (UNRWA 2006: 142) provided for the participation of new members including the PLO which was invited for the first time in 2005 to take part in Commission meetings as an Observer. Ongoing doubts about the PLO’s capacity and willingness to represent refugee rights and interests exacerbated by political and administrative divisions between Palestinian factions (primarily Fatah and Hamas) nevertheless appeared to undermine efforts to enhance consultation with refugees through a reformed Advisory Commission. The marginalization of the PLO and its various factions from reconstruction efforts in Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon exemplified refugee concerns including youth who participated in UNRWA’s aforementioned conference about inadequate or ineffective representation of their rights and
interests. Neither refugees nor civil society organizations were invited to take part in the working group tasked with making recommendations on reform of UNRWA’s Advisory Commission and its Hosts and Donors Meetings. Consistent with broader UN efforts to strengthen the international organization’s partnership with civil society and building upon UNRWA’s long-standing relationship with civil society organizations, however, the working group recommended that the Agency’s Hosts and Donors Meetings “should be broadened, inter alia, to include relevant United Nations and other international agencies and nongovernmental organizations” (UNRWA 2005: para. 169). The establishment of a “Partnership Division” within UNRWA’s External Relations and Communications Department further underscored Agency efforts to mainstream participation of and consultation with its broad array of stakeholders additional to refugees themselves.

UNRWA’s commitment to mainstream stakeholder participation is also evident in the Agency’s evolving approach to the participation of refugees in relation to a solution to their plight. Highlighting the Agency’s ongoing “peace-servicing” role, UNRWA’s medium-term plan for 2010–15 emphasizes “the link between its present activities and the future needs of refugees in the event that there is peace and a just solution”, further noting that “[b]y building their capacity and self-reliance through greater participation, UNRWA seeks to help build refugees’ preparedness for future horizons” (UNRWA 2009a: para. 47). In line with UNRWA’s evolving approach to refugee protection the Agency’s Commissioners-General have in recent years been increasingly outspoken about the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict. Acknowledging that “the elucidation
of that solution is for political actors to achieve”, UNRWA notes that its role includes “advis[ing] and supporting] where possible, necessary efforts by other actors toward achieving and implementing a solution” (ibid.: para. 48) and “help[ing] to ensure that in its elaboration, the rights, views and interests of refugees are heard and safeguarded” (UNRWA 2012b: 4). UNRWA has also begun to emphasize, in a manner consistent with emerging policy and practice governing refugee situations elsewhere, the need for negotiations, as former Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd explained to the UN Security Council, that are

“inclusive and balanced, that allow for refugee representation and address, along with other final status matters, the question of Palestine refugees in a manner consistent with their rights” (UNRWA 2009b). In similar statements AbuZayd and her successor, Filippo Grandi, drawing upon decades of combined experience in other refugee cases have highlighted both the “great capacity [refugees show] for articulating their needs and thinking pragmatically about how their rights and interests may be satisfied” (ibid.) and the “risks [entailed by exclusion and] foregoing of refugees’ consent and cooperation” (UNRWA 2010). A major challenge UNRWA faces in facilitating participation, apart from any limitations in mandate, however, is that “mechanisms for [refugee] inclusion, and consequences thereof, [as in other refugee situations] remain vague” (UNRWA 2009c).

**Concluding remarks**

UNRWA’s approach to participation over its more than six decades of operation has arguably been shaped in part by at least three major factors. Participation has from the Agency’s inception been a function of its mandate and related activities.
Implicit in the General Assembly’s initial instructions regarding relief and works along with subsequent endorsement of revisions to its programmes, participation has been central to Agency efforts to improve refugee living conditions, promote individual and community self-reliance, empower refugees to take part in their own development, address their emergency needs, protect them and support measures to resolve their plight. The evolution of UNRWA’s approach to participation can also be ascribed to the influence, direct and indirect, of participatory policies and practices elsewhere including those relating to women, development, refugees/IDPs and most recently those relating to civil society and peace-building. Partly the result it seems of knowledge, interest and experience of high-level staff, including those who have worked in other development and refugee contexts, the Agency’s approach to participation, especially in recent years, has also been driven by reforms which aim to bring UNRWA practices more in line with global standards governing UN agencies generally.

UNRWA’s evolving approach to participation also appears to be a product of the relationship between the Agency and the refugees it aims to serve. Through resistance and non-participation, empowerment, advocacy and lobbying, and more recently through programme and policy-making processes, refugees (as individuals and as a people) have arguably helped to shape the Agency’s approach to participation over the past six decades. This contribution underscores the role of refugees as agents of change and policymakers rather than simply passive recipients of humanitarian aid.

These factors have shaped UNRWA’s approach to participation in at least three major ways. Initially focused on
refugee output (e.g. labour, skills, material, voluntary time) in its programmes, the Agency gradually began to rely on refugee input (e.g. through its staff, community-based organizations,

individual and community involvement in camp rehabilitation projects) in the assessment, design, monitoring and evaluation of projects to meet their needs. Limited initially to pilot projects in separate fields of operation, UNRWA’s stakeholder participation policy emphasizes the importance of refugee input at both management and programme levels and across all fields of Agency operations. UNRWA’s rationale for participation has also evolved. While early programmes focused on the instrumental benefits of participation (e.g. transforming refugee views, promoting economic development, enhancing self-reliance, adding value to Agency services in light of budget shortfalls later followed by an emphasis on the effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability of Agency projects and programmes), the intrinsic value of participation as a fundamental human right is explicit in UNRWA’s policy on stakeholder participation. UNRWA’s relationship to refugees has also evolved from that of benefactor and beneficiary, to one between the Agency and refugees as a people, with stakeholder participation characterized by an emerging partnership between the Agency and refugees. In contrast to the hierarchical or vertical relationship of the past, where decision-making remained ensconced within a small group of international staff, partnership suggests a “repositioning” of the vertical relationship between UNRWA and the refugee community to a horizontal one characterized by mutual co-operation, collective decisionmaking and shared responsibility. Stakeholder participation as an active, free and meaningful
partnership between UNRWA and its primary stakeholders, the Palestinian refugees, arguably begins to address the original cause of their ongoing predicament, that is, the denial of their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives both as individuals and as a people.

**Note**

This chapter is based on an initial review of UNRWA practice (Rempel 2009) prepared for a conference marking 60 years since the Agency’s establishment and the author’s unpublished doctoral research (Rempel 2013) on the right to political participation and the negotiation of durable solutions for refugees. Due to space constraints this overview contains few references. Readers wishing to consult UNRWA’s annual reports to the UN General Assembly can find electronic copies for most years archived with the UN Information System on Palestine (UNI-SPAL): [http://unispal.un.org](http://unispal.un.org). An initial review of archival documents in UNRWA’s Central Registry revealed few additional sources on Agency policy regarding refugee participation. Major secondary sources on UNRWA consulted for this chapter can be found in the list of sources cited. A number of UNRWA publications cited herein can also be found on the Agency’s website, UNRWA [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org).

**Bibliography**


——(1950) *Summary Record of the One Hundred and Sixty Second Meeting*, UN Doc. SR/162, 5 June.

UNRWA (1950) *Interim Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in*


——(1964) Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Covering the period 1 July 1963 to


——(2012b) *Enjoying Human Rights to the Fullest*, UNRWA Factsheets.

8 Community participation and human rights advocacy

Questions arising from the campaign about the right to work of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

Sergio Bianchi

The main aim of this chapter is to contribute to the understanding of the interplay between community participation and human rights’ protection affecting the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon through the case of the advocacy campaign surrounding the reform of the legal regime regulating Palestinian employment in Lebanon. This campaign, in which the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) played an active role, has been characterized by its emphasis on the importance of community participation. Through discussion on the advocacy practices implemented, their participatory dimension and the decision-making process, this chapter aims at demonstrating that legitimizing advocacy via community participation activated the competition dynamics among community representatives, i.e., the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and political parties, thus further crystallizing the fragmentation of the Palestinian community. This conflict, in addition to Lebanese reluctance to a change of representation over the Palestinian refugees, had a detrimental impact on advocacy.
Introduction

On August 17, 2010, the Lebanese Parliament partially amended the legal measures regulating Palestinian refugees’ access to the labor market by weakening the existing discriminatory regime. This reform was preceded by several advocacy initiatives carried out by UNRWA and a number of community-based, non-partisan organizations to promote the protection of Palestinians’ rights. By questioning how these initiatives interacted with the reform process, this chapter aims at furthering the reflection among academics and practitioners on what community participation practically means, and what its effects are on the political dynamics concerning Lebanon’s Palestinians.

The Lebanese context proves to be particularly meaningful because of the relative freedom enjoyed by international and local actors, including UNRWA and a group of Lebanese NGOs targeting the Palestinian community. Indeed, their easy access to the public space facilitated their respective attempts to launch and implement joint advocacy initiatives about human rights protection. Since the call for enhanced refugees’ participation was one of the most innovative aspects of these initiatives, they seem particularly appropriate when exploring the protection–participation nexus – two buzzwords recently introduced by UNRWA policy-making documents (Gambian 2006; Khouri 2010; Misselwitz and Hanafi 2010; Rempel 2010).

More precisely, the case of advocacy initiatives regarding the right to work of Palestinian refugees is particularly appropriate to explore the protection–participation nexus because it includes a wide array of concrete actions.
undertaken between 2005 and 2010 by two overlapping sets of actors: the UNRWA-backed Committee for the Employment of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (CEP) and the Palestinian–Lebanese Coalition for the Right to Work of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon. These initiatives can be considered as interconnected for two reasons. First, they were nurtured by a relatively unvarying group of interrelated individuals, including some high-level members of the Lebanese bureaucracy, international organizations, Palestinian political parties, and Palestinian NGOs. Indeed, these individuals formed the constituencies of both the CEP and the Palestinian–Lebanese Coalition coordinating bodies. Second, CEP and Coalition initiatives involved official cooperation at the institutional level. For instance, the representative of Palestinian civil society in the CEP and the Palestinian–Lebanese Coalition for the Right to Work jointly supported the organizing committee setting up the contentious June 27 rally in Beirut, arguably the highest point of the involvement of local communities in the advocacy process.

By looking at this case study, in which the claims of both protection and refugees’ participation took a concrete, observable form, it becomes therefore possible to describe and analyze one situation in which community participation occurred in the advocacy/protection process and to question its impact. Hence, in the next section, I present the discriminatory legal regime against which advocacy initiatives were designed. Subsequently, three distinct sections discuss the advocacy activities of the CEP, those of the Palestinian–Lebanese Coalition for the Right to Work, and the impact on protection initiatives once the debate in the Lebanese Parliament began. In the fifth section, some elements of reflection on community participation in
advocacy initiatives aiming at influencing legislative processes in Lebanon are introduced and its impacts are questioned. Finally, in conclusion, I draw on the findings previously introduced to criticize the implicit assumption upon which the participation–protection nexus is built.

Actual legal measures concerning Palestinian refugees’ employment

The aim of this section is to highlight the three main features of the discriminatory legal regime regulating the employment of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon before 2005 and how the legal environment evolved after the end of the Syrian occupation.

The first feature of the discriminatory regimes concerns the administrative procedures to be undertaken by Palestinian refugees with a formal work contract. Like any other foreigner employed in Lebanon, Palestinians are required to obtain a yearly work permit issued by the Ministry of Labor. The second feature has to do with the protections mechanisms granted to employed individuals in Lebanon. According to the reciprocity clause included in the Social Security Law passed in 1963, Palestinians are excluded from the benefits which stemmed from the National Social Security Plan, i.e., all kinds of work leave (maternity, illness, work accident, occupational) and end-of-service compensation payments (El-Natour and Yassine 2007: 68–69). The third and last discriminatory feature is the prohibition to engage in certain professional activities. The legal basis of this prohibition is two-tiered; the Decree No. 17561 banned individuals from practicing liberal professions, such as medical practice, law, etc., if they were not affiliated to the relative professional
syndicate. Given that Lebanese citizenship is a mandatory condition to be affiliated with the syndicates, such a measure precludes foreigners from access to all liberal professions. Furthermore, three ministerial decrees issued by three different Labor ministers restricted the access to a number of salaried jobs to Lebanese nationals. The decrees 38/11 of 1983, 3/1 of 1993 and 621/1 of 1995 barred foreigners from an increasing number of jobs in the banking, teaching, and building sectors, among others. In 1995, more than 70 high-status professions and 46 waged job positions were closed to foreigners, including Palestinian refugees (Knudsen 2009: 59). Even though the Casablanca protocol and, more importantly, the Cairo agreement led to a temporary improvement in the legal situation of Palestinian refugees, the discriminatory legal measures targeting Palestinians were again enforced after 1987, when the Lebanese Parliament formally denounced the agreement and declared it void.

This trend was suddenly reversed in 2005. In July, Labor minister Trad Hmadeh issued the Memorandum no. 67/1 which lifted the ban against foreigners on the 46 salaried professions and some of the independent activities. This decision was taken in an atmosphere of renewed dialogue about refugees’ status which materialized in the establishment of the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) in March of the same year, and in the re-opening of a PLO representation office in Beirut in 2006. At that time, advocacy campaigns focusing on amending the laws concerning right to employment for Palestinian refugees were launched. This process involved both international actors (namely the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the UNRWA and the ILO) and local organizations (such as Lebanese ministries, Palestinian
parties, and NGOs). While the Palestinian and international positive attitudes toward this topic were not new, the change in the Lebanese position may be explained by both the political overturn and a sudden socio-economic change linked to the end of the Syrian occupation.⁶

**Official initiatives protecting of Palestinians’ rights: the CEP advocacy campaign**

Two sets of actors have been involved in the advocacy campaigns and their constitutive events since their very beginnings in 2006. A gathering of NGOs, considered in the next section, formed the first set of actors. The second set operated as “an informal coordination group”⁷ called the Committee for the Employment of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (CEP).⁸ As stated in the “Who We Are” section of the text introducing the Committee, UNRWA played a fundamental role in initiating the establishment of this organization:

In May 2006, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), in collaboration with the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized a technical workshop funded by the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development on the employability of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. As a result of the findings and in response to the evident need for further work, the Follow-Up Committee for Employability of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (FCEP) was established, it was supported by a secretariat funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

(FCEP 2007: 5)

Besides UNRWA, the initial⁹ membership of the CEP included representa-tives from: the Lebanese Civil Society,¹⁰
the Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), the ILO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The representative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation was not a Committee member, but he held the status of observer (CEP 2010c).

According to one member of the CEP, in the first two years of the Committee’s existence, “… A lot of work was to identify research needs and [fill] them. There was an enormous amount of reports that were already available. So, basically the CEP started with the compilation of the available [research] … done and look at where [identified] gaps ….“¹¹

In practical terms, the Committee organized two workshops whose aim was to disseminate the findings of the existing quantitative studies concerning the issue of the employment of Palestinians in Lebanon¹² and make the FCEP known to the others actors involved in this issue.¹³ Having taken over the role of advocate of the right to work form the LPDC, the Committee sought out practical ways to facilitate the employment of Palestinians.

The membership of the CEP at that time was particularly suitable to develop this strategy, as it included representatives of Palestinian refugees, of Lebanese authorities, and of international organizations. According to a member of the committee, “The CEP is a strange animal because it is not really the Civil Society, and it is not the UN … it was a combination of both which involved the government, which is well [sic].”¹⁴ According to the same interviewee, from the standpoint of UNRWA, this composition was particularly valuable because “… The CEP has allowed UNRWA [to become] involved in a sensitive issue without
Finally, the CEP’s composition embryonically enlarged and enhanced refugees’ participation by including a representative of the civil society, namely the director of one of the Palestinian NGOs operating in Lebanon. Although it would not be correct to say that the CEP was UNRWA maneuver to develop its activities in a field – the protection of refugees’ socio-economic rights vis-à-vis host governments – very distant from service provision because CEP was not controlled by the Agency. Some details other than the above mentioned quote also demonstrate that UNRWA was closely involved in the process. First, CEP premises were located inside UNRWA Lebanon field office. Second, and perhaps most important, UNRWA representatives have constantly been some of the most proactive members of the Committee.

In 2009, CEP activities were increased and the Committee went through two important changes. The first one had an impact on the membership of the Committee, which varied for the first time since its establishment, whereby the Field Protection Officer replaced the Head of Relief in his capacity of UNRWA representative. This evolution could be linked to the larger reform of UNRWA’s mandate and internal organization. As Nell Gabiam (Gambian 2006: 724) pointed out: “… the issue of protections surfaced at UNRWA’s Geneva Conference of June 2004, and in 2005 a Protection Officer was hired as part of the agency’s efforts to promote international humanitarian law and protection concepts in Palestinian refugee communities.” According to the Senior Protection Coordinator, the UNRWA’s protection mandate takes place at two levels: 1) the Agency directly promotes the human rights of the refugees through its programs; and 2) where the refugees suffer from human rights infringements,
UNRWA engages the relevant authorities to promote the political and civil rights of the refugees (Brailsford 2010: 3). The change in CEP membership, in which the appointment of a Field Protection Officer in Beirut reflected the increasing relevance attributed to protection in the Agency, was absolutely consistent with the second level just mentioned.

The second change concerned the name and the objectives of the Committee. Welcoming the rehabilitated spirit of the Lebanese-Palestinian relationship,

[T]he CEP has noted an environmental shift in the way Palestinian refugee employment is perceived and the higher priority it is being accorded by major actors such as Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC), UNRWA and the integrated UN Working Group on Palestinian Issues (IUNWGPI) …

(CEP 2010a)

Consequently, the Committee’s members unanimously decided to change the name of the group into Committee for the Employment of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (CEP) (CEP 2010b: fn.1). They also changed the goals of the Committee’s activities from providing reliable data about Palestinian employment in Lebanon to a more proactive role in advocacy by adding a further goal: “ … To enable the Palestinian refugees to enter formally the workplace in Lebanon, in line with Lebanese international obligations” (CEP 2010b: 2). In summation, information production and dissemination on practical aspects of the labor market were henceforth complemented by an improved focus on the legal issues attached to the question of the employment of
Palestinian refugees. In concrete terms, CEP got involved in the publication of more practice-oriented texts targeting the legal texts constraining Palestinian employment, such as the study published in late 2009 with the title *Legal Texts Governing the Employment of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: A Study & Comparison*.

This shift is very important because, by moving from technical to politically sensitive issues, the CEP started to actively participate in initiatives conducive to social transformations. This form of engagement, nonetheless, could not be undertaken without some precautionary measures. In the “Executive Summary” of the above mentioned study, an interesting distinction about the “problem” of Palestinian employment is elaborated. With regards to the right of employment of Palestinian refugees, the authors declared that in the past it has been considered as the first step towards integration and resettlement of the refugees into the Lebanese society. The CEP took a clear-and-cut position in refusing this assumption. On the contrary, it considers that the issues raised by the legal status of Palestinian refugees are mainly due to a gap in the Lebanese law; this gap led to a situation in which the legislation concerning the employment of Palestinian refugees is not consistent with the obligations stemming from the international treaties pre-viously signed by Lebanon (CEP 2009b: 5). In making this distinction, the CEP could then defuse the potential allegations of promoting the resettlement of refugees – a political taboo in the Lebanese political system (El Khazen 1997; Meier 2008: 133).\(^ {18}\)

The CEP then focused on the legislative gap relative to Palestinian refugees’ employment\(^ {19}\) and disseminated its legal study in seminars and conferences at the beginning of 2010. Among the attendees of these events were
representatives from the Palestinian NGOs\textsuperscript{20} and of the main Lebanese political parties.\textsuperscript{21} A legal working group was formed after the conference including CEP and LPDC members, NGO directors and members of Lebanese political parties (CEP 2010b: 3). The working group’s mandate was to prepare a draft bill of law to be considered by all the actors concerned by Palestinian refugee employment and, eventually, to the Lebanese Parliament.\textsuperscript{22} In April 2010, during a conference held at the American University of Beirut, the chair of the CEP and the PLO representative in the Committee jointly announced that the all the Palestinian political parties had accepted to submit the draft bill to Lebanese authorities, and that a coordinated campaign was to be prepared by NPA and Najdeh directors on behalf of Palestinian civil society.

The role of Palestinian NGOs in the advocacy initiative: enhancing protection through community participation?

In the first half of 2010, the aforementioned campaign to support the CEP draft bill became enmeshed with the initiatives already put in place by Palestinian civil society organizations. Another set of actors had become engaged in the elaboration and implementation of protection activities concerning Palestinians’ rights in 2005 – and more specifically the right to work. Among these initiatives, the largest campaign in terms of partner organizations has been the Right to Work campaign set up in 2005 by Association Najdeh.\textsuperscript{23} This campaign merged to form the bundle of joint efforts by individual activists and Lebanese non-profit associations targeting the Palestinian community unsystematically carried out during the five years preceding
the elaboration of the CEP draft bill. Despite the relative lack of coordination, these efforts culminated in the mobilization for the March for Civil Rights of Palestinian Refugees which took place on June 27, 2010 in Beirut. The chain of events though which Najdeh became progressively involved in the organization of the march – i.e., the largest episode engaging local communities’ participation in the advocacy process – is illustrative of the ways in which NGOs’ understanding of community participation in protection initiatives was translated into practice.  

Association Najdeh’s decision to start an advocacy campaign was taken after a training workshop organized by Education Action International (EAI) in Cyprus in 2004. In order to be accepted to this event, EAI required the organizations requesting training to launch an advocacy campaign in the countries where they were active, thereby putting into practice what they had learnt. Najdeh complied with this request and made use of beneficiaries’ perceptions concerning its own programs to select the issue to be advocated. On the basis of these perceptions, it appeared that the legal regime constraining Palestinians’ employment opportunities was a major concern for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Thanks to funding from two European NGOs, Najdeh was able to launch its own advocacy campaign focused on the right to work. The campaign aimed at “ … Enabling Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon to practicing the right to work in Lebanon” (Association Najdeh 2006: 1). To achieve this aim, several forms of varyingly contentious actions were planned in 2006 and 2007.

After the first phase, the pace and the scope of the campaigns improved in 2009. At that time, Najdeh was finally able to publish Working Unprotected: Contributions of Palestinian
Refugees Residing in Camps and Some Gatherings to the Lebanese Economy. This study, based on a survey submitted to 1,500 households (Khalidi 2008: 23), allowed the Right to Work Coalition, the group of Lebanese and Palestinian organizations and individuals affiliated to the Right to Work campaign, to formulate their political demands concerning the protection of Palestinians’ right to employment under the form of knowledge-based findings. In other words, Najdeh demands for social transformation were supported via claims of expertise-based legitimacy (cf. Offerlé 1998: 118). Similar to the initial CEP official discourse, the 2009 report assumed that few studies dealing with the Palestinian labor force as a proactive economic actor existed (Khalidi 2008: 22). Hence, the main aims of the Najdeh study were: a) to identify and describe Palestinian involvement in the Lebanese economy; and b) to strengthen the recommendations of the campaign (Khalidi 2008: 34). Having printed the report, Najdeh organized several public presentations in Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre, which involved the participation of Lebanese politicians, including both ministers and MPs.

In the first half of 2010, the Right to Work campaign became intertwined with the advocacy initiative launched by another group of NGOs (among others, Norwegian People’s Aid, Ai’doun, Najdeh and Palestinian Human Rights Organization) and individual activists gathered to form an ad-hoc march organizing committee. There, Zeina (the employee in charge of the Right to Work campaign) was appointed by the Najdeh director to act on behalf of the latter within the organizing committee. Together with other committee members, Zeina played a very active role in meeting with
Lebanese and Palestinian potential partners for the march, namely political parties and unions.\textsuperscript{33}

These meetings, however, were just one of the components of the march organizers’ political strategy, whose aim was to raise the largest possible support behind the draft law produced by the CEP and supported by Palestinian NGOs and parties. The second component of this strategy concerned the grassroots mobilization of Palestinian and Lebanese masses to be achieved by Lebanese and Palestinian “civil society” organizations. The combination of these actions was meant to gather the widest possible attendance of both private citizens and political organizations at a march starting from locations all over Lebanon and ending in Beirut in front of the Parliament – a tangible manifestation of the support enjoyed by the CEP draft bill of law. In this phase, UNRWA actively contributed to the implementation of this strategy by facilitating information-sharing among its non-governmental working partners. By the same token, for instance, the march was introduced to UNRWA key partners during an NGO meeting at the Lebanon Field Office at the beginning of April.\textsuperscript{34}

The most distinctive feature of this event was that, contrary to most of the previous advocacy initiatives,\textsuperscript{35} it was meant to boost the participation of people from local communities and engage them directly in the advocacy/protection efforts concerning the rights of Palestinian refugees. As the outreach pamphlet signed by the organizing committee said:

The humanitarian approach looks at Palestinian refugees as a group of people that need to be fed and sheltered by international relief agencies and charitable organizations, denying their agency as participatory actors in their state of
affairs. … The march will bring together Palestinian and
Lebanese crowds … [and] it will be joined by other crowds
from the areas

it passes through. The march is expected to end with more
than 5,000 people, and to coincide with a mass signing of the
petition and the draft law modifications.

(Organizing Committee 2010a: 1–2)

This being said, the call for agency and grassroots
participation stood somehow in contrast to the practical
arrangements taken during the organization of the rally. As a
matter of fact, participation consisted mainly in the
organization of transportation means which carried NGO
beneficiaries from the camps to the starting point of the march
in Beirut. The following example is illustrative of the ways in
which the participation of NGOs beneficiaries was mustered.
A few days before the march, the heads of Najdeh regional
branches coordinated with the accountant of the Association
in order to book the buses which took Najdeh “sponsored”
participants to Beirut.36 Furthermore, the organizing
committee asked the Palestinian political parties to inform
and mobilize the whole Palestinian population residing in the
camps.37

Consistent with well-established participation models in
Lebanon, the call for participation was finally translated into
these two sets of actions. The attending constituencies
mentioned in the pamphlet had to be mobilized by the
organizations and civil society groups who were members of
the Organizing Committee or, upon request, by Palestinian
and Lebanese parties. Consequently, in filling the
participation form attached to the pamphlet just quoted, each
participating organizations was asked to estimate how many
people it expected to travel to Beirut for the march (Organizing Committee 2010a: 6). This information was necessary since the organizing committee covered the costs of all the buses used to carry individual participants. These expenses were covered thanks to the participation quota given by all the NGOs gathered in the organizing committee and voluntary donations given by international donors. Amongst the latter, the sum granted by the UNRWA Lebanon field office is particularly significant. This was another indication of the involvement of the Agency, not only in the production of the draft bill of law through the CEP, but also in the facilitation of grassroots mobilization though “civil society” organizations.

In the early afternoon of June 27, march attendees gathered in front of the Sports City Stadium of Beirut and left for downtown. At the head of the rally, the members of the organizing committees marched in a single line. All of them wore the cap of the march (a white baseball cap on which the slogans of the demonstration and the NPA, PHRO, European Union, Norwegian embassy, and Danish Refugee Council logos were printed) and the emblematic white-and-black checkered Palestinian scarf. Groups of NGO beneficiaries and staff followed the lead of the organizers’ line. For instance, I spotted al-Badia employees marching together closely behind the first line. Similarly, a group of Najdeh beneficiaries from the Bekaa valley walked together throughout the rally. This group was composed of young women who had been instructed in the parking lot of the Sports City Stadium to carry a huge Palestinian flag. The Najdeh coordinator of the Bekaa branch walked beside them encouraging them to continuously wave the flag. Once the group arrived in front of
the ESCWA building in Downtown, some of the demonstrators boarded buses which took them back home while a diminishing crowd stayed in the square where a podium was set for the official speeches. These speeches were delivered by Sari Hanafi, Luisa Morgantini, a representative from the Progressive Socialist Party, the representative of the PLO in Lebanon, and several representatives of the Palestinian parties (among others, the PFLP and the DFLP).

No official figure is available to measure the participation in the march. However, estimations made by several organizers tend to converge on 3,000 participants. The Najdeh-led Palestinian-Lebanese Coalition for the Right to Work of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon provided partial figures by claiming to have had a great role in the gathering of 1,280 participants. Even though organizing a peaceful rally of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has been a historical breakthrough, some of the organizers had the impression of not having met their own expectations concerning the size of the attendance and shared this feeling during the post-march evaluation meeting of the organizing committee.

Together with limited participation, the occurrence of another event stood in stark contrast to the idea of a single spontaneously mobilized grass-roots community – an idea implicit (and somehow central) to the participatory discourse adopted by the organizing committee of the march: on June 25 another demonstration was held in the same place and with very similar modalities (a petition was delivered to the Parliament). This last demonstration was organized by the Palestinian political coalition opposed to the PLO (Tahaluf) after its disengagement from the organizing committee of the June 27 march (a move immediately followed by the withdrawal of Hezbollah and Amal support for the march).
The very same duplication occurred on the morning of the vote on the amendments to the labor law (August 17), when two sit-ins – one called by Hamas and the other by the Right to Work campaign – were organized at the same time, in the same place, and with identical participation modalities and equivalent attendance. 48

However, since mid-June, when an amendment bill was put forward in the Parliament, the context in which participatory protection initiatives take place has varied drastically, as described in the next section.

The emergence of competing arenas: the impact of decision-making on protection initiatives concerning the employment of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

On June 15, 2010, the chairman of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), Walid Jumblatt, launched an emergency procedure to amend the laws which restrained employment opportunities in Lebanon for Palestinian refugees – namely those concerning work permits, the access to National Social Security Fund services, and real estate ownership. 49 The activation of the institutional decision-making channels modified the context in which the protection initiatives took place in terms of actors and repertories of action (cf Tilly 1978). Actually, protection initiatives through the production of knowledge were suddenly joined by other processes of narrative creation in which previously sidelined collective actors (namely the Lebanese and Palestinian political parties) directly competed with one another and with the organizations already engaged in protection initiatives to influence the output of the decision-making process, i.e., the actual legal measures
regulating Palestinians’ rights. In doing so, they made use of “new resources”, such as the number of supporters, alliances, and references to the Lebanese nationhood, which functioned as legitimizing sources of their narratives.

**The Parliamentary debate**

The amendment bill put forward by Jumblatt addressed specifically the issue of Palestinians being unjustly recognized and addressed as foreigners. It declared void the principle of reciprocity for those refugees registered with the Ministry of the Interior – and consequently eliminated the requirement of paying for a work permit – and granted limited access to the National Social Security Fund services (end of treatment and injury compensations). Jumblatt’s proposal was followed by two other amendment bills publicly presented to the press (but not to the Committee of Administration and Justice, i.e., the body in charge of the law amendments) by the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (on the June 16) and the Future Movement (on the July 13).

Jumblatt’s proposal provoked an animated debate inside the Parliament. On the one side, Christian MPs from opposing coalitions objected to the proposed amendments. Alternatively, the rest of the MPs (Sunny, Shi’ite, and Druze) from both the majority and the minority blocs in the Parliament supported the amendments. The Christian opposition – reuniting political adversaries such as the Phalange, the Lebanese Forces and the Free Patriotic Movement – was based on the refusal of any form of naturalization of Palestinian refugees, and of any discharge
of responsibility from the International Community (UNRWA) to Lebanon (National Social Security Fund), as declared by then-Minister of Labor, Boutros Harb. The supporter of the amendments called for the granting of social and economic rights to refugees on the basis of international obligations and the respect of basic human rights. In the meantime, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party presented a draft matching the petition of the June 27 march that adopted a more comprehensive approach to refugees’ rights.

Two attempts to overcome the sectarian opposition took place at the beginning of July. First, Prime Minister Hariri and the Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri, declared that any decision about this issue needed to be taken consensually. Second, the Future Movement and the Lebanese Forces distributed a joint draft amendment to the press. This proposal was even more restrictive of the Jumblatt’s respective proposal; regarding access to National Social Security, it limited the opportunity of Palestinian workers to the end of treatment and family allowances, asking at the same time for full payment of contributions to the National Social Security Fund. It also called for a free-of-charge work permit to be obtained by Palestinian refugees. On the expected date of the General Assembly’s vote – after a one-month-long negotiation inside the Parliamentary Committee for Administration and Justice - no compromise on the amendments had been found. Therefore, the Speaker of the Parliament, Berri, delayed the vote to further examine the issue, as requested by the Committee itself.
The final decision about the presented drafts was adopted through a majority vote and not according to the consensus method. This decision gave rise to criticism from the Phalange party and dire opposition from the Free Patriotic Movement.

The beginning of the Parliamentary debate entailed three direct consequences for the protection initiatives launched by the CEP and Palestinian NGOs: 1) the split of the formerly solid alliance of actors supporting the protection initiatives; 2) a profound change in the tones and the arguments used in the public debate; and 3) the blatant disconnect between the promoters of the protection initiatives and the collective actors engaged in decision-making – i.e., the first component of the organizing committee’s strategy.

Concerning the alliance split, the participatory protection initiatives that began in late June showed a clear fracture between the organizations close to the PLO and the ones in the Hamas camp, as already mentioned in the previous section. What is more, this rupture overcame the “borders” of the Palestinian politics and affected also the Lebanese political allies of the Tahaluf, like Hezbollah and Amal, who withdrew their support for the June 27 march and to the joint CEP–NGO efforts. In other words, the coalition of Lebanese and Palestinian collective actors that consensually supported CEP and NGO initiatives, such as Najdeh’s Right to Work Campaign, ceased to exist immediately following the beginning of the discussion in the Lebanese Parliament.

Concerning the change in tone of the debate, the presentation of Jumblatt’s proposal led to a shift in the set of the arguments/narratives used to support and legitimize
protection initiatives. More precisely, the focus of the debate among Lebanese politicians – and subsequently with the organizations engaged in the mentioned protection initiatives – shifted from the promotion of human rights to the question of naturalization (as suggested by the contents of the Parliamentary debate in the text box above). It should be recalled here that, for the first time since the Palestinian-Lebanese negotiations in 1991, Jumblatt’s proposal tackled the question of the legal status of the Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon. Therefore it would seem that the PSP leader, in elaborating the contents of the draft bill, opted for very mild amendments in order not to provide his political adversaries with well-rooted symbolic arguments, i.e., the opposition against the naturalization of Palestinian refugees.

The differences between Jumblatt’s proposal, on the one hand, and the recommendations section of the Najdeh report and the petition of the June 27 march, on the other, show clearly the extent of Jumblatt’s caution and would seem to support my claim concerning the shift of legitimizing discursive registers. First, the measures included in Jumblatt’s proposal were meant to address only the refugees registered with the Ministry of the Interior; both the Najdeh report and the text of the petition delivered by the organizers of the June 27 march referred to all Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon using the UNRWA definition and called for a review of the lists of the Ministry of the Interior. Second, Jumblatt’s proposal did not concern the access to professional orders and, consequently, the access to high-status jobs – in medicine, engineering, and law, among others. Third, it limited the access to the services of the National Social Security Fund by granting some compensation (end of
treatment and family allowances) but not others (maternity and injury leaves). Fourth, Jumblatt’s proposal did not include any precise definition of tawteen (naturalization); on the contrary, both the petition and the Najdeh report provided restrictive definitions for this concept – mentioned only briefly in the Taif agreement without any precise definition of it.

Concerning the third point, in the weeks preceding the final vote, the transmission of information between advocating organizations and Lebanese decision-makers collapsed. On the one hand, decision-makers took a step backwards and restarted their search for exact figures about the Palestinian labor force, although one might argue that existing reports and surveys already contained sufficient information on this issue. The workshop organized at the Grand Serail was quite representative of this new decision-makers’ attitude. On August 5, LPDC head Maya Majzoub invited the main organizations and personalities advocating in favor of Palestinians refugees to provide figures and data to further the discussion within the Committee of Administration and Justice. On the other hand, the majority of the advocating actors had little access (if any) to the decision-making instances. When the CEP representative for the Palestinian civil society and Najdeh organized a roundtable – whose attendance overlapped largely with the one of the LPDC workshop – they invited a state minister from the PSP to speak to the matter of the Parliamentary debate. The majority of the questions asked by participants were addressed to the PSP representative and concerned the advancement of the reform in Parliament. In summation, participants from NGOs and the CEP demanded to be reassured about the PSP engagement in supporting the
The only channel left open in this period was confidential, high-level contact between Lebanese political leaders and some Beirut-based UN agencies, such as the UNRWA and the ILO.

Notwithstanding the marginalization of the human-rights-based narrative of earlier protection initiatives and the resilience of one part of the Lebanese political society, the decision-making process reached its end on August 17, when the Parliamentary Committee for Administration and Justice approved two amendments to the article 59 of the Labor Law of 1964 and to the article 9 of the Social Security Law of 1963. Essentially, these amendments reformed the legal regime regulating the employment of Palestinian refugees by exempting them from some obligations applicable to foreigners, such as the need for costly work permits and the reciprocity clause barring access to salaried jobs. Furthermore, the amendment of the Social Security Law called for the establishment of a separate fund to manage the end of treatment compensations for Palestinian workers. As proved by subsequent events, the recognition of the Palestinian right to employment was far away.

59

The participation–protection nexus: obstacles specific to the Lebanese context and intrinsic limits

The main objective of this chapter is to contribute to the understanding of the interplay between community participation and human rights protection by analyzing the case of the campaign advocating the reform of the right to employment of Lebanon’s Palestinians. Two points emerge from this analysis (and are discussed further below). First, actual patterns of mass participation for protection initiatives
engaged some sectors of the community while excluding others. Second, the participation–protection nexus proved to be relatively irrelevant once the decision-making process started. More precisely, the beginning of the institutional procedure to amend laws entailed an increase in the number of stakeholders in the protection initiatives by including the Lebanese political parties (and to a lesser extent their Palestinian allies). Subsequently, the output of the decision-making process relative to the protection demands no longer concerned simply the employment of the Palestinian refugees, but also the symbolic dimensions of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon – i.e., the question of refugees’ naturalization.

Concerning the first point, it can be said that the efforts toward community participation in protection initiatives carried out by UNRWA and by local NGOs stemmed a very specific form of community mobilization characterized by two participation clusters. In the first one, namely the CEP, civil society representatives, civil servants from state ministries, and international organizations jointly produced knowledge, discussed the question of the employment-related rights of the Palestinians and coordinated/harmonized reform demands. In the second cluster, local NGOs strove to organize contentious events in which the mass mobilization of the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples was indicative of their support to joint protection initiatives, such as the legal reform elaborated within the CEP.

Whereas the first component of the mobilizing strategy proved to be successful, at least until the moment in which the march organizing committee
was not operative yet, the mobilization of Lebanese and Palestinian peoples proved to follow a more limited pattern of participation. More precisely, as demonstrated by the description of the June march, the people who attended this event were mainly employees and beneficiaries of these associations and institutions involved in the organization of the march. Political parties loyal to the PLO did not mobilize their supporters in spite of the podium time enjoyed by their leaders at the end of the demonstration. What is more, Hamas and its allies plainly organized a parallel mobilization event.60

In summary, the second component of the participation–protection nexus – partly financed by UNRWA Lebanon field office – proved to be far less comprehensive than expected/imagined by its organizers. But why?

The claim that community participation results more often than not in the involvement of NGOs and their beneficiaries is neither new in the Middle East, nor elsewhere.61 However, an original feature of mass participation related to the involvement of NGOs becomes evident when calls for community participation become enmeshed with human rights protection initiatives aiming at social transformation, as demonstrated in our case study. Once the repertories of action of the CEP and of the NGOs (a majority of which were ideologically aligned with the PLO) began including forms of mobilization suggesting that their legitimacy depended on the number of participants rather than on the quality of the expertise they produced,62 they entered into conflict with other potentially mass mobilizing actors, i.e., the political parties. In turn, Hamas and its allies refused to gather their constituencies and stopped cooperating with the CEP and the NGOs, thus undermining the mobilization efforts carried out by the CEP and the NGOs in relation to their protection
initiatives. The sudden end (in June 2010) of the alliance, which had been emblematic of protection initiatives, and the perceived low participation in the rally may be explained by the change of attitude of (some) political parties, especially on the Hamas side, toward the advocacy efforts promoted by the CEP and the NGOs. In conclusion, this change of attitude resulted in a lack of participation from some sectors of the Palestinian community. This assertion concerning the mutually exclusive participation patterns of NGOs and political parties follows the same line of argumentation relating to the exclusionary power of civil society in the Palestinian case formulated by Benoit Challand (2009) among others. In Lebanon, however, it was even more evident since the internal fragmentation of the Palestinian community becomes exacerbated when legitimacy and political representation enter in the equation.

Concerning the second point, a superficial analysis would suggest that participation proved to be ineffective in influencing the decision-making process simply because the community (partially) mobilized did not overlap with the constituencies of Lebanese political parties. A more refined take would bring into consideration the centrality of the question of naturalization in the Lebanese, post-civil-war political imaginary.\textsuperscript{63} This imaginary has been the symbolic framework within which the debate on the legal amendments took place and decided the relative importance of each narrative, thus leading to the inevitable sidelining of the human rights narratives produced by the UNRWA-supported CEP and the NGOs. Given the centrality of the naturalization issue in the Lebanese political imaginary, the reasons behind the successful shift towards the naturalization framework
advocated by Christian parties and the early incorporation of this discourse in the legal initiatives enacted by the Lebanese supporter of protection initiatives (as in the case of Jumblatt’s proposal) are quite straightforward. This shift subsequently made the channels of information transmission established by the UNRWA and the NGOs between 2005 and 2010 dysfunctional. Several episodes are illustrative of this situation. In terms of the Palestinian NGOs, workshops (such as the one mentioned in the previous section) were organized by Palestinian NGOs simply to gain assurances from their Lebanese allies affirming their engagement in furthering the draft bill. Relating to the UNRWA-supported CEP, its perceived immobility opened a window of opportunity for other institutions, such as the LPDC, to take the initiative with regards to the issue of Palestinian employment.

At this point, UNRWA, ILO, and other UN agencies played a fundamental role in facilitating the transmission of information between the supporters of protection initiatives and Lebanese politicians. Thanks to their personal contacts within the Lebanese political milieu, high-level officers of the above-mentioned agencies were informed about advancements in the reform process and in turn informed protection initiatives’ supporters, such as interested CEP members and Palestinian NGOs. These interventions, however, were more often than not contingent action taken on the basis of an individual decision rather than follow-up of an official policy approved by the UN agencies. This decision appears to be all the more personal when the UNRWA reluctance to get involved in the political debate concerning Palestinian socioeconomic rights in other fields of operations neighboring Israel, where Palestinians’ rights were less threatened, is considered.
The centrality of refugees’ naturalization, then, appeared to be a further obstacle, specific to the Lebanese context, to the effectiveness of the participation-protection nexus. That being said, the initiatives launched by the UNRWA through the CEP and by local NGOs led to positive outcomes as well. Whereas the involvement of certain sectors of the Palestinian community did not prove to be conducive to facilitating reforms of the Lebanese legal system, enacting participatory practices – such as conferences, sit-ins, awareness-raising workshops, and rallies – had two positive effects. The first was to reinforce communities of interests, including both individual and collective actors supporting protection initiatives (the Palestinian-Lebanese Coalition for the Right to Work of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon led by Najdeh or the UNRWA-supported CEP, among others). The second effect was the enlargement of these communities through the diffusion of narratives about the Palestinian presence in Lebanon – often in the form of statistical surveys. It can be said that the diffusion process did not lead to full acceptance of the narrative outside the Palestinian community and the milieu of activists, comprising representatives from international organizations, a few Lebanese high-level civil servants, and Lebanese politicians. However, it did successfully disseminate the main elements of the narrative – such as the stress on human dignity – in a simplified form (for instance, through the slogans chanted during the march) and/or in more elaborate ways (such as conference speeches, awareness-raising activities, human rights education, etc.) during the participation-related events beyond the mobilized community.
Conclusion

By outlining the actual occurrence of community participation in the campaign advocating the reform of the right to employment for Lebanon’s Palestinians, this chapter questions one fundamental assumption implicit to the participatory approach (praised by both international and local actors engaged in protection initiatives). In theory, the mobilization of civil society/at the grassroots level/of the community is meant to strengthen the advancement of political demands vis-à-vis state authorities. In fact, the aim of mobilizing a single, relatively self-interested community to legitimize protection initiatives in Lebanon conflicted with the well-established patterns of mass participation in contentious events. These patterns, far from being determined merely by cultural factors, are intertwined with the living conditions experienced by the great majority of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The mix of symbolic and material causes leading to the pattern of participation described in the previous section also facilitate the reproduction of the internal cleavages of Lebanon’s Palestinian community along partisan (PLO vs. tahaluf) and social (NGOs vs. parties) fracture lines. Not only did this mobilization not succeed in reducing the existing cleavages within the Palestinian community, but it also had little impact on the political debate among Lebanese decision-makers, whose constituencies were more prone to discuss the implications of social transformation from a purely Lebanese point of view. This being said, the march was one of the few occasions in which (some) Palestinian parties and (some) NGOs cooperated in order to achieve a common objective. In other words, it demonstrated that collaborations across the existing divides are possible, albeit difficult. Lastly, the analysis of the participation—protection
nexus demonstrated that international organizations, such as the UNRWA, are a great deal more successful in providing discussion *fora* than in stimulating mass mobilization through so-called civil society organizations. In my opinion, this is a painful yet valuable lesson.

It is indeed a painful lesson because it confirms the inadequacy of the mainstream, liberal vision of state–society relations in the case of Palestinians in Lebanon. Indeed, it reinforces the call for an adaptation of the conceptual toolbox enabling both researchers and practitioners to grasp the social diversity and the power inequalities which define the collective and individual existence of Palestinians in Lebanon and elsewhere.66

**Notes**

Not only were these individuals related to each other because of their professional engagements, they also belonged to an ideologically driven milieu of middle-class, intellectually engaged activists supporting Palestinians’ rights. This milieu was brought into existence by the interplay among past experiences of political activism, friendships, and familiar ties connecting the majority of individuals belonging to the CEP and in the Coalition. For an analysis of how life spheres interact with political activism, see Passy and Giugni (2000).

In-depth analyses about the legal status of Palestinians in Lebanon before 2010 can be found in Sayigh (1979); El-Natour (1993); El-Natour (1997); Said (2001); Sayigh (2001); Khalili (2005); Kamel-Doraï (2006); Suleiman (2006); Knudsen (2009) among others. It might also be observed, as Bocco and Al-Husseini did, that the contingent legal statuses of the Palestinians in Lebanon were influenced
by the interplay of the political power equilibriums among political actors with the humanitarian endeavors of international actors, and with the Lebanese socio-economic situation (Bocco and Al-Husseini 2010: 263).

According to the Decree No. 17561, foreigners hired in Lebanon must obtain a work permit from the Ministry of Labor. The Palestinian refugees – being legally speaking foreigners according to 1962 law – also need to obtain the yearly permit in order to be legally recognized as workers and access the (limited) protection mechanisms enjoyed by employees in Lebanon. About the impact of 1962 nationality law on Palestinian refugees, see El-Natour and Yassine (2007: 68); CEP (2009a: 16).

“The Casablanca protocol called on Arab nations hosting refugees to grant them rights of work, travel and residency … Lebanon signed the protocol with several reservations that made the right to work conditional on the country’s economic situation and restricted entry into and exit from Lebanon” (Knudsen 2009: 55).

For a comprehensive list see the table in ILO (2010: 16).

After the withdrawal of the Syrian troops in 2005, many of the Syrian workers employed in low-wage jobs left Lebanon leading to a shortage of low-wage labor force.

Interview with a CEP member, August 20, 2010, Beirut.

Previously known under the name of Follow-up Committee for the Employment of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (FCEP). As explained below, the Committee changed its name in 2009.

The actual membership of the Committee includes also a representative from the Business Community and the NPA
The director is listed as the representative of the Palestinian Civil Society. See CEP (2010b: 1).

The member appointed as the representative of the Lebanese civil society was Ambassador (rtd.) Samir el-Khoury.

Interview, August 20, 2010, Beirut.


For a list of events and activities organized by the CEP in this time span, see CEP (2010e).

Interview, August 20, 2010, Beirut.

Interview, August 20, 2010, Beirut.

About the meaning attributed to protection in official UNRWA documents, see UNRWA (2008); UNRWA (2009).

For instance, the already mentioned study about vocational and educational training providers to refugees in Lebanon.

About this topic see, among others, El Khazen (1997); Meier (2008: 133ff).

Interview with a CEP member, May 10, 2010, Beirut.

Amal, Hezbollah, Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, Progressive Socialist Party. For the complete list, see CEP (2010f).

Beside these activities, the CEP got involved in the establishment of Employment Services Centers in Sidon, an activity very similar to UNRWA-ILO Employment center in Tripoli, which does not seem to be relevant in relation to the focus on advocacy of this article. Therefore, it has not been taken into consideration.

Association Najdeh is one of the largest – in terms of budget and staff – non-profit associations targeting the Palestinian community in Lebanon.

A clarification needs to be made here. Participation can be associated with a wide range of observable phenomena. In the eyes of NGOs’ members, this idea is equated to the actual attendance of refugees to contentious events. I am grateful to Leila Hilal for having drawn my attention to the ambiguous significations of participation. For a critical approach to the use of this concept in the domain of international cooperation, see Cornwall (2002).

Especially of the ones concerning the Vocational Training and Social Affairs programs.

Interview with a Najdeh employee, December 14, 2009, Beirut. See also Association Najdeh (2007b: 7 ft.1).

Amongst whom, establishing follow-up committees in charge of advocacy at the local level, mobilizing both Palestinian and Lebanese communities in public events, and lobbying the media. In the first year, the campaign consisted of meetings to set up the local follow-up committees and some awareness raising workshops attended by Najdeh beneficiaries.
The Israeli attack in 2006 and the fighting in Nahr el Bared in 2007 delayed data collection and the publication of the survey-based report.

In a funding-related document of 2007, the expected outcomes of the campaign were formulated as follows:

Amending the labour and unions laws excluding Palestinians from obtaining work permits and reciprocity due to public and official support for the Palestinians’ right to work with understanding of the impact of unemployment and discrimination on the Palestinian and the Lebanese social security as well as the benefits the two communities get from ending this discrimination and that implementing human rights is a basic element towards social security and justice, and finally understanding that ending discrimination the Palestinians are enduring doesn’t mean resettling them in Lebanon.

(Association Najdeh 2007b: 11)

In the 2009 report, advocacy recommendations follow a several headings concerning the issues negatively affecting Palestinian labor in Lebanon – namely legal constraints, lack of security, and Nahr el-Bared destruction. According to the report’s author, the negative impacts of these issues have been documented through “objective” statistics in the previous chapters of the report (Khalidi 2008: 133–34).

The meetings were attended by Tarek Mitri, the Information Minister, and MPs from Amal, the Future Movement, and the Popular Nasserite Organization among others Association Najdeh (2007a). Another meeting between Najdeh director and PSP representatives took place in April in

For a more complete list see the march pamphlet Organizing Committee (2010a).

Zeina is a fictional name. I use fictional names to protect the privacy of the interlocutors who generously agreed to share their experiences with me.

Interview with one member of the organizing committee, June 8, 2011, Beirut.

Observation notes, April 9, 2010, UNRWA Lebanon field office, Beirut. This being said, it should be noted that the organizing committee meetings started much earlier – early January 2010 – at the AUB (personal communication with one member of the organizing committee, December 15, 2012, Geneva-Beirut).

In the framework of Najdeh’s Right to Work campaign, some sit-ins took place. However, they involved a far smaller number of individuals.


The actual meaning of this request goes from advertising the march within the camps to taking parties’ activists to this contentious event. In any case, the meaning attributed to this request by the members of the organizing committee seems to be irrelevant because parties refrained both from advertising the march and from taking their activists to Beirut, as several interlocutors of mine pointed out when they commented parties’ involvement in the march.
Namely ‘Bidna na’ysh bil-Karamah lina’ud’ (trans. ‘We want to live in dignity in order to return’).

The director of Najdeh wore a different cap on which the logo of the Right to Work campaign replaced the slogan mentioned above.

Al-Badia is the commercial enterprise founded by Najdeh to produce and commercialize traditional Palestinian embroidery.

The organizing committee explicitly asked people not to carry flags other than the Palestinian and Lebanese ones.

An Italian left-wing former member and the former vice-President of the European Parliament.

All the interviewed organizers but one estimated that the number of the participants varied between 3,000 and 3,500 during the proper rally. Everybody agreed that people moved away as soon as the representatives of political parties got on the podium.

According to official blog of the campaign “Association Najdeh’s had a large amount of participation in the march. A total of 1,280 people involved with Al-Najdeh and the Right to Work Campaign were present at the march on June 27, 2010 … ” (Right to Work 2010).

Committee members expressed their lack of satisfaction about participation several times; among others, an interview with an organizing committee member, June 6, 2010, Beirut, and an interview with an organizing committee member, August 20, 2010, Beirut.

Attributed to the inexperience of the organizing committee in mobilizing the masses and to the scarcity of buses available
for each camp to take participants to Beirut; interview with an organizing committee member, August 20, 2010, Beirut, and interview with a political activist, August 23, 2010, Saida.

Interview with an organizing committee member, June 27, 2010, Beirut. Essentially, the Tahaluf accused the organizers of the march of depending on the money and the agenda of some European embassies (which, in fact, founded the march together with the UNRWA).

At the sit-ins on the August 17 part of the attendances overlapped because some individuals attended both the Hamas sit-in and the Right to Work coalition one.


About the internal Palestinian divisions, see also Hanafi (2010).

Between 1990 and 1991 several meetings between Lebanese ministers and PLO representatives in Lebanon took place. However, they were interrupted just after the withdrawal of the Syrian and Lebanese delegations from the talks in Madrid. For the complete texts, see Khalidi (2008: 27ff). For the petition text, see Organiz-ing Committee (2010b). Both are available at: http://fcep-lb.org/pdf/ProposedLaw_English.pdf

The Najdeh reports implicitly reject any form of nationalization by mentioning the right of return of Palestinian refugees (Khalidi 2008: 27). The petition goes as follows:

Article 1: According to Lebanese Law, NATIONALIZATION (ALTAW-TEEN) is defined exclusively as (a) a collective acquisition of the Lebanese nationality by refugees registered in the registries of the Ministry of Interior; (b) the collective acquisition of the right to vote, to run for municipal and parliamentary elections; and (c) occupying public offices for the Palestinian refugees that are registered in the registries of the Ministry of Interior. (Organizing Committee 2010b: 2)

According to my informants, this rupture has always been felt by NGO activists and PLO representatives. Among others, Rami Khouri, Sari Hanafi, Souhail el-Natour, Samir el-Khoury (CEP chairman), Leila el-Ali (Najdeh director), Jaber Suleiman, Mathijs Le Rutte (an UNRWA field protection officer, and an UNRWA representative in the CEP). Interview with a workshop participant, 20/08/10, Beirut, and pictures available on the LPDC website.


At the beginning of January 2014, the implementation process of the 2010 reform has still to be completed.

These observations on the march attendance resonate with the patterns of community participation which characterized the different phases of Najdeh’s Campaign for the Right to Work.

The seminal work of Benoit Challand about civil society in the Palestinian Territories addressed in detail about these issues (Challand 2009).

I borrow this categorization of NGOs’ modes of action from Michel Offerlé (1998: 118).

About the importance of political imaginary in Palestinian Politics, see Maffi (2006); Picaudou (2006); Heacock (2008) among others.

To justify its involvement in lobbying Lebanese religious and political authorities, one of my interlocutors working at the UN told me that he was forced into lobbying because of the CEP lack of reactivity (interview with a UN high-level officer, July 10, 2011, Beirut).
About the importance of knowledge creation in the humanitarian field, see Ferguson (1990). About the role of statistics in the creation of imagined communities, see Anderson (1991).

This is not at all a novelty in certain domains of French anthropology. About new conceptual frameworks to analyze the governance of refugees, see Malkki (1995); Agier (2008); Hanafi and Long (2010) among others.

Bibliography


——(2010b) *The Committee for the Employment of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (CEP)*, Beirut.


Organizing Committee (2010a) March for Palestinian Civil and Socio-Economic Rights in Lebanon, Sunday, June 27, 2010, Beirut: Organizing Committee of the march for Palestinian Civil and Socio-Economic Rights in Lebanon.

——(2010b) Proposed Law to Bestow on Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon the Right to Work and Civil and Social Rights, Beirut: Organizing Committee of the march for Palestinian Civil and Socio-Economic Rights in Lebanon.


Part V

Camp improvement/reconstruction and community development
9 Dynamics of space, temporariness, development and rights in Palestine refugees’ camps

Muna Budeiri

Introduction

This chapter discusses the evolution of the Palestine refugees’ camps as well as the new approach by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in supporting the improvement of the camps. It discusses the significant shift in approach towards camps that was triggered by the 2004 Geneva Conference that led to the establishment of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP). I have served as ICIP’s first Head, Camp Improvement Unit since the Programme was established in 2006.

After this introduction the chapter discusses an overview of the evolution and development of Palestine refugees’ camps (second section). It then discusses UNRWA’s changing role vis-à-vis the camps leading to the establishment of the ICIP (third section). The fourth section provides an overview of the new camp improvement methodology followed by a discussion of challenges related to its introduction in the fifth
section. Amongst these challenges are the paradigm shift in the methodology, acceptance by the Agency of shared decision-making with the camp communities and funding. A brief concluding section highlights the dual character of the camp as a symbol and a living space and the challenges this imposes when addressing camp improvement.

Overview of the development of Palestine refugees’ camps

Establishment

Palestine refugees’ camps are exceptional spaces that were established to provide temporary shelters for part of the more than 700,000 Palestine refugees who had been forced to flee their homes in Palestine as a result of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war. In 1967 a further 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from what was then the West Bank.

At the time, the land was made available by the host governments, in different models. In 1948 camps started without any professional planning or intervention. This has been confirmed through our first pilot research project conducted on three camps in the West Bank: Amari, Deheisheh and Fawwar. Refugees grouped and constructed their tents and self-built shelters with families, clans and groups of people from the same villages forming clusters and quarters based on their traditional rural hosh concepts. The shape that these clusters took depended on topography and their surrounding context, and benefited from any natural resources in the surrounding area.

The first planning efforts took place in the mid-1950s, when UNRWA launched the first large-scale shelter building
programme to replace the tents, but mostly failed because the refugees had already established their clusters and quarters based on traditional family support networks.\textsuperscript{4} Traces of these plans could still be identified in some of the camps. However, most of these traces are disappearing since no sustainable framework for these planning efforts was ever put in place. As the refugees underwent a series of events that shaped their struggle for political rights, the urban and spatial environment of the camps evolved.

Notions, such as the understanding of the temporariness of the camp as a symbol of the refugees’ rights, the subsequent belonging to the temporary and the need for a space in which daily life can be navigated are all factors that led to making the camps the exceptional spaces that they have evolved into (Rueff and Viaro, 2009). As such, proactive traditional planning practices have been hindered by the official temporariness of the camps, their unique political and legal ambiguities, and the symbolism of the camps to the refugees.

**Urbanization of camps**

**Extent**

As a result of the fast rates and unmediated ways in which camps have been urbanizing, they have been transforming into what can be called ‘camp-cities’ (Misselwitz, 2012). Factors such as the lack of any regulatory framework, severe demographic pressures (in the form of high birth rates) and finite space restrictions (the fixed official border demarcations of camps) have resulted in exponential growth in the camps.
This growth has first started horizontally until it exhausted the public open space, set backs, alleys and roads. People were encroaching on the public realm in their endeavour to find enough space to meet their family needs. As a result, extended family typology started developing to accommodate new growing families.

Eventually growth was forced to develop in the vertical dimension, and has led to the camps becoming dense, overcrowded and hyper-urbanized settings that invariably contain large pockets of concentrated poverty and underemployment or unemployment. The effects of such restrained urbanization on the quality of life and human development have been sharply detrimental.

Public and open spaces have borne a great deal of the cost of this expansion. Most camps today suffer from acute shortages of such spaces, adding pressure on the overcrowded domestic environments.

Additionally, the provision of basic infrastructure services was done in a piecemeal fashion, lacking a comprehensive plan of how the camps should develop and improve throughout the more than 60 years of their evolution.

This was inevitable, in part due to the unpredictable nature and future of these temporary camps. In most cases, the environmental and service infrastructure facilities have not been able to keep up with the demand. Most systems (water, sewage, storm water drainage and electricity) are substandard in their appropriateness and fitness for purpose, and irregular in their distribution. Roads have steadily become narrower as households have encroached, posing challenges to circulation and mobility within camps, and hampering movement of emergency and service vehicles.
The resulting overcrowdedness in camps and the loss of open and public spaces has furthermore negatively affected the quantity of natural light in homes and the quality of ventilation, resulting in significant adverse health effects. The ad hoc expansion of homes and infrastructural facilities has often resulted in substandard shelters that are structurally and environmentally unsafe. Residents with special spatial needs, such as the elderly and people with disability receive very little by way of support from the camp’s infrastructure.

Finally, the pace of demographic and urban growth shows no sign of abating. Indeed, these camps may be approaching a tipping point, after which interventions will steadily and rapidly decrease in efficacy and the deterioration will become irreversible or if at all possible will be reparable at a high prohibitive cost. Camps in different locations such as Al amari in the West Bank, Shatila and Burj el barajneh in Lebanon, Neirab in Syria and Amman new camp in Jordan demonstrate the severity of this problem.

**Location**

The degree of urbanization of camps varies from country to country and within different areas in the same country. The variation is dependent on factors such as the rights of refugees to ownership of property outside camps (they lack such rights in Lebanon, for example) or affordable access to housing outside the camp (which is very difficult in the West Bank). The location of the camps within the urban environment of the country or the area has had a significant effect on the level of densification. Camps adjacent to vital urban locations have witnessed a faster urban growth than camps in rural areas. Demand on housing inside strategically located camps has
also contributed to growth, and in many cases has changed the demography of the population living in camps.

In contrast, under-developed camps situated in remote excluded areas have a different set of issues. Such camps have higher poverty rates due to the lack of work opportunities. Residents live in very primitive shelters with temporary roofs made of asbestos, wood or zinc, and lack access to basic infrastructure.

**Social aspect**

The clusters that have been formed at the early stages of the establishment of the camps were the nucleus that grew into the existing camp quarters. Families grouped themselves according to their place of origin in pre-1948 Palestine and family structures reproducing previously existing social and spatial relations. Traditional family support networks were, and still are, considered the main support mechanism in times of hardship. Space allocation for families and clans was affected by social factors such as power, authority and status. Uneven land distribution has had an effect on the different densities in the camps witnessed today.

The urbanization of the camps did not happen in isolation from the complex social fabric that has developed during more than sixty years of refuge. The refugee camp is a space that provided shelter, economic activities, social infrastructure and political activities. Conflict and negotiation on space had to be dealt with on a regular basis. In the absence of proper camp governance structures, with the exception of a few camps, mechanisms to solve conflict depended on the social networks, family and clan powers, community representatives and political factions amidst many others.
Political aspect

Another factor affecting the urbanization of camps is the level of politicization of the Palestine refugees within those camps and the extent of their struggle for their rights as refugees and against occupation. Palestine refugees have passed through phases of struggle within their 60 years of refuge and the Palestine refugees’ camps were in most cases the core and centre of this struggle. The rise of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and other political factions, the First and Second Intifada, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and other relevant political and military developments during the past decades have had their effects on camps.

In a number of instances camps have been completely demolished and never reconstructed again, such as Sabra and Tal El Zaatar. In other cases, the reconstruction of demolished camps such as Shatila, Jenin and Nahr El Bared posed a challenge to the Agency. In the Gaza Strip, refugees from demolished houses had to be relocated and yet another challenge was faced when re-housing the refugees in new developments.

Regardless of the factors that impacted on the urbanization of camps and with the exception of a few cases and certain areas where UNRWA and the host governments/authorities intervened, growth and expansion in the camps was solely the result of the contribution of the refugees themselves. The refugees, together with their representatives and institutions, were the main stakeholder who shaped the camps and who had the ultimate role in managing camp life, including dealing with conflict on a daily basis.
Changing the temporary structures into semi-temporary and more permanent ones was a spontaneous act that stemmed from the need to provide more space and improve the socio-economic conditions. It was a continuous process that ultimately changed the face of temporariness to the temporary permanent, but without questioning the process. A dual and paradoxical reality that is ‘temporary-permanent’ was created by the refugees in which they negotiate in their daily lives (Rueff and Viaro 2009).

**Community perspective**

In a context so complex and multi-layered, any attempts by an external agent to improve, regulate and administer space ‘from above’ have led to failure and have not achieved their objectives. One such example was the enforcement of UNRWA’s building codes. The only hope lies in an approach that locates the refugees at the heart of decision-making. Mechanisms to do so will differ in different camps located in the five fields, and will range from self-management of camps by their residents (under the mediation and facilitation of external actors like UNRWA and the host governments) to the establishment of structures that will allow the refugees to be partners in the decision-making.

**Power of the community**

Projects such as the re-housing projects in Gaza, the rehabilitation of Neirab camp, the reconstruction of Jenin camp and most recently the reconstruction of Nahr El Bared camp, in conjunction with our pilot camp improvement projects in the West Bank and Jordan, have proven that no
intervention in the camps could be successful without partnering with the refugees in these projects.

In some cases, as with the reconstruction of Jenin camp, the refugee community and their representatives were instrumental in altering UNRWA’s approach to reconstruction after destruction. The refugee community in Jenin, supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Red Crescent, the donor, and through their representatives had insisted that going back to UNRWA’s shelter rehabilitation programme space criteria was not an option.

The refugees had lost assets accumulated over fifty years and they rejected starting from square one. Internal negotiations within the Agency were lengthy, and resulted in a decision to compensate refugees based on pre-destruction assets, to the extent that funds were available. Such a change in the Agency’s approach was made possible only because the community was well organized at a time of hardship, and members of the community were able to agree on the basic principles relating to reshaping and building their environment.

This changed UNRWA’s approach and set a precedent in which the community and its representatives could change decisions and affect the planning process. Furthermore, the concept of compensation rather than pre-determined space allocation criteria became part of the culture of the Agency.

The reconstruction of Nahr El Bared capitalized on the lessons learned from the Jenin rehabilitation project. Actually the community, through a grassroots initiative (Nahr El Bared Reconstruction Commission (NBRC)), was ahead of the
Agency in initial planning for the project. Reconstruction principles and outlines, preliminary surveys and mappings had already been done before UNRWA started planning for reconstruction. The added value of working with community partners was already established within UNRWA from lessons learned in Jenin and Neirab. Models of compensation were not contested and this made it possible to agree together with the community on the reconstruction principles that they had initiated. This assured the community that the making of the space will be a collaborative work.

Intervening in camp rehabilitation or improvement projects posed serious questions to the Agency. Since the rehabilitation of Neirab camp, the very first of such interventions by the Agency, 6 members of the camp community and the host government questioned the change from the temporary to the more permanent, and how this could jeopardize the rights of refugees. Even the initial steps of change were repeatedly questioned when stakeholders other than the refugees themselves embarked on large-scale interventions in the camps. Whilst never questioning the need to improve the living conditions of the refugees, concerns include questions regarding timing (why now?) and meaning (what is the hidden agenda?) of this new approach towards the camps.

Another lesson learned from the Agency’s earlier experiences in camp improvement is that the level of community organization and mobilization differs considerably between camps, thus requiring flexible and innovative ways of interacting with camp communities in different projects. The Agency’s approach should be able to accommodate and respond to the demography, location, topography, needs and degree of politicization of the camps.
Some camp communities, such as Fawwar and Talbiyeh, needed reinforcement, as they lack significant community organization. Others, such as Dheisheh Camp in the West Bank, house a very organized camp community with more than twenty active civic society institutions and a strong local committee (appointed by the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs), all of whom put forth their terms to UNRWA before any interventions to improve their camps are even planned.

Again, in these camps and others the change of approach prompted scepticism among the refugee community. ‘We have been refugees for more than sixty years ē why are you asking us what we think now?’ This is a frequently repeated question. It is a legitimate question for a refugee community living in camps in countries where no or very little civic participation was traditionally allowed. Participation, partnership and more empowered civic society does not represent the context they are in, even under their representatives.

UNRWA’s changing role

UNRWA’s historic intervention in camps

In order to further understand the evolution of the Palestinian refugees’ camps, it is vital to consider the progressive policy shifts undergone within the Agency.

Over the past sixty years UNRWA has been providing humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees, contributing to their well-being and human development and providing services in areas of healthcare, education and relief services, in coordination with host governments. While not a specialized housing or urban planning agency per se,
UNRWA has been involved in the built environment of the camps and provision of housing for the refugees since it commenced its operations in May 1950. UNRWA has realized that it cannot achieve its mandate of providing basic and essential services to the Palestine refugee community, with a focus on their human development, when the most vulnerable segments of refugees lack access to adequate housing and core infrastructural services.

UNRWA’s interventions in housing and camp infrastructure development have been limited to:

1. Provision of basic shelter;
2. Shelter rehabilitation, including repair and/or reconstruction of refugee shelters that do not meet minimally acceptable standards;
3. Camp infrastructure development and upgrading: this started in a piecemeal fashion, although UNRWA has adopted a more comprehensive approach to camp infrastructure in the recent past; and
4. Re-housing developments undertaken after emergencies or crises, such as large-scale Israeli house demolitions, or when UNRWA and the host government deem the status quo of living conditions in some camp areas to be unacceptable.

**Change inside UNRWA**

Since the turn of the century, UNRWA began to embark on projects that entailed larger-scale interventions in the camps, including reconstruction after demolitions caused by armed conflict and/or significant interventions in relatively large areas within camps. Slowly, UNRWA came to realize the need to change its approach and to have a better
understanding of the spatial environment within the camps in order to be able to intervene in reshaping and improving this environment.

With its mandate of providing public services, UNRWA is the second biggest stakeholder in the camps after the refugees themselves. With the trust it has gained from its donors and hosts, UNRWA was in a position to design and implement interventions in the camps which affected the refugees’ living conditions.

Refugees have had varying degrees of influence on the decision-making process in these interventions and how they are designed, depending on the location of the camp, the organization of the refugees in civil society, the level of politicization and mobilization in the camp, the rights achieved and the timing of the interventions in relation to the refugees’ forced eviction in 1948. The partnership in Nahr El Bared with the NBRC, discussed above, was possible due to the strength and organization they demonstrated. Both partners, UNRWA and the community represented by the NBRC, had agreed on common objectives, values, powers and visions in the planning and design process.

Since the beginning of its large-scale interventions, UNRWA has come to realize that the spatial and environmental conditions in which refugees live cannot be divorced from their livelihood or well-being. The quality of the built environment has a direct bearing on the quality of everyday life. The improvement of the living conditions of the Palestine refugees cannot be seen in isolation from their socio-economic development. More enabled capable refugees will be in a better position to improve their environment in
other sectors and in parallel to the physical improvement, thus ensuring the sustainability of the development.

This significant shift in approach could be observed in respect of all stakeholders, including UNRWA, the Arab League and the various host countries and authorities recognizing the urgent need to address the worsening living conditions of Palestine refugees. This shift in approach was reflected in the recommendation of the Geneva Conference of 2004, which acknowledged that the right of return does not contradict with the right to live in dignified living conditions. Improvements can be made to camps and the quality of life of refugees without jeopardy to their right of return.

This was nothing less than a watershed shift from the piecemeal, fragmented and top-down approach which characterized previous interventions towards new working methods that emphasize coherent and comprehensive plans for development. It is against this backdrop that the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) was established with the aim to work towards the integrated, developmental, participatory and community-driven improvement of the built environment of the camps.

With the refugees, the initiation of the new programme raised concerns regarding the issue of political settlement it could imply, despite the conclusion reached at the Geneva Conference. In all camps that we worked in, the refugees and their representatives were initially resistant to change in the fear that improved living conditions would give their built environment a permanence that places their right of return in jeopardy. Only through extensive workshops and discussions, drafting of MOUs and the trust project teams were able to earn on the ground, has the scepticism been overcome making
involvement in the camps possible. This was achieved through a genuine shift from consultation to real partnership, power sharing and transparency. This should be further capitalized upon by the Agency.

**Overall objective of the new Programme**

The ICIP aims to contribute to the four human development goals of the Agency, namely: a long and healthy life, acquired appropriate knowledge and skills, a decent standard of living and human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent (UNRWA 2010). The Programme’s objective is to maintain appropriate environmental infrastructure, safe and healthy shelters, and an improved urban environment through sustainable camp development with community involvement in planning and advocacy for their rights and needs.

The Programme introduces a set of new and innovative planning methodologies and practices, new conceptual approaches and working strategies, charting the evolution of thought and policy within the Agency.

**Conceptual approach of the Programme**

ICIP is premised on a set of conceptual pillars that structure and inform its working strategy:

*Importance of the built environment:* the Programme is based on the recognition of the connection between the quality of the built environment – from the micro/domestic to the macro/camp-wide scale – and the quality of everyday life. Standards of living and socio-economic development cannot be separated from the environmental/spatial living conditions of refugees. In this respect, there is much emphasis on shelter conditions; the quantity and quality of public space;
institutional and recreational space; socio-economic ‘infrastructure’ provided by UNRWA and others such as civic society organizations; the quality of physical infrastructure networks; access, mobility and circulation, and so on.

**Urban planning:** ICIP uses the tools and methodologies of urban planning as the proven best practice that can enable the Agency to operate holistically at an urban scale (compared to the previous sectoral framework) and tackle the contemporary urban complexities that mark Palestine refugees’ camps. Only through strategic urban planning can actors, be they staff or community members, connect and link the various components that make up the built environment.

**Integrated interventions:** following from this, the Programme recognizes that the camp is an interconnected, networked site that requires interventions at an urban scale that are integrated. In this respect, ICIP also seeks to deploy urban planning as an operational platform that integrates the various outputs of UNRWA departments, interventions by the host governments/authorities and by the civic society. This platform then brings together their disparate outputs and activities in a way that rationalizes and connects the different interventions in the built environments of camps.

**Innovative and flexible interventions:** camps have evolved into complex urban spaces with varying degrees of densification and under different social and political environments. Improving such a built environment requires flexible and tailored proposals answering to the varied problems and conditions of camps as prioritized and defined by the camp residents. ICIP seeks solutions to improve the built environment that are negotiated with the community, regular UNRWA programmes, the host
governments/authorities, each within the context of a specific camp.

Civic/community participation: in most contexts camp residents have invaluable knowledge about their own local environment; though they are spaces of hardship camps contain vast pools of experience, skills, assets and innovation. In such a scenario comprehensive improvement can only take place if the local community becomes the key agent of change. In this regard, ICIP is the first programme to systematically study and document a camp’s spatial character and at the same time systematically involve its residents in the planning of this character. It involves the local community in a structured way across the entire project cycle, from assessment and planning right through to implementation and monitoring.

Transition from relief to development: ICIP focuses on the mobilization of the full potential of local community resources and imparts skills and capacities – ranging from fund raising and proposal writing to environmentally aware building methods – that further human development, as opposed to historical relief efforts. Rather than passive recipients of aid, this approach has and will encourage a community of active participants, centrally involved in the improvement of their own living conditions. As such, the Programme has become one of the main tools through which the Agency institutes the transition from relief to development and towards community-driven processes.

Sustainability of change: improvement be seen in isolation from their socio-economic development. More enabled, capable refugees will be in a position to improve their living environment in other sectors (in parallel to physical
improvement) and can ensure the sustainability of development. ICIP seeks to mobilize different implementation strategies through which refugees can gradually develop capacities to plan and implement self-identified interventions. Access to housing finance, revolving funds, organized self-help and micro project cycles are examples of this process.

It is around the combination of these conceptual principles that ICIP has developed a unique methodology and working strategy that has the potential to successfully tackle the challenges posed by contemporary urbanization in Palestine refugees’ camps and further the human development of their residents.

**Overview of the new methodology**

Over the years, Palestine refugees’ camps have benefited from vast aid and support programmes through UNRWA and other organizations. However, despite this attention, there have been deficiencies in the way projects and interventions are planned, coordinated and implemented. Particularly, the absence of a comprehensive analysis of needs and the medium- and long-term improvement planning has led to the fragmentation of efforts and, consequently, less efficient and effective interventions.

While additional funds to address the urban and community development needs are undoubtedly needed, change must start by understanding the built environment of camps and by achieving synergies between programmes and initiatives. Economic growth that is unaccompanied by urban (physical and socioeconomic) planning and interventions has led to uncontrolled physical expansion in some camp locations,
creating an unhealthy living environment often housing unsafe buildings (such as Shatila camp and Nahr El Bared camp before it was demolished).

Hence UNRWA’s community-driven strategic planning methodology was developed, in order to ensure the following:

- the comprehensiveness of the planning process;
- a community-driven approach that reinforces the community initiatives and enables community participation;
- the integration of all UNRWA programmes within the planning process;
- the integration of host government/authority plans and the negotiation, together with the refugees, in order to achieve the best results.

Figure 9.1 outlines the methodology that is adopted to meet the challenges of the Programme.

Adopting such an approach necessitated the creation of appropriate participatory management structures at all levels. Ongoing capacity building processes are conducted in parallel with the processes of data collection, assessment, planning and implementation.

The new integrated approach posed another challenge: all programmes carried out by UNRWA, host government/authorities, PLO and other actors in Palestine refugees’ camps had to be integrated into the assessment and planning process. Structures and mechanisms to ensure continuous stakeholder interaction are being explored in conjunction with GTZ to support this integration.

The product of the Community-Driven Strategic Planning Methodology is a Strategic Camp Improvement Plan (CIP)
with two complementary and interrelated components: an Urban Improvement Plan (UIP) and a Community Development Plan (CDP).

**Table 9.1** summarizes some of the key aspects of comparison between the new approach, the envisaged future, under the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme, and the old methodologies associated with physical and other sectoral interventions to improve living conditions of the Palestine refugees in the camps. This marks the start of change in the way ICIP is dealing with refugees, UNRWA programmes and host governments/authorities.
**Table 9.1** Old and new approaches to improving refugee camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Old approach</th>
<th>New approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for physical improvement</td>
<td>Yes, reactive and piecemeal</td>
<td>Yes, a participatory assessment process will identify needs in different areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive and strategic</td>
<td>No, shelter, housing, physical infrastructure, including the Agency’s internal infrastructure, dealt with separately within different departments in ad hoc manner</td>
<td>Yes, planned simultaneously and comprehensively integrating all elements of the built environment to produce strategic Camp Improvement Plans with progressive implementation and set priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee needs and aspirations</td>
<td>No, minimum or no systematic approach towards these assessments</td>
<td>Yes, issues and interventions will be based on community needs identified through surveys, integrated diagnosis of the camps and formulation of integrated responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical infrastructure</td>
<td>No, relief and social interventions did not consider spatial,</td>
<td>Yes, physical infrastructure interventions will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Detailed Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linked with socio-economic development</td>
<td>physical and environmental living conditions and their changes. Also, physical infrastructure was provided without integrating socio-economic aspects in the planning, design and implementation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees as an asset in their development</td>
<td>No, refugees were, as a maximum, informed of the approve proposals if at all consulted. Yes, refugees will be a partner in the whole process of development. The planning process and interventions will be a tool to mobilize and empower the community through participation in the whole development cycle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Agency efforts</td>
<td>No strategic framework. At best it will be a coordinated effort in the absence of an integrated ICIP at the Field level. Yes, the key to the success of this approach is the integrated efforts of all Agency departments. However, this could not be achieved without establishing and integrating ICIP at the Field level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency as a facilitator of development</td>
<td>Yes, physical infrastructure improvement, particularly shelter could be enhanced with different financing and implementation strategies where the community manages the development and the Agency is a facilitator.</td>
<td>No, physical infrastructure provision is done on grant basis with direct implementation by the Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges**

*At the Agency level*

Historically, UNRWA’S intervention in camps has depended on addressing programmatic sectors such as education, health, and relief and social services.

The new approach towards addressing the camp as a geographical location entails assessing the demographic, physical, spatial, social and economic aspects prior to setting forth a strategic vision. Such an approach requires a change in the way UNRWA’s programmes operate, and especially require more synergies between the programmes at the HQ, field area and camp levels. Thus far, it has often been easier to achieve this at the camp level between front-line staff than at the more senior levels.

In order for the new approach to succeed, it is necessary to establish coordination structures that will become the platform for discussion at all levels when addressing a new
camp or area. To date, coordination meetings get conducted on an ad hoc basis, and are highly dependent on interpersonal skills. In order for this Programme to succeed and for such structures to be facilitated, buy-in from the senior management of the Field Offices is necessary.

Another significant challenge we face at the Agency level is fundraising for scaling up of the Programme. With an initial European Community (EC) contribution and in partnership with Stuttgart University’s Department of Urban Design, the first pilot project was initiated in the period between 2006 and 2008 in the West Bank, with the aim to develop the new approach and methodology for camp improvement.

Since then, the German government (through different institutions including BMZ, GTZ and KFW) has contributed to three phases of further piloting that continued through 2012. One of the main challenges lies in UNRWA's process of preparation of funding proposals and the need for a shift that includes comprehensive community-driven and integrated urban planning components when soliciting funds for infrastructure projects.

A further challenge resulting from ICIP’s new approach lies in the emergence of a more enabled refugee community. Decisions will no longer be exclusively made by UNRWA staff but through accepting and valuing the input brought in by the refugees as experts in their built environment. While partnership with the community has been established at the Agency policy level as the way forward, applying such a change on the ground is not easy, as it might be seen by some as a hindrance to the way UNRWA provides its services.

The challenges outlined above are all part of an approach that represents a paradigm shift in the way UNRWA views its
provision of services: from relief to development and from ‘service-recipient’ relationship to full partnership sharing the same vision, objectives, values, power and risks. Such a shift is part of the Agency’s Medium Term Strategy (UNRWA 2010), and will only be possible if a cultural shift is effected in the Agency at large and if refugees are invested in the approach through the reinforcement of their initiatives and their inclusion in decision-making processes on matters that affect their lives within the Agency.

To date, there is not enough capacity at the Field level for the full implementation of the Programme. The experience and knowledge that has been accumulated thus far lies with project teams and at the HQ level, with no corresponding structure at the Field level. The old Engineering Office continues to operate separately from camp improvement projects in two Fields and thus splitting operations. The Programme will continue to be delayed unless this gap is filled by setting up the corresponding structures in the fields.

**At the community level**

From the outset, the first challenge that meets any project under the new Programme is fear surrounding the Programme’s objectives, and whether they pose any threat to the refugees’ right of return. Consequently, each project is initiated with open discussions and does not start until the community is satisfied with the outcome of these discussions: more enabled refugees who have their basic human rights achieved in health, education and in respect to the living environment can be expected to be more effective in pursuing their political rights.
Some of the scepticism within the community is created as a result of the approach and methodology of the Programme. A full participatory approach is not something the refugees are used to, and causes them to ask a multitude of questions: What does this mean? Is UNRWA transferring its responsibilities to the refugees? Is this the start of an end to the refugee problem? These are frequently asked questions by the community, to which UNRWA’s position has been that the Agency will be responsible for providing its mandated services to Palestine refugees until a just and comprehensive solution to the plight of the refugees will have been achieved.

Motivating the community is another challenge: in this regard, two scenarios have been observed. In projects aimed at reconstruction after demolitions, there is no shortage of energy, mobilization and organization at the community level. Members of the community reach consensus easily and gather around their main objective, namely rebuilding the camp. High levels of energy and self-motivation within the community are particularly observed during the early stages of planning and design for reconstruction. Often, the communities don’t rely exclusively on UNRWA and they have their own initiatives.

Conversely, motivating the community is a major challenge in camp improvement projects where there has not been an ‘emergency trigger’, and variation is observed from camp to camp. The lack of an urgent need to mobilize makes project initiation difficult. Very little to no involvement in civic society activism is the prevailing mode for most residents, with some exceptions in a few camps.7

In the few camps where mobilization is not an issue, camp improvement projects are often faced with dominant camp
representatives, representing another set of challenges that needs to be addressed. In such situations, power struggles and the self-interests of the different community representatives tend to prevail.

Conclusion

For more than 60 years, the Palestine refugees’ camps have been conceived of as temporary spaces, the temporariness symbolizing the refugees’ right of return to their original homeland. Today, Palestine refugees’ camps are characterized neither as slums nor as traditional refugee camps, but rather as something that can be described as a camp city. Over the course of the time that has elapsed since the formation of most camps, permanence began to permeate the temporary and the camps urbanized in a mostly unregulated and unplanned manner. Different camps have urbanized at different rates and in different ways, depending on the host environment and the surrounding context.

The camps are complex environments with different layers of meaning. At one level, each camp serves as a ‘spatial archive’ of the Nakba (the catastrophe): evidence of the injustice that befell Palestine refugees, and a constant reminder of the fact that the refugees’ plight remains unresolved. Yet each camp is also a living space, a part of everyday life; a source of shelter, refuge, services and work, and in many places a centre of neglect, poverty and inequality.

This dual character of Palestine refugee camps as both a symbol and a living space generates tension when any proposal is made to improve camp conditions. A balance must be struck between the need to maintain the camp’s character as a place of ‘temporary-emergency refuge’ and the need to
ensure habitability; between refugee insistence on return and building attachment and belonging; between the permanent and the temporary; between stillness and action.

It is at this point that UNRWA’s new Camp Improvement Programme and its community partners and all stakeholders seek to reinforce existing community efforts and initiate new ones aimed at achieving basic human rights in health, education, employment, mobility and shelter. The new Programme marks a shift from relief to a developmental approach for improving, in a holistic sense, the refugee camps’ physical and social environment through the introduction of a participatory, community-driven urban-planning approach.

With UNRWA assuming a more assertive role in respect of protection and advocacy of refugee rights and civil life in an environment of dignity and optimism, the Programme heavily involves its community partners in the process of navigating the above contradictions and making decisions that determine the fate of the refugees’ physical and social environment. The result is a radical re-conceptualisation of what constitutes ‘refugee camps’ – from a space of victimisation towards an emancipated space where refugees live with civil rights.

Notes

The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or by UNRWA.

After the relative optimism of the Oslo years, during which UNRWA began to harmonize services with those of the Palestinian Authority in preparation for an eventual handover, the start of the second Intifada in late 2000 demonstrated that
UNRWA’s services would be needed for years to come. This prompted UNRWA and the Swiss Government to organize a major conference in Geneva in 2004 to build new partnerships in support of UNRWA and to prepare the Agency for the challenges that lay ahead. The conference generated an ambitious agenda for reform, prompting amongst other things a major survey into refugee living conditions, the further development of the Agency’s protection activities and the launch of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme.

Camp Improvement Pilot Project funded by the EC and implemented by UNRWA in partnership with Stuttgart University.

On UNRWA’s early involvement with camp planning, see also Kjersti Gravelsæter Berg’s chapter in this volume.

Ibid.

On the Neirab rehabilitation project, see the contribution by Nell Gabiam in this volume.

For an example of this in respect of camp improvement in Talbiyeh camp, see Fatima Al-Nammari’s chapter in this volume.

**Bibliography**


10 Talbiyeh camp improvement project and the challenges of community participation

Background

“We designed this!” the little girl said with bright eyes as she pointed proudly towards the play area (Figure 10.2). The newly constructed space was the delight of children, neighbors, and, especially, the Work Group. The multi-use area was a result of year-long discussions, workshops, meetings, and negotiations. Everybody thought that this was a great initiation of the Work Group plans for improving the camp; however, things did not proceed as planned.

The multi-use area was part of the camp improvement pilot project, which was conceived as a participatory and integrated development process that promises to change the approach of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to refugee camps (Misselwitz and Hanafi 2010). It has been accepted that sustainable development cannot be achieved unless the process included mechanisms encouraging local ownership, empowerment, and social equity. Transparent and democratic processes have
come to be essential for any participatory process (Menegat 2002). Participation is the framework for channelling local assets and building people’s capacity (Imparato and Ruster 2003).

Participation is essential in areas where there are complex problems or non-traditional issues, such as refugee camps. Community and stakeholder participation can generate new ideas and innovations that solve design problems when standard models are not helpful (Balducci and Calvaresi 2005). Noteworthy, participatory approaches do not guarantee positive outcomes, as that depends on the goals and methods of the process in addition to the context, players, and local problems (Gaventa and Barrett 2010). The case study below elucidate how participation cannot single-handedly warrant success within refugee camps.

Marschall (1998) pointed out to the dangers of what he labelled “the technocratic caretaker model”, in which the governing body determines the needed development interventions. She pointed out that community dependency increased through such “government hand-outs”, where projects are typically decided for but, not with, the community. Such communities rarely gained a sense of ownership and responsibility. This point was at the heart of the camp improvement project, which was fully designed to incorporate the community input in the varied stages of the project.

Consequently, an essential component for successful participation is empowerment, a central concept for camp improvement projects that has become central to the work of many development endeavors since the 1980s. Empowerment takes place when the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups
have the capacity to freely express opinions, participate in decision-making, have access to resources, and obtain a meaningful role in shaping society and practising their rights. As shown in the case study below, the context of the participatory process has significant limitation on the outcome.

Literature shows that participatory processes can be a conflict arena for rival groups or local elites who consider themselves as gatekeepers (Botes and van Rensburg 2000). Participation is essential towards challenging the routinization of elite decision-making and enhance the capacity of marginalized groups to act and be part of the policy-making process. Literature has already underscored that power struggles and gender inequities have an impact on the outcome of these projects (Cornwall 2003; Field and Kremer 2005; VeneKlasen et al. 2004), the case study below offers an account on how this can happen.

In her study of spaces of participation, Cornwall (2003) maintains that literature is lacking in investigations of the micro process of participation in which the dynamics of participation can reveal who is participating, in what form, and how the boundaries of their engagement were defined. The investigation here does not claim to answer all these questions, but offers insight into the dynamics of participation on the micro level.

At the center of the Talbiyeh camp improvement project was the notion of empowerment. As cited by Stainton (2005) the substance of this concept is establishing and capturing the ability of a person or group to act. It is about supporting people to articulate their claims in the urban improvement process through participatory assessment, planning, design,
management, and implementation. This entails granting the local community, especially vulnerable groups, control over resources to create the realities that impact their quality of life.

Empowerment though architecture and urban design has many positive impacts. The process encompasses local community engagement resulting in transfer of skills and knowledge (Marschall 1998). At the core of empowerment is the notion of capacity building, which takes place de facto as the community plans, discusses designs, and implements projects.

The social production of the built environment has been examined profusely from a variety of angles. Conflicts over the consumption and creation of urban space and associated construction of meanings were investigated vis-à-vis the role of capital, culture, social dynamics, and socio-political networks (Harvey 1976; Lefebvre 1991; Low 2000; Smith 2008; Daniels 2010; Garmany 2011). Similarly, the significance of architecture and urban design as a tool for empowerment were addressed by several authors, especially in relation to slums and community development. Such literature addresses participation as the locus for transforming the built environment (cf. Serageldin 1997; Inam 2002; Hamdi 2004, 2010; Tovivich 2008; Jann and Platt 2009). Notwithstanding, there is limited investigation of public space as a theatre for power struggles between local groups in slums, camps, or unplanned areas. The built environment is important for explaining patterns of urban violence (Garmany 2011).

Consequently, the objective of this chapter is to review the challenges confronting the participatory urban improvement
of camps, focusing on the micro dynamics of one public space. Ethnographic methods were used to understand and present this study. Further, my own involvement in the project as project manager and architect/planner was essential for understanding the context and case study. Data from the formal project’s documents were coupled with observation of local’s behavior and discussions with local informants.

The case study context: Talbiyeh

Talbiyeh Camp was established as an emergency camp in 1968 following the 1967 Arab–Israeli war. The camp was set up on an area of about 130,000 square meters, 35 km south of Amman in the agricultural area of Al-Jizeh. The camp and its surrounding off-spill include 7,262 individuals according to the 2007 estimates of the Department of Statistics.

Today, Talbiyeh camp has semi-urban characteristics, as the past 15 years have witnessed many changes. The growth of Amman southwards and the establishment of an industrial park nearby changed the job market and economic opportunities.

The poor quality of life in the camp is indicated by statistics. The average family has about 71 m² for shelter space and the number of families in each shelter ranges between one and five, with 10 per cent of the shelters housing two or more families. The average size of a family is 5.7, indicating crowding in those shelters. Further, 12 per cent of families live in abject poverty and 32 per cent are in relative poverty; accordingly more than 70 per cent of camp shelters continue to have temporary roofing (asbestos or zinc sheets) (UNRWA 2008).
The urban context is not very promising either, as there is limited open space, no recreational areas, several environmental problems, oppressively poor aesthetics, and limited vehicular access to many camp corners. The community has identified priority needs including shelter upgrading, educational and health service improvement, creation of open recreational spaces, income generation projects, and employment opportunities (UNRWA 2009).

The Talbiyeh camp improvement project was launched in June 2008 through the creation of the Work Group, the local assembly responsible for strategic planning and decision-making in partnership with UNRWA.

The uniqueness of the refugee camp comes from the fact that urban development materializes under the umbrella of human rights. The relationship between human rights and development is strong, and literature have started to address the links between the two (c.f Ife 2010). The political issue surrounding the camp can damage attempts for improvement, especially since refugees often feel that their “right of return” may be endangered. This political question overshadows all meetings and decisions and can make a difference in trust building. In Talbiyeh, the community required that the project team document their stipulation for improvement: that this improvement has no relation and will not jeopardize their political rights. Sustainable Development for human rights is the condition in the camps.
The participatory structure

Strategy and objectives

The participatory process was intended to go beyond typical consultancy and tokenistic involvement towards a partnership that empowers the local community (Arnstien 1969). As the main element of the participatory structure, the Work Group was intended to:

facilitate the partnership between UNRWA and the community;

create a body that can continue the project’s local implementation;

create a group decision forum for the community where challenges are discussed, and options developed;

encourage community activism through an open discussion of challenges, and possible local solutions;

reduce dependency and mobilize internally;

develop a sense of ownership;

strengthen social capital for future initiatives.

The participatory structure contained several levels of involvement. The first was the Work Group, which included leaders of families and clans (*mukhtars*), representatives from local institutions, such as schools, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), clinic, sports clubs, and UNRWA CBOs, in addition to local government institutions such as the Camp Services Committee (CSC)\(^2\) and Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA). The Work Group also comprised UNRWA employees, such as the Camp Services Officer and the Area Officer. Further, individuals were invited such as
local activists and potential leaders, focusing on women, youth, and adolescence. The Work Group was declared open to the public as anybody can attend. This strategy improved community representation and new individuals came to the meetings based on personal interest and willingness to help.

The Work Group focused on strategic planning, so a supportive grassroots participatory structure was developed. This included neighborhood, thematic, and focus groups. The objective was to avoid monopolization of the project by existing leadership, give a voice for the otherwise “voiceless groups”, identify potential leaders so that they are invited to the Work Group, encourage grassroots discussions of assets and possible solutions of constraints, and mobilize volunteers. These supportive structures provided an opportunity for interested locals to voice their concerns and discuss urban needs and potentials locally. This approach grounded the community vision and encouraged assertiveness.

Dynamics of participation

After pacifying local worries about any hidden agendas concerning the right of return, the project meetings proceeded with caution. The initial meetings for the Work Group were challenging. The community was not accustomed to joint assessment or planning, so the early meetings were mostly used for statement of needs. Some community members were outraged when the notion of shared planning and implementation was presented as they saw this as yet another attempt from UNRWA to abandon their responsibilities towards refugees.
The open discussions in the Work Group generated new solutions and local initiatives while gradually the participants developed better dynamics for meetings. Many cited this admirably as the first time they work together. The Work Group conducted assessment and planning, helped interpret the results of surveys and focus groups, planned projects, created a strategic plan for improvement and an action plan. The Work Group also developed internal by-laws, in addition to identifying the authorities and jurisdiction of their sub-committees.

Initial meetings were characterized by male dominance. Invited females rarely spoke, and when they did, they were ignored by the males. This situation required intense work by the facilitating team, in addition to training on gender roles, participatory planning, group work, and leadership skills.

As a new resource, existing power structures tried to manipulate the project. This took place in several forms, such as insisting on hosting all public meetings (statement of ownership), pressure for financial support, and lobbying the project team. Therefore, community meetings took place in several locations in the camp to avoid any links with any particular group, and the project declared that no decisions will be made outside the Work Group. This competition among local groups was a source of initial tensions and many still do not accept the impartiality of the project and the team.

On the other hand, focus groups, neighborhood groups, and thematic groups had mostly limited duration. The team faced difficulty encouraging positive thinking as there was a general disbelief that the camp can be improved. The majority of youth felt, and still believe, that there is no future for those in the camp.
Similar challenges have been identified by literature. Community meetings often suffer attempts of monopoly by the local elite, which jeopardize the interest of groups that are not sufficiently represented. Furthermore, the selective involvement of some actors, the unequal position of actors as some may have more skills or resources, lack of transparency in the process as a result to pre-meeting decisions, open conflict, and the increased power of public officials who are key players are all possible pitfalls (Haus et al. 2005, Klok and Denters 2005). The Talbiyeh Project have manoeuvred around such hazards through continuous consultation with local players, grassroots input, conflict resolution, good facilitation skills, transparency, training, leadership, and trust.

Changing roles

It is important to acknowledge that community participation should take different forms in the different stages of a project. Focus groups, for example, are suitable mainly for the assessment and planning stages, but have limited benefits during implementation. Often, participation in urban improvement projects is limited to planning, thus the role of a community during implementation is often greatly reduced.

The Work Group’s role prior to implementation was mainly as a decision-maker/consultant/partner, depending on the issue under discussion. Through focus groups and neighborhood groups, the community identified assets and constraints in a comprehensive integrated manner, and developed a list of needs and priorities. The community voted on their needs through a stratified random sample,\(^3\) which created a ranking for priorities. The Work Group discussed these priorities which were ranked by the grassroots,\(^4\) and through that they were able to develop a strategic vision and
create a Camp Improvement Plan and Action Plan. This planning was done in coordination with the project team and the relevant stakeholders.

The Work Group identified their role in 2009 as:

- overview of studies conducted in the camp;
- identification of the needs of the camp;
- coordination between local organizations and institutions and joint future planning;
- recommendation of any project implementation and any study;
- follow-up on decisions made with related bodies;
- overview of any project implemented in the camp.

These roles reflect local attitudes for a central body overseeing the many studies, projects, and activities taking place inside the camp. Some of the objectives are quite ambitious, and require recognition of the Work Group by both UNRWA – Jordan and the DPA.

As noted above, the role during the implementation phase is different. During planning, there are no specific responsibilities for the community, previous experience is not important (thus all ages and backgrounds were able to participate), and there was no accountability on their part, since all work was facilitated by the project team. Further, no hierarchy was needed as all participants shared the same responsibilities and authorities.

On the other hand, participatory implementation is quite different. Implementing the planned project requires clear responsibilities, specific authorities, accountability, and
administrative hierarchy. Thus, previous experience is important for those implementing the planned projects, and field of expertise become essential. Since the Work Group is not a formal body, none of these requirements are present. The project as such had to maintain itself as the implementing body, but created a local group for monitoring and managing the implementation called the Executive Committee. They were elected from among the Work Group membership and were responsible for supervising the implementation of the Action Plan.

The implemented projects included improvements of the UNRWA school and health center, urban improvements for public space, infrastructure treatments, and capacity building for some of the local organizations. As such, the role of the community oscillated between management, supervision, and actual implementation. The Work Group does not have financial responsibilities, but works under the project team to invite tenders, evaluate them, and oversee implementation. In the large-scale projects, such as the school additions, the Work Group had no authority and all work was conducted through UNRWA.

Case study: the multi-use urban pocket

Assessment, diagnosis and design

One example for the challenges facing the participatory process can be exemplified by the urban space, which was planned in one of the urban pockets.

During the assessment phase, one of the main needs of the community was open space. This demand was specifically stated by women and children, the main users of the camp
during the working day. As part of the action plan, this need was addressed through the creation of green urban pockets serving children, women, and social gatherings. Consequently, a pilot intervention was planned and a space was designated based on its vacancy and its current use for social gathering during weddings (Figure 10.1).

The design process commenced through an NGO partner hired by UNRWA, which was able to design a space based on the children’s input. This was shown to the women in the neighborhood, who provided comments to improve the design. They requested seating, space for wedding gatherings, tiling to facilitate cleaning, and locating the children space inwards away from the street (Figure 10.2).

The design was reviewed again, and this time the neighbours were invited to a meeting with the design team. Few responded, and a new design was finalized. New meetings with the women in the neighbourhood and with the Work Group came up with new suggestions for improvements, resulting with the final design (Figure 10.2). The husbands were often at work to late hours, so the male Work Group members communicated directly with them to facilitate their input.

Towards the end of the design process, the project asked the Work Group to contact the males around the space to confirm their approval. The project team met with relevant stakeholders to confirm the design, including the CSC committee head, DPA, and UNRWA.

Once the design was finalized, a new consultant was hired to prepare the working drawings. They also held two additional workshops to allow input to the design and final blueprints before construction. Again, changes were made by Work
Group members and neighbors (women mainly). The final design was printed in several copies and given to the neighbors, so that each resident around the space had the opportunity to make an impact on the project.

The meetings with the neighbors were positive in general. Only one neighbor shunned the idea as foreign to the camp. The rest of the neighbors felt that the space would be improved, clean, and useful. The bidding period witnessed the neighbors coming to the office inquiring about the project, as they worried about the pace of implementation.

*Implementation*

Upon tendering of the project two important incidents took place. First, the Work Group advised the project team that a member of the Work Group, who had not attended for a while, was mobilizing against the urban space project. The individual felt excluded, since the Work Group contacted the males around the space and did not contact him for approval. The Work Group had a response. He was part of the Work Group, he had signed the decision to create this space, and he knew about it for more than a year. The individual was reportedly offended, and had apparently been speaking negatively about the project to other members of the community, arguing that the multi-use space would be the cause of bringing youth males to the area and that their privacy would be compromised and their women exposed to harassment.

Second, the issue of using the designed space for parking turned out to be more significant than anticipated. When the urban space project was first initiated, we noticed that one car used the space at night. Upon developing the designs, the
women in the neighbourhood advised the project that the design should incorporate a parking space for a car, which usually parked there. However, the Work Group members decided that it should be clear that such spaces are for people, not for cars. They felt that if they compromised on this space, future urban spaces would be converted into car parking. The Work Group decided that they knew the person who parks the car and will talk to him as a friend.

*Figure 10.1* Work Group urban planning workshop: top left then clockwise: the open space before the intervention; Work Group workshop for urban planning; the suggested Action Plan, which includes the suggested open space; discussions of the Action Plan in the Work Group.

Despite this, some felt that their views had not been taken into account, and the individual was amongst those who expressed
concerns that the new space would encourage youth street life and trouble-makers to hang around and that the children play space would have a negative impact on their lives.

As such, the male neighbours wanted to cancel the project. A new series of meetings were initiated which led to the removal of the seating arrangements (which allowed for car parking). Further, one of the neighbours gained employment through the multi-space project itself and another created a wall between his house and the space.

During this phase, the Work Group had a tremendous significance. They used their personal contacts to pacify the male residents. Further, they visited the neighbours and facilitated negotiations. They adopted the project as their own and defended their decision to implement it.

The local DPA office also played a positive role. The local DPA had been consulted since the initiation of the planning process and, as such, they felt part of the team. When some of the male neighbours started raising tensions, the DPA representative stepped in and used his authority to appease them.
Unfortunately, the design of the space was changed to give the neighbouring males what they wanted while some of the females living around the space were disappointed. However, the project team pointed out that this space was a slow negotiation and that improvements could be made later. Some of the ladies had ideas for seating, and others for greenery and shrubs.

**Post-implementation**

Children were using the space even before the construction was fully concluded. It was the only space serving children in...
the camp and its immediate surroundings, so children from neighboring Al-Jizzah village were coming to the site too. This underscored a major fault in the project: the unique space was attracting users beyond its design capacity, creating tensions and conflicts among the users themselves and with the neighbors. The project team identified a main lesson here: such interventions are better made in clusters and simultaneously, so that a community has more than one location to fulfil a need that has not been met previously.

Another problem was the assumed neighbors’ capacity. During the design phase the project team had agreed with the neighbors that the daily upkeep of the space would be their responsibility. The neighbors had agreed to keep it clean, water the plants, and oversee its maintenance. However, once the space was swarming with users the neighbors were overwhelmed, eventually neglecting the space.

It is noteworthy that the meaning assigned to a public space and the authority people have over space are important aspects in its sustainability. The project team and stakeholders assumed that if the design of an open space was participatory then the participants/locals would preserve it. Yet, the neighbors lost their authority over the space once it became public; consequently, they felt that before the intervention they owned that space as nobody dared to use it without their consent. However, once the public project commenced they lost their control. Talks with the neighbors at that stage reflected that they “regretted” their approval of the space design and that they would have preferred it had remained undeveloped.
This situation continued until two other spaces were implemented. One was specifically for children within the camp and the other was family oriented nearby the camp. These two spaces attracted users away from this space, which brought peace to the neighborhood.

Conflict started soon afterwards. The space had been used by the camp for several months when new complaints started to arise. They were made by a neighbor who also held a position of authority. Thus, the project team met with the Executive Committee to address the complaints, but the Executive Committee rejected this claim and it was suggested that there was an alternative motivation for the claim.

It was revealed to the project staff that trouble had been boiling for a time and had just started to surface. Some members of the WG and the community had been using the space implementation to express dissatisfaction with some members of the CSC, making claims that insufficient attention had been given to the community’s needs and available resources. They cited the multi-use space as an example for what could have been done, using the achievement as proof of this issue. In response, some CSC members and their allies alleged that the WG had mismanaged funds and created projects unnecessarily. To prove their viewpoint, some argued that such a space would not function and was not needed.

To the dismay of the community and the project team, the multi-use space became a theatre for power struggles between rival groups, each trying to prove the other incompetent.

According to members of the Work Group and of CSC, a prominent individual holding a position of authority was involved in making these accusations. The individual had
held this position for some time and some members of the community were dissatisfied with him. Although he was part of the Work Group and helped in the decision-making process throughout the project design, it was suggested that he had encouraged rumors about those involved in the project, and it was decided that the project contact the DPA for intervention.

With each round of rumors both sides escalated their verbal and social wars until it reached a point when vandalism was used to damage the site.

This was done to construct a negative impression of the space, so that the community would not consider it an achievement anymore. Trees were cut, walls were covered with foul graffiti, and the space was trashed. Now, the community started to perceive the space itself as the provoker of trouble in society. Other similar spaces around the camp were cancelled as neighbours felt that this kind of project only brought trouble.

The complaints against the space escalated to the point where the neighbors felt that it was better to control its use. The space was bordered by a wall with its key given to one of the local kindergartens. It is no longer an open space.

The Work Group felt that the community members in positions of influence succeeded in annulling their achievement, so the wars of hegemony were moved to another area, which was the establishment of a new organization in the camp. Today, the conflicts between the rivals are continued in other ways, as they compete to control local organizations, local resources, and decision-making. The open space ended up as a tool, since neither UNRWA nor the DPA intervened to stop escalation or control the provocation. It is important to note that some individuals
allegedly used their contact within DPA to discourage the newly appointed DPA from supporting the Work Group, which threatens this important open participatory forum in camps.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to provide a summary review of the challenges confronting the participatory process within refugee camps, taking Talbiyeh Camp as a case study. The bottom-up approach appeared to be challenging as it is new to camp residents and major stakeholders.

The micro dynamics of the case study illustrates the nuances of community interactions and complexity of a participatory design project in a context that has not been involved in such hand-on project planning and implementation. The Work Group was created as a forum for empowerment, but concluded amidst a conflict as it turned into another power structure itself. Such conflicts negatively construct the meaning of participation, so that the community and stakeholders doubt the benefits of participation and inclusiveness. The case shows how local groups can utilize a participatory opportunity in their power struggles, which may threaten community achievements and construct negative meanings for the process at large.

Within the overcrowded camp environment, open space has immense value and thus has become a significant symbol of power. Decisions on space and ability to create successful space denote hegemony. Thus, when an open and inclusive urban improvement project enters the arena, it will be dragged to the center point of power wars. Such struggles are important expressions for social control and they take place
on several levels. Women, youth, and children are marginalized and most affected in such conflicts as their needs are undermined. During that process varied kinds of violence will be used including slander, verbal assault, physical vandalism, and official obliteration.

Participation opens the door for individual and collective actors, some of whom have strong networks and seek to influence people and organizations to maintain resources within their circles. Additionally, some of the local actors have formal influence over local governance and they will use their formal contacts to steer matters to their benefit.

Bebbington et al. (2004) have pointed out that power struggles in community-driven and decentralized development are significant components that should be taken into consideration. They argue that built-in mechanisms targeting the identification of manipulation attempts at early stages and address conflicts in transparent ways can make a positive improvement. However, the experience in the case study above stresses both transparency and authority as two balancing continuums.

This chapter reflects the complexity of a true participatory process within the refugee camp and the intricacies of the application of agency by underprivileged groups, since local hegemonic powers would use varied forms of violence to establish and maintain their authority. Camp space has come to be a symbolic resource, thus decisions about it are significant power statements. Camp improvement has a difficult challenge ahead as the approach is based on inclusive decision-making.

An important aspect is the fact that UNRWA has been outside the governance dialogue inside Jordan camps. The DPA has
been the main player in the urban space (Department of Palestinian Affairs, n.d.). As UNRWA moves towards development-oriented community-based urban intervention, creating inclusive urban governance that is based on transparency, empowerment, and equity will be a major challenge. Such a challenge may warrant a change of UNRWA’s typical hands-off approach in favor of critical surveillance of urban space control.

UNRWA can, through the CSO, offer new input in the management of urban space in coordination with the DPA. However, this requires commitment to upholding camp improvement plans and projects developed by the community. So far, neither the DPA nor UNRWA adopts the camp improvement plans as formal documents.

Once the camp improvement plans are adopted, a system for authorising construction within camp space, which UNRWA’s CSO and DPA representative coordinate, should commence. The CSO’s constant presence in the camp provides monitoring powers, while the DPA has had historic governance over urban issues. As such, DPA’s authority in the camp is coupled with UNRWA’s participatory urban planning capacity to organize space use, uphold public interest, and prevent similar escalations of violence.

Notes

The views expressed in this chapter are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or by UNRWA.

The Camp Services Committee (CSC) is a committee created by the Department of Palestinian Affairs. It’s usually composed of 7–15 members who are appointed.
by the DPA and they are responsible for representing the camp in projects managed by the DPA. They do not have the power to make decisions or to implement projects.

A 10 percent sample was taken from the population, stratified by gender and age group, so that responders were individually identified (randomly) based on the database created through the door-to-door survey. The ranking form was distributed during class in schools to cover the samples for ages 7–18 (comprising almost half of the sample), whereas adults were reached at homes by name. The response rate was approximately 92 percent, partially impacted by the personalisation of invitation and the school students’ response.

The ranking was done by grassroots and was maintained as the principal list of community priority needs; however, the Work Group had the task of identifying, from that list, short-term projects and Action Plan based on available funding.

**Bibliography**


Department of Palestinian Affairs (n.d.) *60 Years Serving Refugee Camps*. Amman: Department of Palestinian Affairs.


11 Implementing the Neirab Rehabilitation Project

UNRWA’s approach to development in Syria’s Palestinian refugee camps

Nell Gabiam

According to UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), Neirab Camp, situated about 13 km south of Syria’s northern city of Aleppo, “suffers from the most abysmal living conditions of all the Palestine refugees camps in Syria” (UNRWA 2007: 4). Originally composed of 94 zinc-covered barracks that were used to house allied troops during World War II, Neirab served as housing for some of the Palestinian refugees who ended up in Syria in 1948. Each zinc-covered barrack was divided into ten housing units initially separated by sheets (UNRWA 2003). The barracks were “draughty and squalid to the extreme” and newly arrived refugees were exposed to freezing winters and insect and rodent infestations (Azzam 2005; UNRWA 2003, 2007: 7). Over time, some refugees moved out of the barracks and built houses around them, within the area allocated by the Syrian government for the establishment of Neirab Camp, but the barracks remained and refugees continued to live in them.

In 2000, UNRWA, in collaboration with Syrian authorities, set in motion the Neirab Rehabilitation Project (NRP). At the time, 72 of the original 94 barracks still existed and were providing shelter for some 6,000 Palestinian refugees out of a
total camp population of 18,000 (UNRWA 2003). While insect and rodent infestations seemed to no longer be a problem, barrack residents complained about the extreme summer and winter temperatures, the flooding and leaking during winter rains, the overcrowding, the lack of sunlight and ventilation, and the humidity that left holes and cracks in their walls (Gabiam 2005).

Central to the NRP, were plans to move 300 families from the Neirab barracks to new UNRWA-built houses on land adjacent to the neighboring Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el Tal also known as “Handarat” (the name of a nearby village). A 2003 UNRWA project document refers to the NRP as a “rehabilitation/development” project and indicates that the NRP also seeks to improve the general infrastructure of Ein el Tal and Neirab camps as well as promote “sustainable livelihoods” in both camps (UNRWA 2003: 4).

After holding an international conference in Geneva in June 2004 to discuss its future as the main agency assisting Palestinian refugees, UNRWA officially set in motion a process of internal reform. This process aimed at changing the agency’s emphasis from the provision of relief and basic services to Palestinian refugees to the promotion of sustainable development in Palestinian refugee camps (UNRWA 2004, 2005a). After the 2004 Geneva conference, the NRP became an UNRWA pilot project whose lessons learned would help cement the agency’s reform process (Gabiam 2008).

UNRWA adopted a participatory approach for the NRP, recruiting local volunteers and officially promoting the involvement of the targeted communities into the project planning and implementation. The Syrian government
became a participant in the NRP through GAPAR (General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees) by donating land for new housing to be built next to the existing camp of Ein el Tal and taking responsibility for providing electricity, telephone lines, and sewage to the new housing as well as other parts of Ein el Tal Camp. Also involved in the NRP were the governments of the United States, Switzerland, and Canada (the main donors for the first phase of the project taking place in Ein el Tal) and, later on, the governments of the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and Germany, as well as the regional governments of Galicia and the Basque country (who donated funds for the second phase of the project taking place in Neirab).

In this chapter, I examine the implications of UNRWA’s new emphasis on sustainable development, in terms of the agency’s relationship with Palestinian refugees and the aspirations of the Palestinian refugees as witnessed in Ein el Tal and Neirab. I begin by giving a brief overview of UNRWA’s formulation of the NRP. Then, I go over the way the NRP has been interpreted by Palestinian refugees in Ein el Tal and Neirab. I conclude that one of the major obstacles to a successful implementation of the NRP is that the vision of progress presented by the NRP leaves out the political and historical context of the Palestinian refugee situation, creating a trust barrier between UNRWA and the refugees. My conclusions focus mostly on the first phase of the NRP which took place in Ein el Tal and which was concluded in 2007.

Palestinian refugees’ lack of trust in the NRP should not be interpreted as outright opposition against UNRWA’s attempt to go beyond the provision of relief and basic services in Palestinian refugee camps. What is at stake is that UNRWA must do a better job of communicating with Palestinian
refugees and addressing their fears that “development” is simply an economic solution to their refugee status, one that does away with the issue of return. UNRWA must come to terms with the fact that the right of return has become a cornerstone of Palestinian refugee identity. Any improvement scheme that neglects the importance of the right of return to Palestinian refugees’ self-understanding will most likely not garner the kind of popular support and involvement that UNRWA is seeking from the Palestinian refugee community living in camps.

Most of the information for this chapter was gathered between spring 2005 and spring 2006, while I was working as an UNRWA volunteer on the NRP and simultaneously carrying out my doctoral research in anthropology. The data I collected is mostly the result of formal and informal interviews with Palestinian refugees, UNRWA personnel, and Syrian government representatives, and participant observation through my work as a project volunteer during the implementation of the NRP. Some of this data is also the result of an UNRWA-sponsored research of living conditions in Neirab’s barracks in which I participated. The research consisted of a questionnaire and interviews with 24 families living in two of Neirab’s barracks.

The Neirab Rehabilitation Project from UNRWA’s perspective

The exact terminology used by UNRWA to describe the NRP has changed over the years. UNRWA has most recently referred to the NRP as a “human development” project (UNRWA 2007; UNRWA 2010). The human development approach emerged in response to criticism directed at the
leading development approaches of the 1980s which construed development primarily in terms of economic growth (Sen 1999; UNDP 2011). In addition to economic growth, the discourse of human development emphasizes the access of human beings to social resources such as health and education, democratic governance, civil and political rights, sustainability, and human security from chronic stresses (such as hunger) and disruptions (for example unemployment or conflict).4

There are two major components to the NRP: an infrastructural component that seeks to strengthen and, in some cases, rebuild the camps’ infrastructure as well as a livelihoods component, targeting the long-term socioeconomic well-being of refugees (UNRWA 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). UNRWA’s 2005–10 Medium Term Plan, a document that gives a detailed plan of how UNRWA can “create conditions for human development and sustainable self-reliance for Palestine refugees” (UNRWA 2005a: 5), points to the relationship between infrastructural improvements and UNRWA’s broader “human development” agenda:5

The condition of facilities and the infrastructure in refugee communities have a direct bearing on the quality of the life of refugees. Investment in UNRWA’s facilities is therefore a prerequisite for achieving quality service outcomes that compare favourably with host authority and international standards.

(UNRWA 2005a: 11)

Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to development,6 UNRWA conducted asset-mappings in both Ein el Tal and Neirab in spring 2005 and autumn 2005,
respectively. Local volunteers from both Neirab and Ein el Tal were recruited and trained by UNRWA-hired consultants to administer questionnaires to the residents of each camp and to conduct focus-group discussions with these residents. The goal of the asset-mappings was to determine each camp’s “assets” from the perspective of community members themselves, and figure out, together with the community, ways of building on these existing assets.

A 2007 NRP document states that “through a community development strategy, education and learning opportunities will be enhanced, unemployment will be targeted, health will be improved, cooperation and collaboration amongst camp residents will increase – the overall conditions of the camp residents will be improved” (UNRWA 2007: 4). The project document also alludes to the participatory approach taken by the NRP and emphasizes the long-term aspect of the changes it seeks to promote: “Instead of top-down service delivery, [the NRP] is a participatory process of dialogue and mobilization of refugees. This will achieve sustainable outputs which will improve the living conditions of refugees far beyond the lifespan of the project” (UNRWA 2007:4).

According to a top NRP project official who was primarily involved in the infrastructural component of the NRP, implementing the project in line with the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach means that

We [UNRWA] are trying to help them [Palestinian refugees] to achieve an understanding and also a way of thinking. Try to help them so that they can take their life in their own hands by themselves. And that they can also recognize themselves as subjects who take initiatives who can develop, make steps forward with regard to different aspects of life.
Another top project official who was in charge of the “social development” (as opposed to “physical development”) component of the NRP explained the sustainable livelihoods approach as a way for refugees to build long-term social and technical skills that would enable them to make the most of any environment:

[Sustainable Livelihoods is] a very different approach than relief where you give people things. [These things] may be repetitive like giving help to special hardship cases but they’re payments; they’re not actually going to the heart of the issues that make families and individuals vulnerable. So what the SLA does is it says, well this is where you’re starting from, these are the issues that make you vulnerable so let’s work on those issues to overcome that, and to build on what you already have rather than what you don’t have … Secondly, again, it is about building your own capacities and this is what sustainability is. If I constantly give you something, you’re always going to need me to give you something. If I build your skills and your own resources and capacities, that’s something that always stays with you.

In the next section, I show that while UNRWA relied primarily on an understanding of progress that framed the NRP as an attempt to increase the long-term socio-economic opportunities of Palestinian refugees living in camps and promote refugee “self-reliance”, refugees in Ein el Tal and Neirab usually interpreted the NRP through a politically inflected understanding of progress that includes the possibility of return to their pre-1948 homes. The
disconnect between these two understandings lies at the root of much of the misgivings directed by Palestinian refugees toward the NRP.

Development, temporality, and the right of return

It is difficult to assess with certainty the level of skepticism and resistance faced by UNRWA during early attempts to implement the NRP. In the spring of 2005, the sense among some of the locally recruited project volunteers from Ein el Tal whom I talked to was that the Ein el Tal community was split “50/50” in terms of support for the project. In any case, the issue of community opposition to the project was significant enough in the spring of 2005, that the project team worried about not being able to garner enough support in Ein el Tal to proceed with what was supposed to be a community administered asset-mapping of the camp; the project team was also compelled on several occasions to change or adjust the project’s rhetoric because of negative reactions on the part of refugees and the project team’s fear that these reactions would jeopardize the project’s implementation. For instance, aware of refugee anxieties that “sustainable development” was simply a metaphor for indicating that the future of refugees was squarely grounded in Syria, UNRWA employees placed emphasis on the “portable” skills that refugees would acquire through the NRP and downplayed the part of the project that was dedicated to improving the physical structure of the camps. Referring to insistent rumours in Ein el Tal that the NRP would compromise the right of return, the NRP official in charge of “social development” explained during our interview that apart from the physical rehabilitation, housing and infrastructure, there is really nothing inside the sustainable
rehabilitation program that is not portable. If you’re building people’s abilities, skills education, confidence, networking abilities, social abilities, ability to organize themselves, that can be taken anywhere.

(Interview with author, 18 April 2006)

When I joined the NRP as a volunteer in spring 2005 while the first phase of the project was taking place in Ein el Tal Camp, one of the main stories making the rounds in Ein el Tal was that the NRP was actually a deftly articulated plan by the project’s Western donors, in collaboration with UNRWA, to settle Palestinian refugees in Syria. The focus on radically improving living conditions in the camps without any mention of parallel efforts to bring about a political solution to the Palestinian refugee issue recognizing the right of return was perceived by many refugees as a way of substituting “development” for return. Some refugees also argued that the project’s Western donors were hoping that refugees would “forget” about their refugee-hood and the suffering attached to it once they started leading the comfortable lives promised to them by the NRP (Gabiam 2012).

Another negative rumor making the rounds of Ein el Tal was that UNRWA’s emphasis on sustainability is a sign that the agency considers the presence of Palestinian refugees in Syria to be permanent, thus undermining advocacy for the right of return. The NRP team had explained the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to refugees in Ein el Tal in terms of skills people would be able to keep with them “for ever” (lil-abad). During an interview with Nasreen a teenager from Ein el Tal whose mother had been a volunteer on the NRP, she told me she was convinced the NRP’s goal was the
settlement of Palestinian refugees in Syria: “You’re saying ‘for ever’ so how could [the NRP] not be about settlement (tawtin)?” she asked.

Finally, UNRWA had to confront the rumor that its current focus on development was part of a plan by Western countries to phase out the agency and make Palestinian refugees “disappear”. The impact of these rumors on the project’s implementation was exemplified by an incident during the training for the Neirab asset-mapping inaugurating Phase II of the NRP, which was to focus on improving living conditions in Neirab Camp and finding a solution to the poor housing conditions in the Neirab barracks (UNRWA 2007). Several volunteers threatened to withdraw from the training session once rumors started spreading that the project was not really under the control of UNRWA, prompting some to conclude that settlement and the progressive disappearance of UNRWA were the project’s true intent. “When I sleep, I want UNRWA by my side. When I eat I want UNRWA by my side, because it guarantees my status as a refugee”, one volunteer said, pointing out that he would withdraw from the project if the rumors were indeed true. “Settlement, it’s settlement”, another volunteer could be heard saying in the background. The atmosphere calmed down after the project team promised the volunteers a meeting with the director of UNRWA affairs in Syria, during which he would respond to concerns raised by some of the volunteers.

The centrality of the right of return to refugee identity and anxieties about the effects of the NRP on this right also came up in less contentious situations, some involving refugees who actually supported the project and were involved in it. During the second day of training for the spring 2005 asset-mapping in Ein el Tal, about 30 local volunteers were
asked to make a list of the biggest stresses in their lives. At the top of the list, they put lujú, an Arabic noun which comes from the root verb laja’á, “to take refuge”, and refers the condition of being a refugee. At the end of the training session, a Palestinian volunteer approached the American consultant who had been hired for the occasion and asked him what the volunteers were supposed to tell community members on whose doors they would be knocking on to collect information if they were asked to know how this research would help the refugees to “return”. I was myself put in an awkward position one afternoon in Neirab. During a volunteer training session, Younes, a young volunteer in his early twenties who worked as a blacksmith, came up to me to let me know that he appreciated my desire to help solve problems in his community, but, he continued, “What I really care about is returning to my homeland. What are you doing to help with that?” During a focus group discussion carried out in Ein el Tal in April 2005 with young teenage girls, one girl stood up and asked the British manager of the socio-economic componnent of the NRP who was present at the discussion, “Why don’t you help us go back [to Palestine] instead of developing the camp?” The manager’s response was, “We can’t help politicians to help you go back but we can help improve life until you go back.”

Despite the above-mentioned examples, I encountered little categorical opposition to the NRP in either Ein el Tal or Neirab. Over the course of my interactions with Palestinian refugees in Ein el Tal and Neirab, I mostly encountered mixed and contradictory feelings. Some community members were generally supportive of the NRP but felt a little apprehensive about the ultimate outcome of the project. Even
some of those who had volunteered to help out with the project had worries to which foreign project volunteers like myself were not immune. One of the younger Neirab volunteers who helps run a youth center in Neirab Camp told me:

I will say frankly, when I participated in the project I tried to hear every word and, I’m sorry don’t laugh or be upset but [with regard to] you and Yara (another foreign volunteer helping out with the project), for the volunteers who are the foreigners, I wanted to know what are their motivations, why are they interested in participating in this project? Everyday when I would come home from the training I would write down every word, everything that happened, to analyze it and day after day I got a clearer idea. [In the end] I was convinced that UNRWA wanted to develop the community, wanted the Palestinians to live in better conditions and I was convinced that the foreigners participating in the project wanted the information for themselves, to get an idea about the Palestinian situation and this made me very happy because I realized that there are foreigners who are interested in the Palestinian situation.

(Interview with author, 16 January 2006)

Still the young volunteer pointed out that “10 per cent” of him continues to be suspicious about the ultimate goal of the project “and this has to do with the donors”, whose intentions he still does not trust. On two separate occasions, I interacted with Palestinian refugees who voiced support for the NRP even though they were convinced that its ultimate goal was the settlement of Palestinian refugees in Syria, which they oppose. I asked one of them, Miriam, a middle-aged woman who had played a prominent role as a local volunteer, helping
out with the first phase of the project in Ein el Tal, why she supported the project if she felt its goal was settlement: “because I want my people to live a better life”, she simply responded. Miriam had also told me earlier in an interview that people in the Ein el Tal community (including herself) feared in relation to the NRP that “[UNRWA] will say ‘we gave you everything so stop talking about return’”.

Nevertheless, I encountered a few community members who fully supported the NRP and had no worries that it would undermine the right of return. For some Palestinians in Neirab and Ein el Tal, “development” did not have to have political implications with regard the right of return; the project was simply part of a normal global state of affairs where wealthy countries donate money for projects in less wealthy parts of the world. Wisam, an older volunteer on the NRP who was probably in his fifties and who was known both in Neirab and Ein el Tal (where he lives) for his political activism was not concerned about settlement rumors. He was a direct beneficiary of the NRP, having been part of the first group of 30 families who had moved out of the Neirab’s dilapidated World War II era barracks to brand new houses in Ein el Tal. During a visit to Neirab, he had declined to show me the Neirab barracks housing unit he used to live in with his wife and three children, saying that it brought back too many bad memories. However, he described it as “a three-by-two metre room with a two-by-two metre kitchen and a one metre square bathroom”. During an interview, he brushed away the notion that the NRP had any connection to settlement:

From a human standpoint, it’s normal for people to come and help others who are facing problems … Poor people in
Africa, Sudan, Somalia for example … So from a human point of view it’s a good thing to develop oneself because we don’t own anything. Everything we own is in Palestine. All we have is our capacity to work. But from a political standpoint, I wouldn’t cooperate with any group whose intent was to hurt the right of return. I don’t feel that this project is threatening the right of return.

(Interview with author, 30 March 2005)

During the course of the project Wisam and I were in charge of administering a questionnaire to a selected group of families living in the barracks in order to find out how they felt about their housing and about conditions in Neirab Camp in general. During our visits, residents of the barracks would sometimes express concern about the settlement rumors. Wisam would put an end to them simply by saying: “I am a politician. Do you think I would be taking part in this project if it were about settlement?” Not all residents of the barracks were perturbed by the settlement rumors. When one of the project assistants asked a middle-aged taxi driver who lives in the barracks what he thought about the settlement rumors linked to the NRP, he simply replied, “Do the barracks define us as refugees?” (“al baraksaat, anwan na ka laje’een?”).

The above examples show that the matter is more complex than refugees simply being for or against the project. The above reactions to the NRP, taken as a whole, reveal mixed feelings and uneasiness towards the project rather than wholehearted support or rejection from the communities of Ein el Tal and Neirab. The main issue is whether Palestinian refugees in Neirab and Ein el Tal trust the project and whether they are convinced the project is being carried out in their best interests.
Achievements and shortcomings of the Neirab Rehabilitation Project

At the time of my fieldwork, UNRWA had not been successful in fully convincing Palestinian refugees that the introduction of “development” in Palestinian refugee camps would not, in any way, undermine their right of return. While trust remains one of UNRWA’s greatest hurdles as it seeks to change the dynamics of its relationship with Palestinian refugees and engage with them as “partners” in development (Byrne 2006, Misselwitz and Hanafi 2010), there were other shortcomings in the implementation of the NRP. Even if they are not primarily about trust, most of these other shortcomings still have a bearing on the issue of trust.

Concerning the relationship between the project team and refugees in Neirab and Ein el Tal, it would have been a good idea for the NRP team to try to maintain a close relationship with all of the volunteers it had been able to recruit for the asset-mappings. This would have helped with subsequent community involvement and trust-building. “You [the NRP team] have abandoned us”, Miriam told me as she complained that she hadn’t heard from the project team since the end of the Ein el Tal asset-mapping in which she had been involved. Another female former volunteer, Ilham, was deeply hurt, especially given the NRP’s emphasis on local initiatives to enhance social life in the camp, because she had put on an embroidery exhibit in Ein el Tal on her own and received no visits or acknowledgement from the NRP team. The most likely explanation for this is that the NRP team wasn’t aware of her activities, which nevertheless raises the issue of better communication channels between the NRP team and refugees. Ilham was also upset because her brother, also a
former Ein el Tal asset-mapping volunteer, had been involved in a serious car accident and it had taken weeks before anyone from the NRP team came to visit him. From the standpoint of these local volunteers, they had supported and helped the project team in getting the NRP off the ground and had expected that relationship, which was understood as one of mutual help and support, to continue after the end of the asset-mapping. Thus, there is a need for UNRWA to recognize the personal dimensions of a participatory project such as the NRP which reaches into the everyday lives of the refugees of Ein el Tal and Neirab. Also, the resentment expressed above underscores the work that still needs to be done for a sense of equal partnership to develop between UNRWA and refugees. It is easy to overlook the contributions of refugees to the NRP given UNRWA’s disproportionate access to power and resources compared to the refugees. However, a philosophy of mutual help and support between UNRWA and refugees towards the shared goal of improving conditions in the camp is more productive than one that separates out UNRWA as the “helper” and the refugees as those who are “helped”.

A related aspect of the NRP which needs improvement is that of community participation. UNRWA should be commended for making an effort to involve the inhabitants of Ein el Tal and Neirab in the implementation of the NRP. The agency sought the input of refugees by organizing many community meetings in relation to different aspects of the NRP, published a project newsletter regularly informing the communities about the progress of the project, and made an effort to have the Arabic translation of important project documents available for refugees. However, participation often took the form of seeking the consent of the communities of Ein el Tal
and Neirab after initial plans were made in UNRWA’s Damascus field office or at the agency’s Amman headquarters rather than involving these communities from the beginning in the design of project plans. Neirab and Ein el Tal community members were cut off from top UNRWA decision-makers residing in Damascus and Amman, and in that sense had very little control over the decision-making process concerning the project. An example that readily comes to mind is that well before the NRP organized community meetings in Neirab in the winter of 2005 with barracks residents to determine the form and extent of the changes to be made to the barracks area, UNRWA project documents were stating that the barracks would be replaced by two- and three-storey buildings (UNRWA 2003). This feeds into the notion that UNRWA knows best and that participation, as understood by UNRWA, centers around obtaining the consent of communities for pre-established solutions rather than real partnership in finding solutions. A 2006 UNRWA-commissioned project evaluation report states in relation to the NRP that

the decision-making structures for the social development components of the project – in terms of policy, budgets, project implementation, etc. – were too far removed from the community and staff … [Refugees] were not, and did not feel, involved or empowered. Because staff and communities were too removed from planning, decision-making and monitoring, there hasn’t been a sense of ownership [of the project].

(Byrne 2006: 1)

An example that illustrates the fact that community members and NRP staff were too removed from UNRWA’s power structure is the difficulty that Ein el Tal community-based
organizations (CBOs) – which were formed as a result of the NRP – had in accessing resources from UNRWA. For instance, in early 2006, the newly created “sports group”, with the help of the project team, requested the use of one of the camp’s UNRWA school playgrounds after hours (this was because there were no sports facilities in Ein el Tal). Receiving initial permission from URNWA required weeks of lobbying various high officials at UNRWA’s Damascus-based department of education. Barely a month after it was finally granted use of the UNRWA school playground, the sports group had to return the key it had struggled for due to the decision of a high-level UNRWA employee that the group had not followed proper procedures in obtaining the key (conversation with NRP team member).

During a follow-up discussion with a former member of the now defunct sports group in the summer of 2009, he informed me that the group was never able to regain access to the key. An UNRWA-commissioned project evaluation report further notes with regard to another CBO, the “library group”, that “it took advocating, over 20 meetings, letters, etc., for a period of six months” for the NRP team and the library group to finally get permission for the community to use an empty school room to develop a community library (Byrne 2006: 5).

Another indication that UNRWA still has work to do in the area of community participation was the generally poor attendance at community meetings. There are many possible reasons for this. Henri Lefebvre points out that obstacles to community participation in housing or neighbourhood renewal projects include the “passivity (lack of participation) of those affected, which the ideology of participation will in no way change” (2003: 187). For the first meeting in autumn
2005 of the NRP team with residents of two selected “test” barracks that aimed at getting feedback on various building options that might replace the barracks, about half of the families living in the barracks showed up. The number of families progressively decreased as meetings followed each other. A general Neirab community meeting in winter 2006, which aimed to reach some kind of consensus with the community around the subject of the best building option to replace the barracks was also poorly attended, with about ten to 15 community members showing up in a space that could have contained 60 or 70.

Perhaps having been used to UNRWA and the Syrian government deciding for decades what was best for refugees, Neirab community members had a hard time believing that their voices would actually matter. While visiting a family living in the singled-out test barracks with one of the NRP project assistants, the assistant asked the father of five if he would be attending an upcoming meeting. What was the point, he retorted. What difference would his opinion make? In the end everything would be done according to UNRWA plans, he concluded. He did show up at the meeting with his wife and one of their children but abruptly left in the middle of it. This attitude might be the outcome of years of refugees not being included in UNRWA decision-making but it also reflects the work that UNRWA still needs to do in terms of creating structures of community participation where refugees feel they have some agency in deciding their future.

One aspect of the NRP that seems to have been relatively successful, at least in Ein el Tal, is the infrastructural improvement. In accordance with NRP plans, 300 families from the barracks have moved to the now completed new housing in Ein el Tal. In addition to providing these
families with nicer and more spacious accommodations, the new houses have helped create space in Neirab’s overcrowded barracks. Initial problems regarding the provision of water to the new housing in Ein el Tal seem to have been solved with a water tower having been built close to the new houses. A sewage system, which was non-existent in Ein el Tal, was constructed for the new housing and extended to other parts of the camp. The defective water pipe network in the old part of the camp has been replaced with a new water pipe system. Roads in Ein el Tal have been repaired, enabling the Aleppo bus system to now go inside Ein el Tal Camp and saving residents from an arduous uphill climb every time they take the bus from the city of Aleppo to their homes. Another result of Ein el Tal’s improved transportation system has been an increase in the camp of stores selling basic goods, saving residents the trouble of having to go all the way to the city of Aleppo for basic necessities. The lack of public transportation into Ein el Tal had been a major complaint from the Ein el Tal community during the UNRWA-sponsored spring 2005 asset-mapping of the camp. During a follow-up visit to Ein el Tal in summer 2009, Abu Mohamed, an older Ein el Tal resident who used to complain incessantly about the NRP being only concerned about former Neirab barracks residents who had moved to Ein el Tal and not investing in the camp as a whole, was now happy with the project given the above mentioned improvements to the camp’s infrastructure. Finally, by the end of the project’s first phase in 2007, the NRP, with the assistance of refugees, built a soccer and basketball field in Ein el Tal.

According to UNRWA’s 2005–10 Medium Term Plan, a strong and well-functioning camp infrastructure is crucial for
the long-term well-being of Palestinian refugees. In that sense, it can be said that the NRP has made infrastructural improvements that will contribute to “human development” in the camps. At the same time, human development is a long-term process, the success of which can only be fully grasped after a certain period of time. So far, achievements with regard to the socio-economic (as opposed to infrastructural) component of the NRP have been shaky. The NRP has made some inroads in direct attempts to improve the quality of life in Ein el Tal. A major complaint in Ein el Tal during the spring 2005 asset-mapping had been the fact that the camp’s clinic was only functioning half-time. The clinic now functions on a full-time basis. The NRP was also able to help secure a permanent space in the camp for a nursery that was started through a grass-roots community effort.

On the other hand, plans to build a community center in Ein el Tal, plans that had strong community support, did not materialize. Incidentally, a community centre would have provided the newly formed CBOs with space to pursue their activities and might have encouraged the formation of other community-based groups. An NRP team member argued that GAPAR (the representative branch of the Syrian government in the camps) was the main obstacle and the one to blame for the NRP’s failure to deliver on the promise of a community center. According to the project team member, GAPAR was not supportive of creating a community center in the way that UNRWA had envisioned it, that is, as an independent entity run by refugees themselves. GAPAR wanted a “smaller scale” center that would be incorporated into Ein el Tal’s camp committee over which GAPAR had a certain amount of control. The NRP team member wondered if it had not been a bit premature for
UNRWA to believe that it could help build independent civil society structures under an authoritarian regime like Syria’s. However, another NRP team member was more understanding of GAPAR’s attitude. Having an independent community center was a major shift from the way GAPAR was used to administering the camps and thus a major adjustment for the government organization. She reminded me that GAPAR had been extremely supportive of the NRP since the beginning of its implementation and added, “Don’t forget that we brought a very new approach in a very isolated camp. I don’t blame them [for not supporting an independent community center]. The reason was that they didn’t know [any better] …”

Another outcome of the NRP was the creation of an “employment office”, as lack of stable employment was one of the major stresses listed by Ein el Tal residents during the asset-mapping. An employment advisor was hired to help Ein el Tal residents with professional networking and finding jobs. Unfortunately, the employment office was not sustainable. It had to close in 2007, about a year after it had opened when the first phase of the NRP came to an end and funding for that initial phase ran out.\[11\]

In general, the NRP has not been able to galvanize Ein el Tal’s community into partnering up with UNRWA around issues relating to the long-term socio-economic well-being of Palestinian refugees. The community-based organizations that the NRP helped create in early 2006 in Ein el Tal have dissolved and the momentum gained from refugee involvement in the 2005 asset-mapping has also dissolved.
Finally, UNRWA has cited refugee “self-reliance” as an overarching goal of its new emphasis on human development. Thus, UNRWA’s 2005–10 Medium Term Plan states that Palestine refugees are potentially key agents for the socio-economic development of the wider Palestinian community. This potential could be achieved by providing refugees with the means to become self-reliant – a goal best attained when concerned departments work closely together to end refugee dependence on assistance.

(UNRWA 2005a: 12)

Forced migration scholars have argued for a broader understanding of “self-reliance”, one that takes into account the socio-political context of refugees’ lives (Crisp 2003; Meyer 2006). In a research paper written for UNHCR analyzing its Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) project in Sudanese refugee settlements in northern Uganda, Meyer (2006) warns against an understanding of self-reliance as the opposite of refugee dependency on relief. She argues that this dichotomous view of self-reliance creates a paradox whereby self-reliance is “defined as a process of reduction of external inputs and support for refugees” (Meyer 2006: 14). Meyer points out that self-reliance should actually be understood as a process that requires external inputs and support for refugees with the goal of creating structures that lead to the overall empowerment of refugees. The point here being that self-reliance, as a goal, initially requires extensive external support in order to be reached. Reducing external support from the outset is less likely to lead to the establishment of structures that will enable self-reliance.
Additionally, Meyer notes that a dichotomous understanding of self-reliance led to resistance from Sudanese refugees toward UNHCR’s developmental approach because refugees equated self-reliance with the “pull-back” of UNHCR and were fearful that this would leave them without protection. This reaction is similar to the reaction of refugees in Ein el Tal and Neirab and points to the dangers of a purely technical understanding of self-reliance that leaves out the protection and rights of refugees (Crisp 2003; Meyer 2006). Meyer also points out that an understanding of self-reliance as the opposite of refugee dependency puts the blame on refugees for their situation and fails to consider external or structural factors that might constitute obstacles to refugee self-reliance.

An understanding of self-reliance that incorporates notions of rights and especially protection, since URNWA has come to officially consider “protection” as part of its mandate (Khoury 2010; Schiff 1995; UNRWA 2010), would be much more meaningful to refugees in Neirab and Ein el Tal. Such an understanding would address the general empowerment of refugees rather than reduce their well-being to a question of a shift from relief to development. It would offer refugees a better framework for merging their long-term socio-economic well-being with their commitment to the right of return and help build trust in UNRWA’s new approach. A 2006 UNRWA-commissioned project evaluation noted that the NRP “would of course also hugely increase the community’s trust and confidence in UNRWA’s work if it is seen to be acknowledging refugees’ rights, especially the right of return” (Byrne 2006: 16). Finally, assuming UNRWA is indeed committed to assisting Palestinian refugees until a political resolution of their situation, a broader understanding of self-reliance that would contain a focus on rights and
protection would help mitigate refugees’ fears that UNRWA’s growing emphasis on sustainable development is indicative of a phasing out of the agency.

Conclusion

While from an infrastructural perspective the NRP has made notable achievements, the NRP’s potential as a vehicle for human development in Ein el Tal and Neirab remains to be seen. It is doubtful that UNRWA will be able to remedy one of the main obstacles to its vision for a new approach to assisting Palestinian refugees – the lack of trust from the refugee community – without recognizing and addressing the political dimensions of Palestinian refugee identity as well as the political implications of its new developmental approach emphasizing sustainability.

Rumours claiming that the NRP’s real goal is the permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in Syria or the progressive dissolution of UNRWA, or both, cannot be dismissed as groundless or as conspiracy theories. It is a recognized fact that UNRWA was initially created – in part – to facilitate the settlement of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East through the promotion of large-scale and long-term development schemes, even though Palestinian refugees continued to advocate return (Bocco 2010; Schiff 1995; Rosenfeld 2010; Tackenberg 1998). Second, refugees’ distrust of “sustainability” and “self-reliance”, which, to them, seems to indicate the progressive pullout of UNRWA from their lives should not be simplistically equated to an issue of refugee dependency on relief. As others have noted (Feldman 2007; Peteet 2005), UNRWA’s relief and basic services, which fall within the broad category of “emergency humanitarianism”
(Calhoun 2008), have acquired political significance for Palestinian refugees, as proof of their refugee status and thus as a way of keeping open the issue of return. This is irrespective of the extent to which Palestinian refugees actually need these UNRWA services. A re-articulation of UNRWA’s assistance to Palestinian refugees inevitably raises questions about the political implications of such a shift in Palestinian refugee circles. The main issue is not that Palestinian refugees have a problem with economic independence or living socially rich lives. The main issue is that they do not want UNRWA’s reformulation of its relationship with Palestinian refugees to undermine their refugee identity and political advocacy for return.

The concerns underlying negative rumors about the NRP are legitimate ones and in my opinion, UNRWA did not make enough of a concerted effort to address them in an open and straightforward manner. Because UNRWA considers itself an “apolitical” organization, discussions or issues raised around the political dimensions of Palestinian refugees’ lives tend to be shut down by UNRWA staff. There was no space at community meetings for Palestinian refugees to have an in-depth and open dialogue with UNRWA staff about their fears around the purpose and outcomes of the NRP. There was no space at community meetings for Neirab residents to have an open conversation around the concerns voiced by some refugees about rebuilding of Neirab’s barracks in a way that would preserve Neirab’s uniqueness as a Palestinian refugee community.

As scholars and practitioners of humanitarianism and development have pointed out, there is no such thing as pure humanitarianism or development12 separated from politics (Barnett and Weiss 2008, Ferguson 1994; Terry 2002). It can
be argued that a non-political mission is necessary for UNRWA to be able to provide needed services to refugee in host-countries (Khouri 2010; Schiff 1995). However, having a non-political mission should not preclude the agency from recognizing that particular policies can have harmful effects (even if unintended) on the rights of the very people whose welfare it is concerned with. UNRWA’s non-political mission should not prevent it from recognizing that humanitarianism and development can be, and have been, used to achieve political goals, something that is evidenced by the agency’s own history (Calhoun 2008; de Waal 1997; Schiff 1995; Terry 2002). At the very least UNRWA should make sure its policies do not hurt Palestinian refugees’ internationally recognized rights.

It should also be noted that by taking on an advocacy role on behalf of Palestinian refugees and their rights as part of its “protection” duties (Kagan 2010) UNRWA has already crossed a line that would assume a pure separation between humanitarian or development assistance and politics. Consequently, UNRWA should be able to show a certain level of flexibility in terms of addressing refugees’ political concerns and rights in the implementation of its projects. Doing so is a delicate issue. Rami Khouri notes that “parallel with UNRWA’s increasingly vocal international cry for refugee rights and protection, we have witnessed in recent years more concerted criticisms of the agency and even some calls for its dissolution” (2010: 449). At the same time, the fact that UNRWA’s refugee protection and advocacy activities have increased over time (Kagan 2010; Khouri 2010; Schiff 1995) indicates the agency’s acknowledgement of the role that political factors play in the well-being of refugees.
UNRWA’s latest agency-wide planning document, its 2010–15 Medium Term Strategy, is encouraging in terms of the agency making more of an effort to link its developmental approach to the human rights of Palestinian refugees. The 2010–15 Medium Term Strategy states UNRWA’s commitment to four human development goals: “a long and healthy life, acquired knowledge and skills, a decent standard of living, and human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent possible” (UNRWA 2010: 16, emphasis by author). UNRWA’s 2010–15 Medium Term Strategy further underscores UNRWA’s commitment to the human rights of Palestinian refugees when it describes the agency’s role in relation to protection: “UNRWA has also recognized a scope for a more explicit focus on ‘protection’ in its areas of operation. Protection is what UNRWA does to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees” (UNRWA 2010: 23).

In the short term, the NRP seems to have brought some positive changes to refugees living Ein el Tal, especially in terms infrastructural improvements and accessibility of services. The outcome of the project in Neirab remains to be seen. Infrastructural changes aside, there is no clear indication yet that the NRP has set a solid base for energizing socio-economic life in those camps or that it has been able to draw wide community support and involvement. It will be difficult for UNRWA to mobilize significant Palestinian refugee support around the reforms it has set in motion without articulating a vision of progress that incorporates refugees’ particular history of exile and dispossession and their attachment to the right of return.
Notes

The views expressed in this chapter are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or by UNRWA.

It must be noted that there was a self-help component to UNRWA’s building of new houses in Ein el Tal. In line with project plans, families who moved from the barracks to the new houses were responsible for the “internal finishing” of their new houses. One reason UNRWA gave for this self-help component was that it would contribute to establishing a spirit of “partnership” between UNRWA and refugees (UNRWA 2003: 4,7).

Ein el Tal is located about 12 km northwest of the Syrian city of Aleppo and 20 km away from Neirab camp. Ein el Tal was set up in 1962 with land provided by the Syrian government (UNRWA 2003).


In its 2010–15 Medium Term Strategy, UNRWA draws on UNDP’s definition of human development which states that human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices. Enlarging people’s choices is achieved by expanding human capabilities and functionings. At all levels of development the three essential capabilities for human development are for people to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable and to have a decent standard of living. If these basic capabilities are not achieved, many choices are simply not available and many opportunities remain inaccessible. But the realm of human development goes
further: essential areas of choice, highly valued by people, range from political, economic and social opportunities for being creative and productive to enjoying self-respect, empowerment and a sense of belonging to a community.


According to a 2007 UNRWA project document, the sustainable livelihoods approach has been selected because it is a methodology which recognizes that there are multiple dimensions of livelihood outcomes and therefore, accordingly, addresses objectives and priorities for socioeconomic development through a range of appropriate cross-sector interventions, which in turn, are based on human, natural, financial, social and physical assets.

(UNRWA 2007: 4)


I have changed the names of informants to protect their identity.

I also came to realize that the especially tense atmosphere surrounding the 2005 asset-mapping in Ein el Tal was related to resentment due to what was seen as unfulfilled promises from UNRWA since the official start of the project in 2000. According to an NRP volunteer from Neirab Camp, another reason resistance in Ein el Tal was more pronounced than in Neirab was that the Palestinian political party Fatah
al-Intifada which is prominent in Ein el Tal had come out against the implementation of the NRP.

I don’t have data on the infrastructural work in Neirab Camp, which is still ongoing.

I am not able here to speak to the question of the social adjustment and integration of the families who moved from the barracks to Ein el Tal. A study focusing on the adjustment and integration of families to their new environment in Ein el Tal would need to be undertaken in order to fully gage how successful the move of these families from Neirab’s barracks to Ein el Tal has been.

The extent to which the employment advisor hired by the NRP was successful in helping people in the Ein el Tal community with professional networking and finding jobs during his tenure has yet to be determined.

The boundaries of “humanitarianism” and “development” are somewhat fluid and there is a certain amount of overlap in the way humanitarianism and development are conceptualized. In this chapter I subscribe to a view of humanitarianism as assistance with the goal of saving or maintaining human lives, and consider development to be related to assistance that goes beyond basic human needs and is concerned with long-term well-being.

Bibliography


12 The urban planning strategy in Al-Hussein Palestinian refugee camp in Amman

Heterogeneous practices, homogeneous landscape

Lucas Oesch

Introduction

This chapter deals with the issue of refugee camps improvement and governance. It focuses on the al-Hussein Palestinian refugee camp in Amman. It aims at assessing the different improvement practices and planning strategy which have taken place in the camp over the past decades. Furthermore, it considers this strategy in relation with broader urban development trends (particularly of the camp surroundings), as the camp holds a central location in the urban environment. Officially, two entities operate in the camp, the Jordanian Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). While the former is in charge of governing the camp, the tasks of the latter focus on services provision. However, this chapter considers the work not only of these actors, even if they are the central part of the analysis, but includes other actors involved in the process of improvement, such as Housing and
Urban Development Corporation (HUDC), Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and so on. It analyses as well different types of actions, whether one-off initiatives or recurrent interventions, if they were specific to the camp or implemented city wide, which aspects they cover (physical infrastructure, housing, services, urban layout, etc.) and on which scale (small projects or broader programmes of development). This chapter argues that when it comes to urban improvement, even if the DPA is officially the sole actor in charge of governing the camp, UNRWA and other institutions also contribute, while more informally, to the ‘governmentality’ of the camp-space (see Oesch 2012). It therefore questions governance issues and interactions among the different actors involved in the process of improvement. Finally, it also considers the timing of actions, comparing them with broader context-related issues such as regional developments and events.

In others words, it is the urban planning and development process of the refugee camp that motivates this chapter. Which form does it take? By whom is it implemented? What happens when there are two main agencies (UNRWA and DPA) which operate in the camp and which are functioning according to different ‘rationalities of government’ in the Foucauldian sense, that is different ways of thinking and acting, according to different procedures, objectives, and so on. How do these two rationalities, one that can be qualified as ‘state-centred’ (DPA) and another one that can be qualified as ‘transnational’ (UNRWA), interact when related to the same issue (urban development). And finally, to what extent do they merge or hybridize into a strategy or ‘apparatus’ of urban planning that expresses on its own a
particular form of governmentality proper to the camp (see, e.g., Bigo 2007; Rose et al. 2006).

The camp: between an ordinary urban space and a space of exception

There are 1,979,580 registered refugees in Jordan. 359,410 of these, or in others words around 17 per cent, live in the ten camps co-managed by an international UN body – the UNRWA – and by a specific department of the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the DPA (UNRWA 2012). In Jordan, most of the Palestinians refugees also hold Jordanian citizenship. Camps officially remain temporary spaces established mostly on private lands ‘provisionally’ lent to UNRWA. However, through the years, as this chapter will show, it is real urban development, although particular in its forms and actions, which has been taking place.

Al-Hamarneh considers that:

The general strategy of Jordan has always sought to integrate the Palestinian refugees in the socio-political structure of the country and to integrate the Palestinian refugee camps into the municipal planning and construction.


Others consider that camps have more to do with spaces of exception (see Hanafi 2008). As Destremau (1996) considers, and as this chapter will show, regarding the issue of urban development and camp management in Jordan, the truth is certainly somewhere in between. Ten years ago, Hart also pointed out that for many people in Jordan, al-Hussein camp has become
barely distinguishable from surrounding areas of the city: the same infrastructure, the same low quality housing, the same economic conditions as much of East Amman. … This argument takes no account of the meaning that the *mukhayyam* (camp) has for the inhabitants of Hussein camp themselves.⁴

(Hart 2000: 72)

We could add to Hart that ‘this argument’ also does not take into account the management and planning perspective, which is characterised by a heterogeneous ensemble of practices and rationalities, and the creation of a new planning strategy which came to respond to the special conditions of the camp, which in turn respond to the consequences of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the region and the question of the place of Palestinian refugees in Jordan.

**Al-Hussein camp: physical description**

Al-Hussein camp is located a few kilometres northwest of the historical city centre of Amman. It is situated along the recently constructed ‘four-way’ road *al-Urdun* (two lanes in each direction) which starts behind the Citadel hill and leads to the northern cities of the country, Jerash and Irbid. After its start, the street meanders along the bottom of the valley, the *wadi al-Haddada*, where a small intermittent river used to flow but has now been drained and covered by the road. Medium and small size houses typical of Amman are built on both sides of the valley, first at * jabal al-Qusur* and then * jabal an-Nuzha*. At this point, after a little more than one kilometre, the street takes a significant S-turn after which al-Hussein camp is located on its left for about another kilometre. In the
words of many, namely inhabitants of the camps or the area, employees of UNRWA or DPA, professionals of urban planning in Amman, and so on, the road now marks one of the borders of the camp. This has become a shared and accepted fact, even if in reality the street meanders along the official border, the boundaries of the camp coinciding at some points with the street, while at other places lying in retreat of the road or beyond it.  

Population

Al-Hussein camp was established in 1952 to provide shelter for Palestinian refugees who gathered in the area. According to Destremau (1995: 32–34), it was originally designed to host 8,000 persons. On 1 January 1967, it counted 20,451 registered refugees. In 2008, the population estimate according to UNRWA stood at 29,560 persons (DPA 2008: 50). However, many suggest that the real number of inhabitants is larger. UNRWA’s estimate is based on registered refugees only. There are refugees living in the camp without being officially registered at the agency. Furthermore, there are also non-Palestinian residents renting houses despite the fact that renting is officially not permitted. A DPA (1997: 24) report actually states that 20 per cent of shelters are rented in al-Hussein camp. According to Hart (2000: 101), some are migrant workers in search of cheap accommodation, by far the largest number of whom are Egyptians. Between 40,000 and 60,000 inhabitants is the unofficial number often stated.

Residents of al-Hussein camp are principally refugees from pre-1948 Palestine and their offspring and are of diverse origins, both rural and urban (Hart 2000: 72).  Currently, most of them are merchants, entrepreneurs,
artisans, members of liberal professions and employees of the administration, or involved in construction work (mainly unskilled labour) and some in vehicle maintenance (Abu Helwa and Birch 1993: 405–6, Latte Abdallah 2006: 91–92). 7

**Land**

The size of the camp is estimated to range from 367 Dunums (HUDC 1997: 3), to 418 (DPA 1998: 16) or 445 Dunums (DPA 2008: 50). 8 This variation could be attributable to the road construction which ‘took away’ some portion of the camp – but this is doubtful since the 2008 figure is the largest. Alternatively it reflects a controversy about whether some parcels located in the south of the camp are officially part of it or not. UNRWA’s office and school, the police station and some shelters are located in that area. According to an engineer who used to work for the DPA, in the 1990s original landowners even asked for the removal of these shelters. As stated in the 2008 DPA report, the totality of the camp space is rented by the government (DPA 2008: 25). 9 However, according to the same engineer and confirmed by UNRWA staff members, the contested area has recently been bought by the government from the original owner.

**Services**

Within the camp, UNRWA runs four schools. The agency also runs ten schools in the neighbouring area of an-Nuzha (jabal an-Nuzha) (DPA 2008: 51). If class numbers are limited, some pupils living in the camp can be sent to an-Nuzha. Similarly, some pupils residing outside the camp but close by can be accommodated in the camp’s schools. A UNRWA Public Information Officer even mentioned that there are some ‘exchanges’ with governmental schools in
certain cases. Furthermore, camp schools only offer schooling up to a certain level, after which pupils are obliged to go to an-Nuzha or elsewhere to complete their studies. In the camp, UNRWA also runs a health centre. There are an additional 11 private clinics and the Zakat committee health centre (DPA 2008: 51). Refugees can receive UNRWA health services at no cost. They can also go to other health centres or clinics inside or outside the camp and ask for reimbursement from UNRWA, but as of recently, as reported by a UNRWA staff member, fees coming from private establishments are no longer reimbursed. There are five mosques in the camp, one youth club (supervised and supported by the Higher Council of Youth and the DPA), and several permanent NGOs, supervised and supported by the government or UNRWA (DPA 2008: 50–52). These are the services provided within the limits of the camp. However, residents can also benefit from services or facilities located or ‘delocalised’ outside the camp. For example, the association of the city of Ramleh and al-Lyd are within proximity of the camp, as is the Islamic centre al-Habura (Latte Abdallah 2006: 95).

**Housing**

In 2008, the number of housing units reported by DPA was 2,488, while the number of dwellings stood at 3,726. The report still referred to a housing unit as the initial planned area of 100 m² which was given per household, while the dwellings referred to the actual number of houses in the camp, as in some cases more than one house has been built on the original 100 m² (DPA 2008: 50). Number and denomination have evolved over years and in the mid-1960s, 3,628 houses (called ‘huts’ at that time) were counted for 3,171 families (Goichon 1964: 172). In 1997 (just before the
construction of *al-Urdun* street and the ensuing demolition of houses) there were 1,970 ‘shelters’ (DPA 1997: 24).\(^{12}\) Overcrowding of houses and lack of available plots in the camp is regularly mentioned as one of the main challenges to address.\(^{13}\)

In the mid-1960s, Goichon (1964: 171) reports that the original tents provided had disappeared, and refugees had built small houses in concrete with fibrocement roofs.\(^{14}\) Later, Abu Helwa and Birch state that:

Housing conditions in the camps and their fringe areas were generally much poorer than in the rest of the city …. [M]any units are characterized by problems resulting from poor construction, inadequate ventilation and dampness, and low levels of maintenance. Whole areas suffer from very high densities of development, with each crudely-constructed concrete unit tightly packed against its neighbours so as to make the maximum use of the available plots.

(Abu Helwa and Birch 1993: 407)

In 2010, UNRWA states that within the Jordan field approximately 15 per cent of shelters within camps are assumed to be in a dilapidated condition (UNRWA 2010: 33).

**Infrastructure**

The latest report of the DPA (2008: 50) notes that 98 per cent of houses have connections to the water supply and sewerage system. These numbers are the same compared to the 1997 report (DPA 1997: 25) which adds that 100 per cent have electricity and 35 per cent telephone service. In the mid-1960s, Goichon (1964: 172) reported that some houses only had water installations, while others were forced to use
water supply points in transversal streets. Abu Helwa and Birch (1993: 407–10) maintain that in 1993, in terms of infrastructure provision, namely piped water and electricity, surveys indicate that refugee housing differs little from the rest of Amman’s housing. The camp had also been connected to the city’s sewer system and they noted that major improvements in the provision of main public utilities had been achieved in recent years. Infrastructures come under the responsibility of the government. A UNRWA Public Information Officer explains that, as Jordanian citizens, refugees are entitled to benefits from utility infrastructure. UNRWA has only the responsibility for its services infrastructures.

The area of paved roads and concrete footpaths is indicated to have dropped drastically within the last ten years, to the point that these numbers and the eventual deterioration of this infrastructure are questionable, all the more so considering the work carried out during the Community Infrastructure Program (CIP) in 2000–2001. Concerning the total surface of paved roads, it is supposed to have gone from 77,455 m² in 1997 to 18,000 m² in 2008. Concrete footpaths went from 16,375 m² in 1997 to 11,500 m² in 2004 and 9,126 m² in 2008 (DPA 1997: 25, 2004: 40, 2008: 50).

**Layout**

In contrast to Goichon (1964: 171) mid-1960s description of al-Hussein camp – ‘Well organised. Streets are wide, at least at the entrance. “Village” is the word that comes to mind’¹⁵ – today, at first glance, al-Hussein camp recalls more of a ‘working-class’ neighbourhood.
The regularity of the plan of the camp is noteworthy. Imagine an imperfect rectangle of about one kilometre long and 200–300 metres wide situated on a slope corresponding to the side of the al-Hussein hill (jabal al-Hussein). In the middle, along its longest portion, the camp is divided into two parts by its main road, where commercial surfaces and activities are concentrated. At regular intervals along its shortest portion, about 50 transversal narrower streets lined with houses run from the bottom of the hill upward, crossing the main street perpendicularly. No barriers or walls separate the camp from its surroundings. Furthermore, the camp is contiguous to the urban landscape on each of its sides. The ‘borders’ of the camp are formed only by streets, except in the far southeast of the camp where it is contiguous to the neighbourhood of wadi al-Haddada, an area also known as Hay as Sina’a.

Literature often distinguishes between the upper part of the camp and its lower side (see Al-Hamarneh 2002: 184, Hart 2000: 80, Latte Abdallah 2006: 92). Houses located on the top of the slope are described as better off than those at the bottom. However, this chapter argues that this is perhaps less the case today as initiatives have been undertaken to improve the houses situated along the road. Furthermore, Hart (2000: 81) states that many of the poorer houses with corrugated-metal roofs were knocked down to make way for the new road. However, several such houses can still be found today at the bottom where the most serious problems such as rainwater or sewer flooding in wintertime occur. When asked to describe the valley area before the construction of the road, some inhabitants also said that it was a dangerous place.
The camp and its surroundings

It is impossible to talk about the camp without mentioning its surroundings. Above, on the eastern border of the camp, starts the higher-end middle-class area of Jabal al-Hussein. Only a medium-size street – called Yafa on the city plan – ‘separates’ them. Separation is however not the adequate word as there is much continuity in the urban landscape, even if the distinction in the urban fabric is quite easy to see. The main visible differences lie in the density and physical conditions of housing. Across the street and upward, there is (more) space between houses, which look bigger, more robust and built in a single shot.

More explanation is necessary concerning the western border of the camp located downhill at the bottom of the valley. As mentioned earlier, many consider that al-Urdun street, built in 1998, forms today’s border. Opposite the road starts the working-class neighbourhood of an-Nuzha. Before the establishment of the street, the area was only roughly separated by the riverbed of an intermittent stream which was at a certain point covered and drained. Without the street, the distinction between the two areas would not be easy to make, and as Hart explains:

Where the camp adjoins Jabal al-Nuzha, it was, until 1998, harder to detect where one ended and the other began, for the housing was largely of the same poor quality with narrow streets and alleyways. In the perception of inhabitants, the boundary between the two was vague.

(Hart 2000: 76)

The only major difference would still be that reported by Abu Helwa and Birch:
Such areas are mainly distinguishable by particular features of street layout, building height and size. These all show less uniformity than in camps because control over building development was more lax.

(Abu Helwa and Birch 1993: 407)

When interviewed, UNRWA and DPA employees, as well as professionals of urban planning in Amman, unanimously declare that people on both sides ‘are the same’ and share family or origin ties. For example, the engineer who used to work for the DPA says that ‘before it was only one area, people living in safh an-Nuzha thought about themselves as being part of the camp, it is the street which created two areas’. Furthermore, for UNRWA employees, this border does not seem to bear a lot of significance as their area of duty seems to include both an-Nuzha and the camp, except maybe to some extent for the Officer who coordinates UNRWA services for the camp, as well as for garbage collection and sanitation activities which are limited to the space of the camp.

Hart (2000: 76) reports that many living on the an-Nuzha side of the street had been living there since the establishment of the camp. In fact, it seems that people gathered in that area even before the creation of the camp. A portion of the area just opposite the camp called safh an-Nuzha is what is referred to in Jordan as an informal neighbourhood (sakan ‘achwai). Some even used to refer to it as a ‘slum’ or a ‘squatter settlement’. People established houses without building authorization on plots which did not belong to them. This, however, does not necessarily mean that they were ‘squatting’ the land, as some leased it or bought it from their original owner. Nevertheless, the transaction was not
officially registered. Houses resemble those in the camp, as it is apparent that their construction underwent several stages. Be that as it may, since they were not constrained by regulation, they show less uniformity than in the camp and are generally higher. Density of housing is also very high, with very few empty lots. Access to the neighbourhood and the street scheme are not as regular and functional as in the camp. Streets are usually very narrow, wandering between the houses in many directions. As we will see, the neighbourhood was upgraded and ‘officialised’ by the government in the 1980s and again in the 1990s. This is also the case for wadi al-Haddada, another informal neighbourhood adjacent to the camp to the far southeast.

**Camp management and institutions**

At the institutional level, the DPA is in charge of governing the camp and UNRWA of services provision. Although the camp is located within the city boundaries, officially its management does not come under the jurisdiction of the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) or the other ministries of the Jordanian government which are normally in charge of city management. However, in reality, other actors, such as the GAM or other governmental ministries or agencies, as well as international actors, have an influence and intervene to some extent in the management or ‘governmentality’ of the camp-space, either regularly or occasionally and directly or indirectly. This chapter considers several cases related to urban development issues in the next section.
**UNRWA**

In the camp, UNRWA’s main tasks and activities are the same as in its entire area of operations, which is to provide relief, social, health and education services to registered refugees. Furthermore, a small camp service office is based in the camp, in addition to the schools, health centre, ration distribution centre and the women’s programme centre. On top of that, UNRWA is responsible for collecting and dumping the waste from the camp. In fact, 28 UNRWA sanitation workers and two foremen, dressed in blue, are responsible for some streets, while municipality employees, dressed in orange, take care of others and of then evacuating the collected garbage from the camp.\(^{20}\) UNRWA also takes care of the physical maintenance of its own infrastructures and of some shelter rehabilitation, depending mainly on additional funding availability.\(^{21}\)

**DPA**

The DPA is the government hand in the camp. According to one of its spokespersons, it is involved in all matters and is like a small government coordinating with the big government. It coordinates with other governmental entities, as well as supervising and facilitating activities taking place in the camp. Among its many tasks are: monitoring the building of additional housing units inside the camps, carrying out rehabilitation works, opening of shops, and following up contracting bids related to construction (DPA 2008: 17).\(^{22}\) In the camp, DPA counts a handful of office managers. Two of them tell me that the DPA office in the camp is similar to a small municipality. One of their main jobs is the yearly renewal of commercial licenses. DPA
managers and UNRWA staff members meet from time to time to discuss day-to-day matters. For example, in one of the joint meetings which I attended, an UNRWA Officer asked the DPA managers if the government could do something about the floods that occur regularly on street number four.

The repartition of tasks and collaboration between the DPA and UNRWA in the camp, and the merging and hybridization of different ways of acting and thinking would necessitate further in-depth analysis. This chapter mentions some initial aspects related to urban development.

_Camp Services Improvement Committee (CSIC)_

Residing in the same massive centrally located building which shelters the DPA and the computer centre which was built about 12 years ago and atop which the Jordanian flag flies is the Camp Services Improvement Committee (CSIC).²³ It was institutionalised in 1976 and placed under the responsibility of the DPA. Latte Abdallah (2006: 93) notes that the recruitment of the members of the committee is carried out through co-optation from the population and decision of the Director of the DPA in accordance with the Governor of the region (_muhafez_). The committee is composed of a dozen persons appointed for four years, with the exception of the director, who often remains in office longer.²⁴ The intermediary between the inhabitants and the state, it is financed by the DPA, even if it receives a small amount of funds from UNRWA, and sometimes contributions from merchants and liberal professionals. For example, in 2007, the camp received 60,000 Jordanian Dinars (JD) from the DPA, compared with 35,000 JD in 2003 (DPA 2004: 87, 2008: 90).
Police

Among the institutions which have physical premises in the camp, there is also the police station, situated at the southern extremity of the camp, on the main street, next to the UNRWA camp service office. It is in fact a branch of the main police station of jabal al-Hussein. Furthermore, a police officer is assigned to the DPA/CSIC building. The jabal al-Hussein station holds a monthly meeting with, among others, managers of the camp such as UNRWA staff members to discuss security issues.

Improvement practices and planning strategy

This section reviews interventions on housing, physical infrastructure or urban layout which were conducted in or around al-Hussein camp in the course of the last 30 years. It gives details about the scope of each action in order to highlight similarities or differences, and eventually to explain how together they form a specific strategy of urban planning. Significantly, it does not only consider the work of the DPA which officially is the sole actor governing the camp, but includes UNRWA which also takes part in the process, as well as other institutions which are portrayed as lying outside the governance of the camp, namely the municipality and specific departments of the government dealing with urban development, as well as NGOs. The actions of these institutions inside the camp or at its margins all contribute to shape its governmentality and the form of its urban development. When speaking of UNRWA, Hanafi (2010) has proposed the notion of ‘phantom authority’ to label such ‘informal’ participation to the governmentality of the camp.
Housing

Improving the structural conditions of housing seems to be one of the most urgent needs in al-Hussein camp. The camp has its own regulations concerning housing construction, in particular with reference to vertical extension. At first, the enforcement of regulations was the task of UNRWA, but since 1975 it has been passed on to the DPA (Destremau 1996: 539). The maximum height of houses was limited to the ground floor. Now most houses have a second floor which is tolerated, but some have even added a third or fourth floor. In their survey, Abu Helwa and Birch (1993: 409–10) found that 50 per cent of current householders in al-Hussein camp had made extensions to their houses for an average size increase of 28 per cent. If extensions are mainly vertical, refugees have also from time to time encroached on the streets. If nearly all houses had a kitchen, it was often only a part of the living room, 52 per cent did not have a kitchen sink with running water, and only 13 per cent had a separate bathroom.

Most of the inhabitants transform their shelters themselves, in accordance with their resources. DPA and UNRWA, in collaboration with ministries (such as the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation), NGOs or donors, each also have their own ‘programmes’ of shelter rehabilitation or of help to refugees for improving their houses. Information regarding many of these projects can be found either in institutional documentation or in newspapers, but it is difficult to clearly identify or differentiate between the projects taking place inside each of the two institutions. Shelters are rehabilitated sporadically, depending on available funds, and in an isolated manner. Moreover, the two entities have each their own
eligibility criteria and a low level of collaboration between them in the domain of housing reconstruction has been noted, as reported by a UNRWA Officer. An UNRWA staff member declares that in the past the DPA used to coordinate with UNRWA regarding design criteria, to get examples of shelter plans from UNRWA. In addition, the CSIC also tries to play a role in that field by attracting NGOs or encouraging donors.

At UNRWA, the Engineering and Construction Services department and the Relief and Social Services department have a programme of rehabilitation for the ‘Special Hardship Cases’. Generally speaking, this consists of the construction of one room, with kitchen and bathroom. In 2003, the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) launched a partnership with UNRWA. Under this programme between April 2005 and May 2006, 54 shelters were rehabilitated in Jordan, three of which in al-Hussein camp (UNRWA 2007). The European Union also regularly supports the government and the DPA in the rehabilitation of shelters in refugee camps. This also consists in constructing one-room housing units, including a small kitchen and bathroom, which recalls UNRWA standards (Jordan Times 2007). As a former employee of the DPA explains, this particular programme started with pilot projects implemented by an Italian NGO Istituto per la Cooperazione Universitaria (ICU) in the early of 2000s and continues to run today.

However, UNRWA emphasized the need to change its strategy and its Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2005–2009 mentioned the agency’s aim to develop a comprehensive shelter and re-housing strategy, and to establish an Urban Planning Unit to that purpose. The agency also highlighted the possibility for larger-scale housing schemes, as this
chapter will encourage in the conclusion (UNRWA 2005: 4). Five years later, the agency re-iterates that:

UNRWA needs to take a more systematic approach to planning and implementing shelter upgrading. Focusing on bringing the worst shelters up to minimum standards, rather than the more costly approach of demolition and reconstruction will be important to ensure that more refugees benefit from shelter improvements.\(^{25}\)

(UNRWA 2010: 36)

**Infrastructure setting up**

According to Destremau (1995: 22–23), originally collective infrastructure has been installed in the camp at the same pace as in the rest of the city. The electricity grid reached the camps between 1962 and 1963, with the responsibility of connecting up in the hands of the inhabitants. In 1965, the water distribution network was installed in the camp. Again, inhabitants have to pay for the connection and the meter. Main streets were tarred in the 1970s, in collaboration with the municipality. In the mid-1970s, the sewage system was installed, individual connection being at the expense of the users. Finally, in the early 1980s, the telephone network was inaugurated.

This infrastructure was installed and is supplied by the municipality and other ministries or entities, as is the practice in the rest of the city. It is thus possible to note that these practices of providing utilities differ from the official line that keeps emphasising the specifically institutional management of the camps. However, in refugee camps, the DPA is
filtering, supervising and coordinating the activities of the municipality and other ministries or entities.

**Restrained improvement projects**

Small-size projects of infrastructure improvement take place regularly. It is mainly the DPA which is responsible for these. Funds come from the government, though sometimes through donors. If the DPA is not responsible for the project, it supervises it and coordinates with the interested entities. As mentioned, the DPA headquarters has a Planning and Project directorate where it can establish plans for the necessary interventions. Generally speaking, the DPA then hires a contractor to implement the work. One of the office managers of al-Hussein camp cited the example of the rehabilitation of some sewer pipes that took place in early 2009.

**Urban Development Program (UDP)**

The first large-scale initiative of urban development in the area took place in the 1980s around the camp, in *safh an-Nuzha*. The informal neighbourhood which is located next to the camp was integrated into an Urban Development Program (UDP) aiming at improving the conditions of urban housing, especially informal settlements or so-called ‘slums’. At that time, urban upgrading and rehabilitation initiatives were gaining momentum in Jordan. An Urban Development Department (UDD) was established for that purpose within the Jordanian government, through the National Planning Council and with the support of the World Bank. Most of the hired employees were freshly graduated Jordanian engineers, architects or social workers, as well as a few international consultants. According to these employees, their work was directed towards ‘real slums’. Most of these spaces were
concentrated in the Amman area (Amman, Zarqa, Ruseifa), and inhabited by Palestinian refugees, with a great deal of them situated around refugee camps. UDD used a comprehensive approach, targeting physical infrastructure, services, housing, urban layout as well as the issue of land tenure and social and community development. In *safh an-Nuzha*, the work started in 1986 and was completed between 1987 and 1988. Major interventions on the networks of water distribution and electricity grid, sewage and storm water system were carried out. Improvements on the circulation network (mainly pedestrian) and thus on the urban layout were carried out as well. Furthermore, security of land tenure was provided to inhabitants. The number of beneficiaries was about 3,000 for an area of 24,000 m² (al-Hussein camp is more than 15 times bigger). The cost of the project was 376,000 JD (see Al Daly 1999; UDD 1988).

The informal settlement of *wadi al-Haddada*, also neighbouring al-Hussein camp, was initially included in the programme as well. However, the plans for the construction of the *al-Urdun* street led to the abortion of the project (partially upgraded afterwards in the late 1990s at the same time as al-Hussein camp). Indeed, a UDD (1988: 11–12) report states that it was estimated that 50 per cent of the project surface and 30 per cent of the beneficiaries would be affected by the construction of the road. The construction of the street was the second most important urban development initiative in the area.
Construction of al-Urdun street

‘The street was on the plans of the municipality for more than 40 years’ an engineer of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MPWH) tells me. According to him, it was delayed ‘for political reasons’. The latter were the presence of the al-Hussein camp on the path of the planned road. He then explains that ‘we thought that maybe there would be a solution, so they waited. Then it lasted too long so they decided to build it anyway.’ ‘They’ refers to the urban development decision-makers in Jordan, and ‘solution’ to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the refugees’ issue. Officially, solving the conflict or the refugee question would imply the subsequent dismantling of the camp. This would have ‘rendered available’ the land portion of the camp necessary for the establishment of the road. Without this, the demolition of camp houses required for the construction of the road was a sensitive and risky initiative which could possibly be interpreted by refugees as a sign that their presence is no longer tolerated, and could in turn become cause for protest. No peace accords were ever reached, but Al-Hamarneh speaks of a widespread realistic and pragmatism ‘post-Oslo approach’ throughout the population of the camps:

[T]hey have realised that their future is now in Jordan. … Now they try to make the best of their situation in Jordan for themselves and for their children. They exploit their old networks to make appropriate investments in the camps and co-ordinate their activities with the plans of the international community and its organisations, as well as with the local authorities and non-governmental organisation.

(Al-Hamarneh 2002: 184–86)
This new approach has certainly rendered possible the construction of the road as well as other initiatives of urban development in the camps. Again, subsequent to the Urban Development Program of the 1980s, the construction of the road can be interpreted as an increasing involvement on the part of the government, and particularly the municipality, in camp development and its surrounding.

Furthermore, following the establishment of the road, about 30 houses, from now on situated on both side of the street, were rehabilitated between the late 1990s and early years of 2000, under the initiative of the Arab Women Organization of Jordan (AWOJ) with the support of ECHO. The project manager tells me that after the construction of the street ‘it became evident that the area needed help’. Low-quality houses that ‘were once inside [the camp], were now on its side’, therefore highly visible for anybody taking the new road. She also tells me that they received substantial support from GAM, which had made studies in the area (in view of the construction of the new road). The municipality helped to identify the needy houses. According to the project manager, GAM did not want to limit its effort to the new road, but wanted the entire area to have a better look. Again, it is possible to note the influence of the GAM in the urban development, even when present in an indirect manner, and without having the camp ‘officially’ included in urban development plans.

**Community Infrastructure Program (CIP)**

This is the last important urban development scheme, although limited in its interventions, to take place in the area.
Robins (2004: 183) mentions that the establishment of the Social Productivity Program (SPP) and its Community Infrastructure Program (CIP) component were part of the creation of a social safety net in Jordan which followed the measures of structural adjustment adopted after the economic crisis of the late 1980s. It can also certainly be attributed to the post-Oslo context discussed above as one of its main component, the CIP part A (CIP-A), targeted the upgrading of refugee camps and informal settlements (mainly inhabited by Palestinian refugees and many of them located around camps).

The SPP was adopted in 1996 and aimed at alleviating poverty and generating job opportunities for the poor. In early 1997, the agreement with the World Bank and other entities concerning CIP-A was signed, the implementation starting in early 1998 and completed for the most part by the end of the year 2004 (several projects were delayed). CIP-A deals with upgrading the essential infrastructure of 27 squatter settlements and refugee camps. The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC), a governmental department, was selected as the implementing agency. The programme was financed by the Government of Jordan, the World Bank (WB), Kreditanstalt fur Wiederaufbau (KFW), the Islamic Bank and the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development (see HUDC 2004). For the first time, in the official line at least, refugee camps were included in a nation-wide urban development programme, and included with other poor neighbourhoods of Jordan. In practices, the areas selected were all inhabited primarily by Palestinian refugees living in poor conditions (whether camps or informal settlements),
and the upgrading tended to differ depending on whether it was carried out in a camp or in a settlement.

According to engineers involved in this programme, the physical conditions of the chosen areas were better off than the ones upgraded during the 1980s by UDD. Some infrastructure and services already existed, as discussed above. Interventions were minimal and limited to the upgrading of physical infrastructure as well as, in the case of informal settlements only, the creation or widening of roads and paths (which led to the demolition of houses and the relocation of people).\textsuperscript{29} Upgrading was limited and less costly than the projects carried out in the 1980s, and few cost recovery mechanisms were put in place. Land tenure issues as well as social and community development were not included. As an HUDC employee declares: ‘our work was to put things right’.

Apart from studies, in informal settlements, HUDC prepared detailed design plans and supervised the work of contractors, except in the case of safh an-Nuzha. HUDC asked local consultants to prepare detailed design plans and to supervise works in the camps. Projects financed by KFW were tendered to a joint venture of consultants (local and German firms). Close coordination with the DPA was also advocated and HUDC employees often complain about this interference which limited the scope of their work. The government agency for urban development was thus less directly involved in camps compared with informal settlements.

The project in al-Hussein camp was financed by KFW and estimated at 180,000 JD. Work started on 11 July 2000 with its completion forecast for 10 May 2001. A ten-month
contract was awarded to a local contractor. Before the work, the appraisal study of HUDC reported that:

The access roads are in good condition. All of the roads and footpaths are paved, but some footpaths are in a bad condition. The camp is provided by water and sewerage network, about 250 sewer house connections need intervention to prevent back flow. Stormwater drainage is provided for some parts only.

(HUDC 1997: 3)

Later, the completion report (HUDC 2004) stated that the work carried out on various infrastructure items were as follows: maintenance of roads, pathways and stairs; Improvement and maintenance to the electrical grid; new storm water network; minor works on sewer system.

_Safh al-Nuzha_ was also financed by KFW, for a total cost of about 650,000 JD, among which 65,000 for upgrading. The portion upgraded is neighbouring the area which had already been improved in the 1980s. An initial contract was awarded from 15 May 2000 to 15 November 2001 for work on a school to a local contractor for a sum of 425,000 JD. A second contract was awarded from 27 May 2000 to 27 March 2001 to another contractor for upgrading work. The rest of the sum was allocated for the health centre, the day-care centre and pedestrian bridges (above _al-Urdun_ street, joining the camp). The completion report (HUDC 2004) mentions that these pedestrian bridges were constructed to serve the school built in that area. Minor improvement to storm water sewage network and electrical grid were realised.

Around the same time, _wadi al-Haddada_, which is also neighbouring the camp, was upgraded as well, for a total cost
of about 209,000 US dollars, which was financed by the World Bank. The contract was signed on 9 October 2000. The works focused on: Insufficient pathways and damaged surfaces; old corroded water networks; absence of storm water drainage; insufficient road illumination; adaptation of the electrical grid (HUDC 2004).

**Conclusion: heterogeneous practices, homogeneous landscape**

This chapter has reviewed the improvement practices and urban planning strategy in and around al-Hussein camp. They have definitely all changed the landscape and rendered the camp more viable. However, it has been shown that changes have taken place in and around the camp, but with little coordination in ‘urban planning’ issues (e.g. between DPA and UNRWA concerning housing), or worst with interferences (e.g. between DPA and HUDC during CIP), while the urban development process is evident. Therefore, this chapter calls for a more coherent, inclusive and comprehensive urban planning process of refugee camps and their surroundings in the future.

Until now, all interventions discussed in this chapter are not shaping a coherent program of urban planning. They are multiple practices conducted by multiple institutions, whether governmental, transnational or non-governmental (UNRWA, DPA, HUDC, UDD, GAM, NGOs), each possessing their rationalities. Nevertheless, as we have seen, despite remaining particularities and basic living conditions, the urban landscape of refugee camps located in city space, and their surroundings, looks today relatively homogeneous. When looking at the broad picture of urban changes in camps, it is
thus possible to conclude that these practices, although emanating from different institutions each functioning according to their own rationalities, together form a strategy, or an apparatus (or dispositif) of urban planning in its Foucauldian sense. Furthermore, despite this heterogeneity and lack of coordination, lots of similarities can be found among these practices (e.g. limited interventions centred on physical infrastructure; shared criteria concerning houses renovation; funding coming from the World Bank or European Commission). Ultimately, they were all driven by a discourse of ‘improvement of living conditions’ shared by all actors and which represents the ‘system of relations’ of this heterogeneous ensemble of improvement practices. This discourse is influenced by the regional consequences of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the question of the place of Palestinian refugees in host countries, where officially, for political and ownership reasons, refugee camps are still temporary spaces. However, a normalization of their temporariness has allowed urban changes and has lead to the creation of this specific strategy of urban planning (Jamal 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is not to say that the ‘specific characteristics’ of the camp-spaces are disappearing with this urban planning process. On the contrary, it is to suggest that the characteristics of what constitutes a refugee camp that allow us to define these sites as such are not fixed but evolving over time. The planning strategy specific to camp and informal settlement environments that we are witnessing maintain the character of the camp, as well as ‘rights and claims’ of refugees, while at the same time allowing changes in the urban fabric and responding to the ‘needs of daily life’ (Jamal 2009). According to Misselwitz and Hanafi (2010),
this constitutes a form of reconceptualisation of the camp space.

Notes

I am grateful to the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) for financing my fieldworks and to the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) for supporting the writing phase of my PhD thesis thanks to a prospective researcher fellowship. I also thank the ANR programme TANMIA ‘Le développement: fabrique de l’action publique dans le Monde Arabe’ for including me within its framework, and the French Institute for the Near East (Ifpo) for hosting me. I would like to express my gratitude to the editors of the book for their comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, and to Christine Eade for kindly correcting the language (any error remaining is my responsibility). Finally, I am thankful to my supervisor Riccardo Bocco for his advice at each step of my doctoral research. The views expressed herein are solely my own.

It is based on research materials gathered for a PhD thesis. It makes reference to interviews which were conducted between 2006 and 2010 in Amman with employees from UNRWA, DPA and other government departments such as HUDC, as well as NGOs.

According to Foucault (1980: 194–95), an ‘apparatus’ is a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the
system of relations that can be established between these elements.

Hart (2000: 72) says that residents define the specificity of the camp as a social space distinguished by its sociality and modes of social organisation; a moral space with its own variation of common values and codes of behaviour; a “Palestinian” space which houses a particular community with a common past rooted in the land of Palestine.

If some merely cite this fact as taken for granted, for others it might be part of a deliberate strategy corresponding to the wish of assessing clearly identifiable camp border marks.

From the centre of Palestine, from al-Lyd and Ramleh (45 per cent), Jaffa and its region (20 per cent) Sarafand al-Amar, Beit Dajan and Safriyeh (15 per cent) (Latte Abdallah 2006: 91). These figures are based on the archives of UNRWA. Hart (2000: 75) mentions that refugees from al-Lyd are especially numerous and are prominent in the institutions of the camp.

This information is based on the archives of DPA.

1. One Dunum is equal to 1,000 m².

8. Camps are mainly built on lands that were ‘temporarily borrowed’ from their private owners by the Jordanian government and given to UNRWA. The compensation given to owners is based on the initial value and does not reflect the actual market price of the land.

Women Program Center (UNRWA); Zakat Committee (Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs); Friends of Children Society (Ministry of Social Development); Women
Latte Abdallah (2006: 95) considers that the small number of NGOs is due to the extension of the camp in the urban space and the mobility of its inhabitants.

Apart from a change in the counting criteria, the diminution in the number of units could be the result of the destructions that occurred during the civil war of 1970–71 known as ‘Black September’ and the combats between the Jordanian army and the guerrilla groups. However, destroyed units have long since been reconstructed, and given the density of housing it is difficult to imagine more built-up spaces.

Abu Helwa and Birch (1993: 405–8) found that 57 per cent of households count four to nine persons and 34 per cent more than ten, knowing that 54 per cent of houses have two living/sleeping rooms and only 29 per cent three or more rooms.

The information was confirmed in 1997 by an internal document of the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC 1997: 3) which states that ‘most of the housing units are built with concrete blockwork for walls and covered by reinforced concrete roof’.

My translation.

There are 751 registered commercial shops in the camp, five bakeries and five pharmacies (DPA 2008: 50).

The camp recalls a tree leaf where the main road would be the central main vein (midrib), and the perpendicular small roads, the secondary veins that are connected to the main one and going to the extremity of the leaf.
This echoes Hart (2000: 80–81) when he says that in particular, the area of the seil (drain) itself was considered a dangerous place where young ruffians loitered, engaging in various anti-social activities such as glue-sniffing, consumption of alcohol, sex with younger boys and gang fights using razor blades and knives. People said that prostitutes worked in this area particularly.

There are three types of Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. Four camps were created after the 1948 war and are managed by DPA and UNRWA (among which al-Hussein camp); six camps were set up after the 1967 war and are also managed by DPA and UNRWA; three camps managed only by the Jordan government were also established after the 1967 war.

UNRWA (no date), but the document must have been established in mid-2000.

The UNRWA field office has an Engineering and Construction Services department. One of the engineers is assigned to the North Amman area.

To this purpose, the DPA headquarters has a Planning and Project directorate.

The ration distribution centre of UNRWA is also situated on the bottom floor of the same building.

The current director lives on the upper part of jabal an-Nuzha, in a street with high end houses which were built by ‘returnees’ from Kuwait (see Le Troquer and Hommery al-Oudat 1999). It is said that he has been successful in the Gulf.

Interestingly, and going into a previously unexplored area, at least in Jordan, the strategy also mentions that ‘there are
groups of vulnerable refugees living outside camps, in informal gatherings. UNRWA will take steps to ensure that shelter rehabilitation does not overlook these vulnerable refugees.’

The work was to have started in 1983, but the start of the project was delayed by reservations related to the effects of the municipality’s previous plans to build *al-Urdun* street (which was finally implemented in 1998) (UDD 1988: 12).

Hart (2000: 78) mentions that when the residents of homes along the path of the proposed new road learned that they were to be made homeless and that the compensation offered would be meagre, many expected that UNRWA would intervene. … UNRWA did ultimately get involved, … but this organisation’s ability to effect any changes for the benefit of those being evicted was evidently negligible. … Although residents understand the camp as a Palestinian space, … the government’s ability to destroy several hundred houses was clear evidence that its future existence depends on Jordanian policy.

At the beginning of the 1990s, UDD merged with the Housing Corporation. Under the umbrella of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the HUDC was established.

The HUDC (2004) completion report states that infrastructure components in squatter settlements and refugee camps (CIP-A) have been selected to improve the level of infrastructure services to a defined minimum level alternatives for addressing each deficiency were considered consistent with sound engineering and design standards.
Bibliography


———(no date) *Al-Hussein Camp*, factsheet, UNRWA.
Part VI

Palestinian refugees and durable solutions

A role for UNRWA
UNRWA as avatar

Current debates on the agency – and their implications

Rex Brynen

What is an avatar?

In its original meaning, an “avatar” was the earthly incarnation or manifestation of a Hindu god – the local presence of something bigger and more powerful that held in its hands the fate of whole peoples (Britt 2008). In age of the internet, however, the term has come to mean something rather different. Here an “avatar” is the visual cyber-expression of a user in a online public environment, whether it is a virtual reality “person” in Second Life, or the image or icon chosen to accompany one’s postings to an online chat forum. No longer, therefore, is an avatar a representation of the very real powers of a (divine) reality. Instead, it is an expression of an idea, desire, or an ideal. It is also an attempt to influence the attitudes and orientations of others. Indeed, given the frequency with which uncommonly attractive images of other people are used as online avatars, an “av” might represent quite a lot of wishful thinking. The term has been popularized and transformed still further with the global success of the science fiction movie Avatar (2009), in which humans interact with the indigenous Na’vi population of the planet Pandora through a virtual connection to hybrid human-alien bodies.
Today, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) demonstrates something of all of these meanings. Some see in the organization a representational link to the more powerful domain of the international community. Others see UNRWA as expressing an idea or an aspiration, or acting as a stalking horse for other, very different interests. As with internet avatars, these images are subject to the vagaries of online interpretation and reinterpretation, with the modern blogosphere playing an increasingly important role in the battle over UNRWA’s image – a battle with real-world implications. Finally, film director James Cameron has told us that an avatar can be something big, blue, and rather expensive to produce. Those who have seen the movie will know that his avatars, like UNRWA, aren’t always quite what they seem. They are a well-meaning initiative caught in a political bind. They are a partnership with the local population that is important to empowering a dispossessed people to take control of their own destinies. Yet they are also a partnership that annoys the powers that be – some of whom, indeed, would like to shut the whole operation down.

The indeterminacy of UNRWA and the creation of avatars

How is it that UNRWA has become an avatar? Why is it that the Agency is subject to many multiple, competing, and even incommensurate perceptions and representations? Part of the reason is rooted in the very different narratives that have grown up around the creation and continuation of the Palestinian refugee problem.
For Palestinians, the dispossession and forced displacement of the *nakba* of 1948 was a formative national event, giving rise to a dispersed people half of whom continue to live in involuntary exile from their historic homeland. As a consequence, the refugee issue is not seen simply an issue for Palestinians who are refugees but for all Palestinians, and it is not simply an issue of residency, return, and reparation but also one of recognition, acknowledgement, and justice. Israelis, by contrast, typically deny significant responsibility for the forced displacements of 1948 and 1967. Instead they argue that the issue is an Arab responsibility born of Arab opposition to the partition of Palestine, and one that has been artificially sustained over the years thereafter. Arab host countries share the Palestinian narrative, yet sometimes view the refugees as much as potential security risks than productive contributors to local society. For its part the international community typically views the refugee problem as simply a “problem”, all too often abstracting it from its historical roots and paying little attention to issues of justice and acknowledgement.

Given this broader context surrounding the refugee issue, it is hardly surprising that UNRWA can mean so many different things to so many different people. As Bob Bowker has argued, it was inevitable that the Agency would become deeply enmeshed in the various “mythologies” of the refugee issue (Bowker 2003: 123–48).

Further compounding this is the vagueness, complexity, and ambiguity of UNRWA’s changing mandate over the years (Schiff 1995; Bartholomeusz 2009). The Agency was, after all, first established with the tasks of short-term humanitarian care (“relief) and longer-term refugee integration and resettlement (“works”) for refugees displaced by the
establishment of the state of Israel. It soon became evident that the latter was infeasible, given Arab and refugee opposition. With regard to the former, the immediate humanitarian assistance functions of the Agency gradually morphed into a quasi-state-like delivery of health and education services to more than three generations of refugees – something quite unlike any other UN specialized agency. Yet UNRWA also retains its emergency role, having been called upon over the decades to deal with a seemingly endless series of crises: the 1956 Suez War; the destruction, forced displacement, and Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as a consequence of the 1967 Arab–Israeli War; civil wars in Jordan (1970–71) and Lebanon (1975–90); Israeli attacks on Lebanon in

through the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in the 1982 invasion and occupation; Palestinians fleeing Kuwait during the 1990–91 Gulf War, or fleeing Iraq after US intervention there in 2003; the 2006 Israel–Hizbullah war; the 2007 fighting in Nahr al-Barid refugee camp; two intifadas, and multiple peace processes; the post-2007 Israeli–Egyptian embargo of Gaza, as well as Operation Cast Lead and other Israeli attacks, and now the devastating Syrian civil war. Over time (and especially since the late 1980s) the monitoring and protection roles of the Agency have been augmented. Ever since the signing of the Israeli–Palestinian Declaration of Principles in 1993, it has also been called upon to help support the frequently faltering peace process.

UNRWA’s unique status as a specialized refugee agency solely dealing with one refugee group creates grounds for further ambiguity. Article 1.D of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees states that it “shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or
agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance”, thereby excluding Palestinians within UNRWA’s area of operations from treatment as “Convention” refugees. It has been argued, of course, that the clause was not meant to weaken Palestinian refugee protections, but rather strengthen them. Certainly, Article 1.D goes on to state that:

When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being definitively settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall ipso facto be entitled to the benefits of this Convention.

(Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951)

However the paradox remains that while the 1951 Convention provides a widely accepted political and legal definition of refugeehood and its termination for the purposes of protection and asylum, Palestinians are partially outside this regime. Conversely, UNRWA has only an operational definition of refugee status that largely relates to service eligibility, not political or legal status. Despite this, the perceived role of the Agency as an arbiter or certifier of refugee status in the larger political sense – a role that a future peace agreement might well belatedly confirm¹ – serves to create additional incentives to imagine or portray the Agency in particular ways.

All of these factors – competing narratives, a vague yet complex mandate, an ever-changing operational environment, and a peculiar legal foundation – have been at work in influencing perceptions and representations of the Agency throughout the more than six decades of its existence. What has changed, however, is the speed and ease with which these
representations of the Agency can be shaped and reshaped by modern media. Satellite television and other media coverage play a role in this, such as in the now iconic pictures of Israeli shelling of UNRWA facilities in Gaza during the 2008–9 war.

Equally important, however, is the rise of cyberspace-based interest and advocacy communities, who use blogs, email messages, online reports, and YouTube clips in an effort to influence public perceptions and political action. The internet facilitates collective action and makes it easier to disseminate efforts to define and redefine UNRWA in particular ways. It also gives activists potential direct access to officials and policy-makers in a way that can short-circuit the calmer deliberations of bureaucratic process.

A striking example of the role that internet-based projections of the refugee issue can play came in late January 2009, when the new Obama Administration authorized $20.3 million additional assistance to UNRWA and Gaza from the United States Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance Fund and the Population, Refugee, and Migration (PRM) Bureau of the US State Department (White House 2009). Within a day or two, right-wing websites in the US and Israel warned that the funding might be part of an effort to resettle refugees – or perhaps “Hamas terrorists” – in the United States (Spencer 2009).

The “presidential determination” which allows hundreds of thousands of Palestinians with ties to Hamas to resettle in the United States was signed on January 27 and appeared in the Federal Register on February 4. … [T]he order provides a free ticket replete with housing and food allowances to individuals who have displayed their overwhelming support
of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the parliamentary election of January 2006.

(Williams 2009)

Despite the best efforts of the White House, the State Department, and a number of fact-checking organizations to debunk the rumour (FactCheck.org 2009; Hoax-Slayer 2009; Snopes 2009; About.com Urban Legends 2010), it continued to spread both on blog sites and in protest emails. UNRWA was often linked to the supposed pro-Hamas-terrorist-resettlement conspiracy. Concern even reached the US Congress, where Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl (R-AZ) attempted to introduce an amendment to the 2009 Ominibus Appropriations Bill requiring that “None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be available to resettle Palestinians from Gaza into the United States” (Americans for Peace Now 2009). Kyl later withdrew his amendment on 9 March, acknowledging that he had been mislead by inaccurate emails circulating on the issue. The very next day, however, the rumour was repeated by the Republican Majority Leader in the Florida House of Representatives, Adam Hasner, who charged that Obama had allocated “20 million dollars of taxpayer money to resettling Palestinians with ties to Hamas in the United States” (Hasner 2009; see also Fingerhut 2009).

While this particular avatar of UNRWA – as potential co-conspirator in an effort by Barack “Hussein” Obama to bring Hamas refugees to American shores – has faded, it continues to be periodically resurrected on websites, blogs, and online postings. It highlights the extent to which the politics of representation, as much of the politics of reality, will shape the operational context for the Agency in
the coming years. What then can we say about the dominant representations, and their implications? The rest of this chapter will examine four of the most important such images: UNRWA as the avatar of *international responsibility*, UNRWA as the avatar of *muddling through*, UNRWA as the avatar of *perpetuating conflict*, and UNRWA as the avatar of *refugee advocacy*. In each case, it will examine the roots and content of the role projected on the Agency. It will also attempt to highlight the effects of this for the refugees, UNRWA, and the peace process.

**UNRWA as the Avatar of “International Responsibility”**

For Palestinian refugees UNRWAs importance lies not only in the education, health and other services that it has provided for more than six decades, but also as a tangible manifestation of international responsibility for the Palestinian refugee issue. It was, after all, the League of Nations that endorsed the Balfour Declaration and the United Nations that approved the 1947 Partition Plan for Palestine. Subsequently, UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) (1948) called for the return of refugees to their homes:

*Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;*

*Instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social*
rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations.

Given this, it remains the responsibility of the international community to resolve the refugee issue appropriately, and to care for the refugees in the meantime. Much as the avatars of Hindu mythology represented the here-and-now manifestation of a far more powerful idea, so too the presence of UNRWA on the ground is a tangible connection to something bigger, broader, and more powerful. The deep involvement of UNRWA in the daily lives of refugees, and especially in those of camp communities, strengthens this sense of connection. However much refugees may complain about UNRWA – and complain they do – the Agency has achieved a remarkable degree of public confidence in its areas of operations. In a survey conducted in March 2009 by the Norwegian research institute Fafo, for example, 76 per cent of refugees in the West Bank and Gaza expressed “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in UNRWA, compared with 65 per cent confidence in al-Jazeera television, 46 per cent confidence in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), 37 per cent confidence in international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 36 per cent confidence in Hamas, 36 per cent confidence in Palestinian NGOs, 35 per cent confidence in the security forces, 35 per cent for local community leaders, 31 per cent for the Fayyad government/Palestinian Authority (PA), 23 per cent for Palestinian political parties, and only 11 per cent for the United States (US)–European Union (EU)–Russian–United Nations (UN)
diplomatic quartet (Fafo 2009). The 2010 Fafo survey found confidence in UNRWA health and education services more highly rated than those offered by the PA, and much more highly rated than those offered by Islamist charities (Fafo 2010).

Because of the importance of its services, but also because of what it has come to represent, potential cuts in UNRWA services are often seen by as a harbinger of something bigger. On Fateh’s official website, the late Sakher Habash (2007) emphasized that “continuation of UNRWA which was formed by an international resolution is important, for its disappearance nullifies [UN General Assembly] Resolution 194” and stressed “the necessity that UNRWA play its role as a token of the international community’s responsibility for the Palestinian people’s crises until a just and constant peace which warrants their conclusive national rights is established”. In April 2010 Hamas PLC member Shaykh Fathi al-Qar’awi charged that the Agency was playing a suspicious role in kowtowing to the proposals calling for the liquidation of the refugee issue, exploiting the difficult economic conditions of the Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, and reducing the services offered to the refugees by claiming that there is a deficit in the UNRWA budget. (Filastin 2010)

Host countries typically share the view of UNRWA-as-avatar-of-international-responsibility. They do so in part because they share the Palestinian narrative regarding international responsibility for what happened in 1948, and also believe that the international community is obligated to contribute to immediate refugee needs as well as helping to find a permanent resolution of the refugee issue. Of
course, the avatar is a convenient one too, since it implicitly relieves host countries of responsibilities that they might otherwise have to bear. Certainly, they would much rather have the international community absorb some or much of the cost of refugee services than pay for it themselves – even, it must be said, when they collect tax revenues from those very same refugees. In Lebanon resonance of “international responsibility” is further amplified due to widespread Lebanese opposition to tawteen (permanent Palestinian naturalization in the country). During the debates in July 2010 over expanding Palestinian economic rights in Lebanon, for example, opponents of reform frequently stressed that the refugees ought to be UNRWA’s responsibility.

UNRWA as the avatar of “muddling through”

Paradoxically, much of the international community – whose responsibility for the refugees UNRWA is seen to embody – does not see it that way at all. Donor countries do not provide funding for the Agency because of their collective role in the creation or continuation of the refugee problem. While most would accept that the international community played a role in the creation of the refugee problem, most would also regard that as old history. Few (if any) of UNRWA’s major Western donors would regard the refugees as having any unambiguous “right of return” after three generations, and very few (if any) would regard UNGAR 194 as establishing such a right. More to the point, these are simply not issues that the Agency’s major donors spend any at all time considering.

Instead, Western donors fund the Agency for more utilitarian reasons. UNRWA is seen as a useful way of delivering services to refugees, as part of their broader relations with
host countries, as a way of dealing with the particular complexities caused by Hamas control of Gaza and the Israeli–Egyptian embargo, and as means of reducing the challenge of “radicalism” and “extremism” among refugees and within refugee camps. As with the Peace Implementation Projects of the past (and possibly in the future too, should diplomatic progress ever be made) UNRWA is seen as a way of channelling money into the peace process. Finally, donors also fund UNRWA because they have always funded UNRWA. As anyone who has worked in government will know, past bureaucratic habit is a powerful force in shaping current donor decisions.

In this sense, therefore, the donor avatar of UNRWA is one of “muddling through”. Unlike the avatar of “international responsibility” it is not a particularly glorious idea around which to mobilize. This is perhaps why donors also frequently cloak their avatar in ideas borrowed from their broader aid priorities – child welfare, gender equity, education, food security, humanitarian assistance, and so forth. It is sometimes an awkward fit, for most of the time UNRWA is providing state-like social services (something donors do not usually fund) for a refugee population that, in many UNRWA areas of operation, is not especially needy when viewed in global perspective. This is not to argue that UNRWA, or Palestinian refugees, should not receive assistance. However, it is important to recognize the extent to which UNRWA funding can appear rather anomalous in the context of aid agency budgets. This is especially true when the Agency is funded out of a humanitarian assistance envelope (where it competes against organizations such as UNHCR and ICRC, and their often much needier clients) rather than out of a Middle East regional envelope.
While few donors recognize the paradox, the very need for UNRWA to muddle through, or deal with periodic crisis, is itself a function of the failure of the international community to press more energetically for a resolution of the refugee issue and for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. This contradiction has been particularly evident in Western policy towards Gaza. Most Western donors have promoted or acquiesced in the political and economic isolation of the Gaza Strip since Hamas assumed control there, while simultaneously providing financial support for UNRWA so that it can attempt to deal with the inevitable social consequences of such a policy.

UNRWA as the avatar of “perpetuating conflict”

The third avatar of UNRWA includes some elements of the first, but with a very different twist: it sees UNRWA as an entity which, by its very existence, keeps alive a refugee issue that would otherwise have faded over time. There are several common themes to this projection on the Agency:

- Palestinian refugees should have been absorbed by Arab host countries, the way that Jewish refugees from Arab countries were. Post-World War II Europe and refugees displaced by the partition of India/Pakistan in 1947 are also sometimes cited as examples of non-returning refugees.
- The failure of the Palestinian refugee issue to fade away is a function of UNRWA’s refugee definition, as well as deliberate efforts by Arab states to use the issue as a weapon against Israel.

•
UNRWA’s status as a refugee agency unique to Palestinians is also part of the problem. Those projecting this image claim that only UNRWA recognizes multi-generational refugees, and thus were Palestinian refugees to fall under UNHCR they would all be resettled instead.

UNRWA, again in conjunction with host countries, keeps refugees impoverished, dependent, and confined to refugee camps.

UNRWA’s programmes and educational curriculum artificially keeps refugee identity and ideas of return alive.

In the words of former Moledet MK (and founder of the “Israel Initiative”) Benny Elon, UNRWA is:

An agency that has yet to rehabilitate a single refugee, and will never do so. … UNRWA was not created to serve the Palestinian population, but rather, to serve the Palestinian national narrative. As such, it perpetuates the conflict and offers the refugees conflict and blood instead of wellbeing and life.

(Arutz Sheva 2009)

Rubin et al. (2008) of the Global Research in International Affairs Center at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya have charged that UNRWA is the “refuge of rejectionism”:

On the surface, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) seems a humanitarian group helping Palestinian refugees. In reality, it actually helps destroy the chance of Arab–Israeli peace, promotes terrorism, and holds Palestinians back from rebuilding their lives.

Unique in history, UNRWA’s job is to keep Palestinian refugees in suspended animation – and at low living
standards – until they achieve the goal set for them by the PLO and Hamas: Israel’s extinction. In the meantime, their suffering and anger is maintained as a weapon to encourage them towards violence and intransigence.

A formal report on “UNRWA, Terror and the Refugee Conundrum: Perpetuating the Misery” prepared by the World Jewish Congress goes still further, blaming the Agency not only for perpetuating the refugee issue but even for distorting the policies of the Palestinian leadership (who, presumably, would have been otherwise pleased to forgo refugee claims and resolve the issue through integration): “The UNRWA system is deeply flawed and largely responsible for corrupting the Palestinian Arab leadership who have never faced the real concerns of the refugees but only tried to exploit them for their own political-financial interest” (Beker 2003).

The most nuanced and sophisticated critique presented of the Agency and its effects of the refugee issue is that written by James G. Lindsay, a Visiting Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and himself a former legal advisor at UNRWA. In a detailed and wide-ranging critique of UNRWA’s mandate and services, he concluded:

UNRWA has gradually adopted a distinctive political viewpoint that favours the Palestinian and Arab narrative of events in the Middle East. In particular, it seems to favor the strain of Palestinian political thought espoused by those who are intent on a “return” to the land that is now Israel. UNRWA’s adoption of any political viewpoint is undesirable, but the one it has chosen to emphasize is especially regrettable. In addition to clashing with the objectives of the United States, this view has detracted from UNRWA’s humanitarian assistance, encouraged Palestinians who favor
refighting long-lost wars, discouraged those who favor moving toward peace, and contributed to the scourge of conflicts that have been visited upon Palestinian refugees for decades.

(Lindsay 2009: 65)

As noted earlier, the internet has given these themes a much greater ability to manifest themselves in recent years, with various commentators, blogs, and others feeding of each other. One example of this can be seen in a recent piece by Sol Stern on “The Nakba Obsession” that appeared in the summer of 2010 in City Journal. In a piece that generally decried recognition of the Nakba (“the Palestinian national narrative is the biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East”) and the artificiality of the refugee issue, Stern (2010) charged:

For half a century, the United Nations has administered Balata as a quasi-apartheid welfare ghetto. The Palestinian Authority does not consider the residents of Balata citizens of Palestine; they do not vote on municipal issues, and they receive no PA funding for roads or sanitation. The refugee children – though after 60 years, calling young children “refugees” is absurd – go to separate schools run by UNRWA, the UN’s refugee-relief agency. The “refugees” are crammed into an area of approximately one square kilometer, and municipal officials prohibit them from building outside the camp’s official boundaries, making living conditions ever more cramped as the camp’s population grows. In a building called the Jaffa Cultural Center – financed by the UN, which means our tax dollars – Balata’s young people are undoubtedly nurtured on the myth that someday soon they will return in triumph to their ancestors’ homes by the Mediterranean Sea.
Those themes, and others in his piece, were echoed within days in various other publications and blogs. Robert Fulford (2010), writing in the *National Post* (one of Canada’s two main “national” newspapers) on 7 August, highlighted Stern’s analysis. He also commented that:

The Palestinians are the only people who have their own private section of the UN, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). It defines “refugee” as someone who lived in Palestine between June, 1946, and May, 1948, and “lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab–Israeli conflict”. The definition includes all their descendants. Entirely credible numbers don’t exist, but UNRWA believes there were 711,000 such refugees in 1948, and now more than 4.7 million.

The Arab countries love the Palestinians, praise them and pray for them. They just don’t want them moving permanently into their neighbourhoods. The Arab League advises Arab states to deny citizenship to Palestinians, “to avoid dissolution of their identity and protect their right to return to their homeland”. They pretend it’s a favour. It also means Arabs can hire Palestinian workers when they need them and send them home when the economy sags.

The treatment of the Palestinians has become a major crime of omission committed by the rich Arabs against the poor in collusion with the UN. It has created a permanent underclass, living on meagre public assistance, growing more numerous every day but never put in a position where they can create a healthy, productive community. They are permanent grudge-bearers, who teach their children to yearn for a lost paradise.
This theme was developed still further in an article posted on the Canada–Israel Committee website a few days later, which approvingly quoted from Fulford’s piece and accused UNRWA of perpetuating a “historic con game”:

All other people who were or have become refugees are handled by another agency of the UN – the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which is mandated to resolve their plight. The solution is generally permanent resettlement in a host country. By contrast, UNWRA, mandated only to provide “relief and works programs,” in effect perpetuates the status of Palestinian refugees as refugees.

(Michaels 2010)

The article went on to suggest, “in the case of the Palestinians, the UN has no practical interest in resolving their refugee status. Above all, the insistence of the ‘right of return’ (even in principle) of millions of Palestinians to present-day Israel is a prescription for on-going conflict with the Jewish state, if not its destruction.”

This is but one of many possible examples of how the avatar of UNRWA as perpetuator of an artificial refugee issue is generated and regenerated. Another recent example could be found in the documentary For the Sake of Nakba, produced by right-wing journalist (and vociferous UNRWA critic) David Bedein and broadcast on Israeli Channel 1 in August 2010. The film – condemned by UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness as a “stack of lies” – repeated all of the usual accusations against the Agency. It tried especially hard to identify UNRWA as a fundamental driver of the refugees’
It is a 60-year-old narrative of a people encouraged by UNRWA and the Palestinian leadership to remain as refugees, so that their steadfast goal of the “right of return” might be fulfilled, which would create a Palestinian state that would essentially replace the state of Israel.

(Bedein 2010)

The video was quickly released onto YouTube, via Facebook, and disseminated globally. Within three weeks, references to the video could be found on at least 92 different websites, and thousands of individual webpages.8

Ironically, the position of the government of Israel on these issues is often rather less clear than that of the pro-Israeli advocates who attack UNRWA. Undoubtedly Israel has tended to share the view of the Agency as embodying the Palestinian refugee issue, and in past negotiations has tended to look forward to its rapid dissolution in the aftermath of any negotiated peace agreement (Peters and Gal 2010). Individual Israeli officials have certainly criticized the Agency for artificially keeping the refugees’ dreams of return alive. In the run-up to permanent status negotiations and in the context of arguing for greater attention to the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries, then Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon (2010) questioned UNRWA’s record:

There are numerous major international organizations devoted to the Palestinian refugees. There is an annual conference held at the United Nations and a refugee agency was created just for the Palestinian
refugees. While all the world’s refugees have one agency, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Palestinians fall under the auspices of another agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA’s budget for 2010 is almost half of UNHCR’s budget.

Equally impressive is the fact that UNHCR prides itself on having found “durable solutions” for “tens of millions” of refugees since 1951, the year of its establishment. However, UNRWA does not even claim to have found “durable solutions” for anyone.

If that is not distorted enough, let’s look at the definitions and how they are applied: normally the definition of a refugee only applies to the person that fled and sought refuge, while a Palestinian refugee is the person that fled and all of their descendants for all time. So, according to the UNRWA definition of conferring refugee status on descendants, I would be a refugee.

(Ayalon 2010)

In December 2011, Ayalon released a similar video that, in part, unfavourably compared UNRWA with UNHCR, accusing the former of perpetuating Palestinians’ refugee status (Ayalon 2011).

However, in general most Israeli governments have refrained from directly attacking the Agency on these grounds – in part, perhaps, because they also partially share the donor view of UNRWA as an avatar of “muddling through”. UNRWA provides a mechanism whereby the donor community is able to limit the humanitarian effects of the Israeli–Egyptian embargo of Gaza, for example – assuring that while the local
population feels the pain of the restrictions, the international press has no swollen bellies and dying children to report. Similarly, in the West Bank and further afield UNRWA services are likely seen by Israel as potentially reducing potential radicalism in the camps, compared with a situation where those services do not exist, or are provided by other actors. Indeed, despite sometimes criticizing the Agency, Israel has also sometimes pressed donors to contribute more.

The avatar of UNRWA as a “perpetuating conflict” does rest on a few factual foundations. The situation of Palestinian refugees is indeed anomalous in some respects. However, ultimately this avatar says far more about those who perceive the Agency in this way than it does about the Agency itself. This group of critics, rather than addressing Israel’s historical role in the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948, would rather see refugee claims as somehow emanating from the nefarious machinations of the Palestinian leadership, host countries, and the UN. While seeing the six decades of refugee yearning as artificial, they accept without question that the Zionist movement could be legitimately established on the basis of a Jewish yearning for national homeland after more than two millennia of displacement and diaspora. Moreover, they fail to make the obvious connection between the two: that a population that was displaced on the basis of such an ancient claim would itself be particularly loath to give up its own historical attachments. Moreover, if UNRWA had artificially inculcated a sense of refugee identity and claim as the critics suggest, one would expect to find demands for refugee rights correspondingly weaker among non-camp refugees, refugees who do not use UNRWA services, and non-refugees. In fact, public opinion surveys show few political differences.
between camp and non-camp refugees, or between refugees and non-refugees, including attitudes towards the refugee issue. Indeed, even Palestinian citizens of Israel, who have attended Israeli schools for three generations, strongly support the right of return.¹⁰

This unwillingness to recognize refugee grievances as legitimate and deeply rooted in Palestinian national identity – and instead to attribute them to UNRWA or other manipulations – could prove a major stumbling block in the search for peace. It amounts to a self-deception that risks distracting Israel and its supporters from the political need to find a mutually acceptable resolution of the issue. Yet, without such a resolution, it remains unlikely that any peace agreement would win broad Palestinian popular support, let alone endure.

**UNRWA as the avatar of “refugee advocate”**

Avatars are supposed to be, whether in Hindu mythology, internet chatrooms, or in recent film, projections of an original source. Where the analogy breaks down, of course, is that all of the avatars described above are largely images that others – refugees, host countries, donors, and UNRWA critics – have projected onto the Agency.

By contrast, the avatar of UNRWA not only as service provider but also as refugee advocate is the image that the Agency itself would often like to project. In its public relations materials it constantly reminds the international community of the plight of the refugees, and of the contextual conditions (war, failures of the peace process, restrictions, the Gaza embargo, lack of resources) that account for this. Moreover, Agency spokespersons often articulate the pressing
need for regional and international actors to take the refugees’ interests into greater consideration. In the words of UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi (2010):

And so what do we, as the international community, do with this population? Do we ignore them? Do we neglect their needs? Do we pass on an opportunity to help them develop? Do we – as the international community – live up to our obligations and our opportunity to impact the future? Or do we leave them to despair; to powerlessness; to others?

I believe it is in everyone’s interests to seek to enfranchise the refugee constituency and include the refugee voice in the search for an end to this conflict, and to their plight. No peace process can be implemented; no peace will be stable and lasting without taking into consideration the refugees’ role; their wishes; their needs; their concerns; their aspirations. If we find ways to make refugees partners, if we help them develop, then we harness their potential, we create the conditions they need to succeed and to provide them with choice free from ignorance and intolerance. This development is at the very heart of what UNRWA seeks to achieve. To provide each refugee with the opportunities required to live a dignified life and achieve his or her potential and to contribute to his or her society.

This will make refugees contributors, and not a hindrance, to peace; it will allow them to share the wealth of insights they possess and to shape and underwrite the credibility and sustainability of the peace process and its outcomes.

Palestine refugees – their human rights, their aspirations, and their concerns – are bound to the Israeli–Palestinian
conflict in complex and profound ways that place them in a position to influence the realization of durable solutions. The Palestine refugee presence is a reality whose significance and power genuine peacemaking efforts can no longer afford to ignore. Recognizing and mobilizing the refugee constituency has become a necessity that is consistent with principle, and which will certainly pay handsome dividends in terms of the credibility and success of the search for peace.

(Grandi 2010)

Just as with internet avatars, however, there is a significant gap between the self-image UNRWA would like to project, and how this is received by others. It is unlikely that the PA, the PLO, or Jordan regard refugee interests as inadequately represented within current negotiating frameworks – if they did, nothing stops them from seeking changes. Some of the international community has certainly believed that refugees could be incorporated more effectively into the negotiating process, but this is rather a minority view, and it does not seem to be particularly prevalent in Washington. Instead, the received wisdom is that it is up to the PA/PLO to deal with its various constituencies (refugees included) in whatever way it feels is most politically efficacious. Because UNRWA is forced to speak in the vaguest of terms about inclusion and “informed choice”, its periodic pronouncements on the topic have little effect on the policy-makers it would presumably like to influence, although they do likely further annoy the Agency’s more implacable critics.  

When serious Israeli–Palestinian negotiations on the refugee issue begin, UNRWA will certainly be excluded from the closed rooms of negotiations, as it always has been in the past. If there ever is to be an agreed comprehensive Israeli–Palestinian peace
agreement UNRWA will likely find out about the refugee details the same way almost everyone else will – when the parties hold the inevitable after-the-fact press conference to announce the deal.

Ironically, it is at this point – when many of the major contours of a refugee agreement have been agreed and are effectively cast in stone – that the Agency might enjoy its greatest influence on behalf of refugees (Palestinian Refugee Research Net 2000; Hilal 2010 Brynen and el-Rifai 2013). This is because the refugee section of peace agreement would likely leave many of the practical modalities of return repatriation, resettlement, compensation, and development still to be worked out (Chatham House 2008). Although Israel might seek the rapid termination of the Agency for political reasons, donors have come to recognize that the Agency enjoys considerable technical ability and unparalleled credibility with the refugees themselves. If the Agency is assigned such an implementation role, it certainly will be within certain constraints. It seems likely that the UN Security Council would direct all UN agencies to support implementation of a future peace deal, however imperfect and even if those agencies had doubts about the contents of such an agreement. Equally, the General Assembly might well modify UNRWA’s mandate in a similar fashion. Still, the Agency’s knowledge of the refugee issue would give it considerable influence in shaping implementation of the agreement on the ground.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is not to suggest some sort of post-modern reading of UNRWA, whereby the Agency’s
operations and effects are wholly in the eye of the beholder. At the same time, however, the Agency does unavoidably project a number of different, and at times incommensurate, images. These several avatars of UNRWA have important implications for refugees, host countries, the Agency, and the peace process alike.

For refugees and host countries, it is important to recognize that their projections of UNRWA as the *avatar of international responsibility* are not at all shared by the international community, nor does the international community particularly feel any such responsibility in any case. What connects the international community to the refugee issue is the broad recognition that the refugee issue is not likely to vanish, that UNRWA serves many useful roles, and that any peace agreement that is to endure will necessarily have to address refugee grievances. UNRWA, for the most part, recognizes that donor assistance is motivated by far more pragmatic considerations. However the Agency’s own self-projection as the *avatar of refugee advocate* – however useful that might be – is itself rather limited in its impact. UNRWA certainly can be effective when it highlights the immediate humanitarian needs of refugees, as it has done so in Gaza in response to embargo and war. However, its broader advocacy of a larger role for the refugees in the peace process has little traction, nor is it likely to gain much in the future. General statements by the Agency about refugee interests and inclusion have little effect when confronted with the broader realpolitik that shapes the diplomatic engagement.

Representations of UNRWA as the *avatar of perpetuating conflict* are especially problematic, in several respects. First, they sap the energies of the Agency at a time of increase resource scarcity, and in some cases may even
imperil its continued funding. A case in point has been Canada’s decision to end contributions to UNRWA’s General Fund (although not to all UNRWA projects). Officially, the decision was taken to align Canadian assistance more closely with the Canadian International Development Agency’s strategic priorities in Palestine and more broadly. While this may have played a role in the decision, it also seems likely that more ideological considerations were at work too, driven in part by misrepresentation of the Agency as an agent of conflict. Certainly Canadian media coverage highlighted this aspect of the decision, which seems to have taken place over the objections of CIDA’s own professional staff. Further confirmation seemed to be provided by the very public support given to the decision by the Canada–Israel Committee, which had previously argued that “the plight of the Arab refugees under the responsibility and care of UNRWA is truly devastating”, and that UNRWA funding served to “perpetuate the refugee status of the longest standing group of unsettled refugees in the world today”. According to one former Canadian official, “There has always been a strong feeling among the more ardent supporters of Israel that you can blame the whole Palestinian refugee problem on UNRWA”.

As noted earlier, misrepresentations of UNRWA as somehow perpetuating the refugee issue potentially delude decision-makers into believing that if the Agency were to disappear, so too would the issue. In doing so, they potentially underestimate the importance of the issue, and its key importance in any success future peace agreement. Confusing this particular avatar for reality could therefore prove especially dysfunctional.
What can UNRWA do to control its various avatars? Relatively little, it seems. More often than not they are rooted not so much in what the Agency does or does not do, but in the hopes and fears of those around it.¹⁴ It certainly does not have the resources to chase down every inaccuracy that reverberates in the virtual echo-chambers of the blogosphere. What it can do, however, is push back at the level of key decision-makers, systematically anticipating and refuting the sorts of accusations that they are likely to hear. It can also equip more junior professional staff at embassies and aid agencies with the sort of information resources they need to respond to queries from senior management about such issues.

What no one can afford to do, however, is to dismiss the avatars of UNRWA as mere illusions that have little practical effect. Many of them may well be illusory in many respects. However, their impact upon the politics of UNRWA operations and funding – indeed, upon the very future of the Agency – is far from insubstantial.

Notes

Several past formal and informal negotiating processes have adopted UNRWA refugee registration as an indicator of eligibility for return, repatriation, resettlement, compensation and property restitution (Brynen 2008). Israel’s draft Framework Agreement on Permanent Status (2000–2001) proposed “UNRWA records shall be the main basis for the implementation of this Article” (Article 6.91). The PLO position on refugees put forward in the Taba negotiations in January 2001 stated, “Without limiting the generality of the term ‘refugee’, all registered persons with UNRWA shall be
considered refugees in accordance with this Article” (Article 5.c). Subsequently, the joint Israeli–Palestinian refugee mechanism paper developed by the two sides at Taba noted, “UNRWA registration shall be considered as prima facie proof of refugee status.” (Article 20) – a formulation that was later echoed in of the unofficial 2003 Geneva Accord (Article 7.11.d.iv).

In those cases where readers had an opportunity to comment on the fact-checking, however, some simply refused to believe the denials – and the rumour lived on.

For example, Frank Salvato (2009), which discusses both the Presidential Determination and UNRWA’s alleged long litany of terrorist connections.

In the post-9/11 world, the ability to market UNRWA as an element of counterterrorism strategy has undoubtedly grown in the West, especially given Western opposition to Hamas (and periodic signs of Hamas–UNRWA tensions, for example over the annual UNRWA summer games). Events at Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in 2007 also lend themselves to such a representation of the Agency. While some host countries have made this argument (notably Lebanon), and while references to UNRWA’s role in this regard are sometimes noted within donor agencies, the image has yet to become a full-blown avatar. Part of the reason for this is that the Agency itself is loath to see itself in this role. Such an image would undoubtedly complicate the Agency’s local relations with refugees and political groups. Moreover, Agency staff does not view the world through a counter-terrorism lens. Even the donor agencies that fund UNRWA tend to be more comfortable framing support for the agency in more general
developmental and humanitarian terms, consistent with their mandates.

One donor official, who would have preferred to shift humanitarian funding from UNRWA to agencies dealing with more desperate populations, described the opportunity cost of maintaining the Agency’s funding as “more dead children in the Congo” (quoted in Brynen 2000: 81).

UNRWA is also accused of several other things, including providing assistance to radical groups through its employment and aid practices, or of allowing its facilities to be misused by such groups. These, however, are not necessarily a logical part of the “perpetuating conflict” avatar, and so I have not addressed them herein. For an overview of these sorts of complaints see Nachmias (2009) and CAMERA (2009). As of 31 March 2013, a Google search found some 696,000 web pages linking the terms “UNRWA” and “terrorism” (although not all necessary suggested the former contributed to the latter).

As UNRWA noted, the “documentary” was full of mistakes, such as identifying non-UNRWA facilities as belonging to the Agency, and highlighting alleged anti-Israeli content in UNRWA Grade 12 textbooks (when UNRWA doesn’t teach beyond Grade 9). For UNRWA’s official response, see UNRWA (2010); see also Izikovich (2010).

Google search, 4 September 2010.

For a critique of this representation of UNRWA, see the “Factcheck” section of the Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet blog at http://prrnblog.wordpress.com.

According to an August 2003 survey of Israelis, 80 per cent of all Arab citizens of Israel “every refugee who wants to
should be enabled to return” (Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research 2003).

UNRWA’s emphasis on the informed choice of refugees also skirts a troublesome issue: while any future agreement might well give refugees a number of possible options regarding (say) residency, it is also likely to be a highly constrained choice. It is difficult to imagine any possible peace agreement, for example, that gives more than a few per cent of UNRWA-registered refugees the ability to return to 1948 areas. Understandably, UNRWA tends to embed its view of refugee rights in the context of its own mandate and of general international preference for durable solutions that allow refugees to return home. At what point, however, does this become a process of misleading refugees about what their realistic options are likely to be? Moreover, how will the Agency respond if, in the wake of an agreement, it is asked by the United Nations to shift gears and implement an agreement that contains very little of the “right of return”?

According to an investigation by Embassy magazine,

What has become clear, however, is that despite allegations made by pro-Israel groups – and alluded to by some Cabinet ministers – CIDA staff were extremely confident that there was “minimal” risk of Canadian funding to UNRWA being directed to terrorist groups. Rather, internal CIDA documents say the agency was “quite strong in its relevance to Canadian priorities” and financial management.

(Berthiaume 2010b)

CIC board member Michael Diamond, letter to the editor of the National Post, 14 April 2009, featured on the Canada–Israel Committee website (Diamond 2009). The then
CIC website also hosted articles arguing that UNRWA aids and abets Hamas terrorism. B’nai Brith Canada released a press statement applauding the funding cuts.

Paradoxically, this means that the Agency sometimes gets credit for improvement not because it has done anything particularly different, but because others have had their previous perceptions corrected by more accurate information (Brynen 2010).

Bibliography


Filastin (2010) “MP Al-Qar’awi Says: Fayyad’s Statements on Refugees are the Lifeline that the Israelis Have Been Long Waiting for”, Filastin, 13 April, p. 13 [in Arabic].


Business as usual? The role of UNRWA in resolving the Palestinian refugee issue

Leila Hilal

Introduction

For 64 years the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has existed on paper as a temporary agency. Established to provide emergency humanitarian relief to Palestinians displaced in the late 1940s, UNRWA’s role has evolved over time to cover a broad range of developmental and protection needs of the refugees. Despite the expansion of Agency activities and programmes, the evolution of its mandate has stopped short of the search for durable solutions.

Since their displacement, the question of durable solutions for Palestinian refugees has been reserved nearly exclusively for the diplomatic track. Initially, this track was under the auspices of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP). From 1949–51, the UNCCP attempted to mediate a settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict with party representatives. Decades later, still unresolved, the issue was designated a “permanent status” agenda item in the Oslo peace accords, to be negotiated bilaterally between Palestinians and Israelis.¹ The right of return continues to be
framed as a “political” issue, separate from the humanitarian and development aspects of the refugee question.

The separation of the so-called political from humanitarian issues may have made sense in the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis six decades ago. Today it is increasingly challenged. This challenge rests on two primary realities: 1) there is no sustainable diplomatic process addressing durable solutions; and 2) the growing fragility of both UNRWA and the situation of the refugees. The stalemate has resulted in growing pressure on UNRWA to engage on the political front.

As Mark Brailsford writes in this volume, these pressures have been compounded by expectations generated by UNRWA’s recently claimed protection role, and the fact that it is the singular international agency addressing the Palestinian refugees. As demonstrated by the fall-out from the Arab Awakening, Palestinian refugees are a particularly vulnerable group facing growing uncertainty, legal discrimination, and increasingly dire circumstances in all areas in the region where they reside. Since UNRWA is the only entity or representative leadership claiming responsibility for the refugees’ plight, it is naturally viewed as the entity that should do more to end the refugees’ protracted displacement.

But pushing UNRWA into the political arena is not a viable option at this juncture. The Agency faces formal impediments to expanding beyond its more traditional humanitarian and developmental work based on its UN mandate. Although UNRWAs commissioner generals of the past decade have conducted significant advocacy for other international actors to search for durable solutions, the Agency faces layered
practical constraints that further preclude it from addressing solutions. This chapter elaborates the impediments and constraints on UNRWA playing a meaningful role in resolving the Palestinian refugee issue through durable solutions in the medium term.

A distinction should be made, however, from UNRWA’s potential longer-term peace-building role. Should a political settlement be reached on Palestinian refugee rights, UNRWA would be poised to contribute significantly in shoring up an agreement, albeit not without growing pains. Oslo-era peace parameters proposed a hand-over of UNRWA’s functions within five years of signing a permanent status agreement (Institute for Palestine Studies 2002: 87), but the Agency’s unique history of involvement with the refugees means that it should play a key role in supporting the implementation of durable solutions, if not a participatory role in negotiating the modalities of agreed framework principles at the bilateral level. As this chapter will discuss, a premature closing of the Agency or sidelining of it during a peace implementation process (or otherwise in advance of a settlement) would risk inefficiencies and undermine refuge protection in the longer term.

**Medium term**

Before a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict or agreement on durable solutions is reached, UNRWA’s formal mandate precludes it from wading too far into durable solution territory. As authorized by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), UNRWA was established in 1949 to “carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes” for Palestinian refugees, until “the time
when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available” (UNGA 1949).

The globally-mandated United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is charged with the responsibility of facilitating “the voluntary repatriation of … refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities” (UNGA 1950). Exercising its mandate, UNHCR regularly negotiates with states to secure the safe repatriation or resettlement of displaced persons. Under the “exclusion clause” of the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR’s constituent document, most Palestinian refugees are considered to be outside the global refugee agency’s jurisdiction; thus UNHCR has never considered itself responsible for assisting the repatriation of Palestinians or their protection in exile (UNGA 1950, 1951).

Rather, the task of securing durable solutions for Palestinian refugees was originally handed to the UNCCP as part of its broader conflict mediation between the nascent state of Israel, Palestinian representatives, and Arab governments. ⁵ In UNGA Resolution 194, the UNCCP was requested to: “facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees”, all of whom should be permitted to return to their homes “at the earliest practicable date” (UNGA 1948).

The UNCCP failed to mediate an agreement early in the conflict, thereby frustrating international political efforts. While still active on paper, reporting annually to the General Assembly on its progress in fulfilling its mandate, the UNCCP is practically defunct. With durable solutions left to a non-functional institution and non-existent or unproductive
political process, a “protection gap” exists for Palestinian refugees (Akram and Rempel 2004: 53–56).

As a formally temporary agency heading into its 65th year underfunded and overstretched, UNRWA staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestinian refugees themselves, are painfully aware of the protection gap. The Agency has borne witness to the ongoing consequences of the unresolved refugee issue. Facing secondary displacements from regional conflicts and ongoing human rights exclusions from host states, as well as a burgeoning youth population facing chronic unemployment, the Palestinian refugee condition is worsening. In this context, UNRWA has been forced to cope with expanding and stalemated crises with fewer resources.

UNRWA’s Executive Office has also been populated with ex-UNHCR officials fully knowledgeable of how to conduct repatriation and resettlement operations. The recent Commissioner Generals ran major country operations for UNHCR in other parts of the globe. Other executive supporting staff and several field directors have similarly hailed from UNHCR and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have conducted repatriation and resettlement missions. Despite the protracted nature of the refugee situation, expanding crisis, and in-house expertise, without a formal mandate to reach into the “political” space, UNRWA remains bounded from entering that terrain.

There is a counter-argument: over the course of its multiple decades of work, UNRWA has expanded its mandate through de facto means subsequently affirmed by the General Assembly. A primary example is UNRWA’s interpretation of its mandate as including protection obligations – a duty not explicitly prescribed by UNGA resolutions or statutes.
Following internal comparative expert research and consultation, UNRWA concluded that its protection duties stem from its humanitarian and developmental role, meaning that it derives its protection functions from its existing mandate excluding protection functions associated with durable solutions. UNRWA advocacy has instead called for other actors to fulfil these duties by addressing refugee issues in the peace process.\(^7\)

In theory, UNRWA could step up its engagement on these matters beyond veiled statements reminding of the need for a permanent solution that respects refugee rights.\(^8\) Certainly the protection gap would justify more assertive action on the part of UNRWA. External pressures and “self-censorship”, however, act to keep UNRWA within its limited boundaries.

Due to its representation of Palestinian refugees, UNRWA is subjected to extensive scrutiny by a number of high-powered state actors. Officials and persons of influence within Israel, the host states of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, and Western donor countries, particularly the United States, regularly intervene when the Agency is perceived to be stepping into political ground that contravenes conventional interests of the state concerned. In this context UNRWA executive staff must weigh the competing goals of providing for refugee basic needs – the essence of its mandate – and promoting durable solutions that guarantee the full scope of international refugee rights. In its calculation, UNRWA must meet its duty of fulfilling its explicit humanitarian mandate first. Given the political pressure under which UNRWA operates and its limited resources, pushing beyond current explicitly
mandated parameters could undermine the Agency’s ability to meet basic needs.

A change in mandate by the General Assembly could alter the Agency’s calculations in this regard, but amending UNRWA’s role to include the search for durable solutions has not been a stakeholder priority. Rather most Palestinian refugees have sought to keep UNRWA focused on service delivery. The majority of refugee complaints about UNRWA’s activities have concerned assistance levels. As highlighted elsewhere in this volume, another regularly articulated refugee concern relates to participatory decision-making and transparency within UNRWA.

Some politically active refugees, especially those well-versed in their international human rights and the protection gap that contributes to their protracted displacement, have mounted calls for UNRWA to engage more politically in their cause at both the international and national levels. These movements, while representing the refugee intelligentsia, are still somewhat marginal. Without either regional host countries or the General Assembly having raised the notion of expanding UNRWA’s role, their calls have not gained traction.

UNRWA’s 30,000 staff are similarly focused on service delivery, conceptualizing their work as removed from politics. The refugees themselves understand the bleak outlook for a fair political horizon at this time. As a whole there has been an internationalization of a bureaucratic identity for the Agency on the part of staff and refugee beneficiaries. Therefore, UNRWA is unable to exert much leverage in extending its mandate to cover durable solutions without an explicit international directive. Such a directive is not likely to be forthcoming in the medium term.
But the impact of UNRWA’s limited advocacy space for durable solutions should not be overstated. UNRWA’s primary activities – providing education, health care, and relief services – in theory constitute the foundations of a lasting durable solution. UNRWA’s developmental role has gone a long way in building Palestinian human resources and infrastructure and preparing the refugees for a repatriation process.

UNRWA’s work in the West Bank, for example, has helped to connect refugee communities to public utilities and infrastructure at higher rates than non-refugee communities. In 2007, 87.5 per cent of refugee households were connected to water and electricity, compared to only 77.3 per cent of non-refugee households (UNRWA 2011b: 23–24). Equally noteworthy, UNRWA’s operations have contributed to drastic increases in education levels among West Bank-based refugees. From 1997 to 2007, the percentage of West Bank Palestinians obtaining a secondary degree grew by 43 per cent (UNRWA 2011b: 45). The expansion of educational opportunities not only enhanced male work experience, but also provided additional jobs for women (UNRWA 2011b: 45–46). Direct financial support from external actors, including UNRWA, have accounted significantly for recent increases in the socio-economic conditions of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank.

UNRWA’s protection work in promoting Palestinian refugee basic human rights also can help provide the groundwork for just solutions. Current UNRWA advocacy calls for Palestinian refugees to be able to access their lands in the occupied territory, revealing the debilitating effects of internal movement restrictions and the blockade on Gaza, and calling for improved socio-economic rights within the host countries.
if needed, can enable refugees to lead dignified lives and enable their participation in the search for durable solutions and their implementation. Although the impact of UNRWA’s protection advocacy has been stymied by recalcitrant states and more recently by spreading turmoil in the Middle East region, that advocacy should be viewed as critical for achieving refugee justice.

On the other hand, emergency operations and regional crises have drained UNRWA’s capacity as a developmental agency and intensified its budget deficit, projected to rise from $21 million in 2012 to over $65 million in 2013 (UNRWA 2013a). Contending with mounting instability in host countries as a result of the Syria conflict and its spill-over, as well as the ongoing occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, UNRWA has been increasingly forced to prioritize emergency relief at the expense of developmental assistance for the region’s five million Palestinian refugees.

Protracted armed conflict in Syria, in particular, has placed tremendous pressure on the Agency to support the over 250,000 Palestinian refugees displaced by the fighting (UNRWA 2013a). Further straining UNRWA’s operations, over 67,000 of these refugees have fled to neighboring Lebanon and Jordan (UNRWA 2013a). While the Syria conflict has amplified the strife of Palestinian refugees in Syria, circumstances in Lebanon – where over 60,000 have fled since 2011 – continue to restrict the livelihood of Palestinian refugees.

Facing social exclusion and legal barriers to employment, the majority of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon endure dismal socio-economic conditions. These refugees have limited access to public social services, health facilities, and
educational institutions, and UNRWA estimates that 56 per cent of working-age refugees are unemployed (UNRWA 2011a). Although the 2010 Lebanese Parliament approved amendments aimed at increasing Palestinian refugee access to work opportunities, such measures have not been properly implemented. The Lebanese government’s refusal to implement these legal amendments is blocking progress toward refugee self-reliance and further draining Agency resources (UNRWA 2011a).

**Long term role**

In the longer term, if and when durable solutions for the refugees are achieved, UNRWA’s role should evolve to cover the protection of refugees as implementation of those solutions proceeds. This would not necessarily require a significant shift in the Agency’s mandate, but rather an adaptation of its activities to fit a post-conflict, peace-building context.

Resolving the displacement of some five million refugees spread out across the Middle East would be a massive undertaking. Any agreement resolving the conflict and providing sustainable, just, and durable solutions must address the moral, legal, and material aspects of the refugees’ dispossession. This would require solutions that provide displaced persons with adequate national protection and socio-economic rehabilitative measures. Moral dimensions would be served through symbolic measures and reparations. In all cases, substantial third party and international agencies would be needed to support the process.

In the midst of a floundering peace process over the past two decades, donor countries have invested in Track II initiatives
to promote common ground on refugee issues, among other major points of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Several of these initiatives produced relative consensus on the format of implementing a comprehensive settlement on the refugee question (Hilal 2012: 3–4). That consensus foresees the creation of an international mechanism capable of governing and overseeing the implementation process of durable solutions and reparations (Hilal 2012: 9–11). During this process, such a mechanism would likely be governed by a board of various stakeholders. The composition of this governing board is, however, a topic of debate. Some have proposed that UNRWA be represented as well as multilateral institutions like the World Bank, major donor countries supporting the implementation process, the parties, and host countries. Israeli interlocutors have objected to UNRWA’s participation, making this a contentious political issue – but one that should be resolved based on considerations of efficiency and effectiveness, rather than political posturing.

UNRWA would also likely serve as a major – if not the main – implementing partner to the mechanism for purposes of advancing durable solutions. The Agency’s long-standing proximity to the refugees, pre-existing relationships with host countries and Israeli and Palestinian officials, as well as its developmental work, would make it an especially suitable partner for any repatriation, resettlement, and rehabilitation process. Gaps in expertise or capacity within UNRWA staff could be addressed through international secondments from UNHCR and by supplementary partnerships with international or local NGOs.
Conclusion

In sum, while not playing a direct role in the search for durable solutions, UNRWA’s current services and engagement with the refugees are important precursors for a just and practical resolution of the refugee issue. A precipitous decline in UNRWA’s service-delivery activities would jeopardize peace prospects by both undermining the situation of Palestinian refugees further and removing from the scene an essential actor for peace-building, irrespective of what the final settlement looks like.

At the same time, reaching beyond its existing humanitarian and development role into the so-called “political” realm is likely unviable without a change in the Agency’s mandate. While securing that change in mandate – or otherwise putting in place a meaningful negotiation process for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees – may be a worthwhile cause as the refugee situation protracts into its 66th year, the lack of popular movement in this direction means that for the time being UNRWA’s medium-term functions should be preserved within a longer term view.

The reality of UNRWA’s limited but essential role is underscored by the multiple crises facing Palestinian refugees. At the time of submitting this piece, each of the Agency’s five fields of operations – Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip – faces deepening humanitarian crises. A fragmenting Syria and entrenched Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip strain UNRWA’s capacity, but also magnify the importance of its humanitarian operations. The revolutionary processes and political transitions unfolding in the region should not distract from the need to address the right of return
for Palestinian refugees. Indeed, for Palestinians, the most essential conflict resolution factor remains a durable solution to the refugee issue – without which an Arab/Palestinian–Israeli peace agreement cannot succeed. Throughout these processes, UNRWA will remain a vital entity at all stages.

Notes

The Oslo process, as articulated by the 1993 Declaration of Principles (DOP), aimed “to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority … for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338” (Yale Law School 2008). Both the DOP and the 1995 Israeli–Palestinian Interim Agreement deferred settlement of the Palestinian refugee issue until a later date (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013).

At the time of publication, U.S. Secretary Kerry has just launched a new round of direct bilateral permanent status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. These negotiations are reportedly inclusive of refugee issues; however, given the major gaps between the parties on this issue, the Kerry initiative is not likely to produce an agreed settlement on the issue of just solutions for the refugees. As many cite this negotiation initiative as a last chance for the two-state solution, it is likely going to be years if not a decade before a new track with a new model emerges as a possible avenue for reaching an agreed solution on refugees, among other issues (US Department of State 2013).
In addition to diverting international attention away from the Palestinian refugee issue, the region’s uprisings have exacerbated the living conditions of Palestinian refugees. In particular, the Syria conflict has displaced over 250,000 Palestinian refugees for a second or third time, and over 60,000 refugees have entered overcrowded camps in Lebanon – a country that actively discriminates against Palestinians (UNRWA 2013a).

Grassroots initiatives have advocated refugee rights, but their calls have been eclipsed by self-determination priorities pursued by Palestinian leaders and security-related concerns on the part of Israelis and international diplomatic actors.

Whereas UNHCR was originally founded to resettle refugees from World War II, most Arab states hoped that Palestinian refugees would return to their homes. Arab states sought for Palestinian refugees to be given special treatment and excluded from UNHCR’s remit.

UNRWA maintains that youth – individuals between 15 and 30 years of age – constitute 42 per cent of the Palestinian refugee population as of March 2013. The agency identifies youth as a particularly vulnerable group given their low hopes and social marginalization (UNRWA 2013b).

In July 2009, UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd called on UN member states to affirm “their commitment to accelerate the search for a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestinians and Palestine refugees” (UNGA 2009). More recently, in November 2010, Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi called on the international community to pursue “a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict; [a] viable State of Palestine living in
peace with its neighbours; [and] an end to the occupation” (UNRWA 2010).

Reiterating UNRWA’s long-standing position on the conflict, Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi has consistently proclaimed UNRWA’s support for “a just and lasting solution to the plight of refugees.” See UNRWA (2010).

Announced in May 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s Israeli–Palestinian peace plan represents the most recent U.S. effort to restart bilateral negotiations.

**Bibliography**


UNGA (1948) Resolution 194, paragraph 11.
——(1949) Resolution 301, paragraph 7 (a, b).
———(1951) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, articles 1 (d) and 7 (c).


Index

Note: Italics indicate figures; boldface type indicates tables

abuse see child protection

adolescents see child protection; children; youth

Arab–Israeli conflict: displacement of Palestine citizens (1948) by the 1, 29, 109, 264; displacement of Palestine citizens (1967) by the 7, 29, 109, 117–21, 155, 208; and the goal of durable solutions 284, 286, 291n7; the Nakba (1948) 1, 7, 29, 109, 204, 264; Palestine refugee (1948 and 1967) defined 84n2; secondary displacement of Palestine citizens by the continuing 79, 117, 189–90; the socio-political significance of refugee camps 116, 118, 122–3, 153, 192, 264; UNRWA and the camp residents 196, 242–3, 257n19, 268, 279–80n11, 285; see also Israeli–Palestinian conflict

armed conflict: Convention on the Rights of the Child during 96, 102n3; individual rights during 68; military operations by Israel 42–3n41, 93, 117, 119, 181n28, 264–5; military operations by Jordan against its refugee camps 119, 257n12; military operations by Syria in Lebanon 165, 180n6, 183n52; protection of children in situations of 78, 86n37, 90, 92–3, 95–6, 103n19; socio-economic impact of 2, 92–3; UNRWA work during 78–9, 152, 154, 155, 288; see also violence
camp infrastructures: electrical systems 191, 244, 250, 251, 254, 255, 288; footpaths and pedestrian bridges 245, 251, 254; host country contributions to 222; road systems 76, 257n17; sewage systems 191, 222, 232, 251, 255; storm water drainage systems 191, 245, 250, 254, 255; streets 232, 245, 246, 247, 249, 250; telephone service 222, 244, 251; vertical versus horizontal growth 190, 191; water distribution networks 3, 53, 191, 232, 288; water distribution networks at al-Hussein Camp (Jordan) 244, 250–1, 255; see also camp shelters

camps: al-Hussein Camp (Jordan) 240–56, 257n12; the damage or destruction of by Israel 42n41, 110, 118–19; as disciplinary spaces 132; early plot sizes for shelters 112, 125n42; emergency camps (1967) 117–22; establishment of the first (1948) 123–4, 189; housing densities in 190–2, 242, 244, 247; the influence of the built environment on occupants of 114, 196–7, 207–8; Jenin Camp (West Bank) 43n41, 44n55, 134, 156, 192–4; Karameh (Jordan) 118–19; the location of as a political tool 118; the location of on privately-owned lands 257n9; as military strongholds 118–19, 122; Nahr el-Bared Camp (Lebanon) 76, 135–9, 156–7, 194, 196; Neirab Rehabilitation Project (Syria) 11, 76, 153, 193, 221–37; overcrowding of as a health-threatening factor 115, 191, 199, 221; political power struggles in 208; population growth in 115, 122, 125n44; recognized refugee 109; the reconstruction of as an area of partnership between refugees and UNRWA 76, 138, 155–6, 193–4; the reconstruction or demolition of 192, 195, 203; Talbiyeh Camp (Jordan) 11, 118–20, 194, 207, 208–18; temporariness as an influence on the development of 10, 109–17, 119–21, 134; unofficial
124n14, 247, 251, 258n25; UNRWA’s Camp Site and Layout
criteria (1957) 113–14; UNRWA shelter policy 116, 125n24,
125n28; UNRWA’s management of the physical elements of
124n18, 195–204, 250; UNRWA’s working definition of 111,
122; the urban character of 203–4; water accessibility
problems in 127n80, 191, 244, 249, 255; see also urban
planning for Palestine refugee camps
camp shelters: Conport pre-fabricated 120–1, 122;
constructed by UNRWA 110–17, 114, 118, 119, 125n33;
construction of by refugees but financed by UNRWA 110,
112, 190, 237n1; early plot sizes for 112, 125n42; huts as 7,
110, 111–12, 244; materials used to construct initial huts 121,
127n82, 192, 208;
rehabilitation of 4, 10, 195, 247, 250 camp infrastructures;
tents as 7, 110–12, 122, 126n59, 190, 244; tents as symbols of
temporariness 120, 124n10; UNRWA’s shelter policies and
programmes 111–17, 125n24, 125n28; use of concrete for
some 112, 118–19, 121, 221, 244, 257n14; utilization of old
barracks as 110, 221, 226, 228, 230–2
child protection: Convention on the Rights of the Child
(CRC) 92–3, 95–7, 103n6, 104n22; data collection to support
94–5; during situations of armed conflict 78, 86n37, 90, 92–3,
95–6, 103n19; globally-targeted abuses 103n12, 103n16,
103n19; and poverty 96; UNICEF-led strategies for in the
Middle East 90–101; UNRWA involvement in 72–4, 78–80,
82, 86n38, 91–4, 98–102; see also schools
children: attacks against 73, 74, 79–80, 103n12, 103n19;
exposure of to violence 74, 91–3, 98–100; military detention
of 93, 95, 96, 99; mortality rates among 3; the role of as
agents of change 90, 100, 101; UNRWA’s mandate to protect
civil society: changes in attitudes within 82; efforts of to empower refugees 38n4, 58, 72, 171, 179, 233; as an organ for community participation 135, 153, 154, 157, 158, 196; Palestinian organisations 164, 167, 168–9, 170, 175, 176; role of in the protection of children 94, 95, 97, 99–100 compensation to Palestinian refugees: as a mandated responsibility of the UNCCP 145; as an element of Middle Eastern peace settlements 148, 267, 277, 278–9n1

Declaration of Principles (1993) 265, 290n1
development see human development; urban planning

displaced persons: from the 1967 attack by Israel 84n2, 109, 117, 189; as a source of UNRWA programming knowledge 76, 287; assertions by conservative and Zionist critics of UNRWA regarding 270, 274–5, 278; internally (IDPs) 126n57; Palestinian refugees (1948) 1, 79–80, 109, 264, 284; protection of the human rights of 154, 264, 289; registration of 118; rural during Nakba 29; secondary displacement among 79–80, 117, 286; from the Syrian civil war (March 2011) 2, 79, 288, 291n3; UNHCR’s global responsibilities for 285, 291n5; in UNRWA camps 118, 145, 284; UNRWA’s mandate to protect 68, 73, 146, 149, 264; see also resettlement of Palestinian refugees

donors: assistance of to microfinance markets 19, 21–2, 38n4, 40n13, 44n51; assistance of to refugees 249–50, 251, 279n4, 289; attitudes of donor countries toward Palestine refugees 269–70, 274; contributions of to emergency relief (1967) 117, 121; financial pressures from on UNRWA 5, 52, 58–9; funding of to UNRWA 4, 37, 60, 269–70, 274, 277; on the
issue of politicizing UNRWA 133, 287; and the Neirab rehabilitation project 222, 225–6, 227; support of new UNRWA initiatives by 72, 83, 100, 171; UNRWA’s formal meetings with 139n5, 154, 157 durable solutions: as found for other refugee groups 13, 86–7n40, 274; protection as a means of reaching 7, 84; the quest for on behalf of the Palestinian refugees 1, 9, 69, 276, 279–80n11, 291n7; UNRWA’s role in the quest for 12–13, 81, 133, 284–90

education: as a financial priority among Palestinian refugees 25; as a primary mandated responsibility of UNRWA 3–4, 121, 149, 195, 247, 264; level of among microentrepreneurs 24–5, 27; literacy among Palestine refugees 3, 47, 147, 288; UNRWA-community collaborative programming 76–7, 91, 94–6, 101–2, 155, 204; UNRWA programmes for 47–53, 58–9, 61–2n5–10, 67, 86n30; UNRWA programmes in Gaza 3, 48, 76, 86n30; UNRWA’s supplementary programmes 55, 74, 76–7, 80, 179; see also schools

Egypt: as a host state for Palestinian refugees 148, 152; embargo by on Gaza 265, 269, 274; the microfinance market in 40n15, 41n20

emergency assistance: 1967 humanitarian 117, 119–22, 126n57, 126n59; camp creation as 8, 109, 208; participation by refugees in offering 152, 155, 158; permanent and ongoing 8, 133–4, 137, 238n12; UNRWA mandate to provide 3, 145, 235, 264–5, 284, 288; UNRWA programmes as 57, 58, 114; by UNRWA to vulnerable households 79–80; see also humanitarian assistance

empowerment see Palestine refugees; self-reliance
Fatah 118, 137, 157, 237n8

food: cash in lieu of for refugees 5, 57–8, 59; expenditures on by refugees 25, 27; Healthy Food Initiative in refugee schools 55; provision of as a source of income among refugees 18; provision of as emergency relief 78–80, 117, 147; provision of as part of the UNRWA mandate 3, 42–3n41, 57–60, 79, 80, 269; provision of as relief to destitute refugees 62n13, 73, 115, 132

Gaza: the 1967 war in 117, 264; the blockade of 2, 41–2n26, 74, 93, 265; child protection in 74, 93, 96, 98; Declaration of Principles (1993) 290n1; economic impact of the violence in 41–2n26, 42–3n41, 44n54, 74; the Hamas takeover of 37, 269–70; the Israeli-Egyptian embargo against (2007) 41–2n26, 42–3n41, 265, 269, 274, 277; microentrepreneurs in 24–5, 41–2n26, 43–4n50; the microfinance market in 36–7, 44n54–5; the populace of 92; refugee camp politics in 130, 154; secondary displacement of Palestinian refugees residing in 2, 117, 118, 126n57; UNRWA activities in 155, 192, 193, 275, 277, 290n1; UNRWA assistance to ex-Gazans 81, 84n2, 118, 119, 126n56–57; UNRWA education programmes in 3, 48, 76, 86n30; UNRWA emergency relief work in 78–9, 124n18, 125n33, 266, 269–70, 274; UNRWA job creation programme in 58, 62n14; UNRWA mental health programme in 73–4; UNRWA protection programmes in 77–8, 288; UNRWA shelter programmes in 57, 110, 111–12, 116; women in 24–5; see also Occupied Palestinian Territory; West Bank
Geneva Conference (2004): internal reform of UNRWA resulting from the 46, 133, 189, 221–2; participants in the 60–1n2, 80; reforms initiated during the 2, 5, 10, 167, 196, 204n2

Grameen Bank 21, 38n4, 39n12, 40n13, 49n43; see also microfinance; Yunus, Muhammad

Hamas: offshoots of 130; the opposition of to the PLO 135, 157, 172, 174, 177; as representative of one version of Palestinian goals 268, 279n4; the takeover of Gaza by 37, 269, 270; see also PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)

health care: as a basic human right 203, 204, 236; as a priority for UNRWA 46–7, 53–5, 75, 197, 224; as a regional challenge 28; the child protection elements of 91, 93, 95–8, 101–2; as an element of humanitarian assistance 115, 195; nutrition 55, 62n12–13; School Health Strategy 53, 62n10; for victims of violence 55, 73

host countries: collaborations of with UNRWA 139n5, 146, 147–9, 154, 195, 289; discrimination in against refugees 75, 92, 180n4, 286, 288; military activities of Palestinian refugees living in 118–19, 122, 257n12; perceptions of Palestine refugees as a potentially destabilizing force 110, 132, 264, 279n4; political significance of temporariness of refugees to 114, 255, 270; refugee camps in 113–14, 189–90, 192, 255; refugees’ existence in 112, 129, 132, 150–1; role of in administering and renovating some camps 193, 194, 195–9, 204; role of in the protection of refugees 69, 99; the stance of regarding cash transfers in lieu of food to refugees 5, 57, 59; support of UNRWA programmes by 3, 287; UNRWA programmes in 3, 47, 51, 54, 111, 223; UNRWA’s role as the
protector of refugees living in 132–3, 134, 136–7, 167, 268–9, 277; see also Jordan; Lebanon; Syria

households: access of to infrastructural utilities 3, 53, 288; expenditures of refugee 24–5, 57–8; of refugee microentrepreneurs 17–18, 21, 22–5, 27, 42n37; shelter expansions by 191, 244, 249; sizes of refugee 24, 25, 27, 257n13; tensions and violence in refugee 74, 92; UNRWA assistance to vulnerable refugee 56, 79; UNRWA surveys of 94, 96, 169

human development: definition of 61n4, 85n10, 156, 223, 237n4; as an element of the UNRWA mandate 68, 81, 83–4, 195; individual health as an element of 61n4, 197; of refugees as a move away from relief-oriented services 18, 198, 223, 232–4, 236, 237n4; revised approaches to 8, 46, 60, 156, 198; universal goals for 62n10, 103n18, 145; UNRWA’s primary goals for refugees’ 4, 6, 46, 56–7, 85n10, 197; urban blight as a deterrent to 190–1, 232

humanitarian assistance: as a basis for microfinance 18; as the basis for the UNRWA mandate 8, 56, 109, 149–50, 265, 284; the dehumanizing effects of on recipients 130, 131–2, 170–1; emergency versus long-term development 121, 129, 238n12, 279n4, 288; IASC activities 6, 8–9, 67, 84–5n6; International Humanitarian Law 68, 84–5n6; international standards for 70, 85n17, 94, 103n18, 167; international standards for concerning children 103n12, 103n19; Palestine refugees requiring 43n41, 79; the political implications of 122, 123–4, 133–4, 180n2, 235–6, 274; redefinition of in relief programming 8, 133, 158–9; in response to the 1967 war 117, 120; shelter construction as a form of 7–8, 109, 250; UNRWA and the future of 61n2, 277, 284–7, 290; UNRWA
service delivery programmes as 71, 81, 195, 269; see also emergency assistance

human rights: absence of for many Palestine refugees 2, 6, 276, 286; association of with urban development 209, 236; basic universal 6, 83, 145, 173, 197; community participation in the assertion of 164, 170–2, 176–7, 203–4; enjoyment of as an element of human development 46, 51–2, 61n4, 85n10; protection as essential to the achievement of 6, 68, 72, 84–5n6, 90, 236; the right to work campaign in Lebanon 163–4, 170, 173–4, 176–7, 179, 181n29; United Nations Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) 85n13; UNRWA programming to promote individual knowledge of 51, 72, 75, 78, 86n30, 287; UNRWA’s advocacy to promote refugees’ 76, 78, 167, 287–8; of women, children, and the disabled as a special concern 68, 74

Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (IASC) 6, 8–9, 67, 84–5n6

Intifada: the first 4, 117, 133, 139n4, 192; the second 2, 36, 42–3n41, 44n53, 44n54, 204–5n2; support programs to assist victims of 73–4

Israel: the Arab–Israeli conflict 117, 189, 208, 264, 284, 286; the attack by on UNRWA office in Gaza 265; border warfare 118–19; camp damage and demolitions by 192, 195; control of over Area C (West Bank) 86n39; denial of responsibility for refugees by 264; detention of Palestinian children by 74, 93, 96; deterrents of to movement and commerce 26, 41n26, 44n54, 75; host country borders with 110; invasion of Lebanon by 192, 264; invasion of West Bank by 42–3n41; Israel–Egypt embargo of Gaza 265, 269, 274;
Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (1993) 265; military activities of in the Middle East 42–3n41, 93, 119, 181n28, 264–5; Occupied Palestinian Territory 94, 130, 132, 134, 153, 155; Operation Cast Lead (2008) 93, 155, 265; relations of with Egypt 152; relations of with the PLO 154; settler violence against Palestinian residents 79–80, 93; UNRWA interventions with on behalf of refugees 75, 80

Israeli–Palestinian conflict: as a human rights issue 276, 291n7; attempts to find a peaceful settlement to the 276–7, 284, 290n2, 291n9; damage to UNRWA programs by the 37; noninvolvement of UNRWA in peace negotiations to end the 12, 276, 285–7, 289; the refugee issue as intrinsic to resolving 151, 290, 290n1; see also Arab–Israeli conflict

Jordan: Ain el Basha Camp (Baqa’a) 119, 120, 122; al-Hussein Camp 240, 248, 250–3; Black September (1970) 119, 257n12; Camp Services Committee (CSC) 209, 213, 216–17, 219n1; case study of urban renewal at al-Hussein Camp (Amman) 240–56; child protection in 73, 91, 94–5, 97–101; Community Infrastructure Program (CIP) 245, 253–5, 258n29; Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) 209, 213, 215, 217–18, 240–51, 257n19; the economy of 33, 41n25, 42n34; emergency camps in (1967) 117–18, 126n59; expenditures of on refugee shelters 125n18, 125n33; Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) 240, 247, 253, 255, 257n14, 258n28–29; Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC) 240, 243, 253–5; involvement of in the administration of camps 130, 257n9, 257n19, 258n27; Jerash Camp 76, 119, 242; Karameh Camp 118–19; Marka Camp 119; microentrepreneurs in 24, 28, 32, 41n22, 43–4n50; the microfinance market in 29–33, 36–7, 40n15, 41n20, 44n52,
44n55; militarisation of refugee camps in 118–19; motivations of to underscore the temporary nature of camps 118, 119–21, 123; New Amman Camp 115–16, 119, 191; population of Palestine refugee children in 91; programmes for Palestine refugees living in 31, 32, 77, 81, 100; refugee and displaced persons in 81, 126n56, 126n57, 241, 258n25; refugee camps in 109, 110, 115, 117–19, 122–3, 257n19; relationship of with its refugees 118, 148, 241, 244, 252, 276; shelter programmes in 111, 112, 119–20, 122–3; Shu’fat Camp 55, 116, 120, 125n31, 125n53, 127n80; Social Productivity Programme (SPP) 253; Talbiyeh Camp case study 11, 118–20, 194, 207, 208–18; UNRWA activities in 10–11, 36–7, 44n55; Urban Development Department (UDD) 251–2, 254, 255, 258n28; urbanisation of 28–9; urban renewal of refugee camps in 124n7, 191, 193, 244, 250–3; Zizia Camp (Talbiyeh) 119; see also host countries

Jumblatt, Walid (Lebanese PSP) 172–5, 178

Lebanon: the Cairo Agreement (1969) 122, 165; case study in refugee participation 135–9; child protection in 91, 94–7, 99; Committee for the Employment of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (CEP) 164, 166–70, 174–8, 180n1, 181n22; discrimination against refugees in 62n9, 92, 164–5, 173–4, 191, 288–9; fragmentation of the Palestinian community in 177, 179; Hezbollah 172, 174; human rights protection of refugees in 157, 163, 168, 174–6, 179; Israeli military operations in 192, 264–5; Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) 135, 164, 167; the microfinance market in 29–34, 40n15, 41n20, 43n43–44; the militarisation of refugee camps in 119, 122; Nahr el-Bared Camp reconstruction 76, 135–9, 156–7, 194, 196; Najdeh 168–75,
178, 181n23, 181n29, 182n44, 183n54; the naturalization of refugees as a political issue in 173–6, 178, 183n54, 268; the Palestine refugee population in 92, 288; Palestinian-Lebanese Coalition for the Right to Work of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon 164, 172, 178; the participation-protection of refugees in 176–9; the PLO in 119, 122, 153, 157, 183n52; poverty among Palestine refugees in 92, 134; programs for refugee youth in 99, 101; Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) 172, 175; refugee camps in 110, 130, 132, 191, 291n3; relationship of with its refugees 9, 134, 173–6, 178, 268; the Right to Work campaign by Palestinian refugees in 80–1, 136, 164–74, 180n3–4, 181n29, 182n44; the Syrian occupation of 165, 180n6, 183n52; the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party in 173; UNRWA’s advocacy role on behalf of refugees in 134, 136–8, 157, 166; UNRWA’s educational programmes for refugees in 3, 47, 61n6, 99; UNRWA’s refugee protection program in 77; UNRWA’s shelter construction programmes in 112, 115, 124n18, 125n33; urbanisation of 28–9; see also host countries

medical services see health care; UNRWA

MENA region: child protection in the 6–7, 91, 92, 94, 96, 97; microfinance and microenterprise in the 23, 28–9, 31, 40n15, 41n20

mental health programmes of UNRWA 50, 73–4, 77, 79, 92, 99

microenterprise: as a complementary reserve to employment markets 28, 40–1n16; characteristics of households participating in 17–18, 27–8, 41n23, 43n45; distinguishing traits of 23–4, 26, 28, 34–5, 41n23, 42n32; as an economic
sector 29, 38n3, 40n14, 42n32; female microentrepreneurs 17–18, 23–5, 41–2n26; financial typology of microentrepreneurs 22–3; literacy rates among microentrepreneurs 24–5, 27; sociological profiles of subaltern microentrepreneurs 17–18, 23–5, 26–7; versus formally regulated enterprise 17–18

microfinance: as a means of mitigating poverty 17–19, 21–5, 27–31, 33, 41n20; best practices institutions in 4, 19, 30–6, 34n44, 42n30; client characteristics 24–5, 27–8, 38n2, 42n32; client statistics 19, 21, 24, 27–31; IPOs by institutions 39n7; Microcredit Summit Campaign 21; MIX (Microfinance Exchange Market) 19, 32, 41n20; participating institutions 19, 21, 29, 42n36, 42n39, 43n44; purpose and logic underlying the market 18–24, 38n4, 39n9; ROSCAs 20, 27, 39n10; the sector as a product of socio-economic bias 21–2, 39n8; spending patterns of loan recipients 25; statistics for the global and regional markets in 19, 29–38, 39n7, 39n8, 40n13, 41n18; support of by NGOs 38n4, 40n15, 41n17, 41n19; UNRWA’s activities to support 4, 26–7, 35–8, 39n8, 43–4n49–56; see also Grameen Bank; Yunus, Muhammad

*Nakba* (the catastrophe) 1, 7, 29, 109, 204, 264

Neirab Rehabilitation Project (NRP) 221–37

NGOs (non-government organisations): collaboration of with UNRWA and government entities 137, 152–4, 211, 250, 286, 289; involvement of in camp civic affairs 130, 139, 163, 243, 268; involvement of in establishing the first refugee camps 109; in Lebanon 137, 163, 167–8, 170, 178; Palestinian in Lebanon 137, 164, 167–70, 174, 178; role of in initiating communal activism 177–9, 181n24, 209; support of child
protection programmes by 73, 98–9; support of educational programmes by 48; support of microfinance markets by 19, 21, 38n4, 41n17, 43n44; support of protection programmes by 72, 82–3; support of

the right to work by 80, 165–7, 169–71, 174–6; support of

urban renewal of camps by 212, 240, 249–50, 255

Occupied Palestinian Territory 94, 130, 132, 134, 153, 155; see also Gaza; West Bank

Oslo peace process 2, 204n2, 252–3, 284, 285, 290n1

Palestine refugee camps see camps

Palestine refugees: confidence levels of in their advocates 154, 267–9; definition of 84n2; direct consultation of by UNRWA 59, 148, 151, 201; with disabilities 3, 68, 74, 90, 191; discrimination against 33, 68, 79, 92, 284; discrimination against in Lebanon 62n9, 163–5, 181n29, 291n3; elderly 17, 79, 191; European Union assistance to the 4, 40n15, 250, 268; host countries’ perceptions of as a politically destabilizing populace 110, 132, 264, 279n4; human rights of 2, 6, 132, 276, 286–8; income-generating opportunities for 11, 40–1n16, 55, 152, 208; literacy rates among 3, 24, 25, 47, 147; marginalised groups among the 50, 207, 210, 218, 291n6; and the Palestinian identity 132, 222, 226, 235, 275; the political fragmentation of 177, 179, 268; population statistics 60, 67, 79, 92, 291n6; problems of low income among the 17–18, 22, 23, 24–5, 38n2, 61; protection initiatives on behalf of the 55, 69, 76–7, 167, 178, 234; rehabilitation of as a UN goal 113, 115, 125n25, 145, 267, 286; reintegration of 9, 99, 115, 125n25; responses of to
paternalistic treatment 130; shelter construction as self-help by 110, 111–13, 123, 190, 247; the spending patterns of 25–7; the Nakba (the catastrophe) (1948) 1, 7, 29, 109, 204, 264; UNRWA’s advocacy on behalf of the 132–4, 154–5, 167, 275–7

Palestinian Authority (PA): actions of the on behalf of children 48, 96, 104n22; the political roles of the 37, 154, 204n2, 268, 271–2

participation of Palestine refugees: grassroots initiatives as 135, 170–2, 179, 194, 209–11, 291n4; in matters of protection 69, 71, 167, 178; Refugee Affairs Officers (RAOs) 152; in UNRWA projects 135, 153–4, 230–1

peace in the Middle East: dependency of on resolution of the plight of the Palestine refugees 2–3, 81, 275–6, 290; the Kerry plan for 291n9; the Oslo process 2, 204n2, 252–3, 284, 285, 290n1; reforms in the approach to achieving 103n18, 133–4, 146, 154; relationship of to the Palestinian right of return 155, 279–80n11, 284, 291n7; socio-economic effects of the impasse in negotiations 37, 42–3n41; as an underlying element of the UNRWA mandate 145, 154–5, 275; UNRWA Peace Implementation Programme 139n4, 269; UNRWA refugee participation programmes as a tool for achieving 99, 101, 151, 152, 158; UNRWA’s peace-servicing role 146, 157, 265, 267–8; UNRWA’s potential role in the future 13, 276–8, 285, 288–90; violence in response to failed negotiations for 37, 155

PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization): activities of the in Lebanon 122, 138, 153, 165, 183n52; as a presence in refugee camps 130, 192, 194, 199; interactions of the with UNRWA 150–1, 154–5, 157; military operations of the 122, 151; participation of the in asserting refugees’ right to work in
Lebanon 166, 168, 172, 174, 177, 179; as representative of one version of Palestinian goals 135, 268, 276, 278–9n1; reservations of some refugees regarding the 154, 268; see also Hamas

poverty: as a commonplace in the Middle East 5, 22, 28–9, 41n20; among subaltern business owners 17–24, 28–9, 31; cash transfers versus food distribution to mitigate 5, 57, 59–60; and child protection 92; connection of to inequality 34–5, 40–1n16, 60, 74, 80, 103n18; employment programs to mitigate 31, 58, 152, 208, 253; failures of CBOs in mitigating 58; global 20–1; growth of among Palestinian refugees 5, 55–6, 92, 134; methodologies to assess 56, 58; microfinance as a means of

mitigating 17–19, 21–5, 27–31, 33–5, 41n20; sickness and high mortality as by-products of 28; statistics 21, 24, 31, 55, 92, 208; UNRWA’s mission to fight against 55–6, 58, 60, 62n13, 62n15, 73; violence as a cause of 41–2n26, 43n41, 114–15; within refugee camps 190–2, 204, 208, 226, 244, 253

protection of Palestine refugees: child protection 72–4, 79–80, 91–101, 103n6, 104n22; Operational Support Officers (OSOs) 155; programmes specific to women 55, 76–7; UNRWA’s efforts to facilitate 69, 167, 178, 234

registered refugees: eligibility of for medical services 3, 54; eligibility of for UNHCR assistance 87n40; eligibility of for UNRWA assistance 84n2, 91, 145, 247, 278–9n1; overlap of with displaced person status 117, 118, 122, 242; population of 3, 5–6, 67, 91–3, 241, 242

relief see emergency assistance; humanitarian assistance; UNRWA; UNRWA mandate
renovation see rehabilitation

repatriation of Palestinian refugees: absence of from UNRWA’s mandate 134; as a mandated responsibility of the UNCCP 145, 267, 286; as a product of the nature of any future peace agreements 277, 278–9n1, 279–80n11, 286, 287, 289–90

resettlement of Palestinian refugees: actions of Lebanon’s CEP regarding 168; as a mandated responsibility of the UNCCP 145, 267, 286; as a political issue 147–8, 235, 264, 265–6, 278; failures of envisioned schemes for 109–10; fears of among refugees themselves 110–11, 147, 148, 153, 226–8; misunderstandings of UNRWA’s responsibilities regarding 134, 264, 266, 273; the potential complexity of 277, 278–9n1, 285, 289–90; see also displaced persons

Resolution 194 (General Assembly) 87n40, 124n2, 154, 267, 268, 286

right of return: as a deterrent to the construction of adequate camp shelters 110–11, 120, 123–4, 252; development as a perceived threat to the 4, 10, 196, 202–3, 209–10, 225–9; feasibility of the 154, 264, 279–80n11, 290, 291n4, 291n9; as an issue outside the UNRWA mandate 133, 147, 269, 284; naturalization as a sacrifice of the 183n54; physical limitations of the 151; refugee expectations that UNWRA should assert their 12; refugee registration as a requirement to exercise 278–9n1; self-reliance as a perceived threat to the 234; support for among Israelis 279n10; support for among resettled Palestinians 275; temporariness as a symbolization of the Palestine refugees’ 203–4, 222, 236
schools: UNRWA-operated 3, 47, 61–2n5–8, 134, 243; violence in 72–3, 82, 91–5, 98–102; vocational 47, 49, 51–2, 80, 99, 147; see also child protection; education

self-reliance: microentrepreneurship as a form of 18, 21, 22, 41n18; misinterpretation of the meaning of 225, 234–5; refugee participation in emergency assistance as 152; shelter construction and expansion as a form of 110, 111–13, 123, 124n7, 190, 237n1; UNRWA civic participation programming to promote 157, 158, 159; UNRWA efforts to promote refugee 146, 147, 149, 155, 233

settlements: creation of informal and squatter by Palestinians outside UNRWA camps 79–80, 247; urban renewal of informal and squatter 251–2, 253–4, 256, 258n29

subalterns: definition of 38n2; the economic plight of 17–38

sustainability: as a concern of unemployment programmes 42n38, 55, 233; as a goal of UNRWA programming 11, 12, 197, 206, 234–5; financial of UNRWA and its projects 152, 159; importance of the physical environment to socio-economic 196, 198, 209, 224; of the microfinance sector 18–19, 21–2, 30, 38n4, 40n13, 40n15; and the politics of right of return 225–6, 234–5; of self-reliance among refugees 152, 222–3, 225; Sustainable Livelihoods Approach 223–6, 237n5–6

Syria: child protection in 91, 93–7, 99, 101; conflict in 2, 103n15, 288, 290, 291n3; employment programmes in 40n15; General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) 130, 222, 232–3; humanitarian programmes for refugees in 79; microentrepreneurs in 24, 27–8, 43n45, 43–4n50; the microfinance market in 29–32, 34–5, 43n46–48; military activities of in Lebanon 165, 180n6, 183n52; Neirab
Rehabilitation Project 11, 76, 153, 193, 221–37; Palestine refugees in 79, 92–3, 126n56; participation of refugees in projects 231; poverty in 29; refugee camps in 130, 191, 221, 237n1–2; relationship of with its refugees 148, 225–6, 231, 235, 291n3; Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party 173; UNRWA’s microfinance programme in 36–7, 44n52, 44n55; UNRWA’s programmes for women 77; UNRWA’s relationship with refugees in 225–6, 231, 235, 288, 290; UNRWA’s shelter assistance programme in 112, 237n1–2; see also host countries

UNCCP (United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine): inactivity of the 145, 147, 149, 154, 286; mandate of the 124n2, 145–8, 267, 284–5, 286; purpose of the 145–7, 149, 151; relationship of the to UNRWA 145, 148

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 35, 41n17, 61n4, 84n4, 136–7, 237n4

unemployment: as a characteristic of Palestinian refugee camps 190, 223, 224, 288; Agency for Combating Unemployment (Syria) 40n15, 42n38; among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon 80–1, 136, 164–74, 180n4, 181n29, 182n44; among Palestinian refugee youth 51, 286; among subaltern business owners 18, 24, 28, 33; programmes to reduce 30, 31, 42n38, 233

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): as compared to UNRWA 6, 13, 86–7n40, 133, 270, 291n5; evolution of in the performance of its mandate 137–8, 139–40n10, 273–4, 285; presence of staff members from in UNRWA 286, 289; RAD Project (Sudan) 233–4; relationship of to the Palestinian refugees 87n40, 145, 265, 272–3; the
top-down approach of 147; the work of in Tanzania and the Congo 138, 139–40n10, 279n5

UNICEF: child protection activities of in the Middle East 91–101; collaborations of with UNRWA 7, 78, 95–6, 98–9, 101; the mandate of 90; the programmes of 3, 77

United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 86–7n40, 265

United Nations General Assembly: enhancement of UNRWA’s responsibilities by 46, 68, 78, 126n64, 277, 286–7; mandate for UNRWA 1, 2, 124n2, 145, 158, 285; policy of concerning the Palestinian refugees 286; Resolution 194 (1948) 267–8; UNRWA annual reports to the 155, 159n1

United Nations Security Council: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) of to protect children during armed conflict 78, 86n37, 103n19; Resolution 1612 to protect children 93, 95

UNRWA: accusations of paternalism against 130, 131–2, 138, 231; as an acknowledgement of global responsibility for refugees 264, 267–8, 277; activities of in microfinance 4, 26, 35–8, 43–4n49–56; advocacy role of 132–4, 154–5, 167, 275–7; as a mechanism for averting political violence 114–15, 123, 134, 274, 279n4; as a provider of emergency relief 129, 145, 235, 264–5, 284, 288; assistance of to refugees with disabilities 3, 68, 74, 86n25, 90, 191; attacks against the staff and facilities of 75–6, 85n20, 137, 147, 265; biased comments against 266, 270–5, 278, 279n7; the budgetary concerns of 4, 35, 44n53, 60, 83, 269; camp and shelter rehabilitation by 159, 194, 249–50; Chief Area Officers (CAOs) 137, 139; collaborations of with refugees
collaborations of with UNESCO 3, 4, 47, 49–50, 61n7; collaborations of with UNICEF 7, 78, 95–6, 98–9, 101; collaborations of with WHO 3, 4; detection and intervention services 73, 77, 80, 95, 98; dilemma of emergency relief versus development assistance 121, 129, 238n12, 279n4, 288; educational programmes 3, 47–53, 61–2n5–8; European Union support to 4, 268; Family Health Team (FHT) approach of 54–5, 59, 76; the fight of against poverty among refugees 55–6, 58, 60, 62n13, 73; the food-related programmes of 55, 57–60, 78–80, 117, 147; future possibilities for under a durable peace 276, 284–90; global best-practices designation of in microfinance 30, 35, 36, 42n30; global best-practices programmes of 49, 54, 57, 197; Healthy Food Initiative 55; holistic approach of to camp improvements 10, 12, 197, 204; holistic approach of to education services 49, 52, 58; holistic approach of to health services 54–5; holistic approach of to refugee protection 67, 83; Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Program (ICIP) of 4, 10–11, 189, 196–202, 204; job creation programmes of 57, 58, 62n14, 73, 74, 99; Medium-Term Plan (MTP) (2005–9) 61n3, 250; the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) of UNRWA (2010–15) 1, 5–6, 46, 68, 236, 237n4; mental health programmes of 50, 73–4, 77, 79–80, 92, 99; microfinance programmes of 35–8, 44n54–5; non-political character of 2–3, 134, 156, 276, 284–7; the Organizational Development (OD) process of 5, 100, 156; primary education programmes of 3, 48–53, 61–2n5–10, 86n30, 155; primary health care programmes of 3–4, 53–5, 59, 77, 80–1; protection of individual human rights by 76, 78, 167, 287–8; Relief and Social Services (RSS) Programme of 4, 53, 56–8, 59; relief operations of 79, 112, 114–15, 288; School Health Strategy
programme 53, 62n10, 62n12; Schools of Excellence initiative 48, 76, 86n30, 155; Special Hardship Assistance Programme (SHAP) of 56–7; staff members of previously employed by UNHCR 286, 289; staff members of who are Palestinian refugees 8, 146, 147, 149–50; vocational and technical training programmes of 47, 51–2, 95, 99, 147, 151

UNRWA Commissioner-General: Filippo Grandi as (2010-present) 156–7, 275–6, 291n7, 291n8; Giorgio Giacomelli as (1985–91) 154; Karen Koning AbuZayd as (2005–10) 133, 157–8, 291n7; Laurence Michelmore as (1964–71) 118; Peter Hansen as (1996–2005) 133; roles of the 13, 69, 81, 84n2, 157, 285

UNRWA field offices: in Gaza 48, 76; independence of 2, 49, 52, 112, 193, 202; in Jordan 244, 257n21; in Lebanon 167, 170, 171, 177; in Syria 147, 230; in the West Bank 48

UNRWA mandate: budgetary challenges to meet the 5–6, 60; as compared to that of UNCCP 145–8; as compared to that of UNHCR 86–7n40; concerning UNRWA’s relationships with host countries 154; evolution of the 3, 8, 9, 60, 137, 264; execution of the 84, 101, 131–4; extension of to emphasize refugee participation 9, 158; human development element of 145–6, 195; humanitarian basis for the 56, 109, 132, 149–50, 265, 284; and the idea of temporariness 114, 134, 203; the original (1949) 2–3, 145, 146, 285–6; the potential of political activity by UNRWA to undermine its 287; the protection element of the 6–7, 12, 68–9, 101–2, 133, 234; the public service element of the 5–6, 60, 68, 134, 195; refugee misunderstandings of the 8, 129, 132–3; the relief element of 8, 129, 146

crisis uprisings see Intifada
urban planning for Palestine refugee camps: al-Hussein Camp and environs (Jordan) 251–5; community-driven strategic planning elements of 198–201; improvement projects in refugee camps 10–12, 197–8; the influence of local politics on 208, 208–18; participation by Palestinian community members in 76, 196, 202, 204, 219n2,248; problems of coordination among interested entities 199, 249–50; Talbiyeh Camp case study 212–18; UNRWA’s ICIP program 4, 10–11, 189, 196–202, 204; UNRWA’s participation in 134, 195, 250; see also camps

violence: as a cause of poverty 41–2n26, 43n41, 114–15; against UNRWA and its employees 75–6, 85n20, 137, 147, 265; definition of 102n4; domestic and family 55, 77, 86n38, 91–3; gender-based 55, 77, 82, 86n34, 102; originating from local camp politics 218; perpetrated by Palestinian fedayeen 118–19; in schools 72–3, 82, 91–5, 98–102; by settlers in occupied areas 79; UNRWA programmes to curb domestic 54–5, 73–7, 91–3; wars and uprisings 79, 92, 264–5; see also armed conflict

West Bank: 1967 emergency camps in the 117, 189; Area C in the 79, 86n39; child protection in the 77–8, 96, 98–100; continuation of humanitarian relief emergencies in the 288, 290; Declaration of Principles (1993) 290n1; Israeli military operations in the 42–3n41, 44n54, 264; Jenin Camp 43n41, 134, 156, 192–4; local politics in refugee camps of the 130, 154; microentrepreneurs in the 43–4n50; the microfinance market in the 36, 37, 44n54–5; plight of ex-West Bank residents 117–19, 126n56–57; populace of the 92; refugee
camps in the 189–90, 191, 193, 194; secondary displacement of Palestinian refugees residing in the 3, 79–80, 117, 126n57; UNRWA advocacy activities in the 79–80; UNRWA educational programmes in the 3, 48, 288; UNRWA health programmes in the 75; UNRWA Healthy Food Initiative in the 55, 62n12; UNRWA programmes in the 55, 57, 58, 62n14, 77, 287–8; urban renewal of camps in the 202, 287–8; see also Gaza; Occupied Palestinian Territory

women: as clients of microfinance institutions 32, 37, 39n12, 40n13, 73; as microentrepreneurs 17–18, 21, 24–8, 41–2n26, 43n45; participation of in the Talbiyeh improvement project 209, 210, 212–13; the plight of female-headed households 56, 79; protection of against violence 55, 76–7, 82, 86n34, 90–1, 103n16; UNRWA employment programmes for 55, 147; UNRWA health programmes for 54; UNRWA programme centers for 3, 134, 247; UNRWA programmes to protect the rights of 6; UNRWA’s attempts to address the needs of 56–8, 68, 100, 153, 218, 288

World Bank: guidelines for global educational reform 49, 61–2n8; studies of the global microfinance market 29–35, 40n14, 42n30, 43n43; support of urban development in Jordan by the 251, 253, 255

youth: as a large segment of the refugee populace 51, 286, 296n6; mental health among refugee 50, 73–4, 79–80, 99, 101; participation of in camp civic affairs and public service 99–101, 139, 150, 156–7, 209, 210; as perpetrators of camp violence 73, 99, 257n18; plight of among the Palestine refugee populace 92, 100–1, 218, 227, 291n6; UNRWA centres for 3, 99, 152, 243; UNRWA programmes for 49, 53,
56, 95, 96, 97–9; UNRWA vocational training for 51–2, 95, 99, 151, 286; as workers in microenterprises 25

Yunus, Muhammad 22, 38n1, 40n13; see also Grameen Bank; microfinance

Zionist extremists see UNRWA, biased comments against
Taylor & Francis

eBooks

For Libraries

Over 22,000 eBook titles in the Humanities, Social Sciences, STM and Law from some of the world’s leading imprints.

Choose from a range of subject packages or create your own!

- Free MARC records
- COUNTER-compliant usage statistics
- Flexible purchase and pricing options
- Off-site, anytime access via Athens or referring URL
- Print or copy pages or chapters
- Full content search
- Bookmark, highlight and annotate text
- Access to thousands of pages of quality research at the click of a button

For more information, pricing enquiries or to order a free trial, contact your local online sales team.

UK and Rest of World: online.sales@tandf.co.uk
US, Canada and Latin America:
e-reference@taylorandfrancis.com

www.ebooksubscriptions.com

A flexible and dynamic resource for teaching, learning and research.