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Perceptions on Enhancing Youth Access to Decision-Making Positions in the Palestinian

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Summary

This policy paper addresses the reality of Palestinian youth participation and access to decision-making centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, amidst the political, economic, and social challenges faced by Palestinian youth due to Israeli occupation, internal division, and the Gaza blockade. Youth face significant difficulties in gaining opportunities for active participation in decision-making processes.

The paper emphasizes the importance of empowering youth to access decision-making centers as a step toward achieving development and stability in Palestinian society. It highlights the need to enhance educational and training opportunities, improve economic conditions, and enable youth to have a real impact on public policies.

Additionally, the paper offers alternatives, solutions, and practical recommendations, such as promoting political dialogue between the West Bank and Gaza, providing platforms for political participation, and developing economic and educational opportunities, in order to achieve genuine empowerment for Palestinian youth in various fields.

Keywords: Youth, decision-making, political parties, democracy, challenges and alternatives, political system.

Introduction:

Youth are the most dynamic segment of society and the primary driver of sustainable development in any community¹. For Palestinian youth, who represent the largest sector of society, they face significant challenges that affect their access to decision-making centers, such as political and economic marginalization, which hinders their effectiveness in political and social building.

The absence or attempts to exclude youth from decision-making centers have led to a weakening of their impact and contributions to public policy making. Additionally, factors such as occupation, unemployment, the geographic and political division between the West Bank and Gaza, and successive wars have all played a key role in this marginalization and weakening. The lack of skills and capabilities among youth further exacerbates their political and social exclusion.

In this context, this paper aims to explore how to enhance opportunities for Palestinian youth to access decision-making centers, by providing an analysis of their current participation in decision-making, the challenges they face, as well as the available opportunities and solutions to strengthen their active involvement in building a democratic and inclusive political system.

The Reality of Youth in Political Life

The Palestinian political system suffers from a multiplicity of authorities and structures, whether as a result of the Oslo Accords, internal divisions, the proliferation of political parties, or the absence of a clear party law, and the irregularity of elections.

This has led to the lack of real opportunities for renewing the institutions and structures of the political system by introducing young political actors with new ideas, ensuring a fresh infusion of ideas that can help overcome the acute crisis afflicting the political system. Youth representation in the political system is almost non-existent. Furthermore, youth participation in

¹ The term "Palestinian youth" here refers to the age group defined by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, which is (18-29). For more information, see: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2023, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics*, Ramallah, Palestine, p. 18.

unions and federations is very limited, amounting to only 1.4%, with 2.4% in the southern governorates and 0.9% in the northern governorates².

Moreover, all federations and bodies within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) are devoid of youth in the highest leadership levels or as members of the General Secretariat³. On the governmental level, Palestinian youth have been absent from eighteen consecutive governments, with no youth ministers in the age group of 18-29. The youngest minister in the history of Palestinian governments was Sabri Saydam, who served as a minister in the ninth government in 2005 at the age of 34.⁴

Despite Acknowledging Their Importance, Challenges Remain:

Youth in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank face multiple and complex challenges arising from political, economic, and social conditions. These challenges vary somewhat based on geographic location, but there are some common issues that affect all Palestinian youth, including:

- **Israeli Occupation and Military Policies:** Youth face difficulties in moving between cities and regions due to military checkpoints and the separation wall. In Gaza, youth suffer from a suffocating blockade that prevents them from traveling or reaching other places for work or education.
- **Political Marginalization:** Youth suffer from weak representation in decision-making centers, whether in political parties or governmental institutions. There is no legislative council through which youth projects that address their needs can be adopted. Furthermore, there are no youth institutions or federations that represent their aspirations. As a result, youth see themselves as

² **The Sectoral Youth Strategy 2021-2023**, Supreme Council for Youth and Sports: cutt.us/hw8dR.

³ **Roz Al-Masri et al.**, *Enhancing the Role of Youth in Decision-Making Centers*, as part of the "Palestinian Youth Visions" program, implemented by Masarat Center in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, November 24, 2022.

⁴ Previous reference

incapable of influencing political directions, thus reducing the likelihood of their participation in decision-making.

- **Palestinian Division:** The internal political division has caused youth to lose confidence in the political system, as they perceive the resulting conditions as limiting their ability to achieve their aspirations. It has also restricted their opportunities to engage with national issues in all their forms, imposing significant limitations on expressing their political views or participating in protests. This means that youth activism in areas like political protests, social campaigns, or joining political parties has been severely restricted.
- **Structural Stagnation of Political Parties:** The concentration of high political positions in individuals who have held them for long periods limits youth's opportunities to enter the political arena. This prevents the opening of opportunities for youth involvement in politics.
- **Generational Priority Differences:** There is a significant gap in ideologies (or political beliefs) and priorities between youth and older generations. Youth seek change and progress, while older generations tend to hold on to traditional patterns, leading to the marginalization of ideas and proposals that may be more modern and relevant to the contemporary reality.
- **High Unemployment Rates:** Unemployment rates skyrocketed during the war on Gaza, reaching as high as 46.1%, surpassing 30% in the West Bank and 75% in Gaza⁵. This impacts youth's ability to achieve financial independence and social stability, distancing them from engaging in political processes.
- **Educational Institutions' Inability to Create an Enabling Environment:** Educational and cultural institutions are unable to create an environment that nurtures leadership qualities and personal and professional skills capable of fostering impactful public mobilization, which influences the political situation.
- **Difficulty Achieving Independence:** Social and economic pressures make it difficult for youth to achieve full independence,

⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024, *Performance of the Palestinian Economy*, Ramallah, Palestine, p. 23.

whether in making personal or professional life decisions. Youth facing financial hardships may find it difficult to engage in political activities, limiting their ability to access leadership positions.

- **Cultural Barriers:** Traditions and customs can be a major obstacle to enabling youth to access political or leadership positions based on traditional criteria. These cultural factors may make it difficult for youth to gain leadership roles or have a meaningful impact on political decision-making.

Visions on Alternatives and Solutions for Enhancing Youth Participation in Decision-Making Centers

Enhancing the access of Palestinian youth in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to decision-making centers requires the adoption of several practical alternatives and solutions that take into account the reality of youth in Palestine. These proposed alternatives and potential solutions can provide ways and mechanisms to support their participation in reaching decision-making centers.

Alternative 1: Providing Youth with the Tools and Skills Necessary to Enhance Their Role

Youth are often marginalized and excluded from key decision-making processes, limited to being tools at the field level in political parties or seasonal events. This restricts their capacity to shape their future.

Helping youth become decision-makers involves more than just addressing objective challenges; it requires equipping them with the tools, skills, and mindset necessary to take initiative, adopt critical thinking, and make decisions. This can be achieved through the following:

- **Developing Analytical Abilities:** Teaching youth to analyze situations rationally, considering multiple perspectives and viewpoints.
- **Encouraging Curiosity:** Promoting a culture of intellectual curiosity, encouraging youth to question, explore, and seek knowledge continuously.

- **Providing Leadership Opportunities:** Offering opportunities for youth to manage and lead at intermediate levels, such as in clubs, associations, or community projects.
- **Engagement with Experts:** Allowing youth to engage in work environments alongside experts to learn from how decisions are made and implemented.
- **Fostering Responsibility:** Encouraging a sense of responsibility by giving youth the space to solve problems on their own, fostering a sense of ownership.
- **Training for High-Pressure Environments:** Teaching youth to work under pressure and in diverse and uncertain environments, ensuring they are ready for complex decision-making scenarios.
- **Creating Supportive Environments:** Building safe and supportive environments that allow youth to refine both their personal and professional skills, starting from the family, school, and community.
- **Exposure to International Experiences:** Providing opportunities for youth to engage in volunteer work outside of Palestine, enabling them to learn from different systems and cultures.
- **Ensuring Access to Information:** Guaranteeing youth access to necessary information and providing them with the media presence they need to advocate for their ideas and engage in the decision-making process.

These efforts aim to create a generation of youth capable of taking active roles in shaping the political, economic, and social landscape of Palestine. By equipping them with the necessary skills and providing them with opportunities for leadership and decision-making, they can become influential contributors to the future of their communities.

Alternative 1	
Effectiveness	Empowering youth and equipping them with skills, knowledge, cultural awareness, and personal abilities will enhance their self-confidence and strengthen society’s belief in the importance of their presence in decision-making institutions.

Verification	It will depend on the role of educational institutions and the adoption of an inclusive participation policy involving youth, families, universities, and civil society organizations.
Impact	Equipping youth with skills and capabilities will motivate them to engage in public discourse and participate effectively.

Alternative 2: Encouraging Youth Involvement in Trade Union and Political Work

In order to enhance the role of Palestinian youth in decision-making centers, it is essential to encourage their participation in trade union and political work. This can be achieved through the following:

- **Organizing Training Workshops:** Offering training courses that focus on understanding the political system, developing political leadership charisma, governance techniques, and political communication skills.
- **Engagement with Political Parties and Groups:** Encouraging youth to join political parties and political groups, which will help raise their voices on public issues and give them a platform to influence political agendas.
- **Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations:** Engaging with civil society institutions will enable youth to participate in campaigns that aim to change policies or influence decision-making processes. This will also enhance their ability to address social justice issues and advocate for their rights.
- **Strengthening Popular Accountability Initiatives:** Youth involvement in initiatives that promote transparency and accountability will allow them to demand greater scrutiny of governmental actions, while also facilitating the transfer of their issues to decision-making centers.
- **Active Participation in Local Councils:** Youth should be encouraged to participate in local councils, which will provide them

with opportunities to influence local decisions and contribute to addressing community needs.

- **Involvement in Local Development Committees and Advisory Councils:** Engaging youth in local development committees and advisory bodies will strengthen their role as consultants and stakeholders in determining local priorities and fostering sustainable development.
- **Coordination Between Youth Movements in Different Palestinian Cities:** Creating a coordinated platform for youth movements in various Palestinian cities will facilitate calls for political and social change, contributing to shaping local and international policies.
- **Establishing Continuous Dialogue Between Youth and Older Generations:** Encouraging ongoing conversations between youth and older generations can allow for the sharing of experience, wisdom, and guidance. While the older generations can impart their knowledge, the youth can contribute their fresh perspectives and demands, reflecting their contemporary realities.

By facilitating the active engagement of youth in these areas, they will be empowered to influence the political, social, and economic landscapes, thereby contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and dynamic decision-making process in Palestine.

Alternative 2	
Empowering youth and integrating them into channels of engagement with societal issues will benefit all groups, ultimately driving the enhancement of youth participation in decision-making centers.	Effectiveness
It depends on providing a supportive environment for youth and the willingness and conviction of all parties regarding the importance of their role.	Verification
This alternative requires integrated plans and programs with the participation of all parties, which would strengthen youth participation.	Impact

Alternative 3: Empowering Youth Economically

Empowering Palestinian youth economically is a crucial step towards enhancing their participation in decision-making processes. This can be achieved through the following strategies:

- **Supporting Youth Small Businesses:** Encouraging and supporting youth entrepreneurship through small business initiatives can significantly contribute to economic empowerment. When youth are economically independent, they become more influential in shaping national economic policies and decisions.
- **Encouraging Innovative Thinking:** Providing opportunities for young people to start their own businesses fosters creativity and innovation. This enables them to think critically, make decisions, and develop skills that can be applied in broader decision-making contexts. Youth who engage in entrepreneurship are often better equipped to influence and participate in decision-making processes at various levels.
- **Building Self-Confidence:** Successful youth entrepreneurship boosts self-confidence, which plays a vital role in empowering youth to engage in broader societal activities. As they gain experience in managing projects and businesses, youth will become more confident in expressing their opinions and contributing to discussions about their community's future.

Through economic empowerment, youth will be able to contribute more effectively to political and social decisions, bringing fresh ideas and energy to the table. By supporting youth in establishing their own businesses and creating platforms for innovation, Palestinian society can benefit from an energized and forward-thinking youth sector.

Alternative 3	
Supporting small projects provides youth with opportunities for sustainable income, reduces unemployment and poverty rates, fosters entrepreneurial spirit, and encourages the exploration of innovative ideas.	Effectiveness

Establishing networks of young entrepreneurs, providing them with opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences.	Verification
Through economic empowerment, youth gain confidence in themselves and their ability to influence society. This strengthens their participation in local and national decision-making.	Impact

SWOT Analysis

Weaknesses	Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of necessary legislation • Party and political stagnation • Weak political representation • Weak youth leadership skills • Patriarchal society • High unemployment rates among youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth represent a large and dynamic demographic in Palestinian society. • There is a growing recognition of the importance of youth's role. • Civil society institutions adopt youth initiatives that call for their inclusion in decision-making centers. • Educational opportunities are available.
Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political, administrative, and geographical division • Occupation, settlement, and ongoing wars • Blockade and economic conditions • Social and cultural customs and traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for political reforms • Technology and social media • International institutions' support for youth issues • Continuous advocacy for the importance of holding elections

Solutions and Practical Opportunities to Enhance Youth Participation

First: Institutional Reforms:

Efforts should focus on creating a political system that ensures public freedoms and provides Palestinian citizens, especially the youth, with equal opportunities for participation in decision-making. This includes lowering the age for candidacy in legislative and presidential elections to 18 years instead of 28 and 40 years. Additionally, laws should be amended to increase youth participation in both local and general elections. It is also essential to facilitate and support the establishment of new youth movements and parties that represent their aspirations and political goals.

Second: Community Role:

The restructuring of institutions is necessary to better support the role of youth in politics and society. Organizing awareness campaigns that aim to change societal views on the role of youth is vital, as well as promoting success stories of youth across various fields. Furthermore, enhancing cooperation between the private sector and civil society to support youth training and provide employment opportunities is crucial. Additionally, promoting both curricular and extracurricular activities will create space for skilled student leaders who can face challenges and express the needs of the community.

Third: Ensuring Implementation:

Achieving effective youth participation requires real political will, societal pressure, and comprehensive reform policies to ensure the building of a more democratic and inclusive political system in Palestine. This can be done by establishing a committee or office to monitor and evaluate the level of youth participation in decision-making processes. The committee could include representatives from the government, civil society, academia, and youth themselves. Organizing regular surveys among youth to assess the impact of training programs and political initiatives on their participation, as well as analyzing the results to draw lessons, is essential. Finally, issuing comprehensive reports on the success rates of alternatives and solutions, reviewing what has been implemented, and comparing it with set objectives is necessary.

Conclusion: Toward Enhancing Hope

Enhancing opportunities for Palestinian youth to participate effectively in decision-making is a key step toward achieving sustainable development in Palestine. Empowering youth will increase the inclusivity of the Palestinian political system and contribute to building a Palestinian society capable of facing current challenges while achieving national goals of freedom and independence.

Coordination between governmental institutions, civil society, and the private sector to provide sustainable educational, economic, and political opportunities is fundamental for broad youth participation in decision-making.

Promoting this role is not only about providing space for youth to speak out or express their opinions but also about empowering them with the knowledge and skills to have a real impact on public policies. Through this participation, youth will have the opportunity to shape their future and work with their peers to build a new Palestine based on the principles of justice and equality.

In conclusion, it is crucial to emphasize that integrating youth into the decision-making process is an investment in the future. It is an essential and necessary path to ensuring the sustainability of progress and growth in Palestine.

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