

Civic Engagement for Development

A Comprehensive Modality for Building Inspirational Civic-Minded Youth



By Abeer Al Yazji



Education is the powerhouse of a nation – leading to stability, peace, and prosperity for its citizens. However, it is essential to have quality education that is relevant, modern, and broad. Education is a lifelong endeavor of learning and adapting to changes in theories, practices, and

technologies. It should be instilled in students so that they realize, appreciate, and embrace changes rather than resist them. This is their guarantee for lifelong relevance of skills and employability.

In the Gaza context, as in any area in crisis, access to educational resources is severely restricted. It is well-known that this can leave a whole generation of children and young adults without education. If and when a region does recover, there remains a dire void of qualified individuals who could take the lead in rebuilding the country. For this reason, there is a desperate need for qualified individuals with civic leadership abilities.

“To build a cadre of educated and trained leaders who are civic-minded, intellectually able, and professionally skilled to

become the community, business, and national civic leaders of the future” is the vision of Al Fakhoora Scholarship and Empowerment Programme, which began in 2009. UNDP and its partners, with funds from Education Above All Foundation, have envisioned this long-term comprehensive program that links the provision of more than 1,000 educational scholarships for post-secondary students to other supporting interventions such as civic leadership opportunities, student services, internships, career guidance, academic advising, and various personal and professional development opportunities. The interventions aim to fill the gap between academic programs and the skills required by the national and international labor markets. Since the establishment of the program, a civic engagement component was developed to reinforce the skills of the youth.

In highly volatile crisis environments, securing an adequate education is extremely challenging or sometimes impossible. In Gaza, however, and despite the waves of instability, there is potential to expand access to quality higher education, and therefore it is possible to provide quality and relevant education to youth. It has also become apparent that a specialized or custom-built curriculum is required for Gaza youth.



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“I was amazed by the youth's efforts to change something about their lives and the lives of their communities, and I was motivated but did not have the network or ability to go and look for volunteering opportunities. Al Fakhoora was the first step towards achieving my aspiration,” said Fidaa Ali. The civic engagement component is a multi-stage training program designed to empower scholars to become highly skilled civic leaders who are fully prepared and empowered to engage productively and make meaningful contributions to their communities and beyond. The program offers a broad range of skill-development opportunities, and the approach involves a variety of experiences. Scholars learn and apply new skills, and in so doing, develop their character and capacity as

self-advocates and civic leaders. The curriculum design developed through Al Fakhoora Programme is unique in many ways compared to other programs; for example, it captures four main categories of student learning: academic skills; student learning outcomes (SLOs) and global achievement gap (GAG) skills; social-emotional learning spheres (SEL); and professional development skills (PDS).

During the selection phase, Al Fakhoora identifies youth who are willing and able to maximize the opportunities provided by the program. This ensures that program beneficiaries are not just recipients of assistance but are in their turn supporting their peers and communities, adopting positive action and ethical behavior. In addition,



Husam Salem, Fundamental Skills and Qualities of Civic Leadership, 2017. © UNDP/PAPP

throughout the program, the scholars go through different stages of training, starting from fundamental skills and qualities of civic leadership, art of dialogue and facilitation, and activating civic leadership to shaping communities, student clubs, and organizing the Inspire Conference.

Most of the curriculum is originally designed and developed to be a youth-centric program that utilizes best national and international practices. Trial and error techniques, evidence-based teaching and learning methods that are equally balanced between theory and practice. In addition, a parallel technique was used to develop the content in which iterative and incremental modification/ revisions were done in parallel and continuously through meetings, discussions, and content piloting. On the other hand, the delivery of the curriculum ensures a careful

selection of trainers who receive comprehensive training on how to deliver the content and monitor the progress of the participants. The flexible design responds to the realities on the ground. Continuous feedback is collected from the participants and considered in the designed interventions.

“A life-changing experience is how I can describe my inspirational journey with the civic engagement program. After I lost my father in the 2014 hostilities, I lost hope, passion, and the willingness to succeed. Through the implemented activities, I could regain my energy and enhance my skills. Now I share my experience with others through different platforms and events. I also work as an academic advisor helping youth to overcome their circumstances and succeed in their academic journeys,” said Athar Ahmed, a scholar of the AI



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Fakhoora Programme. The modality has been replicated with refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, and Lebanon. Furthermore, some scholars have been selected to join international conferences to share their experiences and inspire other youth around the globe. This includes leading and facilitating sessions as part of the WISE Summit and the Generation Amazing Festival (GA). Additionally, one scholar has been selected as the GA ambassador in Palestine.

It has been a challenge to ensure the cohesion of all scholars regardless of their gender, background, and health status. Through the implementation process, we have seen cases where some of the female scholars were forbidden by their families to engage in the activities since they do not believe in the program's impact or they object because of cultural reasons. Through careful interventions and direct communication, the perception of families was positively changed

as they could recognize the positive impact not only on the alumni themselves but also on the family. By providing a glimpse of hope as well as an opportunity and a gateway, these vulnerable individuals can be nurtured to become peaceful, responsible, and prosperous members of society. With this in mind, the program was conceived to provide a "golden key," for marginalized individuals within our society.

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