# COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY
## IN THE PALESTINIAN CONTEXT
### CONCEPTS, ALTERNATIVES AND CHALLENGES

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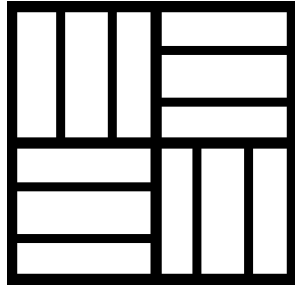Illustration and design by Michael Jabareen

# DALIA ASSOCIATION

Dalia Association is a Palestinian community foundation dedicated to empowering Palestinians to exercise their inherent rights to control their resources in pursuit of sustainable, long-term development. Guided by a mission to effectively mobilize and utilize resources, it seeks to empower an independent, vibrant, and accountable civil society through community-led grant-making, focusing on local ecological, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions of community development.

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# CONTENTS

# PREFACE

The self-reliance approach, rooted in accumulated knowledge and experience, forms the bedrock of social capital growth. By simultaneously fostering local economic accumulation, it engenders new values that ripple through society, driven by transformative change and socioeconomic dynamics that promote self-reliance.

Societies often tap into their historical experience as a catalyst to shift values and attitudes—whether in investment choices, consumption habits, or methods of public service provision. The traditional concept of *Al-Ouneh*, once central to agrarian society in Palestine, is a cornerstone in fostering collective philanthropy and participation. Volunteer movements, particularly prominent during the 1980s, became a key bridge between Al-Ouneh and the broader idea of community philanthropy, which is firmly anchored in mobilizing local resources.

Rooted in kinship ties, local bonds, and neighborly relationships, Al-Ouneh thrived in self-sufficient communities where ownership and labor were intertwined. Similarly steeped in volunteerism and a rejection of wage labor, it served both individuals and the broader community without the need for formal contracts or legal frameworks. Instead, Al-Ouneh relied on trust and reciprocity, based either on mutual benefit between individuals or on solidarity for the common good, whether at the level of the *hamūlah* (clan) or the entire village.

This social action was deeply tied to positive customs, traditions, and collective values. Over time, it fostered a unique culture characterized by distinctive semantics and symbols found in folklore, songs, proverbs, and other cultural expressions.

The gradual decline of the *Al-Ouneh* tradition can be traced to significant social shifts that commodified village life, replacing traditional systems of self-sufficiency with market-driven transactions. Once rooted in localized production, Palestinian villages became increasingly reliant on market forces and external economies. Palestine's entry into the global marketplace, from a weak and dependent economic position accelerated the erosion of traditional cooperation. The external modernization of the village stunted its organic development, tethering rural areas to urban centers. These imposed transformations reshaped Palestinian society, as the productive sectors—once the foundation of both rural and urban life—were marginalized by the rise of the service sector. The cost of this meta-

morphosis was substantial: local resources were neglected, reliance on foreign aid surged, and villages that once thrived independently became reservoirs of labor.

This shift became more pronounced as peasants, once engaged in self-sufficient agricultural work, were transitioned into wage laborers in Israeli workshops or public servants within both pre- and post-Palestinian Authority (PA) structures. This socioeconomic shift fostered a novel mindset, one that either disregarded local resources altogether or deemed them inadequate for sustainable economic and social development.

This transition distorted the social and cultural fabric in rural areas, deepening their dependency on urban centers, which themselves rely on administrative hubs tethered to global power structures. What had once been a culture of self-reliance gradually shifted toward dependence on external forces—whether political, economic, or otherwise.

The challenges that grip Palestinian society extend beyond the issues already outlined, particularly affecting civil society organizations (CSOs). A key problem lies in their reliance on international aid, which, while providing vital support, also serves as a major obstacle to these organizations' ability to independently fulfill their missions.

At this juncture, a critical question emerges: shall we revive the Al-Ouneh value system or continue down the path of dependency on external forces? Both options carry significant risks, particularly in terms of failing to establish a sustainable, self-reliant model. The answer likely lies in developing a model rooted in a dynamic, critical interplay between our historical legacy and current realities. This is not a simple blending of past and present but a deliberate integration of the positive values inherent in both.

The discussion thus far has underscored the presence of untapped resources within Palestinian society—resources that, if effectively utilized, could serve as the cornerstone of a development model aligned with the region's context and needs. However, these resources have often been neglected or squandered, overshadowed by consumerist trends and a cultural reliance on external aid.

This leads us to the central research problem: What stands in the way of the effective utilization of local resources and community philanthropy as a driver of development? Several lines of inquiry arise from this primary question: What obstacles hinder the full leveraging of community philanthropy for development? What limitations does this approach face in delivering development? And crucially, how do donors influence whether community philanthropy thrives or withers away?

This research argues that a flaw in social perceptions and attitudes toward local resources—a gap rooted in the dominance of socioeconomic values and customs that block their full potential and stand in the way of social transformation. It also assumes that donors play a significant role in shaping the landscape of community philanthropy.

The significance of this study lies in the high unemployment rate among Palestinian youth, particularly recent graduates. Offering fresh perspectives, it aims to unlock the potential of this section of society to branch out into self-reliant forms of work, fostering opportunities for cooperation and innovation. The paper also calls for a new funding framework—one that moves beyond the current constraints and lends greater autonomy to CSOs that are more attuned to their community needs than international donors.

At its core, this study explores the concept of community philanthropy within Palestinian society as a viable alternative to the understanding of conventional volunteering. It also examines the role donors play in supporting and containing Palestinian CSOs.

This study primarily relies on semistructured interviews comprising five central questions, with further follow-up questions based on the respondent's responses. These interviews were conducted with selected personnel from CSOs engaged in community philanthropy and lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes. The only exception was a focus group session, which extended beyond sixty minutes. The interviewees were selected based on their involvement in community philanthropy and their roles within their respective CSOs.

The interview questions span the demographic information of the respondents, the nature of their roles within their organizations, and the origin and significance of their organization's projects and programs. They also touch on their CSOs' primary beneficiaries and how their project models diverge from conventional funding methods. These questions were designed to serve as discussion prompts, allowing for deeper exploration and insights into the respondents' perspectives and inputs.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws upon Gramsci's theoretical contributions, albeit with a broader interpretation, specifically his theorization of *traditional and organic intellectuals*. In this school of thought, intellectuals are not confined to ivory towers—detached from quotidian social realities—but are anyone who holds a role—organizational, cultural, or ideological—within society (Magdy 2019). Traditional intellectuals view themselves as occupying a higher social position than the rest of society, distant and detached. In contrast, organic intellectuals remain rooted in their class and strive to improve both their conditions and modus vivendi (Al-Jameel 2019).

In this research, Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual is expanded beyond individuals and single actors to groups that form and support organizations that work in the best interest of their communities. Within community philanthropy, this is reflected in groups with a clear understanding of their community's needs and, as a result, come together to establish and sustain social structures (i.e., organizations) designed to improve the well-being and conditions of their communities. Class alert, these structures often serve with a pronounced bias and commitment to the poor and marginalized strata of society. This conceptual framework holds particular significance in analyzing the role of elites within community philanthropy, offering a lens to examine the social function of organizations as agents of change.

## VOLUNTEERING, CHARITABLE WORK, AND SOCIAL PROTECTION: DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

Before engaging with the corpus of literature on community philanthropy, it is essential to define this concept and related concepts that overlap with it—namely, *volunteering*, *charitable work*, and *social protection*. Understanding the distinctions between these terms is essential for analyzing their roles in the larger framework of community philanthropy.

### VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering, also referred to as voluntary work and volunteer work, is defined through various interpretations. Peggy Thoits and Lyndi Hewitt (2001) define it as "the voluntary giving of time and talents to deliver services or perform tasks with no direct financial compensation expected." This captures the essence of giving, both in time and expertise, to

foster community well-being. Wageman and Jordan add to this understanding, defining voluntary work as an intentional, unpaid effort driven by personal agency for the benefit of others. Sanaa Dweikat (2021) frames it as "an act in which an individual dedicates a portion of their time and skills to help others, their community, or nonprofit organizations, without expecting financial compensation."

Across these definitions, several overlapping points are evident, most notably the absence of any expectation of financial compensation. They all converge on the idea that people *volunteer* their time and skills freely and consciously as an act of solidarity. Nevertheless, each definition brings in certain nuances. Dweikat, for example, focuses on the groups that benefit from volunteer work. Notably absent in these definitions is any mention of the benefits volunteers themselves might receive, such as increased social capital or the acquisition of new skills and experience.

## CHARITY WORK

Like volunteer work, charity work is defined in various ways. Muhammad S. J. Mahdi (2012) frames it as a collective endeavor by a group of people to achieve common interests and goals—whether humanitarian, religious, scientific, industrial, or economic—through raising donations and channeling them into charitable activities. He links charity work with Islamic tradition, specifically zakat , a system that historically embodies the principles of traditional charitable giving in Muslim societies. Mustafa Khadir (2016) defines it as a social action that is not motivated by financial gain or profit but is instead about delivering essential humanitarian services to those in need. In a nutshell, charitable work is a practice whereby individuals or groups with greater resources lend a helping hand to those less fortunate.

Drawing from the definitions above, it is evident that there is significant overlap between charitable and volunteer work. Therefore, it is essential to crystalize the blurred lines before moving forward to social protection and community philanthropy. Two key differences stand out between the two concepts. First, charity is often driven by religious or spiritual motivations—people seeking divine grace and blessings through acts of kindness. In contrast, volunteering arises from a profound sense of social responsibility. Second, the scope of the two differs: charity often focuses on aiding individuals, whereas volunteer efforts tend to ripple through entire communities, creating a broader impact. Last but not least, while charitable work usually involves monetary or material contributions, volunteerism primarily involves a personal investment of time and skills.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 2017), social protection is a set of interventions aimed at the mitigation of social and economic risks and vulnerabilities and the elevation of extreme poverty and deprivation. Similarly, the International Labour Organization defines social protection as a "set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle," adding a sharper focus on nine key areas: "child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection (medical care), old-age benefits, invalidity/ disability benefits, and survivors' benefits."

These definitions highlight the intrinsic link between the economy and social protection, emphasizing that social protection ensures the continuity and survival of those who receive it. However, they place a niche focus on individuals, leaving out social structures such as groups and organizations, which also need support to maintain their services. Community philanthropy plays a key role in bridging this gap, extending the concept of social protection beyond individuals to include community organizations.

In this paper, community philanthropy is defined as a form of social protection provided by individuals within a community through solidarity and volunteer efforts, alongside support for organizations serving the public interest. This definition has been chosen because civil society and CSOs require protection, especially in the face of persistent pressure on public

# LITERATURE REVIEW

To contextualize community philanthropy in Palestine, it is essential to review the direct and indirect corpus of literature on this concept. This body of research can be categorized into three main areas: first, studies exploring the nature of community philanthropy and its impact on driving social change; second, examinations of the concept of Al-Ouneh as a parallel to community philanthropy, deeply rooted in Palestinian cultural heritage, along with efforts to connect community philanthropy to this legacy; and third, analyses investigating the far-reaching influence of international aid on Palestinian society and the complex effects this funding model has on community-driven philanthropic practices.

## COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY: DEFINITION AND ROLE IN CHANGE

Jenny Hodgson and Anna Pond (2018) emphasize that community philanthropy plays several roles, the most significant of which is shifting power from donors to individuals within the community. Arguing that these individuals are the ones who drive development and amplify the voices of their communities, they offer suggestions for those looking to strengthen CSOs working at this forefront. Last but not least, they underscore the importance of ensuring that the decision-making of the supported CSOs remains independent.

Avila Kilmurray (2020) traces the expansion of community organizations and charts how community philanthropy has been adapted to meet the needs, opportunities, and challenges in regions as diverse as Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Global South, particularly the Middle East. Her research also touches on the challenges these organizations face, particularly with the terminologies and lexicons they use—an issue echoed by other scholars in this field.

Hodgson and Hilary Knight (2016) build on the broader understanding of community philanthropy by examining its historical evolution. They make a case for a shift from the dominant model of international aid toward a more localized framework that delivers tangible, on-the-ground results. This approach aims to return the essence of support back to its roots—positioning aid as a conduit for genuine development rather than a vehicle for external control. Community philanthropy, they argue, rebalances power dynamics by transferring decision-making from international donors to individuals within the community itself.

## AL-OUNEH

In a study that saw the light in 2017, Abdel Karim Mizal traces the historical evolution of the landscape of voluntary work in Palestine—from the historical practice of Al-Ouneh to today's specialized, organization-dominated voluntary sector. He identifies key characteristics and challenges in each of the major historical phases of voluntary work in Palestine. Marked by spontaneity and informality, The Al-Ouneh or traditional volunteer work phase (1919–70) saw the advent of service structures. From 1970 to 1990, volunteering then took a national turn, with closer ties to national and liberation movements. Today, civil volunteering has morphed into a professionalized sector managed by specialized organizations. In conclusion, Mizal advocates for a new approach that merges the grassroots, self-reliant spirit of Al-Ouneh with community philanthropy, which aligns closely with the definition the researcher ascribes to community philanthropy.

In their exploration of Al-Ouneh (2013), Jibreel Jahshan and Hussein Yahya delve deeply into the concept of Al-Ouneh, charting its historical development and emphasizing its connection to Palestinian volunteerism. Their research highlights the impact of volunteering and Al-Ouneh on the Palestinian cause, village leagues, and the intifada. They also consider the gender dimensions within this context, acknowledging the contributions of women. Notably, their study draws parallels between the traditional concept of Al-Ouneh and the current work of CSOs.

## FOREIGN FUNDING IMPACTS ON PALESTINIAN SOCIETY

In his 2012 critique, 'Awashreh argues that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often operate as extensions of donor agendas—meaning that the donor governments' priorities dictate the decisions of these NGOs, often at the expense of the real needs of local communities. He further concludes that this form of aid locks the status quo in place. To counter interference, CSOs draw a clear line between donor nations based on the political strings attached. According to 'Awashreh, these distinctions typically revolve around whether the donor enforces political stipulations and whether the funding originates from government agencies or NGOs. Community philanthropy emerges as an alternative, offering these communities a pathway to reclaim control over their development priorities.

In their 2011 analysis of the socioeconomic impacts of foreign aid, Sami Sarsour, Rami Naser, and Mahmoud Atallah highlight the grave consequences of foreign aid in Palestine, with most of the aid being consumed rather than invested. This implies that such assistance is not reliable for achieving long-term sustainable economic growth.

Moreover, a significant portion of the aid comes with political strings attached rather than being driven by solidarity or development objectives. Instead of promoting self-reliance, these funds uphold a status quo of dependency, keeping the Palestinian economy tethered to external forces rather than nurturing local resilience.

Salem Darwish (2019) arrived at a similar conclusion in his examination of foreign aid's influence on development in Palestine. He argues that donor countries primarily provide this aid to serve their interests rather than to foster real development. Asserting that foreign aid does not necessarily contribute to sustainable development, Darwish notes that both the policies of the Israeli occupation and the PA have hindered the proper use of these funds. In some cases, these policies have a detrimental effect, working against development goals. This argument reinforces the pressing need for an alternative to international aid that translates stability into real development—one that places Palestinians' needs at the heart of the effort rather than being driven solely by donor agendas.

According to Abdul-Rahim al-Sheikh (2012), a new developmental concept called charter-based development was proposed as an alternative to conventional development models. Grounded in the rights of the Palestinian people to liberation and independence, this model hearkens back to the Palestinian National Charter of 1968 as the ethical compass for the Palestinian National Project, along with its political and cultural discourse. In the Palestinian context, any developmental process should be based on two key principles: liberation and justice. The extent to which various interventions are deemed developmental depends on their contribution to achieving these two principles. For instance, an agricultural intervention that links local production and consumption is developmental, while those that tether Palestinian farmers to the Israeli market are classified as nondevelopmental.
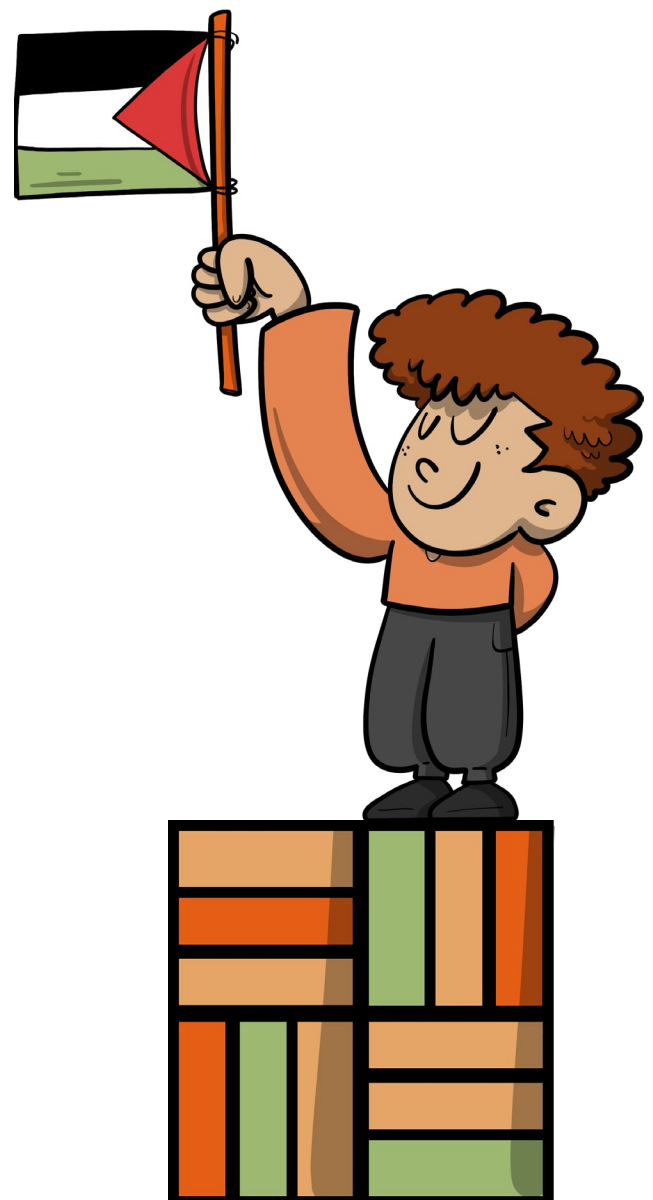
This literature review highlights the need for a new model to address the challenges posed by international aid, particularly conditional funding. This new approach could draw from Palestinian heritage, which offers fertile ground for such a model, with the tradition of Al-Ouneh providing a potential cornerstone. However, while Al-Ouneh carries many strengths, it alone is insufficient to meet the intricate needs of the current landscape.

Community philanthropy steps into this gap, as it intersects with Al-Ouneh, albeit without its limitations. It taps into the advantages of international support but also returns agency to local communities. In doing so, it overcomes the barriers posed by conditional funding, fosters social solidarity and cohesion through its locally sourced roots, and potentially achieves the envisaged development, aligning with what the Bisan Center for Research and Development describes as *charter-based development*.
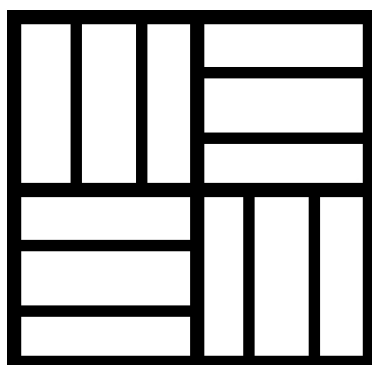
# HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTEERING IN PALESTINE:
## FROM AL-OUNEH TO THE ORGANIZED MOVEMENT

### GEBRIL MOHAMMED

Historically, the Palestinian countryside covered the majority of the Palestinian landmass, with the rural communities making the mainstay of the population. Agriculture, dominated by family labor, was the primary livelihood for these agrarian communities, which operated within a village structure heavily influenced by extended families organized under various *hamā'il* (clans). At certain times and peak seasons, the demand for labor soared. However, because the village economy was largely self-contained and separate from the broader market, this seasonal labor shortage was not addressed through hiring additional workers. Instead, the community relied on cooperation among families in practice historically known as *Al-Ouneh*.

## AL-OUNEH:
## A DEEP-ROOTED TRADITION IN PALESTINIAN POPULAR CULTURE

The practice of Al-Ouneh is based on the principle of mutual aid among villagers. It manifests as voluntary cooperation, where relatives and friends come together to assist a family in completing essential tasks, especially during harvest and olive picking or in larger projects such as house construction. This reciprocal support system fostered collaboration, benefiting everyone in the community.

# ⬚ RURAL VOLUNTEERING

For instance, families would often harvest crops in one part of the village and then collectively move to another area to complete the work—a practice known as *al-talqah al-sharqīyah wa-al-talqah al-gharbīyah* (Eastern round and Western round) in olive picking.

Al-Ouneh was not solely limited to family cooperation for private needs but extended to activities for the public good—including improving water springs, building communal guesthouses, digging rainwater cisterns, and even constructing mosques and agricultural roads (Barghouthi 2013).

More than just a practical system of labor-sharing, Al-Ouneh had its own songs, rituals, and shared traditions. As a key socioeconomic institution in Palestinian rural communities, it grew into a source of many of the modern public values of the Palestinian society at large.

## URBAN VOLUNTEERING

While the rural areas were rooted in the traditional practice of Al-Ouneh, urban Palestinian society painted a different picture. Cities, as administrative centers and hubs of crafts and industries had already integrated into market economies, especially towards the end of the Ottoman era. This urban society did not mirror the village model; instead, it showcased a distinct character of volunteering. Large families, alongside churches, took the lead in establishing charitable associations, which primarily focused on relief work and aiding the urban poor. Their efforts extended to founding health centers and orphanages, demonstrating a more structured and institutionalized approach to social aid. Urban volunteering also included the establishment of women's associations, such as the Arab Women's Union, and religious entities like Caritas, which played a significant role in setting up health centers. Furthermore, scout groups also engaged in various volunteer activities (Smith 1987).



## VOLUNTEERING AFTER THE NAKBA

The 1948 Nakba reshaped the Palestinian landscape and dismantled many of the socioeconomic structures that had marked Palestinian life. Reflecting this disruption, *al-mukhayyam* (refugee camp) emerged to replace *al-qaryah* (village). With 78 percent of Palestinian land occupied—the most fertile swathes—the practice of Al-Ouneh—rooted in productive cooperation—was greatly weakened. In the remaining villages of the West Bank, Al-Ouneh persisted but diminished as these regions were increasingly integrated into the market economy, and commodification took hold over the village socioeconomic landscape. While Al-Ouneh's role in compensating for labor shortages dwindled, the influx of refugees seeking work altered the labor dynamics. At the same time, charitable work surged across Palestinian cities, with efforts focused on housing the displaced, feeding the hungry, and caring for orphans left in the wake of the 1948 great dispersal. Among refugees, self-reliance and mutual aid mechanisms emerged, creating new forms of cooperation to address their immediate survival needs (Bast 2013).

Figure 1. Hind al-Husseini with her school students during a march, Jerusalem, Palestine, 1936.

During this period, a notable phenomenon emerged in the form of charitable volunteer organizations dedicated to serving the refugee population. These structures were often based in urban centers but focused their efforts on refugee camps and those displaced individuals who chose to live outside these camps. One of the most notable organizations born out of this period was the Hind al-Husseini College, which later established the Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi School in Jerusalem (Mohammed 2012). In a similar vein, certain groups from the same village or town formed voluntary charitable associations to address their communal needs. A prime example of this is the al-Lydd Charitable Association, founded in the late 1950s.



Figure 2. Volunteers at the Lod Charitable Society prepare food parcels for distribution to families in need during Ramadan.

Volunteerism also became intertwined with scouting, particularly in major cities where the practice of voluntary service was one of the core values embraced by the scout movement. However, this form of voluntary work remained largely confined within the scope of scouting duties.

## MASS VOLUNTEERISM FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION

Driven by broad national and political principles, mass volunteerism for national liberation transcended rural and urban divides. It emerged from a national need to build a mass movement to resist the occupation after the 1967 June War. The aim was to engage young Palestinians, who, after decades of erasure, were beginning to rediscover their Palestinian identity in a liberationist context. Some sought to establish a social position that complemented this resistance. As Abd al-Jawad Saleh, a pioneer of liberation volunteerism, explains (2013):

> The occupation's policies failed— whether in stifling armed resistance or in halting political defiance. The Palestinian people have maintained their resistance, often shifting in strength but always present. The occupation could not depopulate the land nor pacify its people into submission.
>
> (Saleh, 2013)

The Palestinian national movement sought to wield resistance mechanisms rooted in grassroots efforts from within the occupied territories. These methods aimed to create ongoing pressure on the occupation forces while fostering a cohesive national identity closely aligned with the Palestinian national resurgence embodied by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The first step came in the form of a group of intellectuals meeting at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) to offer tutoring in mathematics to secondary school students. This initiative gained traction in Ramallah, where Saleh, then mayor of al-Bireh, provided them with tools and meeting spaces (Fasheh 2013). The idea soon spread to Birzeit University, which formalized the concept by making 120 hours of volunteer work a graduation requirement. Soon after, other universities followed suit, embedding volunteerism into the fabric of higher education.



Figure 3. Birzeit College, 1942.



Figure 4. Birzeit University students take part in a volunteer-led cleaning campaign in Jenin and its refugee camp, 1974.

The early core group at Birzeit University, which had students from across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, set the stage for a broader movement of volunteerism. The university became a crucible of social and national unity, which helped this idea take root and spread. The ripple effect saw the emergence of volunteer groups in different villages, with newspapers often reporting their activities. Before long, groups of youth in various villages began organizing volunteer committees, with the first examples being in the Am'ari refugee camp and Kafr Ni'ma village northwest of Ramallah (Jbeil 2013).

These committees became the nucleus of grassroots action, extending even to Gaza, where Dr. Haider Abdel-Shafi spearheaded efforts through the Red Crescent. From there, the movement flourished, reaching cities and villages across both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The rise of the PLO played a pivotal role in expanding grassroots activism in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). After Israeli occupation disrupted the leadership of the National Front, scattering its members through exile and imprisonment, a new structure emerged: the National Guidance Committee. This body brought together elected mayors, labor activists, and prominent community figures who helped nurture the growing national movement within the oPt. They channeled the energy of the youth, particularly through university students, high schoolers, and youth clubs, alongside local volunteer committees (*as-Salhi*, 2013). These committees became a cornerstone of resistance, sprouting up in nearly every village and town and eventually organizing into regional groups that operated under the coordination of a central office. The leftist factions, especially the communists, played a prominent role in organizing this momentum. The communists, for instance, established the Higher Committee for Volunteer Work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine followed by the foundation of the Union of Volunteer Work Committees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Fatah soon followed suit, forming the Youth Committees for Social Work (Barghouthi, 2013).

These volunteer committees not only fostered political awareness but also delivered a range of essential services to Palestinian communities. They became the backbone of the



Figure 5. Children participating in cultural activities during the First Intifada.

grassroots popular committees that organized the lives of Palestinians during the first intifada (1987–93). However, political rivalries among Palestinian factions, vying to gain public support, soon led each group to form its network of local and central volunteer committees. These committees emerged as the face of mass mobilization outside formal organizations, especially in rural areas and refugee camps that lacked public services. They became symbols of resistance against the occupation, whether through direct volunteer work or popular national actions against Israeli forces and settlers.

Beyond their voluntary services, these committees combined national political education—through lectures, discussions, and practical involvement—shaping a generation of highly engaged, nationally aware Palestinians. This new generation was empowered not only with knowledge but also with a strong sense of commitment to the broader struggles of Palestinian society and its everyday challenges.

The Israeli occupation soon recognized the growing influence and threat posed by the volunteer movement. It initiated a crackdown on volunteer activists, employing tactics such as obstructing efforts and preemptively detaining volunteers, especially around pivotal national events like Land Day. To break the will of young volunteers and activists, the Israeli occupation established the Far'ah Prison. Ironically, rather than deterring these youth, the prison turned into a formative place of solidarity and education, strengthening the commitment of those detained. After the Oslo Accords and Israeli withdrawal, this same facility was repurposed into a youth rehabilitation center, now overseen by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.



Figure 6. The Popular Committee for Food Self-Sufficiency in the Shu'fat Palestinian Refugee Camp during the First Intifada.

## VOLUNTEERISM AND THE FIRST INTIFADA: A SURGE OF GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE

During the first intifada, volunteerism flourished. Though widely discussed as a spontaneous uprising, a closer examination reveals that without well-organized popular momentum, the uprising might have fizzled out within a week or two. What sustained its continuity was the groundwork laid by a well-organized Palestinian grassroots movement. This movement took shape after the PLO departed from Beirut in 1982 when attention shifted to organizing efforts within the oPt. Volunteer committees spread across villages, cities, and refugee camps became the driving force behind intifada activities, supported by university students whose institutions had been closed by the occupation. Looking back at pre-intifada dynamics, it becomes clear that the women's organizations were less elite-driven and more horizontally integrated across the oPt, as were the volunteer committees and other labor movements. During the first intifada, volunteerism began to specialize, with volunteers divided across sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, popular education (following school closures), and village guards against Israeli raids. This specialization contributed to a heightened awareness of volunteerism among the public and deepened the practice of self-reliance. A central pillar of this effort was the collective boycott of Israeli goods, which became part of daily resistance.

The preparation costs for volunteer activities were not high. Volunteering was not limited to time and effort but also included the donation of materials and tools. The transition from planning to action was swift—not bogged down by bureaucracy. Unlike today's extensive reporting procedures, progress was immediately visible through tangible results, with little need for formal documentation or extensive statistical evidence. It was a movement where less formality led to greater impact.

## PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

The path to embracing voluntary work in this era was not smooth. Beyond the systematic harassment by the occupation forces, traditional attitudes—particularly among the semieducated and some religious groups—acted as significant roadblocks. However, the tangible results achieved through these efforts helped to overcome these barriers. The visible impact on communities and the palpable change in local realities gradually won over skeptics, fostering a broader acceptance of volunteerism as a force for social good.

The earliest opposition to volunteerism stemmed from the fact that it was born in an urban, progressive context where gender mixing and modern dress were the norm—elements that caused some discomfort. This atmosphere emboldened rising religious

factions at the time to publicly attack volunteerism from mosque pulpits. However, the social benefits of these volunteer efforts and the visceral nationalistic spirit among the people surmounted societal hesitations, allowing volunteerism to transcend traditional barriers. Despite this breakthrough, the criticism did not entirely dissipate. Religious groups fixated on the perceived "immorality" of gender interaction within these initiatives, branding the volunteers as "communists" and "immoral." Yet, their isolation and lack of participation in the national movement until the outbreak of the intifada—combined with their opposition to the national forces—rendered their efforts ineffective. As a result, volunteerism was ultimately able to establish itself as a respected and integral element of Palestinian social and cultural life (al-Nahhas 2013).

Beyond that, various sections of society threw their weight behind the volunteer movement, offering in-kind donations—such as equipment, construction materials, and other tools—that served these efforts. These contributions not only reduced the financial burden of volunteer initiatives but also engendered a broader community of supporters. As a result, the forms and avenues for volunteerism expanded.

Negative perceptions of volunteerism were not inherent in the nature or social impact of the work itself. In fact, they were stirred by specific factions that exploited people's ignorance, conservatism, or adherence to tradition to turn them against volunteers, not volunteerism as a concept. Nevertheless, the volunteer movement managed to overcome this resistance by challenging critics to present their contributions to society rather than merely disparaging those who were actively engaged in the work—something that was not part of their agenda at the time (Jbeil 2013).
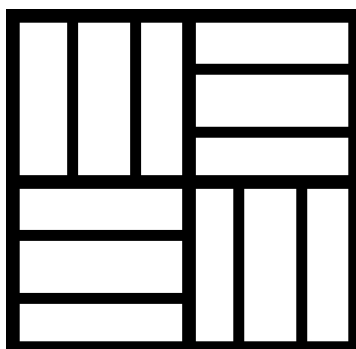
# VOLUNTEER WORK AND THE ADVENT OF THE PA

While the day-to-day activities of the intifada altered the forms and arenas of volunteer work, the essence and core values remained intact. However, in the lead-up to the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the imposition of checkpoints along the Green Line and the restriction of work permits led to an increase in unemployment, which became a significant barrier to volunteer efforts. The shift toward peace negotiations also dampened the momentum for collective activism during this period. With the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the subsequent commitment from donor countries to fund the newly formed PA, volunteerism took a major turn. The establishment of the PA, along with its need for personnel in both civil and security sectors, ushered in a new cultural outlook that contrasted sharply with the spirit of volunteerism that had been prevalent during the intifada. Overstaffing in the PA's institutions changed the perspective from self-reliance and community-based initiatives to a growing dependence on the PA. This newly formed government was seen as the primary avenue for addressing long-neglected developmental issues and for legitimizing the previously oppressed aspects of society under occupation.

The PA lacked a clear developmental vision for the areas under its control. It overlooked the popular grassroots structures, once vital to social progress, leaving the developmental field open to private initiatives and NGOs.

Volunteer work, once widespread, began to diminish, and its forms, fields, and readiness for such initiatives underwent significant changes. At universities, for instance, volunteering became more of a formality—a mere graduation requirement—which distorted the values and purpose of such efforts. The public increasingly expected the nascent authority to resolve problems that volunteer efforts had previously addressed. In this phase, a new type of community organization emerged—one that aligned with the new international and local dynamics. Some formerly widespread mass-membership organizations transformed into more professionalized organizations with smaller memberships and administrative structures that allowed them to receive foreign funding. These organizations, once rooted in volunteerism with minimal staff and limited external funding, shifted toward a model dependent on such resources (Shawwa 1999).

# ▊▊ VOLUNTEERISM AND NONGOVERNMENTAL ACTION

Some view civil work as a form of volunteering, which holds if it aligns with the core values of genuine volunteering. The essence of this connection lies in transforming civil work from technocratic operations into a broader social movement aimed at achieving specific demands. This transformation relies on three interdependent sine qua nons: an influential and structured political community capable of mobilization, CSOs that serve as repositories of expertise and knowledge, and social movements advocating for concrete causes, such as "Students for Free University Education," "Youth Against Settlements," or "Women Against Honor Killings." Together, these components integrate human action, knowledge, and organization to create impactful change within society (Shalabi and Saadi 2001).

Palestine's civil work or NGO landscape remains fragmented, with isolated initiatives that lack a unifying thread of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration within organized frameworks. Any coordination that does exist tends to revolve around the availability of donor-driven funds or fleeting, seasonal activities. The absence of political parties willing to invest in building lasting social movements further weakens these efforts. When such movements do emerge, they are frequently short-lived and, rather than aligning with national priorities, they tend to follow the stipulations and agendas set by donors, which may not necessarily reflect Palestinian national aspirations. Consequently, these movements struggle to gain public momentum or rally large constituencies behind their causes.

Without grassroots cohesion, movements struggle to grow beyond niche support. Even the resistance actions in Bil'in, Ni'lin, Nabi Saleh, and Al-Ma'sara—while fueled by a strong spirit of volunteerism—are not purely voluntary efforts. These movements are better described as social movements, as they focus on resisting the apartheid wall and settlement expansion.
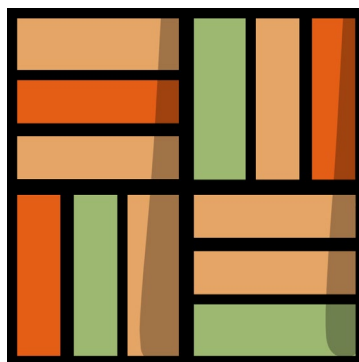
# COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY
# AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In the wake of the PA's establishment, *corporate social responsibility (CSR)* took root, suggesting that private sector profits should partially serve social welfare and charitable purposes, benefiting vulnerable groups and communities. Private sector contributions span various projects, from building schools and community centers to sponsoring orphaned children and funding scholarships for students across Palestinian universities.

While there is no formal law mandating CSR contributions, companies are required by law to disclose their CSR activities in their annual reports. Most companies listed on the Palestinian Capital Market maintain consistent community philanthropy efforts, albeit with differing approaches.

That said, not all CSR efforts have been without critique. In some cases, the lines between social responsibility, public relations, and corporate marketing have become blurred. Some businesses have adopted CSR initiatives primarily as a form of promotion rather than as a genuine commitment to social well-being (Civil Society Team for Enhancing Public Budget Transparency 2022).

This commercial approach to CSR metamorphosizes it into a marketing strategy. As a result, the community perceives CSR efforts as part of corporate marketing strategies rather than genuine social contributions. The lack of transparency around the selection criteria for supported initiatives and organizations has also become a problem. In some cases, large investors have established nonprofit entities to manage CSR funds from their companies, casting doubt on whether the funds are reaching the intended vulnerable and underserved groups.

A genuine partnership between the private sector and community service organizations could be a crucial step toward realizing the concept of community philanthropy. Establishing such collaboration would require building strong communication channels, especially with members of corporate boards and executive leadership, to foster a deeper understanding of community needs.

# GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY ORGANIZATIONS IN HISTORIC PALESTINE

To map out the organizations that are engaged in community philanthropy and related activities, several interviews were conducted. This section provides an overview of these organizations and their roles, categorized by the geographic duty stations: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and Palestinian society within the 1948 occupied Palestinian land. The section that follows this distribution moves to the individual contributions of each organization within its respective area.

## THE INASH AL-USRA ASSOCIATION (AL-BIREH)

The Inash Al-Usra Association, a pioneering organization aimed at empowering women, has adopted a multifaceted approach to support women while ensuring the organization's financial independence. The association runs several initiatives, including a vocational training college, a traditional foods kitchen, a dormitory for female students, a childcare center, and a sewing workshop. These various branches work together to generate revenue streams that enable the association to operate autonomously. Although the Inash Al-Usra Association accepts donor funds, particularly through traditional aid mechanisms, it upholds a principled stance by not allocating these funds to cover staff salaries. This strategy helps ensure that external financial contributions do not influence or compromise the association's core mission, decision-making, or objectives.



Figure 7. A booklet published by Inash Al-Usra Association showcasing key activities for children during the International Year of the Child, 1979.

Alongside the political turmoil that shapes daily life in the region, the Inash Al-Usra Association has also endured considerable setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has directly impacted community engagement, with fewer participants in the association's programs, thereby stifling its ability to reach its full potential. Yet, the challenges are not purely financial. The association also contends with ingrained societal and cultural challenges that hinder its ability to thrive fully. However, financial challenges are not the only obstacle; the association also grapples with issues arising from societal norms and cultural expectations, which can complicate its efforts to fully achieve its mission.

Figure 8. A clipping from *Al-Mithaq* newspaper, dated June 29, 1980, featuring a selection of Inash Al-Usra Association's achievements and activities up to that year.

# THE POPULAR ART CENTER (AL-BIREH)

The Popular Art Center is a grassroots organization dedicated to the preservation of Palestinian cultural identity. The center's mission is anchored in two main aspects: preserving traditional songs and running a *dabke* school. Beyond teaching this iconic folk dance to children and generating income for the center, this school positions itself as an international ambassador of Palestinian culture by participating in global festivals.

Beyond its artistic mission, the center is also engaged in supporting agricultural cooperatives by providing them with financial aid through fundraising efforts. It also helps market the farmers' products, aiming to boost their profits and lower consumer costs by eliminating intermediaries.

The Popular Art Center faces challenges tied to conditional funding and the scarcity of alternative financial resources. It also maintains a firm stance against accepting grants that could compromise its cultural mission, objectives, and commitment to serve the community.



Figure 9. A performance by the Popular Art Center during the Palestine International Festival.

# ██ DALIA ASSOCIATION (RAMALLAH)

Dalia Association is a grassroots organization with a strong commitment to advancing community-led development by leveraging available resources within Palestinian society. Its guiding ethos centers on self-reliance, rejecting the traditional reliance on foreign aid. Dalia focuses on mobilizing contributions from both local actors and the Palestinian diaspora to finance projects that support sustainable development efforts. These projects aim to empower individuals and local organizations—referred to as partners—who are directly involved in addressing their respective community needs. Beyond funding, Dalia lends its partners with guidance and expert knowledge.

Dalia adopts a participatory and inclusive modus operandi and funding. A committee, formed from active community members and organizations, identifies the specific needs of the region. A fund is then established, with contributions from Dalia and other participating organizations, and is allocated to meet the community's needs as identified by the community itself. Despite the strengths of this approach, Dalia faces several challenges: Some organizations fail to fulfill their financial commitments to the fund, and there is a societal tendency to favor the more traditional model of financial support. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated these challenges.



Figure 10. A community service day organized by Dalia Association in Kafr Ni'ma.

## THE ISLAMIC CHARITABLE SOCIETY (ALKHALIL – HEBRON)

The Islamic Charitable Society (ICS) is one of the organizations operating throughout the West Bank, with its headquarters located in Hebron. The ICS primarily focuses on supporting orphans by offering education and learning opportunities, supported through donations from charitable organizations, local community groups, private sector contributions, and dignitaries. This support comes in various forms: direct financial assistance, individual sponsorships for orphans, or scholarships.

ICS's work goes beyond education. It is also dedicated to improving the living conditions of orphans by renovating their homes and offering microloans to support small business ventures. Through its partnership with the Doctors' Union, it ensures orphans receive free medical treatment.

ICS faces several layers of challenges that hinder its ability to provide much-needed support for orphans. First, society must navigate complex financial barriers. These include restrictions on banking transfers caused both by harassment from the Israeli occupation and global banking policies that enforce stringent blocklists. These obstacles severely limit the flow of funds to the organization. The second primary issue arises from the societal tendency toward self-criticism, which creates a climate of doubt about the potential of local solutions. This is exacerbated by the rising poverty levels, resulting in a shrinking pool of individuals capable of supporting orphans. Last but not least, ICS grapples with fierce competition from other CSOs, a fact that weakens the funding available for its programs.

## THE CULTURAL SYMPOSIUM CLUB (ALKHALIL – HEBRON)

The Cultural Symposium Club (CSC), a youth organization based in Hebron, actively promotes cultural awareness by hosting cultural events and symposia. Its funding is largely driven by donations from volunteers, coupled with modest profits from a small café that it manages. In addition, much of its support comes from targeted projects funded by international donors or the PA. The main challenges CSC faces are social pressures and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## THE ZAKARIYA VILLAGE ASSOCIATION (BETHLEHEM)

The Zakariya Village Association is a grassroots initiative established by Palestinian refugees from the village of Zakariya, which was depopulated during the 1948 war. The association's raison d'être is to maintain connections among community members, whether they are living in the West Bank or remained on their lands post-1948. As a small association, it is sustained largely by the voluntary contributions of time and resources from the people of Zakariya.

## AL-ATAA' CHARITABLE SOCIETY (GAZA STRIP)

In Gaza, the Al-Ataa' Charitable Society has taken on the mission of providing essential services to marginalized women and individuals with disabilities. Over time, especially after the latest war on Gaza, it has expanded its reach to include relief efforts. The primary funding sources for Al-Ataa' come from international organizations, along with community contributions aimed at relief work. However, these local contributions remain limited in scope. The organization faces several challenges in three key areas: the political environment involving both the PA in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the Israeli occupation; the widespread and ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; and, lastly, the hurdles imposed by restrictive banking policies, which have created a significant operational burden.

## GRASSROOTS AL-QUDS (AL-QUDS – JERUSALEM)

Grassroots Al-Quds, a Jerusalem-based organization, is committed to serving the entire Jerusalem governorate, covering both East and West sides as well as regions within and beyond the Separation Wall. The organization's mission is rooted in documenting the sociopolitical history of the region alongside producing relevant research. Central to its activities is offering political tourism, a unique approach that uses tours to explore the city's intricate political landscape. These tours also serve as a key source of income for the organization. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced this income due to the drastic halt in tourism.

Beyond the tours, Grassroots Al-Quds has other income sources. The organization receives funding from local municipalities in areas where it operates, as well as from donations by individuals, both within Palestine and the diaspora. It also draws support from nonprofit

organizations. Interestingly, Grassroots Al-Quds has successfully engaged with for-profit businesses, offering these companies contracted political tours, which represent a vital part of its financial sustainability.

## RAWA FUND (PALESTINE)

Rawa Fund is an organization committed to community philanthropy, driven by a mission to reshape how aid reaches Palestinian communities. Its model does not merely challenge the central role of external donors but also addresses the cultural footprint of traditional funding mechanisms. By moving away from the proposal-based grant system, a hallmark of conventional aid models, Rawa shifts power to grassroots actors. This is done through field-based committees, comprising members chosen by the local initiatives themselves, who assess needs and make funding decisions. This participatory approach transforms recipients into true partners and co-owners of the process rather than passive beneficiaries, signaling a deeper commitment to empowering the Palestinian community at every level.

However, the Rawa Fund faces several challenges, which can be summarized as follows:

1. **Funding shortfall:** The primary challenge stems from the fund's consistent refusal to accept conditional external aid, which limits its sources of financial support. Individual contributions, while valuable, remain inherently small-scale. Additionally, the fund imposes a cap on the maximum amount it can accept from a single donor. While this policy has significant positive implications for maintaining independence, it creates a funding barrier by restricting the overall amlount of available resources.

2. **The Palestinian discource on the relationship between funding and mainstream cultural perceptions:** There is an ongoing discource within Palestinian society regarding the relationship between funding, institutions. Members of the Rawa Fund have noted that many people struggle to distinguish between different types of funding, which adds to the complexity of the funds opperations.

3. **Lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:** The pandemic further exacerbated the challenges faced by the Rawa Fund, according to representatives of the organization.

To wrap up the discussion on the Rawa Fund, it is worth emphasizing two key points. First, the fund's mission seamlessly integrates both national aspirations and the aim to rebuild trust between Palestinian organizations and their communities. The interviewees

consistently stressed the importance of fostering ownership and self-reliance, positioning the fund as a counterweight to foreign-controlled grants. On the financial side, the fund's model predominantly draws from individual contributions. Though the original goal was to secure 70 percent of funding from these personal donations, the disruptions caused by COVID-19 have made this target yet to be fully realized.

## THE ARAB YOUTH ASSOCIATION - BALADNA (HAIFA)

Last but not least, the Arab Youth Association – Baladna, was also interviewed. Based in Haifa but working across historic Palestine, this organization focuses on rekindling a sense of national volunteerism among Palestinian youth. To this end, geared toward identity formation and nurturing a deeper understanding of identity and national concepts, helping youth navigate an environment that seeks to erase their identity.

Given its geopolitical context and location, Baladna faces a number of substantial challenges. A primary obstacle is the fragmentation of Palestinian society, which creates barriers to effective coordination, particularly with organizations operating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The organization's core mission, which emphasizes Palestinian identity, is also routinely challenged by the political pressures imposed by the Israeli occupation. Additionally, Baladna encounters significant funding difficulties. While the organization generates some revenue from products like Palestinian-themed games and relies on contributions from volunteers and individual donors for select projects, it is still largely dependent on external donors. This dependence is further complicated by its registration within Israel, which often limits its eligibility for international funding or deprioritizes it in comparison to other Palestinian organizations.

# FINDINGS

The research findings demonstrate the widespread presence of community philanthropy within Palestinian society. While international donor-funded organizations are often the most visible in the Palestinian civil society landscape, volunteer and community-led organizations that are steeped in and driven by local philanthropic contributions are more prevalent and deeply embedded across Palestinian communities. These organizations can be categorized into three tiers based on their structure and modus operandi:

1. **Grassroots Organizations:** This category comprises clubs, small cultural organizations, and volunteer social committees that operate primarily through the time and effort of local activists. While these grassroots organizations occasionally receive intermittent support from larger CSOs, the core of their activities is driven by local contributions. The sporadic external support they receive serves to complement their activities rather than sustain them.

2. **Charitable Organizations:** The second category includes charities (e.g., zakat committees and welfare organizations) that primarily rely on community philanthropy. These organizations derive the bulk of their operational funds from the local communities from which they are birthed and endeavor to serve. While they often sustain their activities by income-generating projects and donations from wealthy Palestinians, both within Palestine and abroad, some of these organizations may occasionally receive project-based funding from international donors. Such funding is typically geared toward development goals rather than covering the organization's operating expenses.

3. **NGOs:** The third group consists of NGOs that integrate community philanthropy into their broader operations despite their core activities being funded by external donors. Organizations like the Dalia Association, Rawa Fund, and the Dunya Women's Cancer Center are examples of organizations attempting to mobilize community resources to create organizational models of community philanthropy that are less reliant on external donors and their conditions.

The study underscores a pivotal commonality across the referenced organizations: an unwavering dedication to their communities and core missions. This alignment manifests through engagements with stakeholders, including individuals, grassroots initiatives, and occasionally, private enterprises, all aligned towards achieving their defined social objectives. Furthermore, these organizations collectively eschew the designation *beneficiaries* for those with whom they engage, preferring instead the term *partners*. Promoting a more

egalitarian, organic ethos, this lexical shift signals a critical break from power-laden discourse. By distancing themselves from top-down models, these groups aim to subvert entrenched power structures within civil society, aligning themselves more closely with the people they serve. Such an approach is emblematic of the *organic organization* paradigm—where entities are intrinsically embedded within, rather than superimposed upon, the communities they serve.

# BARRIERS TO
# A COMMUNITY-PHILANTHROPY-BASED
# DEVELOPMENT

The research delineates a series of obstacles to the realization of the full potential of community philanthropy. They are primarily rooted in prevailing cultural norms, the absence of analogous historical precedents and experiences, and the entrenched volunteerism model in Palestinian society.

The cultural barriers arise from the dominance of donor-funded aid over community philanthropy. Despite community philanthropy, rooted in traditions such as Al-Ouneh, being a historically significant and widely prevalent grassroots model, the donor-funded model has overshadowed it. This is partly due to their ability to market themselves effectively through media channels, which reshape the popular understanding of self-reliance and distort the concept of self-reliance among large swaths of the Palestinian public.

The predominance of donor-driven aid paradigms exacerbates cultural impediments to community philanthropy. Although community philanthropy, with its origins in traditional practices like Al-Ouneh, represents a deeply ingrained and historically pervasive model at the grassroots level, it has been eclipsed by donor-funded initiatives. This shift can be attributed to the latter's superior capacity for self-promotion via various media outlets, thereby redefining public perceptions of autonomy and warping the notion of self-sufficiency across significant segments of Palestinian society.

This challenge is succinctly articulated in a discussion with the Rawa Fund focus group: A principal obstacle to embracing community philanthropy is ingrained in social attitudes and perceptions. "People are accustomed to established patterns. . . We need to decolonize their minds," they explained (2022). This notion highlights that shifting away beyond donor-centric funding models requires investment in time and effort so as to reshape the prevailing public perceptions. This perspective finds resonance with the observations from

the Dalia Association's representative. Cultural expectations of organizational perfectionism pose further challenges. Both the Inash Al-Usra Association's and the ICS's representatives point out a widespread expectation of flawless grassroots organizations. The ICS representative further notes that when the organization cannot fully address the needs of orphans, the community blames the organization as the singular bearer of responsibility for these perceived failures.

It can be concluded that the community often expects organizations to operate in an ideal manner. Any deviation from perfection, even if caused by external factors, is often blamed on the organization and its staff. To mitigate this perception, one suggested solution involves ongoing, transparent communication with the community regarding the organization's operational challenges. This proactive engagement could mitigate adverse reactions during times of strain and further mobilize community support to assist in rectifying perceived deficiencies where feasible.

The limited promotion of community philanthropy models in Palestine reflects two main issues.

1. **Historical Legacy of Al-Ouneh:** The concept of Al-Ouneh, while deeply ingrained, has traditionally been limited to close-knit groups, often centered around individual, familial, or village connections and patriarchal structures. Despite these limitations, the model of Al-Ouneh has significantly influenced contemporary forms of community philanthropy. However, this link between the past and present remains unclear due to the lack of sufficient promotion of community philanthropy models, obscuring their historical and cultural significance.

2. **Scarcity and Visibility of Models:** Across the Arab world, and especially in Palestine, examples of community philanthropy are few and far between, with hardly any well-established cases. Despite the existence of some initiatives, they are not widely recognized or understood. This invisibility contributes to a knowledge gap, which in turn heightens economic risks faced by new community philanthropy initiatives.

Therefore, organizations such as Inash Al-Usra, Grassroots Al-Quds, the Popular Art Center, the CSC, and, to some extent, Baladna initiate self-sustaining projects aimed at generating income to support their operations. These efforts reflect a strategic approach to lessen their dependency on external funding by creating revenue streams that might cover a portion of their expenses. However, these projects typically do not suffice to meet more than 50 percent of their financial requirements.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded this already challenging scenario, as both Ali from Inash Al-Usra and Fayrouz Sharqawi from Grassroots Al-Quds noted. All interviewees agreed that the pandemic severely impacted their activities, including significant delays or even complete halts to the income-generating projects. Grassroots Al-Quds, in particular, faced notable setbacks, as their Jerusalem tours—one of their key revenue streams—were suspended due to pandemic-related restrictions.

Last but not least, the current prevalent volunteering landscape in Palestinian society has diverged from its historical roots. Losing much of its national character, it has evolved into a more formalized, structured activity. This shift can be seen implicitly when considering the objectives and transformations that institutions, organizations, and groups aim to achieve in society. For instance, Nida Nasser from Baladna mentions that one of the main objectives of the organization is to cultivate a sense of national identity among Palestinian youth. This statement points to an underlying observation: there might be a perceived deficit in national consciousness among volunteers (2022).

# LIMITATIONS TO COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY–BASED DEVELOPMENT

Two principal limitations impede the viability of community philanthropy for development:

1 **Colonization:** This overarching challenge not only stifles community philanthropy but also hampers broader developmental progress.

2 **Dominant System Constraints:** This encompasses restrictions enforced by governing bodies and the financial frameworks set by funding entities, including banks and donors.

The drive to create and deploy a new model that leverages available local resources is to achieve genuine development. However, is real development feasible under occupation? This is where the barriers imposed by colonialism come into play. The Israeli occupation systematically thwarts any efforts to bring real community progress—whether by groups, organizations, or even individuals. This pervasive impact is clearly evident in Jerusalem, as articulated by Sharqawi from Grassroots Al-Quds (2022). She repeatedly underscores that Israeli occupation's policies are the main factor exacerbating the challenges the Grassroots Al-Quds faces in delivering its services. Similarly, the interview with Naser from Baladna reiterates these concerns, revealing that operating under direct occupation not only com-

plicates securing support but also affects the nature of the organization's activities and hinders communication across different regions of historic Palestine (2022).

However, the effects of colonialism do not end there. It has also played a significant role in shaping the consciousness of Palestinian society, especially the youth. The occupation instills a particular kind of fear regarding involvement with CSOs. In other words, there is a perceived risk that long-term negative consequences might arise from working with these organizations, with volunteers and employees potentially facing harassment during their movement across the country.

The pervasive impact of colonialism extends deeply into the psyche of Palestinian youth, particularly influencing their engagement with CSOs under occupation. The Israeli occupation has instilled a profound sense of fear and caution about the long-term repercussions of affiliating with or working for CSOs, with volunteers and employees being harassed as they move across Palestine. Several interviewees, especially those working across multiple West Bank regions, underline this concern.

The constraints imposed by the ruling political regime manifest in dual dimensions. First, PA's policies exert significant pressure on CSOs, particularly female staff within these entities. PA's high taxes on financial aid and grants also intensify the economic challenges faced by these organizations. Adopting neoliberal economic policies, the PA undermines traditional values of self-reliance and collective collaboration, which are foundational for initiatives propelled by community philanthropy and volunteerism. On the flip side, the PA occasionally facilitates certain projects in this field. For example, as noted by the Dalia representative, the Chamber of Commerce supported the operations of some CSOs, and the Ministry of Culture played a role in backing the initiatives led by the CSC.

The second category of constraints pertains to funding and can be broken down into two primary issues. First, the financial transactions of CSOs are subject to several restrictions due to banking policies—an issue echoed by the Al-Ataa' Charitable Society in Gaza and the ICS (2022). In many cases, banks restrict their access to their funds, thus complicating their operations. Second, the contribution of individual donors to community initiatives is limited. While the culture of individual donations is not foreign to the Palestinian society, these contributions are often insufficient to cover the CSOs' needs. This challenge is especially pronounced for smaller entities such as the CSC and Zakariya Village Association. Larger organizations, while not immune to these challenges, benefit from their scale to secure more resources and better navigate financial limitations.

To overcome these limitations, there is an urgent need for systematic regulatory reforms that would grant organizations greater autonomy over resource management. Unlocking the full potential of community philanthropy requires more flexible frameworks that allow organizations, particularly those dependent on local resources and engagement, to utilize their funds more effectively. This shift is crucial for fostering sustainable, community-driven development. Additionally, a cultural transformation is necessary—one that broadens the societal understanding of the value of individual contributions, encouraging more active participation from Palestinians both within the homeland and the diaspora.

# THE ROLE OF DONORS IN THE RISE OR DECLINE OF COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

To effectively examine the role of donors in supporting or hindering community philanthropy, it is essential to categorize them into two distinct groups. The first group includes traditional donors, such as donor organizations and nation-states. The second group comprises individual donors in the homeland or in the diaspora, who are often driven by a personal desire to contribute to their communities or regions of origin.

Interviews shed light on several key types of donor institutions, starting with mainstream international donor institutions, such as the World Bank and U.S.-affiliated entities. These institutions typically offer conditional funding, which was universally met with disapproval by the respondents. The underlying concern was the attempt to control and influence the activities of local organizations. In fact, this kind of restrictive support was a major impetus for the shift toward community philanthropy. Aligning with their own community's needs and values, seeing this model as fundamentally at odds with their visions and missions. The second group consists of institutions that provide funding without political strings attached. All respondents acknowledge the instrumentality of this form of funding, highlighting that they have no issues engaging with these donors. In fact, this is the primary source of funding for the CSOs covered in this paper. This source of funding, while essential, still comes with its limitations, as it is frequently earmarked for specific projects, restricting the CSOs' flexibility to address broader community needs. Another important source of funding discussed by respondents comes from organizations tied to Palestinian groups or the PA. These organizations are considered vital in fostering a development model aligned with local priorities. As the Dalia Association representative notes (2022), these groups

are instrumental in shaping an alternative framework for development. Similarly, several respondents, including those from the CSC, note receiving support from PA-affiliated institutions (2022).

The second group of donors comprises individuals, including Palestinians both in the homeland and in the diaspora, as well as those who support the Palestinian cause. Interviewees unanimously view these individual donors as critical to harnessing local resources, as they align closely with the core values of community philanthropy. This group is often preferred, as emphasized by Rawa Fund (2022) because they are not only embedded in the self-reliance ethos but also have an intimate understanding of their communities' needs. Unlike donor institutions, which may impose conditions or prioritize external agendas, individual donors are seen as more flexible and responsive to local priorities. Their contributions reinforce community ownership and allow organizations to maintain their independence, fostering a sense of empowerment and agency that is crucial for sustainable development.

Despite its significance, individual contributions come with certain limitations. As previously noted, these contributions are often inconsistent, fluctuating in response to the donors' personal circumstances. This volatility became particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several interviewees, such as Rami Mas'ad from the Popular Art Center, highlight that individual philanthropy tends to be reactive, addressing immediate crises rather than providing long-term support (2022). Samaher al-Masri from Al-Ataa' Charitable Society echoes this sentiment, discussing how fundraising efforts surged following the most recent war on Gaza (2022). Likewise, Nida from Baladna notes a similar trend when discussing the support fund for families of Palestinian detainees and prisoners in the Israeli occupation's detention centers and prisons (2022).

# BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE USE OF LOCAL RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY FOR DEVELOPMENT

The findings point to three central challenges that impede the effective use of local resources and reliance on community philanthropy for development. The first set of obstacles stems from entrenched cultural attitudes and perceptions, where change is often met with resistance. Second, a lack of knowledge and promotion of prior experiences leads to a fragmented, uncertain landscape where organizations do not know the right steps to achieve their objectives. This fragmentation, as several interviewees emphasized, fosters unhealthy competition between organizations, all vying for the limited resources available. Finally, the prevailing culture of volunteerism in Palestinian society has strayed far from its origins. Instead of serving as a tool for development, it has increasingly become more of a professional, task-oriented activity.

The second category of obstacles stems from the roles that donors—whether institutional, individual, or collective—play in shaping the environment in which community philanthropy operates. These limitations are largely influenced by the prevailing power relations and dynamics. Those in positions of authority may restrict or obstruct the efforts of organizations to cultivate community philanthropy, as such practices could challenge or even destabilize existing power structures.
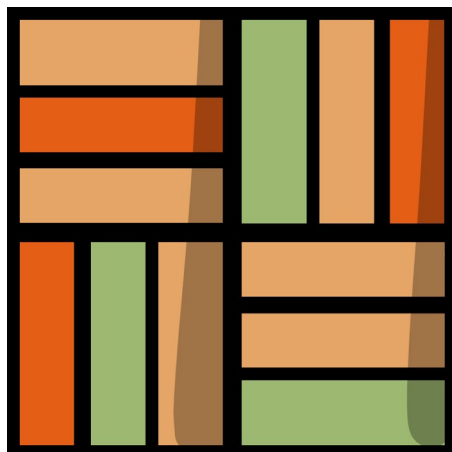
# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this paper highlights a series of solutions proposed by various organizations to optimize the use of resources within Palestinian society. One of the solutions involves creating profit-generating ventures to offset operational costs, as illustrated by Ali from Inash Al-Usra Association (). Some organizations, such as Grassroots Al-Quds, offer services that provide supplementary income streams, as noted by Fayrouz (2022). Other initiatives, like the Popular Art Center, collaborate with cooperatives, such as local farmers, to support their operations, as described by Rami (2022). By and large, a consensus emerged among all the organizations in favor of minimizing reliance on institutional funding and preferring grants from individual donors. The Rawa Fund offers a prime example, targeting 70 percent of its overall funding to come from individual contributions. To safeguard against undue influence from any one contributor, Rawa implements a unique mechanism by capping the amount any single donor can provide.
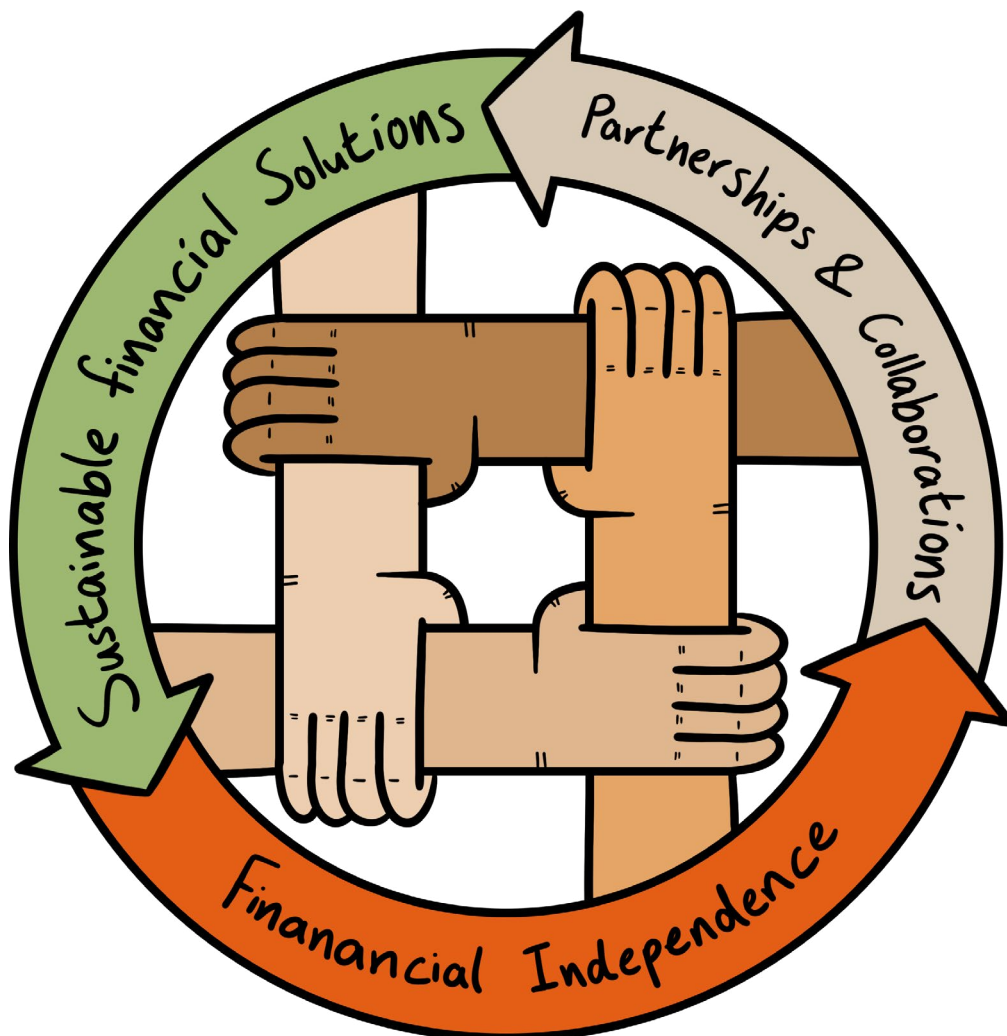
# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1** Community philanthropy model promotion and expansion through sustained media and awareness campaigns: It is recommended to launch continuous media and awareness campaigns to address the resource limitations facing organizations that rely on community philanthropy. These campaigns should focus on not only increasing material and human resources but also promoting a broader understanding of the community philanthropy model. By enhancing awareness and encouraging the mobilization of resources, such campaigns can attract greater support. Moreover, accumulating and sharing knowledge, through these efforts will mitigate risks, reduce fragmentation, and foster long-term success for organizations operating under this framework.
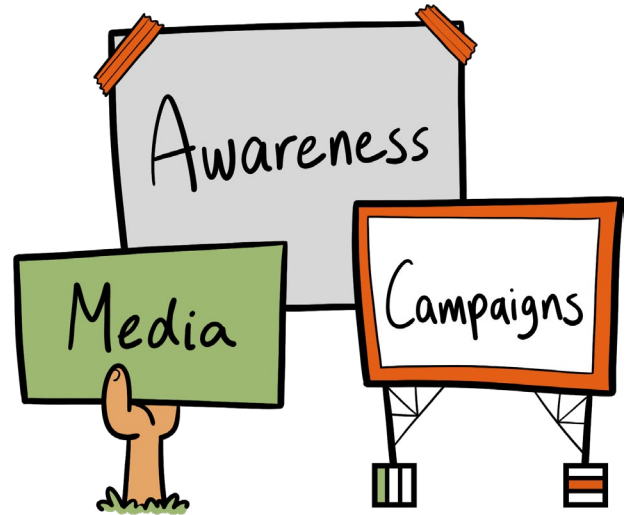


**2** Successful community philanthropy model documentation: To enhance the effectiveness of community philanthropy models, proper documentation of existing practices should be a priority. This documentation would ensure easy access to critical information regarding the strategies, plans, and lessons learned by pioneering organizations. By systematizing this knowledge, new organizations can avoid repeating past mistakes and adopt best practices, enhancing their operational efficiency and success.
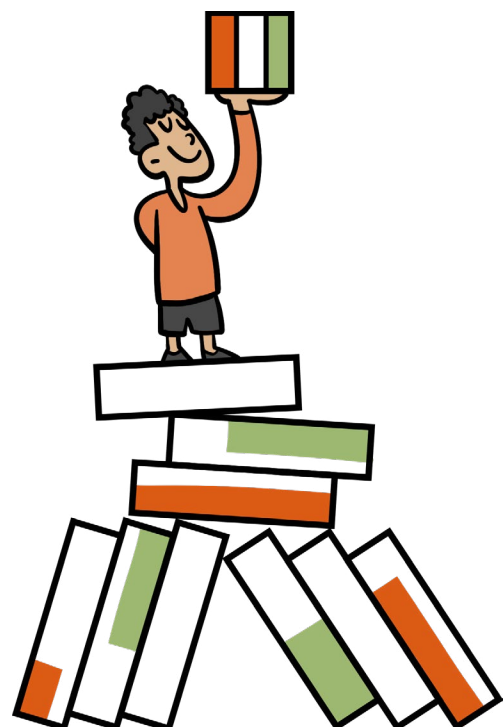
**3** **Strengthening networking among community philanthropy organizations:** Encouraging stronger networking among community philanthropy organizations is vital to broadening the scope of their efforts and fostering the exchange of ideas. By reducing unhealthy competition over limited resources and increasing collaboration, organizations can more effectively address shared challenges, particularly the financial constraints that often limit their operations.
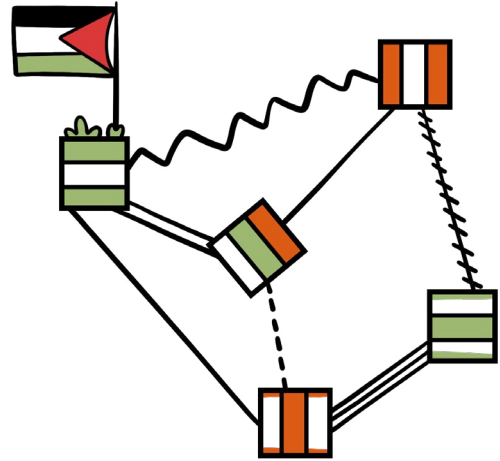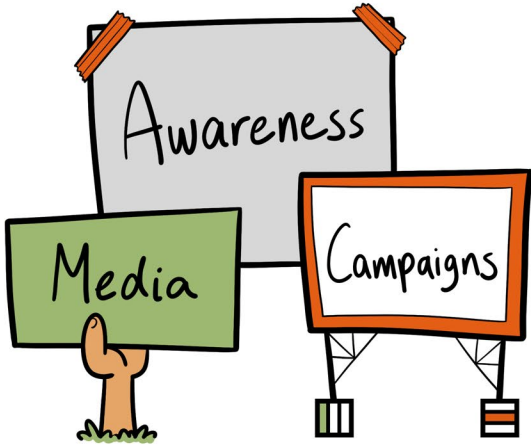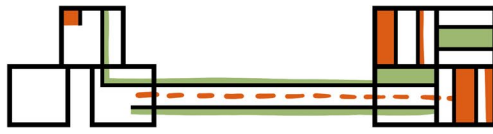
**4** **Engaging CSOs working beyond the community philanthropy model:** It is crucial to initiate dialogue with CSOs that are not currently operating under community philanthropy models. Such discussions may encourage these organizations to explore alternatives to foreign institutional funding and begin adopting more community-driven approaches. This dialogue would also serve to strengthen civil society as a whole by fostering more cohesion between different types of CSOs.
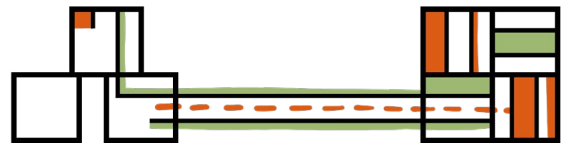
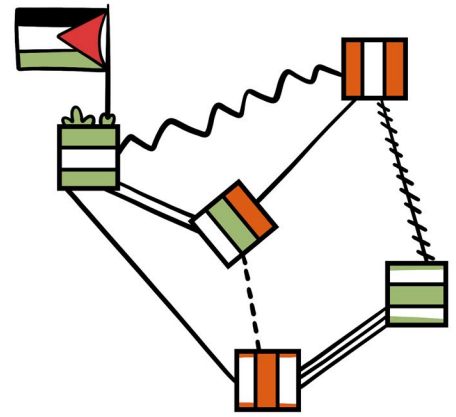**5** **The development of a national community philanthropy and self-reliance strategy is essential:** This strategy should be a collaborative effort involving all sections of Palestinian society, both in the homeland and in the diaspora. Public and private organizations should work together, as both have vital roles to play in supporting the development of Palestinian society and its organizations.
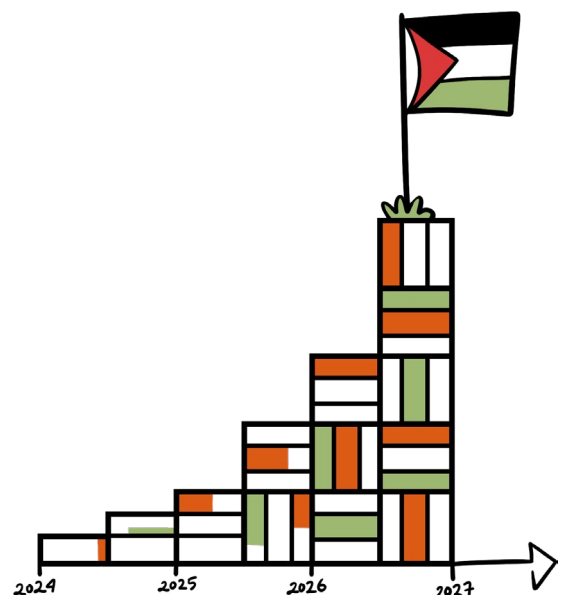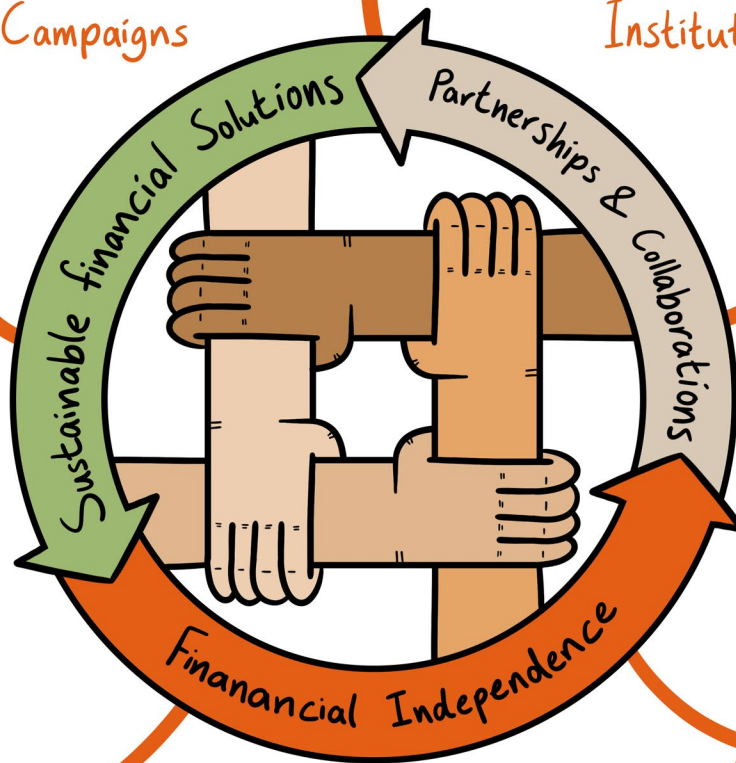
Open dialogue with
Civil Society Organizations
that don't work with
Community Philanthropy model

Awarness Media Campaigns

Institutions Networking

Sustainable financial Solutions

Partnerships & Collaborations

Finanancial Independence

Models documentation

Building a national strategy
for Community Philanthropy

2024    2025    2026    2027

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# CASE STUDY 1:
# MA'AN DEVELOPMENT CENTER'S RELIEF EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO THE GENOCIDAL WAR ON GAZA

Founded in January 1989, the Ma'an Development Center is a Palestinian nonprofit, non-governmental, nonpartisan development and training organization. Ma'an is based in Ramallah, with chapters in Gaza, Khan Younis, Tulkarm, and Jenin. Its guiding principles center on the promotion of self-reliance and empowerment through the development of human resources and sustainable initiatives.

Amid the ongoing genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza, Ma'an has spearheaded significant relief efforts. These initiatives have garnered support from both international partners and local Palestinian communities, demonstrating powerful solidarity and swift mobilization of local resources. One campaign, launched during the war, raised approximately ILS 200,000 from the West Bank alone, underscoring the community's capacity to respond to critical needs. Though the campaign was brief (a month) and coincided with Ramadan, it stands as an exemplary case of effective community philanthropy. The rapid mobilization of resources exemplifies how grassroots-driven initiatives can provide timely, impactful support in times of crisis.

When asked about the reasons behind the campaign's success, Hamza Zubaidat, campaign coordinator, explains, "From the very beginning of the onslaught on Gaza, Ma'an mobilized its staff and volunteers to carry out relief activities, particularly in the northern region of Gaza, which gave the center considerable momentum in executing its initiatives there."

With the onset of Ramadan, the center launched a fundraising initiative by selling meal vouchers for a charitable iftar, with the proceeds directed toward Gaza relief efforts. Zubaidat noted that both individuals and organizations were eager to contribute. He cites several key that encouraged people to donate:

1. Ma'an's quick response to the crisis in Gaza demonstrates its capacity to operate even in challenging circumstances.
2. Strong community williabhan Omarngness and eagerness in the West Bank to support and assist their fellow Gazans.
3. Public trust in Ma'an, which had built a solid reputation for efficiently delivering aid to those in need.
4. Media coverage of Ma'an's effort, including accessible reports and statistics, helps generate widespread support.

The campaign's successes can be attributed to several factors:

1. Clear objectives: The campaign targets were well-defined.
2. Alignment with public sentiment: The campaign's objective resonated with the Palestinian public, encouraging widespread support.
3. Strategic timing: By launching during Ramadan, the campaign leveraged a period known for increased charitable giving, which made it easier to encourage people to contribute.
4. Accessible donation methods: The campaign offered easy ways to contribute, whether online or through cash donations via vouchers.
5. Qualified teams: Ma'an employed competent staff who established a system that linked on-the-ground activities with the donations received. The system adhered to Palestinian laws and global governance standards, ensuring a transparent and effective process.

# CASE STUDY 2:
# INASH AL-USRA AS A MODEL OF COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

Inash Al-Usra Association was founded in 1965 as a Palestinian, women-led charitable development organization. Created by a group of dedicated volunteer women, with the late Sameeha Khalil at the helm, the association was established in direct response to the increasing challenges Palestinians have faced since the Nakba of 1948, through the Naksa of 1967, and the ongoing adversity under Israeli occupation. For decades, Inash Al-Usra has focused its efforts on addressing the critical needs of Palestinian society, particularly by providing relief and support to the most vulnerable families.

The association's activities range from sponsoring orphans and assisting families in extreme need to creating employment opportunities for women. Operating under a community philanthropy model, Inash Al-Usra serves as a powerful example of how locally driven organizations, guided by community needs and a spirit of volunteerism, can effectively address societal challenges and generate tangible grassroots impacts.

To fulfill its mission, Inash Al-Usra harnesses two primary sources of funding: donations from affluent Palestinians, including those in the diaspora, and income-generating activities. These activities include a kitchen, hall rentals, and the sale of embroidered goods and handicrafts. These initiatives—ranging from operating a kitchen, renting event halls, and selling traditional embroidery and handicrafts—help the association fund its nonprofit activities.

The income-generating ventures span several areas, such as the kitchen, embroidery, student dormitories, vocational training, and a college. The association has established a robust administrative structure to manage these varied enterprises. For example, the college has a dean and a staff system. The embroidery department employs three to four permanent staff members and additionally contracts rural women—sometimes as many as 100—to work on a piece-by-piece basis.

Vocational training, another source of income, provides several specialized programs. The student dormitories, which accommodate 133 individuals, are a consistent income source. Furthermore, the association's ownership of strategic assets, including properties and real estate, has ensured steady financial stability.
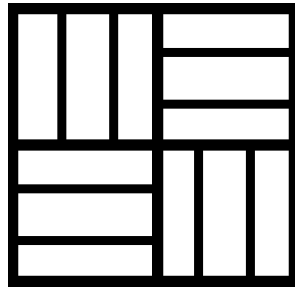
Thanks to its diversified income streams, Inash Al-Usra has been able to preserve its inde-

pendence and responsiveness to the Palestinian community's needs and priorities. A key example of this is the association's launch of a sponsorship program for 5,000 orphans in Gaza during the genocidal assault on the region. Rooted in its ethos of self-reliance, the association refrains from applying for grants to cover operational costs, focusing exclusively on securing funds for development projects.

Through building robust relationships with Palestinian society, including key private sector entities, Inash Al-Usra successfully establishes a direct funding mechanism from the community and income-generating enterprises. This approach ensures that both its projects and the administrative expenses tied to them are covered through local resources.

## Key lessons from the experience of Inash Al-Usra include:

1. **Systematic and incremental approach:** The association methodically and gradually works to meet community needs.

2. **Mobilizing funds from within the community:** Inash Al-Usra focuses on fundraising within the local community by maintaining regular engagement with public figures, community leaders, chambers of commerce, and the private sector.

3. **Tapping into Palestinian diaspora:** By actively reaching out to Palestinians abroad, the association successfully harnesses this often-overlooked resource, fostering deep-rooted connections and securing financial backing for its activities.

4. **Income-generating projects as a path to self-reliance:** A cornerstone of Inash Al-Usra's sustainability is its refusal to use grants for operational costs; instead, it relies on income-generating projects to cover these expenses.

5. **Prudent, vision-driven development of income-generating projects:** Inash Al-Usra skillfully develops income-generating projects, ensuring these are managed by qualified staff to respond to community needs while maintaining a long-term vision.

COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY