



State of Palestine
Ministry of Education

National consultations report
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Submitted to

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES)





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Context

Palestine's commitment to the SDGs has been solid and unwavering. Current and previous national development plans and Education Sector Strategies aim to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including SDG4. However, the sustained invasive Israeli occupation and its multifaceted collateral damage on all sectors constitute a paramount impediment to the timely fulfillment of such commitments.

This document supplements the national consultation report submitted on August 14th. The National Statement of Commitments will be submitted shortly.

Preamble

In Palestine, education is a custodian of our national identity and an individual and collective and collective survival strategy. At all times, education remained a unifying factor for all Palestinians at home and in the diaspora. Besides, it has become an inspiring global model for resilience.

National consultation

In advance of the Transforming Education Summit, Palestine held three major consultations with key education stakeholders and partners, including but not limited to, relevant ministries, civil society organizations, international partners, universities, social activists, media, youth parliaments, parents' councils, teachers' union, social activities, practitioners, etc.

Covid response

The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Palestine was one of the first ministries to develop a comprehensive and holistic COVID-19 response plan. In implementing the plan, the MoE worked closely with all its partners and counterparts, to ensure that every child in the country can access distance learning and psychosocial support. The Ministry adopted a blended learning approach to reopening schools, where children were learning half their time online and the other half face to face on school premises. Major interventions included improving ICT infrastructure, capacity building of teachers and parents on distance learning, establishing an MoE/educational satellite channel to broadcast lessons, improving all MoE online learning platforms, and providing remote MHPSS interventions. The Ministry, with the support of its partners, implemented strict safe school measures that included awareness raising, improving WASH facilities, and distribution of school and personal hygiene kits in all schools. These quick interventions allowed the government to safely re-open schools, minimizing students learning loss and timely administering all twelfth-grade official exams.

Transformation: key challenges and drivers

Early 2021, the ministry of education launched a structural reform agenda which identified a number of strategic reform priorities, which happened to include the five action tracks spelled out by the TES concept note.

Transformation our education system faced and is still facing several challenges that include amongst others: the structure of the civil service law and its executive charters; excessive bureaucratization and centralization; inadequate accountability; inadequate alignment between different key components of the system; constricting school matriculation and college systems.

On the other hand key drivers of the desired transformation include amongst others : the successful implementation of the ministry's mobilizing an inclusive national partnership; effective engagement of children, youth and parents, synchronization with Higher Education.

In what follows we shed more light on the insights emerging from the national consultation.

I. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

Equity, safety, and inclusion

Our education law and ensuing legislations establish binding commitments to provide all children, with free inclusive just, and quality education, with no discrimination based on gender, social or economic status, or disability of any sort. The education system population remains gender balanced renewing our commitment to the implementation of our inclusive education strategy. However, this is compromised by the following challenges:

Israeli policies obstruct the construction of new schools and kindergartens outside the limited municipality contours, especially in occupied East Jerusalem and so-called "Area C", coupled with impediments to safe mobility and internet connectivity.

The orchestrated attacks aim at the Israelization of our textbooks and the annexation of the public education system under the threat of school closure in flagrant violation of international law. Daily violent attacks on the education landscape by the Israeli army and by rogue settlers, including school demolitions, armed assault on students and teachers, checkpoints, detentions, harassment, intimidation, and more. Besides their traumatic physical and psychosocial impact, impeding the safety and wellbeing of our children, such attacks result in a significant learning loss.

Healthy and sustainable schools

The MoE will expand and sustain its drive for healthy, green, and sustainable schools. Generating solar energy from school rooftops; provision of WASH facilities and safety kits; establishing school gardens; cultivating healthy habits and lifestyles, tackling digital addiction, and supporting students' agency in taking ownership of their wellbeing.

II. Learning and skills for Life, Work and Sustainable Development

Students in a school are small citizens in a small society, hence schools are incubators for engaged and enlightened citizenship where students live body, mind, heart, and soul, and learn how to navigate their paths to success in the big wide world making prudent choices in their personal and career journeys. This perspective has inspired our commitment to making our schools safe, green, healthy, supportive, inclusive, stimulating, and engaging spaces.

Life skills have been a consistent stream across numerous in-and-out-of-school programs for decades. Recently, however, the MoE has been set on mainstreaming them into the DNA of the education system. Students' holistic [physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing] approach is the overarching envelope of our strategy. Life skills include, amongst others: assimilating the values, attitudes, practices of reading, cultural heritage, scientific research, STEAM, civics, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, leadership and innovation, community service, creative expression, art and theater, climate change, environmental awareness, agricultural experiential learning and more. Students' sports and students scouts associations are effective catalysts.

Student clubs and elected student parliaments are mandatory in every public school. This supports students' agency and proactive engagement in co-authoring their learning environment. A voice of children survey instrument will be periodically deployed to capture students' perspectives and perceptions of different aspects of their learning experience. The survey findings will inform policy reform and priority setting.

III. Digital Learning and Transformation

Predicated by the rapid response to the pandemic, the MoE accelerated its drive for its digital transformation.

A digital E-School platform was deployed hosting a unified repository for all elements and stakeholders of the education ecosystem. This platform operated tens of functions serving the educational and communication and administrative needs of the school community. It was also equipped with functions related to early childhood, school facilities, student health, online counselling services, emergency tracking, and response. An e-learn platform hosting a large repository of digital learning items for all ages was also deployed. All functions were powered with a mobile application.

Microsoft TEAMS accounts were made available to all members of the educational community. Intensive in-person and online training of teachers and supervisors was carried out in preparation for the blended learning approach enacted by the cabinet.

A dedicated educational TV channel was authorized and deployed within a few months of the pandemic outbreak.

Whenever possible, a technology empowerment program provided schools, teachers, and students

with devices and connectivity. However, this program didn't receive the necessary financing to cover the needs of large sectors of schools and school communities. Moreover, the Israeli restrictions on operators and the absence of 4G services, and even 3G services in remote areas, compromised the effectiveness of the distance learning stream.

On the administrative track, a major thrust is underway to digitize hundreds of functions, allowing teachers and staff to enjoy a cohort of digital mobile-friendly self-services that alleviate the chores of bureaucracy and red tape.

Efforts are underway to build knowledge and question banks and to digitize and make smarter and safer national exam procedures. Similarly, an interactive digital curriculum supported by digital reading, STEAM, and other simulations and virtual reality platforms and resources is also in the pipeline.

IV. Teachers, teaching, and the teaching profession

A "teaching profession legislation" is being enacted by the cabinet. This legislation will constitute a significant lever in uplifting the moral, professional, administrative, and financial status of teachers and will provide a path for merit-based accelerated professional development pathways.

A cross-cutting commitment is being made to transform classroom practice from teaching to learning; igniting, and cultivating students' curiosity, wonder, inquiry, and joy in learning, coupled with the capacity to learn, unlearn, and relearn throughout their life journey. Teacher preservice and in-service training programs are being adjusted; accordingly, teachers' performance evaluation policy and criteria are also adjusted to support this trajectory. Various components of the STEAM program also feed in. The cabinet has enacted several structural reform decisions aiming at making education more capable of nurturing the desired transformation and delivering the desired returns on investment and achieving constitutional commitments. This includes the establishment of a curriculum center mandated with the continuous modernization of our curriculum; a national center for examination and assessment mandated with modernizing national and high-stake exams of various types, in synch with the curriculum center; a school education quality assurance unit; more flexible and inclusive school matriculation and tertiary education admission systems.

V. Financing of Education

The past few years have witnessed a significant drop in international aid to Palestine. This was coupled with rolling constricting punitive financial measures by Israel, leading to a serious socioeconomic crisis compounded by the coronavirus pandemic. This resulted in salary cuts and more reductionist measures, causing a serious dissonance in the education system and a freeze or delay in carrying out important projects.

In partial response to this financial crunch, the ministry launched a nationwide school adoption program aiming at increasing local community and expatriate contribution to the financing of education. Besides, the cabinet passed the first legislation on the "education tax," allowing for a manifold increase in education tax revenues.

Palestine's lack of sovereignty over its natural resources and its borders constitutes a serious impediment to its capacity to generate sustainable financial resources to support its education. A free and sovereign Palestine won't be needy, but a Palestine whose resources are systematically drained and hijacked by its occupier is entitled to solidarity and support from the international community to deliver on the commitments made in this paper.