

Palestinian NGOs

and their cultural, economic and political impact in Palestinian society

Eighty percent of the budget of Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations is funded by external donors, mainly the EU and the USA. NGOs complain about conditions set by the donors in terms of using this money. Fewer criticize its negative impact on Palestinian society. Only very few suggest alternatives, without being able to translate them into action on the ground.

This study doesn't look at the outcomes of individual NGO projects, but focuses on the higher level of the NGOs' work or, more precisely, the impact of foreign funding implemented through local NGOs in Palestine. The researchers have come to the conclusion, that NGOs here in general aren't a civil society system of checks and balances to the Palestinian Authority, but, rather, stabilizing the ruling system.

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1. Background of the research

Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (PNGOs) play an important role in various social and economic spheres of Palestinian society. They are active in many fields such as human rights, democracy promotion, good governance and women's rights. They also support social services such as education, health, special health care, rehabilitation services for people with special needs, agriculture, environmental services and youth programmes.

According to statistics on PNGOs provided by the Palestinian Economic Policy Research

Institute (MAS) and the NGO Development Center, the number of PNGOs increased from 1,230 in 2004 to about 2,130 in 2009. In 2010 we estimate there were around 2,400 PNGOs.

The Oslo Agreements of 1993 sought to realize for the Palestinian population their hope for an almost independent, viable state. Additionally, since the 1995 Oslo II agreement, the West Bank has been divided into jurisdictions A, B and C. Area A (17.2%) came under the internal administrative responsibility of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Area B (23.8%) remains under Israeli military rule; the PA,

however, exercises responsibility for services and civilian administration. Area C (59%) is completely under Israeli civil and military administration.¹

The NGOs and the PA were political partners in the pre-Oslo period under the umbrella of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). After the Oslo accords the NGOs had to find a new independent role within civil society. They also had to redefine their position towards a former political partner, the PA, which now governs and is building up state structures. The fragmentation between the West Bank and Gaza and the division between areas A, B and C makes working and maintaining unified operations difficult.

After Oslo in 1993, external aid increased and new NGOs flourished. At the same time, donors started to change their broad-based solidarity contributions of the past into funds, usually with preconditions regarding their use, and provided support for development.² During the same period, former popular-based, grass-roots initiatives underwent a process of institutionalization and professionalization, gaining official offices and paid, professional employees with appropriate educational backgrounds. The arrival of different donor funding criteria established a hierarchy and competition between NGOs to access funding. Professionalism was the key word to gain funding. Institutions and organizations that were unable or did not want to be "professional" were marginalized. New major trends in NGO work began to appear, such as "empowering" individuals, "advocacy" and "capacity building".

In retrospect, the establishment of the PA, strictly circumscribed by the Oslo agreements, did not seek to build up governing structures for a future Palestinian state. Basically, the PA is responsible under limited self-rule for providing services and jobs for the non-refugee-population and security for Israel.

The electoral victory of Hamas in January 2006 was answered by the West with a boycott of the PA, newly headed by Hamas, and a tight blockade of Gaza by Israel. Internal disagreements between Hamas and Fatah (in which the West took a hand) resulted in June 2007 in an armed conflict from which Hamas benefited. Abbas dismissed the Hamas-Fatah coalition, headed by Prime Minister Haniyeh and declared a state of emergency. Salam Fayyad was appointed as new Prime Minister for the West

Bank. Since then, Hamas has been ruling in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank.

This brought about a change in the types of aid provided by Western donors: a reduction in development assistance and an increase in emergency aid for PNGOs. Aid for Islamic PNGOs and joint projects from Islamic and non-Islamic NGOs was stopped. PNGOs that ran no joint projects with Islamic religious organizations continued to receive Aid.

The "Fatah-PA" and the "Hamas-PA" continue to rely on different external donors. In the period between 1999 and 2008, external aid to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip increased from US\$ 516 million to 3.25 billion per year.³

60% of the budget of the PA (WB) is subsidized and maintained by the international community. 80% of the budget of PNGOs is funded by external donors, mainly by Europeans and the USA. Ten per cent of international aid is channeled through such civil society institutions.⁴ The local community seems to be rarely involved or unable to mobilize the needed funds.

During the period 1999 to 2008, external aid for PNGOs increased from US\$ 48 million to US\$ 257 million.⁵ This has promoted great financial dependency on donor countries. Funding and fund raising has a double importance for the sustainability of PNGOs: by allowing them to maintain their services and to provide paid employment.

In 2010, the unemployment rate was estimated at 23%: in the West Bank 15% and in Gaza 39%. The employment rate for the public sector was 23% and 62.5% in the private sector. 10% of the Palestinian labor force from WB&GS worked in Israel and settlements and 4% in other sectors.⁶

Concerning the Palestinian labor market, PNGS provide around 10% of job opportunities in the Palestinian labor market.

If general, when Palestinians talk about NGOs, they have external, western funded NGOs and

³<http://www.ndc.ps/uploads/File/Researches/Tracking%20External%20Donor%20Funding.pdf> and also MAS / NGO Development Center 2009: Tracking External Donor Funding to Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations in the West Bank and Gaza 1999-2008, table 12, p.29 Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, Ramallah and also see Sara Roy 2011 'Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector'; Princeton University Press

⁴ MAS / NGO Development Center 2009: *ibid* p.29

⁵<http://www.ndc.ps/uploads/File/Researches/Tracking%20External%20Donor%20Funding.pdf>

⁶ See PASSIA 2011, p.349

¹ PASSIA diary 2011, Jerusalem: PASSIA Publications

² See also Rex Brynen 2000; Sari Hanafi & Linda Tabar 2005

their employees in mind. Among the general public, it is well known – or at least the rumor goes – that NGO employees are better paid than others, that they are born abroad, that they are young, professionalized and career-orientated, that they have a lot of key benefits compared to the average Palestinian, that they don't think politically anymore and work only in their own interest etc.⁷

This paper relies on research carried out to understand these ongoing changes, by taking a look inside the “black box NGO employee” in PNGOs which were mainly externally funded with western aid. Because personal data resources about Palestinian PNGO employees are rarely available the hope was to find clues to clarify rumors and to discover answers.⁸ The personal data of NGO employees are analyzed in a context of how international aid influences the particular personal situations of NGO employees and, in an interconnected step, how international aid which is transferred to selected PNGOs instead to the PA, influences the development of Palestinian society as a whole.

What kind of NGO employee landscape exists in Palestine? Palestinian NGO workers have already been observed and analyzed in the literature as middle class, depoliticized and de-radicalized, forming a globalized NGO elite.⁹ This paper focuses on how the NGO sector is affecting the current political system in Palestine which is dependent on international donors and on Israel.

This research is based on a quantitative and qualitative study and provides data on personal backgrounds, working histories and careers, living standards, including salaries and also personal political attitudes in the past, present and future of a range of typical PNGO-employees (from service staff to directors) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was done in cooperation with Birzeit University, Human Rights and Democracy Program, in the period August 2010 – March 2011, and is financed by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Ramallah. The quantitative survey covers 1050 questionnaires in 128 NGOs (93% are PNGOs, 7% are international NGOs) in the West Bank and in 75 NGOs in the Gaza Strip, covering all districts (West Bank:

Jenin, Tulkarem, Tubas, Nablus, Qalqilia, Salfit, Ramallah, Jericho, Jerusalem and Bethlehem; Gaza: North Gaza, Gaza, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah) and 5 different NGO working fields: health, agriculture, women, human rights, and youth. Locality, whether rural, urban or refugee camp is taken into account. In the qualitative study, six focus group interviews (FGI) were held in the Gaza Strip and 6 focus group studies in the West Bank.

2. Basic facts about NGO employees

NGO employees can be characterized as follows:

57.5% female and 42.5% male; 71% are in the age between 17-37 years. Age group 26-37 years has the highest representation with 48% of employees, followed by age group 17-25 years with 23% employees.

88% are born in Palestine and 82% (WB 74% GS 96%) have a Palestinian passport. The permanent residence of employees in the NGO sector illustrates a nearly identical copy of the Palestinian Population: 76.5% urban, 16.5% rural and 7% refugee camp.¹⁰ An academic background is shared by 90% of NGO employees (59% BA, 19% diploma, 12% MA and 1 % PhD. primary, preparatory and secondary school education 10%) and 41% of NGO employees do take part in improving their education and in training courses. For their attendance in training programs, 47% of the employees are funded by the NGOs and 46% pay for themselves. Foundations pay for 7% of NGO employees to attend such programs.

In private life there is a tendency to later marriage and that includes the tendency to fewer children. Comparing the WB with the GS, NGO employees in the WB tend to send their children to private schools. In the WB 42% (including 8% who send some to private and some to governmental schools) and in the GS 14% (also including 8% who send some to private and some to governmental schools).

59% (Gaza 47% WB 68%) of NGO employees have a partner who is working. The majority of NGO employees perceive their living standard and their wages to be above average.

⁷ NGOs are known in public for offering well paid jobs and also in reality according to statistics on wage differentials, provided by MAS 2007

⁸ Focus of this research was not the objective and substantial results of PNGOs

⁹ See the critical literature of Sari Hanafi & Linda Tabar, Rema Hammami, Khalil Nakhleh, Lisa.Taraki, Islah Jad, etc.

¹⁰ PCBS/PASSIA 2011/page 329, urban 73.7%, rural 17% and camps 9.3%

2.1. Motivation to work in an NGO

Responses by NGO employees to questions about their motivation for working in a NGO can be broadly sorted under the headings economic, individual and political background.

Economic (personal) is acknowledged by 27% of NGO employees because of “better income” 13%; “better position” (connected with a better income) 12% and “better benefits” 2%.

Individual: 23% of NGO employees stated “contributing something to society” and 18% “feeling more independent at work” as well preferring to work in an open atmosphere between men and women

In FGI a strong argument was working on a professional level. NGOs are offering the possibility of different work experience, acquiring skills also through training courses and diversity in work. All these factors support self-development and provide professional stability. Professional stability is increasing the chance of job security (long-term contracts or permanent contracts).

Economic / Political: for 25% NGO employees, the offered work in the NGO was the only job available (WB 17% male, 18% women; GS 30% male, 34% female) “It is not a question of choice, you take what you get” (FGI Gaza, male <30).

28% of NGO employees with BC, Diploma and PhD would only find work abroad or in the NGO sector.

NGO employees were asked to emphasize their individual goals. Most cited “supporting civil society” and “gaining money” with 31%, “gaining skills and experiences” in second position and “helping to change society” in third position.

82% achieved their individual goals, 18% suggested that, to achieve their goals the NGOs needed to be improved. This would involve changing institutional strategy and the improvement of political and job security.

2.2. Working contracts and level of income

The data show full time employment of 68% and part time employment of 32% in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). In the WB full time employment is 84%; part time employment is 16%. In the Gaza Strip, there is a tremendous difference between full time employment at 47% and part time employment at 53%.

Part time contracts are considered in Palestinian society to be “bad contracts”. In focus group interviews (FGI) in the WB and the GS, employees explained “having a part-time contract means working full time for half of the salary”. Also in focus group interviews, men and women reported working without a written contract and for example below 500 NIS a month is a reality (FGI, female and male below 30 years). “Working without a written contract” is, according to Palestinian labor law, possible and according to the law people would have the same protection as with a written contract. Reality is rather different.

57% of NGO employees with an income of \$600 (\$501-\$1000 and up) earn above the Palestinian average income (see table, below). According to PCBS April-June 2010, US\$ 600 (= NIS 2340) is the average monthly wage for a Palestinian employee

Monthly wage

In \$	Palestine	Westbank			Gaza		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
< 500	42.5%	20 %	34 %	28 %	48 %	73 %	62 %
501-1000	38 %	47 %	46 %	46 %	36 %	21 %	28 %
1001-1500	12 %	21 %	11.5 %	16 %	11 %	3 %	6 %
1501-2000	3 %	5 %	3 %	4 %	2 %	1 %	1 %
2001-2500	2 %	4 %	3 %	3 %	0.5 %	1 %	1 %
2501-3000	1 %	1 %	1 %	1 %	2 %	0.4 %	1 %
3000-4000	1 %	2 %	1 %	1 %	0.7 %	0.4 %	1 %
> 4000	0.3 %	0.3 %	0.8 %	0.5 %			

Table 1: Monthly salary of NGO employees
Exchange rate: 500\$=1950 NIS, 1000\$=3900 NIS, 1500\$=5850 NIS, 2000\$=7800NIS (source, OANDA, date: June, 30.2011)

2.3. Finding a job in the NGO sector

45% of NGO employees land a job through the help of friends (34.4%) and relatives (10.4%). 23% of NGO employees profit from relations in previous work and 6% from doing voluntary work. There is a contradiction to the results of the focus group interviews where the majority mentioned (< 30 years) finding their job through voluntary work. Many feel (GS, female and male <30 years) that a good education is not enough to secure a job, “high education and “wasta” is needed to get a job.” “Wasta” in Arabic is defined as using the help or connections of another person/s to get what you want.

For 46% of NGO employees the current NGO is their very first working place.

2.4. Working reality

In the oPt 37% of NGO employees have a contract for 1 year or below 1 year. 10% of employees have a contract more than 1 year and 13% have a permanent contract. 40% of NGO employees have no written contract at all.

See the differences between WB&GS in the figure 1 below.

Duration of written contract

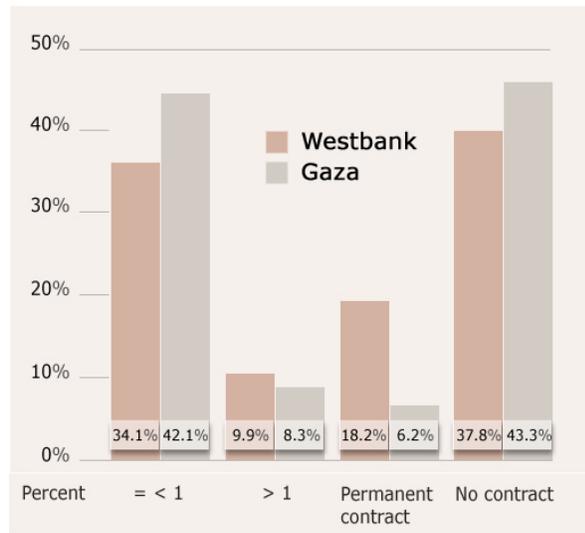


Figure 1: Duration of contracts in WB&GS
(=<1 means having a contract for 1 year or less, >1 means having a working contract more than 1 year in duration)

Short term contracts in PNGOs can be extended. Looking at the table 2 below we see the duration of an NGO employee staying in the current NGO.

Duration of contracts in years in a NGO

Duration	Palestine
	Total
1 / < 1	31 %
2-3 years	23 %
4-5 years	13 %
6-10 years	17 %
11-15 years	8 %
16-20 years	5 %
21-35 years	4 %

Table 2: Duration of years in a NGO

31% of NGO employees have contracts with the duration of up to 1 year. 36% have been working in the same NGO for up to 5 years, 17% for up to 10 years and 17% for over 10 years.

Working in different NGOs

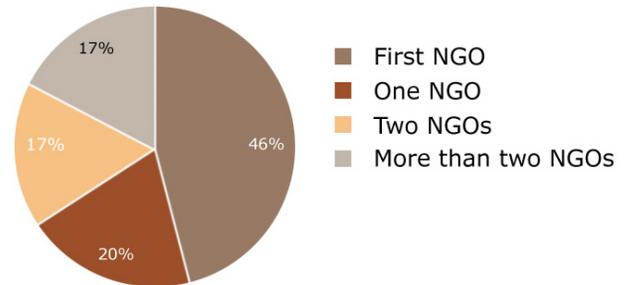


Figure 2: working in different NGOs

2.5. NGO-tracking

For 46% of NGO employees the current employer is the first NGO they have worked in. If we compare table 2 above, we can conclude that, 31% with contracts of 1 year and < 1 year are newcomers. They are employees who started working after having finished their education or having come from other sectors. 15% have already been longer than 1 year in the same NGO.

54% have moved by force or by chance internally in the NGO sector. 20% of employees had already worked in one other NGO. 17% had already worked in 2 other NGOs and 17% of NGO employees had already worked in more than 2 other NGOs (some in up to 5 NGOs).

With more working experience in NGOs the personal chances for “a better chance” (better position, long term or permanent contract, higher salary etc.) increase.

2.6. NGO tracking by force or by chance¹¹

Objective and personal reasons to leave or change former NGO:

59% of NGO employees were forced to find another working place because their “contract finished” (22%), or because the “project was over” (31%) or the “previous institution closed” (6 %). 8% of NGO employees changed their working place because of “other reasons”, mainly

¹¹ The word ‘tracking’ is used in the sense of ‘following a track’ to reach a goal.

personal. 33% of NGO employees were able to land a better job in a different NGO.

3. NGO sector: working background of NGO employees

Based on their work, PNGOs are part of formal international and national networks. Informal networks go along with formal networks. "People know each other," in their community (FGI in WB&GS). This fact, as in any other sector, makes finding a new job easier.

Looking for another job in the NGO sector, where "no extension of the ongoing contract is possible" (59%) or looking for a working place which offers better conditions such as a long-term contract, better payment, pension, insurance etc., both movements are target orientated. The motivation is the desire to improve the personal situation through finding a better working place and job security in the NGO sector.

3.1. Interim Conclusion

NGO tracking – the fact that contracts are mainly short (without job security) creates a community. Moving from one job to another, NGO workers are always on the run to find another or a better job. Formal, professional working networks as well as informal networks strengthen this development. The admission ticket for the community is a university degree and/or "wasta". A requirement to stay in the NGO community with short term contracts is flexibility and further training. The practice of these qualities enables NGO employees to extend their contracts or to find another job they are required (59%) to leave their current employment or do so "by chance" (33%).

Table 2 shows the duration of contracts in the current working NGO. It reveals that 25% of employees stay between 6 and 15 years in the same NGO. Staying long term in one NGO or practicing NGO-tracking by force or by chance guarantees knowledge of aid business and the ability to use it. Having the knowledge and ability to operate in the aid sector includes the power to create jobs (sometimes well- paid jobs) in a country with an unemployment rate between 23% and 28% in a desolate economy.

Hanafi and Tabar talk in their book "The Emergence of a Palestinian Globalized Elite", about a globalized elite by

1. referring to actors that are informed by global agendas,

2. distinguishing its position on the Middle East peace process,
3. describing it as an urban elite, since donor funding is concentrated in Palestinian cities and
4. seeing it as a professionalized elite.¹²

Talking about elite always implies the question of power. The power tool of the NGO elite is "job creation" (around 10% of jobs are covered in the NGO sector). In this sense, external western aid creates a part of a new middle class and concurrently a globalized elite, based on academic degrees.¹³ The use of the terms middle class and elite is confined not only to NGO leaders.

All NGO employees go through a selection process to enter the NGO sector. They are young, academic, professional and education orientated. Furthermore, administrators in business, in finance and in project management have the same knowledge of fundraising as directors nowadays. To remain on a long term basis in the NGO sector the determining factor is one's ability to move around in the community network and having the know-how to create funds and jobs.

It can also be observed that external western aid is preventing a brain drain of academics. 28% of NGO employees with BC, Diploma and PhD stated they could find work only in the NGO sector (14%) or abroad (14%).

One positive aspect is that 28% of NGO employees are making a living income in their home country and are not facing unemployment or emigration. As the study shows, NGO staff is mainly educated in humanities and economics. The following questions arise:

- Do they find work because people are educated above the average in these fields and the public and private sector can't provide jobs for them?
- Or do people decide to be educated in certain fields, because external funded NGOs are in the country and promise a career and a good income?
- Would they really emigrate or would they take a lower paid job in a different sector?

¹² Sari Hanafi & Linda Tabar, The Emergence of a Palestinian Globalized Elite. Donors, International Organizations and Local NGOs; p.248/249; Institute of Jerusalem Studies Muwatin, Jerusalem 2005

¹³ See Lisa Taraki 2008, Urban Modernity on the Periphery. A new middle class reinvents the Palestinian city

3.2 Capturing human capital and long term dependency

80% of NGO employees asserted, that it would be more effective to support the productive sector such as agriculture, industry and sustainable development projects and education. So the questions arise, why professional NGO employees don't use their knowledge of experience on the ground, their formal and informal networks and their ability to raise funds – to signal or force the donors to support productive sectors of the Palestinian economy to become independent from external aid?

The academic education of the people generally does not match the type of work they do in their NGO. Private sector, industry, agriculture and also universities do offer jobs but they do not offer such good salaries as NGOs do from the beginning. MAS published a study in 2007 dealing with "Wage Differentials in a Fast-Changing Environment: A Sectoral Analysis." The results show higher wages in the NGO sector than in the private sector and the payment in the private sector is higher than the public sector. Their appeal to the NGO sector was to understand the impact of the driving wage inflation to point out a greater responsibility for all sectors to reach "balanced financial incentives across the sectors of economy."¹⁴

Recently the private sector has started a campaign at universities to introduce the needed skills for new types of jobs. University education is teaching theory and often not skills required for employment. The NGO sector offers paid training courses to improve professionalism of their employees.

NGO tracking, practicing NGO networking for well paid jobs and long term contracts keep the people in the NGO sector. In the long run, external aid does capture human capital and this leads to a long term dependency on aid with consequences in the economic, political and cultural fields.

3.3. Types of NGO employees

NGO employees who stay a longer period in the NGO sector are able, through international networking to work abroad. In the study research the NGO employees who have left the country

either for experience of living abroad or for a better position are not included.

We characterize the NGO community as follows:

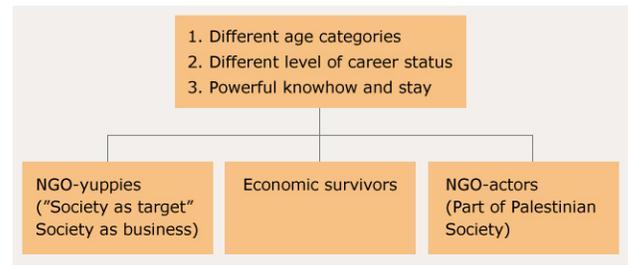


Figure 3: Types of NGO employees

NGO-Yuppies – young urban professionals

71% of NGO employees are young (between 17 and 37 years), 76.5% are urban and they are professional (90% have an academic degree and 41% have undertaken further training courses / improving skills).

The term yuppie which originated in the early 1980s in America, describes a young upwardly mobile professional individual, a well paid middle class professional who works in a city and has a lifestyle characterized by conspicuous consumption. This definition is based in the context of the beginning of globalization and changing attitudes towards political matters.

Verified through quantitative research yuppies are in the sense of Hanafi and Tabar a part of the professionalized elite, described as "Palestinian actors are no longer the pure activists of the first Intifada. They are either former activists with a technical [bent] or they are technocrats who do not have a connection with the national movement."¹⁵ For a yuppie personal and economical advantage matters, "gaining money", "and gaining skills and experiences", "self-development". "Supporting civil society" comprise a vehicle for the realization of one's own interests.

"Supporting civil society" is often taken to mean using society as a target in need of instruction. And the approach is "all problems can be solved" by being a social engineer and doing social engineering work.

This analysis has to be seen in the context of the history of Palestinian NGOs and their

¹⁴ MAS 2007, Wage Differentials in a Fast-Changing Environment: A Sectoral Analysis, p.xiv; Jerusalem and Ramallah

¹⁵ Sari Hanafi & Linda Tabar 2005, p.249

withdrawal out of the grass root movements and the impact of institutionalization and professionalization, with the consequences of the changing self concepts of NGOs.

NGOs are not political actors – being part of a liberation struggle – anymore. They are “political actors” alongside the PA in building up state structures. The goal of the NGOs today is not to change Israeli politics of apartheid and to stop the still ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Jerusalem and the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

In this thought, changing from a broad grass root movement into professionalism, a political class dissolved through individualization with the consequences of de-politicization, de-radicalizing and demobilization of a former political opposition.

Two strings of argument will be touched upon without deeper analysis at this point.

First: Critics can argue, again and again a Eurocentric view is imposed on Palestinian society or a developing country. What made us to do this – even if we are aware that donor support for “building up civil society” means promoting and implementing the donors’ perception of civil society and their own cultural values – often ignoring the already existing Arab civil society and political facts on the ground? Because NGOs / NGO employees refer to actors (donors) they practice global agendas and adopt them uncritically on the ground. This keeps the aid business running. On one hand, donors are conformed in their policies of support through implementation of native people on the ground. On the other hand NGO employees do the work on the ground and get well paid for it.

Second: to what extent should this development be analyzed as an aspect of changing society in the context of transformation in the Arab world?¹⁶ Which role does this new middle class play in changing society? Are they relevant or irrelevant?

Economic survivors

Economic survivors (25%) are NGO employees who take any job, because they have no freedom to choose the sector in which they want to earn a living. In 2010 the unemployment rate was estimated by PCBS between 23-28% in the oPt. A desolate economic situation and high unemployment force people to take any job they

find. “It is not a question of choice, you take what you get” (FGI Gaza, male <30).

NGO actors

Before Oslo in 1993, voluntary work was an essential part of NGOs, charitable organizations and popular committees’ missions, as a means of fighting against Israeli occupation and supporting Palestinian society. People did this work unpaid in addition to their work as pupils, students, employees or housewives etc. Because voluntary work was and remains an essential part of NGO-work, the study tries to shed light on the attitudes of NGO employees towards personal voluntary work.

31% of NGO employees (40% male, 20% female) do volunteer work in addition to their official work, 69% do not.

Some 32% of NGO Employees in the age group 17-25 years do voluntary work. In the age group 26-37 the participation rate drops to 24% and within the age group 38-45 the percentage is 38%. 53% of 46-54 year olds do such work. Participation decreases again to 38% in the age group 55-74.

The highest participation in volunteering is among professional administrators at 40%, followed by coordinator (19%), supervisors (13%), service employees (12%), office employees (5%), researchers (4%) and others (4%).

54% of NGO employees whose declared personal goal in working for a NGO is “feeling independent” do voluntary work, while 59% of those wanting “to contribute something to my society” also do voluntary work.

Most do their voluntary work in educational and cultural activities (52%). Others participate in training activities (39%) or supporting charitable organizations and providing technical assistance (14%).¹⁷

Because the formulation “training activities, providing technical assistance” does not specify for whom the work is done we are careful in drawing conclusions here. We can assume “training activities, providing technical assistance” has a close connection to an NGO worker’s profession. It can be either taken to mean “it is sharing my own personal knowledge with Palestinian society” or “training activities and providing technical assistance in NGOs for NGO

¹⁶ See Lisa Taraki 2008

¹⁷ The possibility of answering “being a member of “board of trustees” was excluded

employees." This would be aimed at improving the NGO community, improving the network and improving personal job possibilities.

Volunteering in the light of changing times

"Is there any of you who volunteers in addition to work?"

"No, now we are employees."

The results of Focus Group Interviews, revealed different attitudes towards volunteering between the first Intifada generation (38 years and above) and second Intifada generation (17-37 years).

First Intifada Generation:

In Focus Group Interviews (female and male, 40 years and above, GS&WB) the topic was enthusiastic discussed.

- Being aware that times have changed; changes in attitudes towards voluntary work came with the Oslo agreements and the changing policies of external donors.
- Voluntary work was/ is patriotic and it is done by people for the people in addition to labor and for no money
- Voluntary work was / is patriotic in the sense of fighting against Israeli occupation
- Voluntary work was mainly initiated and organized through political parties – today it is not a party topic anymore.
- Today, mainly voluntary work is ruled by calculation of getting something in return: experience and employment.

Second Intifada Generation:

Generalizations are seldom useful and they sometimes miss the voice of minorities in the described group. Voluntary work was rarely considered to be unpaid work in and for the benefit of society.

The majority indicated voluntary work as:

- gaining experience, especially immediately after graduation from university
- improving job prospects
- acquiring different experience. Experience in different fields one's chance of achieving a long term or permanent contract. Having job security and not having to contend with permanent short term contracts means

stability in life and that implies "having a future" (FGI <30 ?).

- Offering travel opportunities, providing money to pay for study.

NGO-actors (31%) typically do voluntary work outside their jobs. A greater percentage of the first Intifada Generation see themselves as doing something as a part of society for society and in the context of fighting against occupation (FGI >40 years). One can argue that the majority of this generation enjoys long term contracts and brought their feather one's own nest. Nevertheless, nobody has to do voluntary work as a contribution to society and age is irrelevant in this respect.

Comparing voluntary work between secular and religious, Islamic orientated organizations and NGOs would possibly reveal that people have different philosophies and concepts of themselves and of society; but this is not dealt with in this paper.

NGO employees are not a homogenous group. They offer a very differentiated picture depending on:

1. Working conditions, contract level: short term employees, long term employees/ permanent employees, project based employees
2. Working type: Yuppie, Economic survivor and NGO actor

NGO employees who stay long term or have permanent jobs enjoy better chances of careers and of achieving executive positions compared with persons with short term contracts and earning below US\$ 500.

The categorization concerning wages and duration of contracts among the NGO-proletariat (having short term contracts, below US\$ 500 per month), NGO-middle class and the globalized NGO elite – does not disguise the fact that all of them benefit from the aid industry.

4. NGO employees – and their membership in political parties

Being a member of a political party is not as common as it was during the 1970s and 1980s. 37% of NGO employees have been members of a political party. Currently 24% are members of a political party and 16% are active members.

37% of NGO employee's still feel loyalty to a party they have left.

Membership in a political party

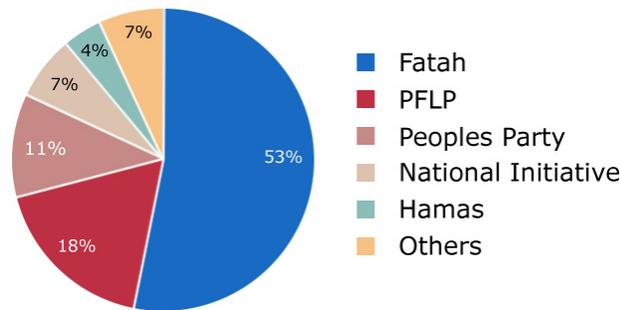


Figure 4: Membership in a political party

Vote in the election 2006

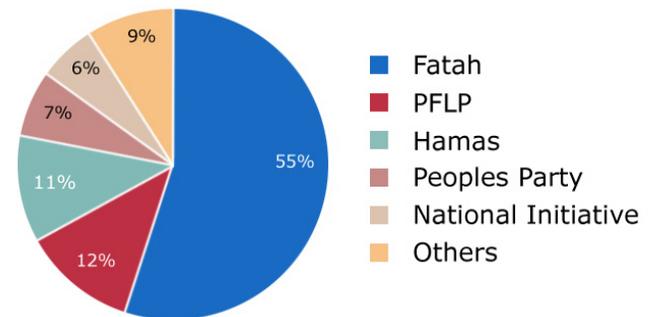


Figure 5: vote in the election 2006

4.1 NGO employees and their votes in the 2006 election

The answers to a question concerning participants' votes in the 2006 election was valid with 500 answers but with 550 answers missing. We must therefore interpret the result with caution.

The strongest vote with 55% of NGO employees was for Fatah followed by the PFLP 12% then Hamas with 11%. 7% of NGO employees voted for the People's party, 6% for the National Initiative and 9% for others.

According to polls from Palestine Center for POLICY and SURVEY RESEARCH (15 February 2006) support for Fatah decreases considerably among merchants (28%) and increases among professionals (36%), laborers (37%), housewives (42%), students and employees (44% each) and the unemployed (51%). Support of Fatah is weaker among employees in the private sector (37%) compared to employees in the public sector (43%).

Support for Hamas increase among merchants (49%) followed by housewives (47%), professionals (46%), laborers (45%), students (42%) and employees and the unemployed (41% each). Support for Hamas is higher in the private sector (45%) than in the public sector (42%).

Support for the other lists increases among merchants (23%), laborers and professionals (18% each), students and employees (14% each), housewives (12%) and the unemployed (9%). Support is slightly higher in the private sector (18%) comparing to 16% in the public sector.

5. The NGO sector – stabilization for the ruling system

Political subject

NGO employees – characterized as “yuppies”, “economic survivors” or “NGO actors”– benefit significantly from the current political and economic system. This results in their tacit or explicit support for that system.

1. In the PNGO sector, 90% of employees have an academic education. Most NGO employees earn more than the average Palestinian employee with a comparable education in other sectors.

2. The labor conditions of NGO employees are mainly distinguished by short term contracts or by the absence of any written contract. Short term contracts can offer good wages but they do not provide job security. The result of short term contracts and uncertain labor conditions is so-called NGO tracking: moving from one job to another, always looking out for another or a better job. An existing formal work network together with an informal network strengthens the existence of a NGO worker community.

3. Above-average wages and a community open mainly to academics with “*wasta*” form the basis of a new NGO middle class and NGO elite.

4. The NGO middle class and NGO elite possess a powerful tool for job creation.

This tool comprises knowledge of funding possibilities and know-how in fundraising along with contacts on the international and national levels. It creates around 10% of jobs in the Palestinian economy and helps prevent a brain drain of academics from the country. This job creation power tool works, however, only if NGO employees operate within the framework of an

agenda set by donors or if the projects they suggest find acceptance from donors.

5. This results mainly in jobs for young academics and brings about a long term dependency of Palestinians on external aid. This is because donors focus mainly on emergency aid and not on development aid and also because aid flows to a large extent into civil society – a non productive sector – rather than into productive sectors such as industrial, agriculture or the private sector. A balanced and sustainable external aid supply to all sectors would help Palestinians to become independent from external donors in the future.

The question arises, what would happen to those 41% of academics, educated in humanities, if the NGO sector were not able to offer a well paid job? These people are, to put it frankly, not educated for productive work in other sectors. As stated in the survey, they would face unemployment or emigration – or a less well paid job. The percentage (72%) of employees who have the chance to find work in the governmental, public or private sectors have chosen to work in the NGO sector because of higher wages. Their ability to generate employment means not only the creation of new jobs for the Palestinian population. It is also a tool to re-generate their own jobs and thus to support and perpetuate the NGO middle class and the NGO elite itself.

6. Donor countries encourage Fatah and the Palestinian Authority to engage with Israel, reinforcing this encouragement by means of aid. To some extent they treat the PA itself as a non-governmental organization.

Hence external aid supports the internationally-accepted Fatah PA and allows them to co-opt their political clientele. Furthermore it supports the NGO sector, which is treated by donors as financially autonomous. The NGO sector co-opts parts of academia and is creating a new kind of middle class and a globalized elite. The consequences are that NGO employees clearly benefit from the political situation by positioning themselves within it. This has the impact of stabilizing the ruling system.

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The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's office in Ramallah cooperates with partners in Palestine and Egypt. The RLF is committed to participatory development and alternatives to the current way of international "support" to Palestine.

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