

## BACKGROUND

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The Creative Palestinian Communities Fund (CPCF), a new international basket fund to support Palestinian grassroots initiatives in Palestine and Israel, was initiated by a group of independent community development and social justice philanthropy professionals with decades of experience in Palestinian civil society development. CPCF seeks to fill a vacuum in resources to promote the work of often overlooked communities that are creative in their approach to community health and development, and are striving to secure viable and dignified lives under conditions of occupation and structural discrimination. Ideally, this new support initiative will depart from existing international aid structures in the region in its pursuit of community participation and collective decision-making processes.

The initiative has garnered a network of friends, colleagues and advisors in Palestine, Europe and the US who have been providing advice, assistance, and leadership. The planning and early development period has been supported in part by Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF), The Open Society Foundations (OSF), The Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) and the Ford Foundation.

An exploratory convening was organized in New York in October 2014 to discuss the need for and initial parameters of the initiative. The meeting was attended by representatives from foundations and NGOs, as well as by individual activists, advocates, and philanthropic consultants. An extensive network of additional colleagues and friends emerged from our wide-ranging discussions and a working group was formed to help steer the work forward.

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS & CONVERSATIONS

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In April-May 2015 we had the first opportunity to present the concept of CPCF in the region as a new innovative international fund that is informed and inspired by Palestinian community creativity. We conducted around 50 individual conversations and carried out five community consultations (Ramallah, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Aida Refugee Camp - Bethlehem and Gaza) with the technical and hosting support of A.M. Qattan Foundation, NGO Development Center, Dalia, YWCA, Al Feniq, Aida Youth Center, and the Academic Union. These encounters engaged over eighty individuals in an open process of reflection and exchange. What follows is a summarized selection of the most common statements, perspectives, observations and advice we heard during our five community conversations.

In preparation for the community consultations, an Open Invitation to people living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem or inside '48 interested in discussing new resources and new mechanisms of support for community-based efforts was issued and disseminated widely. All participants completed a basic application form, and then received confirmation, a **CPCF Overview, a Meeting Agenda and a Who is Involved in this Fund?** prior to the meeting. All documents were available in Arabic and English. The agenda and the process were developed in consultation with thought leaders and development professionals. The consultations provided a forum in which to explore ways of working which might inform the piloting of the Fund's first program, slated for launching in early 2016, through:

- Reflecting on ideas and initiatives on the ground that focus on the mobilization and (re)distribution of resources for Palestinian communities in participatory, transparent ways, and providing alternatives that promote greater equity and justice for Palestinian communities; and
- Learning from these experiences as we together attempt to translate our values and principles into effective mechanisms and practices appropriate to local Palestinian contexts.

Conversations were facilitated by Sharry Lapp, Serene Huleileh and Moukhtar Kocache. Minutes were taken by Rauda Morcos and Randa Mikki.

## WHAT WAS PRESENTED TO PARTICIPANTS

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- We believe in and desire to support holistic and innovative creative community solutions. We are confident that the people most affected by injustice and inequality holds the most creative and effective solutions to these problems.
- We would like people working in communities to reflect on what they are really doing/contributing to (aside from running programs and services and fundraising etc.). Things like: restoring hope, engaging people in their communities, building trust, building social capital, restoring dignity, mobilizing community assets etc.)
- We strongly believe that the values community leaders and activists uphold can be represented and embedded within the mechanisms and governance we design together for the Fund in an authentic partnership.
- We are all involved in a learning process, and we don't have all the answers yet.

- Only a structure built with community involvement, perspectives and participation will be resilient enough to be effective and succeed.
- Our goal is to explore mechanisms with everyone we speak with during the Fund's pilot phase. We may not use all suggestions but will retreat with the information we acquire and propose mechanisms that most resemble the most common suggestions. There might be more than one mechanism, and mechanisms will likely roll out in stages.
- We want to imagine ways for the allocation of resources as a developmental process rather than a transactional tool - to devolve and delegate power and resources to local groups that are often overlooked.
- We see building trust between 'givers' and those looking for resources as a major component of our activity, amongst donors, NGO's, philanthropies and community-based groups.

## WHAT WAS VOICED BY PARTICIPANTS

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- Despite the fact that Palestinian communities in the various parts of historic Palestine are today experiencing different contexts and realities, we are fragmented and need to be considered as one community and given opportunities to connect and engage with each other.
- We need opportunities to network amongst each other, learn from each other about models and initiatives and exchange knowledge.
- We need support systems that allow us to move to the next level of self-reliance and independence.
- What we really want is empowerment for problem-solving at the local level.
- We want to be able to work and contribute in our neighborhoods, villages and communities.
- We need to be honest with ourselves and ask: What are we doing (or not) for ourselves and by ourselves? What responsibilities do we have towards our communities?
- We need to better organize at the local level.
- Current development and donor aid parameters are stifling us and restrict our creativity for problem solving. We are tired of the 'conditions' placed on us.

- We feel roped in by the current conditions, processes, reporting and frameworks imposed on us by donors.
- How will this fund be different than others?
- How will those that donate to the fund participate with us and be involved? We want them to be involved in the process, implicated.
- We need the flexibility to work across disciplines and categories under the larger rubric of community development: successful and efficient community development is crosscutting and interdisciplinary - not thematic.
- We want opportunities for radical continuity and sustainability not just funds for yet another project.
- We have local ideas and social capital; help us materialize our visions.
- We don't just need money. Funds are an added value and not the value. We need structures and mechanisms that resemble us and respect our values.
- Money is increasingly being centralized in a few places. This Fund should help diversify the centers of resources rather than consolidate them.
- The power and prospects of real creative community development is the closest thing we have to political participation and self-determination. This initiative can be alternatively political in so many ways.
- There is a requirement for a basket of needs not just a basket of funds.
- We want to be part of structures that are transparent and accountable.
- We want to decolonize our knowledge and our minds.
- We need to be challenged to think outside of the mold created by donor aid.
- Allow us to speak of our weaknesses, failures and our lack of knowledge and not just of our strengths and successes.
- Will the fund tackle serious issues that people are afraid to talk about? What are the red lines for the fund?
- The fund should challenge existing power dynamics.
- We want to and need to challenge the prevalent "relief" model.
- If "we" are indeed part of the fund then we will work from our hearts.

- There is a lot of corruption and the donor community and the NGO's are unfortunately inseparable from this reality.
- Why a new fund now? Why is this moment important? What will really be different?
- We do not need money without genuine partnership.
- We want to change our narrative.
- We want to see continuity.
- Initiatives should be part of a process of community empowerment and end with local ownership.
- We want to learn more about community philanthropy and community foundations. We need to build a culture of giving as a form of participation and independence.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

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- Almost half of the projects elaborated by participants in a simulation exercise during the consultations included a mix of economic development, environmental sustainability and resource management concerns and solutions.
- Larger organizations are finding fewer resources to continue long-term programming.
- Small organizations are finding difficulties in accessing funds; especially non-conditional funds that don't require them to bend their priorities and vision.
- There is significant competition amongst organizations for funding.
- There is a breadth of relatively unknown and undocumented successful/ alternative initiatives that work with communities with limited financial and development aid monies, yet are often able to mobilize significant numbers of volunteers and human resources.
- There is a strong desire and visions for support/investment that would generate earned income possibilities for communities.
- Communities are finding it hard to convince funders to support creative models.

- There is a gap between what funders say and what funders do.
- The culture of scarcity that has settled within Palestinian communities needs to be challenged.
- There is a generational gap / tension in views on development, politics and civic action.
- Trust in donors has faded. There is wide belief that donors have helped sustain the occupation and normalized colonization.

## RECOMMENDATIONS WE WERE GIVEN

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- It is important for the new fund to work with collectives and unregistered groups and initiatives. Consider they use an NGO umbrella in their communities or partner with key organizations that might facilitate the transaction of funds to them. (It is important to note that this solution was not satisfactory to some.)
- Support processes of creativity and innovation at the local level; not just business as usual.
- Consider making it a condition or an important parameter for support that community initiatives bring something to the table; either: social capital, financial capital, volunteers, etc.
- Don't just support models but also support experiments.
- Create opportunities for self-criticism and self-evaluation.
- Consider multi-year support based on accomplishments.
- Frame community engagement, participation and exchange at the heart of the issue of self-determination at the local level.
- Consider economic opportunities and earned income potential as cornerstones of supported initiatives.
- The fund should be more equitable in its decision-making process and actions than existing funds.
- Consider allowing communities to use the tools they see best suited for their intervention. These may include: social investments, direct investments, social entrepreneurship, classic grants, etc.

- Consider matching funds - ask initiatives to bring their own funds, too.
- Consider partnering with other organizations that might provide the following to selected community initiatives: advocacy, organizing skills, management training, visual advocacy, campaigning, etc.
- Encourage youth initiatives while regenerating the experience and excitement of previous generations of community leaders.
- Reach out to marginalized groups and regions.
- It is important to respect identity and traditions but also equally important to not get caught in “traditional” and stereotypical notions of Palestinian culture. Acknowledge that Palestinian culture is also contemporary and vibrant.
- Focus on vision and not only on outputs/outcomes.
- Consider the formation of focus groups in each area.
- Try to act as a repository / a catalogue of good initiatives.
- When the time is right, explore private/public partnerships with the fund and community initiatives. Explore a role for municipalities and corporations.
- Make sure that the funds are used for durable / change-making development and not just for ongoing projects and ideas.
- When mechanisms and programs are in place, consider holding community meetings to announce and educate community leaders and initiatives about them.
- Make knowledge about the fund’s mechanisms widely accessible with a wide opportunity for participation.
- Encourage self-determination, independence, trust-building, volunteerism.
- Encourage voluntarism models.
- Encourage social skills and not just professional skills.
- Can local funds eventually become the larger part of resources in the fund?
- Determine community buy-in and community needs for presented initiatives.
- How to assess if what the community is proposing will actually work?

- Allow for a slow process of idea development and community mobilizing around initiatives before final submission of proposals.
- Consider how to allow those that may have knowledge and creative solutions but no trust and no desire or no access to support mechanisms to approach the fund as well.
- “Who decides” is a key issue for the success of the fund.
- Project reporting and expenditure should be made publicly available
- Use accessible language and not donor language. Create new language.
- Consider alternative and simplified forms for communities to submit concept notes, applications and reports like stories, interviews, films etc.
- Consider how initiatives are rooted in places, regions and communities from either a cultural, historic or emotional perspective.
- Selection committees should be independent and rotating.
- Take learning into account during the pilot phase.
- Take risks, that’s where opportunities are.
- Consider community-based/group evaluations.
- Don’t just recognize new ideas; help to point them out as well and to find them.
- Create mechanisms where communities can constantly interface and influence the fund.

## WHAT WE ARE THINKING

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Following the community conversations, we started to explore potential models for the Fund’s governance and its mechanisms of support. Working with the CPCF network of colleagues and advisors, our plan is to help solidify the mechanisms in the Fall of 2015.

### Community Committees (Clusters)

A key element of our vision is the creation of four local clusters, each with 5 to 7 individuals that bring a diversity of perspectives, knowledge and demographics

to the mix. Committees will be formed for Gaza, Jerusalem, West Bank and Israel/48 Palestine. Committee members will rotate every 2 to 3 years. Their role is to act as intermediaries between the Fund's operation and local communities, to field questions and concerns, to identify opportunities and priorities and represent communities' perspectives and voices at the governance level. Committees will also be involved in the decision-making process and allocation of resources. In addition, each local committee will elect one member who will sit on the Fund's advisory governance board.

### Three Support Mechanisms to Explore

We are currently summarizing and distilling the above information to propose up to three different grant making mechanisms which would be rolled out in 2016. This process of experimentation will include and will be vetted by the network of friends, community partners and advisors.

#### The 3 proposed categories of support are:

- **Catalytic Quick Response** support of around \$3,000 for special opportunities and circumstances
- **Community Advised Social Investments** of \$15-\$30,000 for projects and initiatives that are pre-selected and recommended by local community committees/clusters and vetted through an open process by other committee members and advisors.
- **Annual Open Call Grants** support of \$5-\$25,000 for innovative initiatives in response to a yearly open call with voting and participation of pre-qualified applicants in the final selection process.

Clear guidelines and parameters will be crafted with the goal of ensuring that participation and evaluation is simple, clear and transparent. An online process will be established for both grant-seekers as well as for team members and local clusters. These mechanisms will be experimented with and fine-tuned during the pilot period. We are currently exploring how other organizations might offer additional types of support to grant recipients in the form of capacity building, campaign design, visual technology and communication needs, etc.

## FINAL THOUGHTS & NEXT STEPS

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For now we are satisfied that a review of rapporteur notes indicates that CPCF's values of transparency, accountability to both community and funder, creative community building and connections, flexibility, sustainability, continuity, and participatory decision making were all affirmed and deeply appreciated. There was also confirmation that creative community development requires crosscutting rather than singular thematic paradigms, and is never divorced from political consciousness and notions of self-determination.

Work is currently being planned during November of 2015 to work on the formation of four local clusters, perfect support mechanisms with them, advance collaborations with partners and continue research on innovative community development.

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**NAME**

**ORGANIZATION**

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**NAZARETH**

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The Galilee Society (The Arab national society for Health Research and Services)

Deemah Shehadeh

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Iqrit Community Association

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Fathiyya Hussein

Adalah

Jafar Farah

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Samar Hawila

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Shatil-Beersheba

Shahira Shalaby

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Amal Jamal

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The Academic Union

Naila Awwad

Women Against Violence (WAVO)

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## JERUSALEM

Ruba Akel	NGO Development Center (NDC)
Lana Bandak	Qader for Community Development
Rania Elias	Yabous Cultural Center
Sandrine Amer	YWCA of Jerusalem
Khaled Farraj	Grassroots Jerusalem
Mosab Abas	The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem
Amani Khalifeh	Grassroots Jerusalem
Omar Da'na	The Center for Victims of Torture
Fayrouz Sharqawi	Grassroots Jerusalem
Alia Rayyan	Al Hoash/ Palestinian Art Court
Raed Saadeh	JTC, Rozana, NEPTO, Masar Ibrahim, Hoash, Mamal, Sunbula

## AIDA

Ruba Akel	NGO Development Center (NDC)
Sandy Hilal	DAAR - (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency)
Ishaq Al Barbari	Campus in Camps
Fahmi Abu Aker	Al Fineeq society
Naji Odeh	The Palestinian Center of Youth Action for Community Development
Kareem Ameereh	Aida youth center
Hazem Al Qassas	Shourouq society
Mohammad Abu Srour	Aida Youth center

Mahmoud Zeidan Jaffra Association for Culture and Arts

Athar Mufreh DAAR

Mustafa Al A'raj Aida refugee camp

## RAMALLAH

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Alaa Al Tarteer Al Shabaka - The Palestinian Policy Network

Sana Shbeita Mothers' School society

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Jamal Jumaa Land Defense Coalition

Celine Dagher Al Kamandjati Association

Salah Al Khawaja Stop the Wall

Majd Hajjaj Abdel Muhsin Al Qattan Foundation

Tamara Tamimi Palestinian Vision

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Ihab Balaha	Orchard of Abraham's Children

## GAZA

Azhar Bseaiso	NGO Development Center (NDC)
Elayan Wadi	Ajyal Association for Creativity and Development
Wesam Mousa	Director of documentary films
Amal Al Haj	English language teacher
Rasha Abu Shaaban	CCP - Japan
Bessan Shihadeh	RLS
Ibtisam Marzouq	Friends Society of the Visually Impaired Rehabilitation
Atef Al Ghussein	Welfare Association
Mamdouh Abu Kmeil	Al Qattan Foundation
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Abdallah Al Sayyed	Culture and Free Thought Association
Maysoun Al Faqa'awi	Culture and Free Thought Association
Andaleem Edwan	Community Media Center