

# Sports as a Lever for Sustainable Societies



By Mazen Al-Khatib

**C**an sports be a lever for capacity building and sustainability in the Palestinian society under an extremely diversified mosaic?

How can this tool be used to substantially change the lives of youth and children of both genders, and how can it promote physical, mental, and psychosocial values?

In addition to its vital role in health and fitness, sports plays a role beyond the fields of play. For instance, in Ancient Greece, an Olympic truce was announced before and during the Olympic games to ensure that the host city would not be attacked. Sports has led societies and individuals to better places and represented a key educational and health pillar for all communities, regardless of their philosophies.

The Palestinian society is not an exception although it has different priorities. It needs to exercise its right to create positive opportunities and alternatives so that its people can enjoy a normal life. This requires innovative means, including the creation of an incubator to support the role of civil, official, and sporting organizations that respond to the needs of young athletes. The incubators need to build on the natural inclination toward sports and explore youth sportive abilities under scientific and specialized supervision. Programs need to take into account the various stages of physical, psychological, mental, and social growth. It should also adapt to the particularities of sporting



organizations in terms of duration of training, nature of competitions, and connection of distinguished young athletes to clubs and associations, especially in remote areas, and for the youth who cannot financially afford to join sports academies and clubs. The goal is to prevent them from missing opportunities to excel in major tournaments such as the Olympic games or continental and international cups.

For this reason, the Palestinian Youth Sports League (PYSL) was established to include two incubators, one at Al-Quds University (in Abu Dis) and another at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza. The incubators will operate in eight governorates in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem to enable youth, who range in age from 7 – 17 years, to register in various tournaments for basketball, handball, volleyball, and others. Our hope is to promote Palestinian youth in sports and help them acquire various skills.

Establishing incubators in educational and sporting institutions aims to administer sporting and recreational activities for Palestinian youth within a comprehensive vision that fosters a suitable environment to spend spare time and achieve psychosocial, sporting, and health benefits. Targeting marginalized youth in this effort contributes to integrating this segment into the society and promotes the optimism and hope needed to confront the daily pressures that exist under the present harsh living conditions. It is a lever for society and for sports.

The Olympic Committee and educational establishments view the incubator as a platform of equal opportunity for youth to compete and express themselves through sporting values. It also guarantees gender equality and focuses on exploring talents to employ them optimally. The incubators will connect higher

education institutions (universities) and schools with youth in remote areas and involve them in the sporting activities in sports associations and in the Olympic Committee.

With funding from the Government of Japan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated the PYSL sports incubators in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Higher education institutions, and the Olympic Committee. This effort will respond to the aspirations of youth based on the belief that sports can effect positive change in society. Palestinian youth, like other people, can express themselves through sports to make the change desired. They can agree to the principles of the Olympic Charter to find a common language, sports, and to promote its noble values that abolish differences and encourage integration and empowerment. These endeavors will promote the role of sports and concerned institutions, which have been progressing and expanding, in order to provide youth with the tools they need in order to evolve and prosper.

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