

Solidarity through Development

The State of Palestine's Role in South-South Cooperation

By Imad Zuhairi



Guided by a vision of “solidarity through development for a more resilient world,” the State of Palestine, through the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA), seeks to mobilize its skilled human resources to provide technical assistance to support partner countries in responding to crises and tackling development challenges. Precisely, PICA aims to promote South-South and triangular cooperation while realizing the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In order to work towards this vision, PICA was created in 2016 as the main development cooperation tool of Palestinian foreign policy with specific attention given to supporting developing countries across and beyond the Arab region. PICA envisions sustainable development becoming reality through cooperation and solidarity within a just and prosperous international community.

The Palestinian Rapid Response Team on a humanitarian mission in Dominica, 2017.



As a result, PICA aims to strengthen Palestine's relations with a variety of countries around shared interests and with the dual objective of creating value for Palestine through public diplomacy, and creating value for partners in the global South through the transfer of Palestinian knowledge, crisis-response capacity, and resilience, in addition to fostering business opportunities.

PICA works on shaping a partnership-driven approach that focuses on both technical assistance and connecting existing and emerging capacities through South-South and triangular cooperation. This approach, which integrates partnerships, innovation, and knowledge exchange as key pillars, is designed to enable PICA to achieve rapid gains while maximizing cost-effectiveness and stimulating local ownership and sustainability. Importantly, PICA seeks to further enhance social and international development through the exchange of expertise, capitalizing on Palestinian human capital in multiple industries, and engaging in a dynamic exchange of good practices rather than a traditional donor-recipient relationship. Importantly, PICA also plays a vital role in exercising solidarity on the international level by implementing bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral cooperation initiatives that lead to improved living standards and strengthened resilience across the world.

Hence, PICA is created as a result of Palestine's will to mobilize its human and institutional resources, expertise, and know-how in service of solidarity, technical assistance, and the international development cooperation agenda. In addition, PICA is mandated to provide a new platform for enhancing international development cooperation with the



Since its establishment in 2016, PICA has successfully implemented more than 45 development missions and projects in various countries across the African continent, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia, transferring Palestinian technical knowledge and know-how in diverse fields, including health, humanitarian relief, education, media, communication, renewable energy, and entrepreneurship.¹

support of Palestinian embassies abroad and dispatching qualified Palestinian expertise to provide technical assistance as an expression of sharing and solidarity with developing countries.

The agency and its team are mandated from the highest political authority of the State of Palestine, through a presidential decree, which is the foundational document. The decree is an ample license to operate



A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Sovereign Order of Malta (SOM) and the State of Palestine in the presence of H.E. President Mahmoud Abbas and H.E. the late Grand Master Giacomo Dalla Torre. The MoU was signed to build a framework for a joint development cooperation between PICA and the Ministry of International Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs of SOM. Rome, December 3, 2018.

and is broad enough to empower PICA to experiment with ways of delivering development solutions to partner countries and emphasize the importance of South-South and triangular cooperation as a framework for enhancing cooperation, dialogue, and solidarity among nations of the global South.

Because the agency was established on the back of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its new paradigm for development, it has an exceptional opportunity to leapfrog several stages of development approaches. As PICA continues to solidify and expand the coverage of its delivery (both thematic and geographic), its tested and tried development solutions will make a bigger impact not only on the realization of the SDGs but also on strengthening solidarity between nations of the world.

To turn this mission into reality, PICA, as a young purpose-driven



Palestinian doctors transfer their know-how to health practitioners in Côte d'Ivoire.

organization, harnesses a continuous learning culture, an innovative mindset, and an ability to create and share knowledge that meets changing needs, which are aligned to the evolving targets and priorities of its partners. Importantly, PICA staff, partners, and supporters are dedicated to working together to foster this culture that is critical to realizing the shared vision of all stakeholders involved.

Despite considerable challenges, PICA has reflected the Palestinian development strategy through international actions in a large number of countries and provided as much assistance as possible.

In line with its current and future vision, the agency signed and developed long-term strategic agreements and partnerships with regional and international organizations, such as the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Volunteers (UNV), and other like-minded governmental and international cooperation agencies. In addition, PICA has been able to expand its team members and integrate young Palestinian expertise in various disciplines to further enhance the achievement of its vision and objectives.

In fact, the success of PICA is directly linked to the resilience of Palestine and Palestinian technical experts. Irrespective of the thematic/sectorial profession – doctors, nurses, professors, engineers, business entrepreneurs, agricultural experts, etc. – the realities of the operating environment in Palestine lead to the ability to work “anywhere” in the world.

The core team of PICA is young, motivated, skilled, and committed to delivering on Palestine’s promise to scale up efforts to deliver on the vision of solidarity through development.

For the experts whom PICA deploys, business as usual has never been an option, so adaptability is an indispensable part of their skill set. This makes PICA able to deliver results with unusually low transaction costs in difficult risk-



PICA health mission in Côte d'Ivoire, 2019.



Palestinian agricultural engineer during a technical cooperation mission in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, October 2019.

The establishment of PICA inaugurates a new chapter of contemporary Palestinian history filled with hope and giving. This is evident through the implementation of national policies in the field of international cooperation, sustainable development, and sharpening Palestinian expertise inside the State of Palestine and in the diaspora, representing Palestinian people internationally.

filled environments. In addition to experienced professionals, young Palestinian experts are not only a key part of PICA's constituency, they are also qualified as potential experts for dispatching. The young core team of PICA is only one example; other examples are linked to the sectorial experts deployed on PICA missions.

In April 2020, PICA was chosen by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) as the South-South Cooperation Partner of the month, recognizing the great efforts made by PICA throughout the years, including its recent response to the COVID-19 pandemic.ⁱⁱ This significant recognition not only sends a clear message to the global community that Palestine is capable of providing assistance and addressing development challenges, it also gives a greater incentive for PICA staff, volunteers, supporters, and partners to work harder in the future to realize shared dreams and aspirations.

Palestine is not a donor country in the traditional sense, and it is difficult at the present time to be so, as a result of decades of occupation and deliberate deprivation in various fields of development. Despite the current status quo due to occupation, however, PICA represents a driving force of positivity and reciprocity with partners in the global South. Drawing on already existing goodwill and determination of the Palestinian people in Palestine and across the diaspora communities, PICA

PICA, as opposed to most development cooperation agencies, can draw from a national resource pool of experienced people who have turned the necessity of being able to deliver “anywhere” into a science and an art that is refined not only during missions but also at home between missions.



Palestinian agriculture experts in Venezuela, in 2018.

will continue to provide a unique and unprecedented example of the potential of public diplomacy in breaking stereotypes – both of Palestine specifically and of what a developing country can do in general.

All this can be leveraged for a stronger international engagement with the Palestinian cause and provides PICA with an opportunity to prove that development cooperation is not only the business of a few privileged donor countries.

YES, PALESTINE CAN!

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Article photos courtesy of PICA.

ⁱ For further information on the history of PICA missions and projects, please visit <http://pica.pna.ps>.

ⁱⁱ PICA: South-South Cooperation Partner of the Month, South-South Galaxy, available at <https://www.southsouth-galaxy.org/pica-south-south-cooperation-partner-of-the-month/>.