UNRWA AND THE PALESTINE REFUGEES: 
A GENEALOGY OF “PARTICIPATORY” DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the evolution of UNRWA's approach to refugee participation over the past 60 years through a discussion of the Agency's programmes and its relationship with the refugees it serves. The article identifies a range of participatory approaches: participation in economic reintegration; participation in the management and delivery of Agency services; participation in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; and stakeholder participation. The article illustrates how the evolution in UNRWA's approach to participation represents a significant shift in the Agency's relationship with the Palestine refugees. While UNRWA traditionally viewed participation as a means of programme implementation, the new approach acknowledges participation as a human right with the primary objective of empowering refugees to realize their rights and improve social equity within the framework of the Agency's mandate, values, and other UN principles. The article concludes that the fundamental challenge for stakeholder participation will be to find ways to facilitate the participation of refugees in the search for and realization of durable solutions to their long-standing plight.
UNRWA and the Palestine Refugees: a genealogy of “participatory” development

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It has become commonplace to describe participation as one of the buzzwords of contemporary development theory and practice. While their policies and methods may differ, non-governmental organizations, governments, and international development agencies promote the benefits of participatory approaches to human development as a matter of course. Participation is widely viewed as having both intrinsic and instrumental benefits. The UN Declaration on the Right to Development, for example, affirms the right of every human person and all peoples to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development. The right to participation is often characterized as sine qua non for the realization of all other rights. Participation is also seen to contribute to better needs assessment, improved project design and implementation, enhanced programme ownership and sustainability, and greater understanding and trust among development partners. The fundamental measure of participation is the degree of control or power exercised by individuals and peoples in determining the course of their own development.

This article traces the evolution of the UN Relief and Works Agency’s (UNRWA) approach to refugee participation over the past 60 years. UNRWA was established to carry out, in collaboration with local governments, a programme of emergency relief and public works to facilitate the economic reintegration of an estimated 750,000 refugees displaced as a result of the conflict over Palestine. Agency officials soon discovered, however, that UNRWA’s mandate would be difficult, if not impossible to carry out in practice: the refugees rejected resettlement, Israel objected to their return, and Arab host states were reluctant to resettle the refugees against their will. The public works programme was eventually replaced by a core programme of essential services that aimed to equip refugees to lead useful and productive lives in the absence of a solution to the conflict. Sixty years later, approximately 4.7 million Palestine refugees are registered to receive UNRWA services. The Agency describes its mission as contributing to the human development of the refugees by providing essential services within the framework of international standards until a durable and just solution is found to the refugee issue.

Based on a review of UNRWA practice, Agency documents, and secondary sources on Palestinian refugees, the article identifies four different approaches to refugee participation in UNRWA programmes. These approaches mark shifts in participation rather than discrete periods of Agency practice. The article traces the evolution of UNRWA’s approach to participation through a discussion of the Agency’s programmes and its relationship with the refugees it serves. The first section describes UNRWA’s attempt to promote refugee participation in public works projects that aimed to facilitate a

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1 The article distinguishes between participatory approaches and policies. It is only in recent years that UNRWA has begun to develop a participation policy as part of the Agency’s comprehensive programme of reforms.

solution to the crisis through their economic reintegration in the region. The second section examines refugee participation in the management and delivery of the Agency’s core programme of essential services. The third section describes the expansion of refugee participation in programme planning, design, implementation, and evaluation. The final section reviews UNRWA’s developing approach to stakeholder participation, which represents a significant shift in relations with the refugees it serves. While UNRWA traditionally viewed participation as a means of programme implementation, stakeholder participation acknowledges participation as a human right with the primary objective of empowering refugees to realize their rights and improve social equity. The article concludes that the fundamental test for the success of stakeholder participation may well lie in its ability to enhance the capabilities of refugees to project their agency beyond the specific context of UNRWA services in ways that transform the underlying processes of exclusion that have kept them in exile for more than 60 years.

1. Participation in economic reintegration

Participation was a function of UNRWA’s initial mandate to carry out, in collaboration with local governments, a programme of emergency relief and public works designed to facilitate the economic reintegration of Palestine refugees in the Middle East. Established in December 1949 under General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV), UNRWA’s mandate was based on the recommendations of the Economic Survey Mission (ESM), a UN-appointed team of international experts, who were sent to the region in the fall of 1949 at the request of the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) to examine the economic consequences of the conflict over Palestine. UNRWA was essentially born of the UNCCP’s failure to expedite a solution to the refugee crisis on the basis of paragraph 11 of General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, which instructed the Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement, economic and social rehabilitation, and payment of compensation to the refugees. The creation of UNRWA and the cessation of UNCCP efforts to facilitate a solution to the conflict three years later effectively recast the refugee issue as a problem of poverty. It also provided the international community with a new solution – economic development. The ESM hoped that “the opportunity to work [would] increase the practical alternatives available to refugees, and thereby encourage a more realistic view of the kind of future they want[ed] and the kind they [could] achieve”.

Refugee participation was thus central to UNRWA’s early relief and works programmes. The Agency hired refugees to distribute rations on a diminishing basis until they became self-reliant through employment in their countries of refuge or elsewhere in the region. UNRWA encouraged

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3 UNGA res. 302 (IV), 8 Dec. 1949, para. 7.
5 The UNCCP was established under para. 2 of UNGA res. 194 (III), 11 Dec. 1948, to facilitate a comprehensive solution to the conflict over Palestine, including the implementation of specific provisions in the resolution on Holy Places, Jerusalem, and the refugees. For a discussion of the UNCCP’s mission see, D. Forsythe, United Nations Peacemaking, the Conciliation Commission for Palestine, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.
7 UNCCP, Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, op. cit., vii. It also comprised an attempt to shift the responsibility for the refugees from the state of Israel, where their homes, villages, and towns were located, to the Arab states, where they had found refuge during the war. Arab states reacted by amending UNRWA’s mandate to ensure protection of the refugees' right of return as set out in UNGA res. 194 (III). For a discussion of Arab views see: J. Husseini, “Arab States and the Refugee Issue: A Retrospective View”, in E. Benvenisti et al. (eds.), Israel and the Palestinian Refugees, Berlin, Springer, 2007, 435-63.
refugees to participate in the Agency's small-scale employment projects (carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, dressmakers, tinsmiths); medium-sized public works projects (road-building, forestation, irrigation, municipal improvement, and experimental and other housing projects); and large-scale development (water sharing) and resettlement plans. A placement service was established to facilitate refugee employment and small-scale emigration across the Middle East. UNRWA also hired refugees to continue the education programmes initiated by private voluntary organizations in the aftermath of the 1948 war. International civil servants designed and administered the programmes, offered technical assistance in preparation for the transfer of responsibility to host governments, and refugees were expected to participate in the Agency's programmes.9

The idea of setting up an international agency to promote economic conditions conducive to the resettlement of the refugees in the Arab world was inspired by Western development theories and practices of the time. The ESM characterized the poverty and unemployment affecting both the refugees and the Arab world at large as “a challenge to the technical and scientific knowledge of, and to the wealth possessed by, those peoples [presumably the west] whose standard of living is a measure of the goal to which the people of the undeveloped areas may aspire”.10 Benjamin Schiff observes that the American backers of the project “visualized a Middle East Tennessee Valley Authority, sowing seeds of cooperation among nations, absorbing refugee creativity and labour in a transformed Jordan Valley region”.11 The refugees were thus seen as “a reservoir of idle manpower”.12 Their participation in public works projects was meant to catalyze economic growth and development across the Middle East. According to the ESM, there was “no substitute for the application of work and local enterprise to each country's own resources. Help to those who have the will to help themselves should be the primary policy guiding and restraining the desire of the more developed areas to help the less developed lands”.13

UNRWA's efforts to promote refugee participation in its public works programme provoked a hostile response from the refugee community. For refugees, the fundamental obstacle to a solution to their predicament was not poverty and unemployment, but rather the denial of their right of return. These views were easily ascertained and widely reported in the press, diplomatic correspondence, and reports by emergency relief organizations. A study of refugee opinion in the early 1950s by Fred Bruhns, for example, found that less than 10 per cent of the refugees would be willing to accept resettlement.14 UNRWA reports throughout the 1950s regularly noted the overwhelming desire of the vast majority of the refugees to return to their homes, towns, and villages of origin.15 Refugees feared, and probably with good reason, that participation in the Agency's works programme would lead to their permanent resettlement. The ESM itself acknowledged that

[m]ost men in their position, given a choice between working in a foreign land or returning

9 For a detailed discussion of UNRWA's early programmes see Chapter 2 in, B. Schiff, , Refugees Unto the Third Generation, op. cit., 13-47,
10 Ibid., vii.
11 B. Schiff, Refugees Unto the Third Generation, op. cit., 13. The US government established the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) during the Great Depression to promote economic development and lift the residents of the Tennessee Valley out of poverty. TVA officials were involved in UNRWA's creation and also comprised some of the Agency's first international staff.
13 Ibid., viii.
15 In 1951, for example, the Agency reported that “[t]he desire to go back to their homes is general among all classes; it is proclaimed orally at all meetings and organized demonstrations, and, in writing, in all letters addressed to the Agency and all complaints handed in to the area officers”. UNRWA, Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UN GAOR, 6th Sess., Supp. No. 16, UN Doc. A/1905, 30 June 1951, para. 37.
to their homes and to conditions understood and experienced from youth, would strain towards their homes, even were they told that, in their absence, conditions had so changed that they would never be happy there again. They would be reluctant to believe it. They would suspect a trap to hold them in exile until it was too late for them to return.\textsuperscript{16}

The cessation of UNCCP efforts to facilitate the implementation of Resolution 194 appeared to confirm the refugees’ worst fears. UNRWA's early years of operation were thus characterized by refugee petitions, demonstrations, strikes, and attacks on Agency personnel and installations.

Refugees also demanded a greater say in the planning of UNRWA programmes to ensure that their rights and interests were protected. In the aftermath of the 1948 war, refugees set up a range of committees to deal with the distribution of emergency relief, family reunification, and property claims, among others.\textsuperscript{17} The lack of solidarity and cohesion among the various committees combined with the restrictions imposed on them by host states, however, hampered refugee efforts to secure a greater say in their future. In the aftermath of a 1953 tri-partite meeting with UNRWA and the refugees in Jordan, for example, the government concluded that such gatherings were impractical and only raised the prospect of having to confront the unsatisfied needs and demands of the refugee community. UNRWA's response to refugee demands for a greater say in Agency programmes appeared mixed. In the summer of 1950, for example, the Agency's first director, General Howard Kennedy, informed the UNCCP that “UNRWA's experiences with organizations claiming to represent fairly large groups of refugees had been disappointing” and that the Commission should follow the Agency's policy and ask host governments to appoint committees to represent the refugees.\textsuperscript{18} Several years later, however, UNRWA officials made the first of several requests to the government of Jordan for permission to hold a tri-partite congress to give the refugees an opportunity to air their concerns.\textsuperscript{19}

Refugees were less reluctant to participate in UNRWA's small-scale employment projects. The Agency's facilitation of a small road-building project in the West Bank village of Battir, south of Bethlehem, exemplified one of UNRWA's more successful attempts to encourage refugee participation in its programmes. Battir, like a significant number of other villages, had lost access to part of its lands which were located on the Jewish side of the 1949 armistice line, which had also cut normal lines of transportation and trade linking the village to Jerusalem. UNRWA thus decided to assist the villagers in constructing a new road that would provide access to Jerusalem via the Hebron road to the east. The Agency observed that

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[\textit{once the refugees had overcome their initial suspicion of the Agency's work and saw what advantages the new road would bring, they gave their active and enthusiastic cooperation. On five separate holidays, 250 men, women and children worked without pay so that the work might be expedited. When the shortage of blasting powder threatened to interrupt operations for a few days, the refugees, unwilling to delay the work, purchased the powder themselves as a donation to the Agency. When a house stood in the way of the road the owner agreed that it should be demolished without compensation, trusting that his...}}$
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{17} In some cases, organizations that had existed before the war were reconstituted in exile. In other situations, relief agencies providing assistance, like the ICRC, tried to set up local committees to facilitate the distribution of food and other supplies. Host governments also appointed committees to represent the refugees. See the discussion of refugee organizations in Jordan in, A. Plascov, \textit{Palestinian Refugees in Jordan 1948-1957}, London, Frank Cass, 1981, 16-26.

\textsuperscript{18} UNCCP, \textit{Summary Record of the One Hundred and Sixty Second Meeting}, UN Doc. SR/162, 5 June 1950.

\textsuperscript{19} According to Plascov, the Jordanian government “was hardly enamoured of this assembly and did not share the Western view of participation in the process of decision making”. The government nevertheless approved the one day meeting, which was restricted to the discussion of “non-political” issues. A. Plascov, \textit{Palestinian Refugees in Jordan}, op cit., 57. Plascov's account of the 1955 congress is based on documents from the Truman administration archives.
neighbours would later help him to build another. Moreover, the village was stimulated to make many improvements on its own initiative such as a retaining wall, a reservoir, baths and a handsome mosque at the entrance to the village.\textsuperscript{20}

UNRWA's first decade of operations established a “top-down” approach to development that would shape the role of refugees in the Agency's programmes for the coming decades. Participation was simply a means to the end of the refugee crisis; a barely-concealed attempt to facilitate a de facto solution through the economic reintegration of the refugees in the region. The United States had already concluded that as many as 600,000 refugees would have to be permanently resettled in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{21} The Economic Survey Mission that recommended UNRWA's creation was aptly named to disguise its real purpose, which was to draw up plans for a massive resettlement operation.\textsuperscript{22} By abstracting the refugee crisis from its historical, political, and legal context, and recasting it as a problem of poverty, which could be mitigated through employment, the refugees were reduced from being citizens and holders of rights to objects of development and beneficiaries of international charity, effectively denying them their right to determine their own future. If the fundamental measure of participation is the degree of control or power of individuals or groups in the decision-making progress, refugees were, at most, “being participated rather than participating”\textsuperscript{23} in the Agency's works programme.

The cost, ineffectiveness, and the ill-will generated by UNRWA's works programme illustrated the limitations of the approach. The Agency's medium-sized public works projects alone had cost UNRWA five times more than the delivery of general rations.\textsuperscript{24} Moreover, UNRWA reported that it “found itself financing and operating labour camps to build public works which the governments themselves would have built the following year”.\textsuperscript{25} Refugees surveyed by Bruhns likened UNRWA headquarters to a “narcotics castle” and compared Agency services to the “giving of a shot of morphine”.\textsuperscript{26} From their perspective, UNRWA had “failed in its main task, which was that of helping the refugees go home” and provided “nothing but a palliative, curing none of the basic ills but perpetuating the misery of refugee life”.\textsuperscript{27} UNRWA's small-scale employment projects, however, demonstrated the potential for effective co-operation when projects reflected shared interests. UNRWA explained that even though the small-scale employment projects were insignificant in terms of the overall refugee situation, they nonetheless “offer[ed] opportunities for decent lives”.\textsuperscript{28} The Agency found that the refugees were willing to participate because the programmes enabled a degree of self-reliance without the “serious political implications” associated with the it's large-scale development projects. These types of small-scale self-reliance projects would become a staple of UNRWA's

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\item \textsuperscript{22} Nancy Gallaher, \textit{Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, The Dilemmas of NGO Humanitarian Activism}, Cairo, The American University of Cairo Press, 2007, 105-6.
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{26} F. Bruhns, “A Study of Refugee Attitudes”, op. cit., 134.
\item \textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
approach to refugee participation over the coming decades.

UNRWA's first decade of operations also illustrated refugee capacity to shape the Agency's approach to development. For refugees, participation was both an objective and a means through which they could address and remedy the underlying causes of their plight. This included the UN's decision to ignore the express wishes of the majority of Palestine's inhabitants when it recommended the division of the country into two states in 1947 (UNGA res. 181), thus contributing to the circumstances that led to the massive displacement of the country's Arab population, and the state of Israel's subsequent decision to prevent the refugees from returning to their homes, villages, and towns of origin following the cessation of hostilities. The exclusion of refugees from UNRWA's decision-making process thus exacerbated the original cause of their predicament, which was not simply a matter of unmet needs, but rather one of rights denied. Refugees accused the UN of treating them as “a million 'unemployed population’ … ignoring their history, place of origin, their homes and lands, and their ancestral rights”. Participation was essentially a demand for the restoration of their status as citizens and holders of basic rights, including the right to determine their own future.

The widespread non-participation of refugees in UNRWA's works programme essentially comprised a referendum on the Agency's reintegration agenda. UNRWA was eventually forced to concede that “the problem posed by the Palestine refugees [was] not simply an economic problem susceptible to economic solutions”. UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, similarly acknowledged in his 1959 report on the future of UN assistance to Palestine refugees that while economic development would remain an important component of any solution to the conflict, the refugees would have to be given a choice about their future: “No reintegration would be satisfactory, or even possible, were it to be brought about by forcing people into their new positions against their will. It must be freely accepted, if it is to yield lasting results in the form of economic and political stability.” The Secretary-General's remarks essentially reprised the formula originally set down in UNGA res. 194. Referring to the drafting history of the resolution, the UNCCP observed that by using the phrase “those wishing to return”, the General Assembly “intended to confer upon the refugees as individuals the right of exercising a free choice as to their future”. The mobilization of refugees in the coming decades would continue to shape UNRWA's approach to participation.

2. Participation in service delivery

The expansion of UNRWA programmes in the 1960s provided new opportunities for refugees to participate in the management and delivery of a core programme of essential services comprised of primary education, comprehensive primary health care, and a range of social service interventions. The programme shift was, in part, an implicit acknowledgement that the views of the refugees could not be ignored, but it also reflected the general lack of political will to facilitate a comprehensive and durable solution to the refugee question. Israel objected to their return, Arab states refused to resettle them against their will, and the international community was unwilling to force a solution on either side. UNRWA's Director, John Davis, conceded that the Agency was “one of the prices – and perhaps the
cheapest – that the international community was paying for not having to solve with equity the political problems of the refugees”.

The expanded programme of services also reflected Agency concern about the future of the refugees given the youthful character of the population and the lack of job opportunities for unskilled workers in the countries where they had found refuge. UNRWA explained that the Agency's core programme of essential services would thus help in “alleviating human suffering, equipping young refugees to lead useful and productive lives irrespective of where they may live, and supporting the general stability of the Middle East”.

UNRWA's core programme of essential services comprised a combination of self-reliance and basic needs strategies common to the 1960s and 1970s. The Agency continued to promote refugee participation in small scale income-generation and self-help projects, including shelter rehabilitation, the development of camp infrastructure (construction of pathways, installation of water and sewage systems, electrification), and the expansion of youth activities centres in the camps, with the aim of encouraging self-reliance and enhancing community development in the absence of a durable solution to their plight. UNRWA's education and health care programmes along with the distribution of rations and provision of social assistance to refugee poor, meanwhile, aimed to meet the basic needs of the refugee community. In order to staff its expanded programme of services, the Agency hired refugees as teachers, doctors and nurses, social workers, administrators and managers, and maintenance workers, among others. UNRWA quickly became one of the largest employers in those areas where it provided services to the refugees, namely, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. By the mid-1970s, the Agency employed more than 15,000 refugees across its five areas of operations. While the means and ends differed from the Agency's early works programme, UNRWA's expanded programme of services nevertheless aimed to facilitate the immersion of refugees in the economic system of the region.

UNRWA's core programme of essential services also contributed to the empowerment and political mobilization of the refugee community. As Jalal Husseini explains, Agency services ensured the existence of the refugee camps, which provided a semi-protected space for Palestinian activism; schools provided an “informal space” for the maintenance and reproduction of Palestinian identity and the development of a new generation of refugees who were active in rebuilding Palestinian society; vocational training centers facilitated the employment of refugees across the region leading to an increase in remittances, which contributed to the consolidation of the camps; and, the hiring of refugees to manage and deliver services led to the emergence of a new middle class, many of whom were active leaders in their own communities. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, refugee camps, UNRWA schools and vocational training centres, and youth activities centres thus increasingly became sites of political activism, especially around anniversaries like the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the 1947 UN partition plan and the 1948 war (Nakba). The rejection of the refugee label of the 1950s and the self-identification of refugees as “returners” (al-'a'din) symbolized the transformation taking place in the refugee community. As Edward Buehrig points out, the irony was that an Agency designed to facilitate the dissolution of the refugee question through their economic reintegration in the Middle East, had, through the provision of its services, contributed to their empowerment and political mobilization. These developments took place within and contributed to the re-emergence of a Palestinian national movement that eventually coalesced under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

UNRWA acknowledged that the transformation taking place in the refugee community was not

36 E. Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees*, *op. cit.*, 188-89.
Without effect on its thousands of local staff. Since the Agency's creation, decision-making power had been consolidated within UNRWA's small international staff. The empowerment of the refugee community, however, contributed to a situation where local staff increasingly challenged Agency policies and practices on a range of issues from employment conditions to the quality of UNRWA services and the protection afforded to refugees in the Agency's areas of operation. In the absence of an international agency with a clear mandate to protect Palestine refugees, for example, local staff called upon UNRWA to advocate for the legal rights of the refugees, especially those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). According to Schiff, “[a]s long as headquarters officials could respond favourably to their demands for improved working conditions, agency services, or a stiffer backbone in support of Palestinians rights, informal consultation worked well. It failed when headquarters became more remote and the agency impoverished”. A series of financial crises in the 1970s caused by funding shortfalls and the expanding needs of a growing refugee population, the relocation of Agency headquarters from Beirut to Vienna as a result of the civil war in Lebanon, and the impact of Israel's 1967 military occupation on the livelihoods and security of refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip increasingly strained relations with local staff as the Agency found it difficult to meet their demands.

UNRWA's top-down approach to development nevertheless remained largely intact throughout the 1960s and 1970s. By scaling back initial efforts to “participate refugees” in its works programme designed to facilitate their resettlement, and replacing it with a core programmes of essential services designed to promote the more limited ends of self-reliance and personal independence, UNRWA had created opportunities for a much larger number of refugees to participate in their own development and in the development of their community. This included both refugee staff, who acquired valuable job experience and a reliable income, along with the larger refugee community who benefited from Agency services. The locus of decision-making, however, remained firmly ensconced within the Agency's small international administration. According to Schiff,

\[\text{n}o\ \text{matter how talented, persuasive, or vigorous [local staff] were, the agency was run from the top by foreigners, and although the foreigners' agenda might overlap with their own, there were insurmountable differences. When Palestinians argued for change, the internationals retreated behind the agency's financial problems and its 'non political status'. When local officials challenged the internationals' authority, the administration struck back, centralizing power and dethroning the [Agency's] “uncrowned kings” [senior Palestinian staff].\]

UNRWA's expanded programme of services may have reflected self-reliance and basic needs strategies common to the period, but parallel developments in participatory development, such as the UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development, along with the UN's own conclusion at the end of the 1950s that refugees would have to be given a choice as to their future appeared to have little impact on

38 The cessation of the UNCCP's protection mandate in the early 1950s and the devolution of responsibility to the parties themselves, followed by the failure of UNHCR to provide protection as required under article 1D of the 1951 Refugee Convention had left the more than a million-and-a-half Palestine refugees without the protection afforded to most other refugees. See also the contributions of B. Goddard, M. Kagan and N. Morris in this volume.
39 B. Schiff, Refugees Unto the Third Generation, op. cit., 152.
40 Ibid., 139. Schiff describes UNRWA's approach as “residual colonialism”. “If a colonial situation is one in which the interests of the dominant power are served, even if gently and even if incorporating locals into the administrative system, while the interests of the local population are of secondary importance, then this situation is colonial. So is [UNRWA's] internal structure”. Ibid., 140-1.
the Agency's top-down approach to development.41 In effect, even though UNRWA witnessed a significant expansion in opportunities for “horizontal” participation, that is to say, in the actual delivery of education, health, and social services, refugees still faced a “glass ceiling” in relation to opportunities for “vertical” participation in the assessment of refugee needs and in the design of programmes to meet them.

The fact that UNRWA's core programme of essential services was created, in part, as a response to the non-participation of refugees in its early works programme, likely shielded the Agency from the protests, demonstrations, and strikes that characterized its first decade of operations. UNRWA's education, health care, and social service programmes reflected the shared interests of both the Agency and the refugees. Agency-staff relations nevertheless highlighted the limitations of UNRWA's top-down approach to development in terms of programme relevancy, assessment of needs, and the promotion of understanding and trust, among others. In 1969, for example, the Agency unilaterally introduced a new employee category to improve the status of its teachers. Caught unaware, Agency teachers rejected the change and UNRWA was forced to retreat. Several years later, however, the teachers requested improvements to their status, including many which had been covered by UNRWA's original proposal. UNRWA's top-down approach also hampered its ability to properly assess and modify its rations programme, which the Agency had inherited from the voluntary organizations that provided initial relief for the refugees in the aftermath of the 1948 war. UNRWA's decision to reject needs assessments conducted by local staff and then wind down the programme in light of the Agency's ongoing financial crisis undermined its credibility and trust with both its local staff and the refugees it served. UNRWA eventually created a post for staff relations, however, the largely “extractive” nature of the consultation process simply underscored the imbalance of power between the Agency's international and local staff. Thus, while consultation provided a mechanism for local staff to share ideas and air grievances, it did little to improve staff relations given their continued exclusion from UNRWA's decision-making process and the Agency's inability to meet their demands for better wages and improved working conditions.42

The empowerment and political mobilization of refugees in the 1960s and 1970s, however, was not without its effect on UNRWA's top-down approach to development. Throughout the 1950s, the relationship between UNRWA and the refugee community had been mediated, primarily, through Arab host countries, and, informally, through various refugee committees and community leaders. The re-emergence of a Palestinian national leadership in the 1960s, however, fundamentally altered the Agency's relationship with the refugee community. UNRWA's mandate required the Agency to cooperate with host governments, but provided little direction in relation to consultation with the refugees themselves.43 In its 1970 annual report to the General Assembly, UNRWA pointed out for the first time that the problem with past consultation mechanisms was their partial or otherwise inadequate representative quality. The Agency's first Director, General Kennedy, had made similar observations some two decades earlier. The establishment and subsequent recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people provided a new address for Agency consultation with the refugee community. UNRWA thus acknowledged that “just as the refugee community now

41 The Declaration states that social progress and development requires “the active participation of all elements of society, individually or through associations, in defining and achieving the common goals of development”. UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development, UNGA res. 2542 (XXIV), 11 Dec. 1969, art. 5. See also, Declaration of Principles and Programme of Action of the World Employment Conference, UN Doc. E/5857, 1976.
42 For a detailed discussion of UNRWA-staff relations see Chapter 6 in, B. Schiff, , Refugees Unto the Third Generation, op. cit., 138-81.
43 General Assembly resolution 302 required UNRWA to carry out its relief and works programmes “in collaboration with local governments” and to “consult” with them about measures to be taken prior to the cessation of international relief and assistance. UNGA res. 302 (IV), op. cit., para. 7. The provisions were introduced by Arab states during the drafting process to ensure they retained sovereign control over the development process thus providing a mechanism to resist international efforts to shift the burden of responsibility for the refugees from Israel to the Arab states. See: note 7 above.
exercised an agreed right to consultation with Governments in host countries in some form or another, it [would] increasingly expect to be consulted on Agency affairs in the same way that the Governments of host countries are consulted by the Agency, though not necessarily on the same subjects”. The 1969 Cairo Agreement between the government of Lebanon and the PLO, which gave the latter wide-ranging authority in the refugee camps in Lebanon, had already necessitated a degree of consultation and co-operation between UNRWA and the PLO in Lebanon. Formal contacts became possible when the UN granted the PLO observer status in 1974.

UNRWA's recognition of a developing "right" and corresponding obligation to consult with the refugee community through the PLO comprised an implicit recognition of their right as a people to participate in decisions affecting their lives. This represented a significant change in the Agency's early relationship with refugees and paralleled growing recognition in the UN of the "inalienable rights" of the Palestinian people. Important as it was in relation to the way in which UNRWA viewed the refugee community, however, the change simply provided a new mechanism of consultation, one that was, arguably, more representative, but also one that carried little prospect for changing UNRWA's top-down approach to development. While the PLO both facilitated (and complicated) UNRWA's relationship with the refugee community, it had little impact on the Agency's top-down approach to development.

The empowerment and political mobilization of refugees also created an interesting dilemma for UNRWA. With the expansion of its services, the Agency had, in effect, become a type of "surrogate state" for the Palestine refugees, most of whom were also stateless persons, providing many of the services usually falling within the purview of a state. UNRWA's humanitarian mandate, however, prevented the Agency from functioning as an address or site for refugee expression of their political rights. UNRWA often appeared to be working at cross-purposes, especially to the refugees it served, both facilitating their empowerment through the provision of core services, and trying to contain their political activism in order to maintain the Agency's humanitarian mandate. UNRWA increasingly found itself in the middle of major conflicts between the refugee community, the Israeli occupation authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after 1967, and host governments in Jordan and Lebanon.

3. Participation in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation

UNRWA's approach to refugee participation in the 1980s and 1990s was marked by a shift from participation in project implementation and service delivery towards greater participation in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Agency programmes. The expansion of

45 UNGA res. 3237 (XXIX), 22 Nov. 1974.
46 The UN defined the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as including the right to self-determination and the right to return to homes and properties. See, especially, UNGA res. 3235 B (XXIV), 10 Dec. 1969 and UNGA res. 3236 (XXIX), 22 Nov. 1974.
47 The PLO facilitated UNRWA's work, for example, by assisting in funding raising, resolving disputes with local staff unions, and through an “informal and confidential” partnership in the early 1980s to enhance the living conditions of refugees in the OPT. It complicated the Agency's work when it interfered in UNRWA hiring practices and when its military organizations violated Agency privileges and immunities. J. Husseini, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process”, *op. cit.*, 55-56. See also, See the discussion in: B. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, *op. cit.*, 100-09.
UNRWA's women's programme centres and the development of a Palestinian Women's Initiative Fund to provide financial assistance, training, and technical support to women-owned enterprises in the early 1980s exemplified the beginnings of the new approach. For decades UNRWA had simply offered Palestinian women courses in dressmaking and traditional embroidery, home-making skills, health education and literacy training. The new initiative aimed to empower more women “to acquire the skills and opportunity to earn a living; to help them cope better with family and social problems; and to facilitate their role in the development of their community”. 49 Refugees thus played a major role in all stages of the project cycle. As part of the planning process, for example, UNRWA conducted a number of surveys in each field, including one on women's needs and wishes “as perceived by women themselves”. 50 The women's initiative marked the initial confluence of Agency practice and international discourse on participation in development. This included the UN's Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies setting out a range of measures for the achievement of women's rights, including equality in social and political participation, which provided a framework for UNRWA's women's initiative. 51

The Neirab Rehabilitation Project (NRP) in Syria comprised UNRWA's first major attempt to systematically involve refugees in all stages of the project cycle. Initiated in the late 1990s, the NRP, which is now in its second phase, aims to facilitate a sustainable improvement in refugee living conditions that could be used as an Agency model for self-reliance and community development. Phase one of the project involved the voluntary relocation of some 300 refugee families from Neirab refugee camp, located 13 km from the city of Aleppo, to Ein el-Tal (also known as Handarat), an “unofficial” camp 20 km from Neirab where the Syrian government provided land for camp expansion. The second phase, which is now underway, involves the replacement of Second World War army barracks in the Neirab refugee camp by two- and three-storey housing units. 52 The project began with a participatory rapid appraisal and a series of town hall-style meetings in the camp to determine refugee needs and priorities along with their perspectives on the project and its implications for them. A local committee was established to act as a facilitator for the project. UNRWA also hired a team of international consultants to train Agency social workers and community volunteers in research methodologies used to carry out an asset mapping exercise in the camp, comprised of household surveys, focus group discussions, a business mapping exercise and gender analysis. Participation extended through to project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of phase one. Lessons learned are now being incorporated into the second and final phase of the project. The participatory approach reflected a range of interests, including local, national, international housing experts, Agency donors, Syrian government officials, UNRWA, and the refugees themselves. 53

UNRWA continued to promote refugee participation through income-generation and self-help


50 Ibid.

51 B. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, op. Cit., 58, citing, UHA, “UNRWA's Women's Program: Monitoring the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies”, July 5, 1991, 2. See also, UNGA res. 37/55, 3 Dec. 1982, entitled, “Popular participation in its various forms as an important factor in development and in the realization of human rights”. The resolution called upon UN organs and organizations to promote popular participation in the execution of their programs.


projects in the 1980s and 1990s to encourage self-reliance and enhance the social and economic development of the refugee community. The Agency's Expanded Programme of Assistance (EPA), for example, which was set up to address the deterioration of refugee living conditions in the OPT during the first intifada, provided opportunities for refugees to participate in shelter rehabilitation, improvement and expansion of health services, betterment of living conditions in the camps, as well as employment, income-generation, and self-support projects. As Angela Williams, then director of UNRWA Relief and Social Services, explains, the EPA was “intended to be parallel with a credible effort towards a peace process, and in support of that peace process”.54 Participatory opportunities grew under the Agency's Peace Implementation Plan (PIP), established five later to improve infrastructure and stabilize socio-economic conditions in UNRWA's areas of operation in order to “make the results of the [Middle East] peace process felt at the local level”.55 The Agency observed that the expansion of beneficiary participation in the development and implementation of programmes in the 1980s had enabled it to respond rapidly to the new situation.56 UNRWA also consulted with the PLO to reach a common understanding of the Agency's role during what was then thought to be a period of transition followed by the transfer of services to a future Palestinian state. The Agency explained that refugee participation in UNRWA programmes during the interim period provided “an added value to the Agency's output in excess of that funded by donors” and a means to “help the Palestine refugee community assume greater responsibility for its own future, and ensure the sustainability of [UNRWA's] programmes and services within a rapidly changing environment”.57

UNRWA's shift towards the inclusion of refugees in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Agency projects, however, contrasted sharply with the exclusion of refugees from parallel efforts to craft durable solutions for them in the context of the Middle East peace process. In its 1995 report to the General Assembly, the Agency acknowledged that the refugees were “caught between the hope for a better future and the fear that they might be neglected and even forgotten in the new political environment”.58 UNRWA went on to explain that the majority “had not seen any concrete benefits from the peace process thus far. They suffered from the impact of new restrictions in some countries and were concerned that UNRWA services might be curtailed owing to political considerations or financial constraints”. The ossification of the PLO's representative structures and the absence of an international agency with an explicit mandate to advocate on their behalf as a result of the collapse of the UNCCP decades earlier, moreover, left many refugees feeling vulnerable to the balance of power with no say in the determination of their future.59 The situation was further exacerbated by the absence of any reference to international law and relevant UN resolutions in the 1993 framework agreement between Israel and the PLO setting out the parameters of the peace process, the deferral of the refugee issue to so-called final status talks between the two sides, and the focus on

refugee needs as opposed to rights during the interim period. In this context, international efforts to encourage self-reliance and promote community development through UNRWA increasingly appeared to resemble early efforts to resolve the refugee situation through their economic integration in the region. The Middle East peace process thus witnessed a growing number of refugee demonstrations, petitions, and the rejuvenation of annual commemorations of the Palestinian Nakba. Refugee demands for representation and participation eventually found expression in the form of a popular refugee movement. Among their demands was a seat at the negotiating table alongside the PLO to defend and lobby for their rights.

The participation of refugees in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of UNRWA projects in the 1980s and 1990s marked yet another shift in the Agency's top-down approach to development. UNRWA had long encouraged the participation of refugees in Agency “output”, that is to say, through the implementation of works projects, self-help initiatives, and in the delivery of services. The expansion of the women’s programme centers in the 1980s and the large-scale camp improvement and community development projects begun in the late 1990s had provided for the first time opportunities for refugee “input” in the planning and design of Agency projects to meet their needs. The shift reflected both the “situated” analysis of their predicament demanded by refugees in the 1950s when they charged the UN with ignoring their history and their ancestral rights and the UN's own recommendation that refugees should be given a choice in decisions that affect their lives. UNRWA's sustainable livelihoods approach to camp development in Syria thus made a commitment to making refugees “the center of any strategy which will impact their lives”. While these changes were important, their nature as pilot projects meant that in terms of Agency-wide practice, UNRWA's top-down approach to decision-making still remained largely intact. When asked about whether NRP phase one had been characterized by “true partnership”, one refugee responded: “you need to ask the question: what can we both do, UNRWA and the community together. To ask this question itself will be very good. If I heard this question, I would be very interested and encouraged to be involved with you”.

The involvement of refugees in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Neirab Rehabilitation Project nevertheless demonstrated both the benefits and some of challenges of participation. On the one hand, UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd points out that participation “yielded improvements in programme design and created a new dynamic of trust, transparency and efficiency”. Aisling Byrne describes trust as “[t]he biggest challenge facing UNRWA”. It is also a major theme in the Agency's evaluation of NRP phase one. Trust involves issues of transparency, representation, and accountability, and is especially important in relation to long-held concerns among refugees that camp improvements, in the absence of the protection of refugee rights and the pursuit of durable solutions would inevitably lead to permanent resettlement. A

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second major challenge that UNRWA faced was in identifying community representatives and structures to act as facilitators for the project. In accordance with local “tradition”, UNRWA appointed camp committees in consultation with the General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees in Syria (GAPAR). Byrne concludes that the Neirab experience “reinforces the need for [representative and accountable] structures and processes to involve all sections of camp communities, including volunteers and political representatives, thereby ensuring that decision-making and responsibility for camp development are truly accountable and participatory processes”.67 An Agency evaluation of NRP phase one further noted the need for clear terms of reference identifying the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders; better communication mechanisms and strategies to provide timely information and feedback on projects; the imperative of addressing the lack of sufficient capacity to facilitate refugee participation in Agency programmes; and, the need for the development of Agency-wide policies and guidelines on participation.68 As important, the NRP experience exposed “the contradiction of introducing community participation in a context where all systematic components operate against any such community involvement”.69 The evaluation thus cautioned that the success of refugee participation in future projects would depend on the willingness and ability of UNRWA to change its top-down approach to development.

It was, in part, developments in the refugee community, in general, that facilitated UNRWA's shift towards refugee participation in all stages of the project cycle. While refugees had long voiced suspicions about large-scale camp improvement initiatives, by the mid-1990s there was also growing acknowledgement among many that improvement in their living conditions could also strengthen community efforts to protect and secure their rights. A popular refugee conference in the West Bank, for example, declared that “[t]he fear and concern of resettlement schemes must not prevent the provision of professional services for the improvement of conditions in regard to work opportunities, education, health, environment and other social affairs”.70 Participation, moreover, provided a means to ensure that the projects reflected community needs and were “complementary to the plans aimed at achieving the right of return and national rights”.71 While UNRWA's pilot project in participation was not without its problems, it was the actual participation of refugees that demonstrated the viability of putting refugees back at the center of their own development. UNRWA acknowledged that participation in NRP phase one challenged some of the long-standing conceptions in the Agency about roles and responsibilities, including the willingness of refugee communities “to take on some issues which are currently within the realms of service delivery by the government or UNRWA”.72

UNRWA's response to the exclusion of refugees from the Middle East peace process and the emergence of the popular refugee movement may also reflect a more subtle example of the capacity of the refugee community to shape the Agency's approach to participation. Several decades earlier, in the context of the re-emergence of the Palestinian national movement, UNRWA had established formal relations with the PLO, recognizing that existing means of consultation were insufficiently representative. The demand of refugees for representation and participation in the context of the Middle East peace process in the 1990s presented the Agency with a new challenge.73 One of the primary catalysts for the popular refugee movement was the camp-based Youth Activities Centers initially

67 Ibid., 51.
69 Ibid., 23.
70 “Recommendations and Decisions Issued by the First Popular Refugee Conference”, op. cit., para. 13.
71 Ibid.
72 UNRWA, Neirab Rehabilitation Project Assessment of Problems and Challenges in Phase I and Lessons Learned, op. cit., 29.
established under the auspices of UNRWA. UNRWA had long noted that the responsibility for resolving the refugee situation lay elsewhere within the United Nations; the Agency's mandate was limited to the provision of assistance and the development of the refugee community until there was a durable solution to their plight. At the same time, UNRWA acknowledged in the context of the Middle East peace process that "as the symbol of the international community's determination to achieve a solution to the Palestine refugee question the Agency was closely associated with the process and the outcome".74 The ad hoc measures taken by UNRWA to address the exclusion of refugees from the peacemaking process suggest an incremental step forward in recognizing possible ways for the Agency to facilitate refugee participation in peacemaking within the scope of its mandate. UNRWA conveyed to the international community the refugees' sense of exclusion, it lobbied donors to ensure that adequate attention was given to refugees outside the OPT, namely those in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, along with resources to meet their needs, and it provided unofficial assistance to the popular refugee movement when it declared the Agency's school in Deheishe refugee camp as a “non-UNRWA” site in order to facilitate the convening of the first popular refugee conference in the West Bank. While UNRWA did not address directly the exclusion of refugees from the negotiating table, it nonetheless represented a step forward from the Agency's response to refugee mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s.

4. Stakeholder participation

UNRWA has since begun to develop a systematic approach to “stakeholder participation” in the context of an Agency-wide reform process begun in the late 1990s as prospects for a negotiated solution to the conflict and the transfer of Agency services to a future Palestinian state appeared increasingly remote. Indicators of Agency successes in education, health, relief, and social services were in decline as a result of years of underfunding.75 UNRWA's outdated management system and the lack of long-term planning, policy frameworks, tools, and standards further undermined the quality of Agency services.76 The collapse of final status talks between Israel and the PLO in 2000-2001 and the increasing demands placed on UNRWA as a result of armed conflict in the 1967 OPT and elsewhere in the region underscored the need for comprehensive Programme and Agency-level reforms to restore the living conditions of Palestine refugees to acceptable international standards and strengthen and sustain the Agency's capacity for programme management and service delivery. UN-wide reforms initiated in the late 1990s provided further impetus to bring the Agency's programme management and service delivery in line with international standards and practice. In language familiar to the Agency's transition in the early 1960s, UNRWA noted that the reforms would “help prepare Palestine refugees to contribute to any positive changes that may be realized in the region over the coming years”.77

UNRWA defines stakeholder participation as “an active, free and meaningful participatory partnership between UNRWA and its stakeholders, and in particular, [the Agency's] primary stakeholders, the Palestine refugees”.78 While the Agency has yet to finalize the policy, a range of

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78 UNRWA, “UNRWA Policy on Stakeholder Participation”, Draft, Programme Co-ordination and Support Unit, 28 Oct. 2008, para. 5. Other stakeholders include UNRWA staff, Host Governments, Donors, UN Agencies and other relevant organizations in the region. The draft policy is comprised of 6 discrete sections: (1) a preamble, which describes UNRWA' mission, the principles governing its work, and the Agency's vision for Palestine refugees; (2) a statement of commitment to achieve stakeholder participation; (3) a policy statement that defines the parameters of stakeholder
Agency and Programme-level reforms already reflect the new approach. UNRWA's Interim Programme Strategy and its Programme Budget for 2008-2009 both emphasize the importance of expanding stakeholder participation in Agency operations. The updated (April 2008) Social Services Department guidelines, for example, state that the Agency's Social Services Programme seeks to enhance the participation and social inclusion of the Palestine refugees themselves in articulating and prioritizing their needs, identifying opportunities and developing individual and community assets. … The [Programme] recognizes the right of people to be involved in, and empowered to, express their needs and to be part of the decisions which affect their lives and part of the process to decide their own future in a way that contributes to their empowerment.

Participatory initiatives underway as of June 2008 include integrated community assessments in the West Bank, camp improvement in Jerash refugee camp in Jordan, the second phase of the NRP, and the Agency's “Schools of Excellence” initiative, which aims to address declining educational achievement in the Gaza Strip.

Stakeholder participation draws on both intrinsic and instrumental rationales for participation. On the one hand, the draft policy recognizes participation as a human right with the primary objective of empowering refugees, including under-represented and otherwise vulnerable groups, to realize their rights and improve social equity. On the other hand, UNRWA's developing approach to stakeholder participation further aims to improve efficiency in the delivery of the Agency's core programme of essential services. The draft policy on stakeholder participation also brings UNRWA's approach to human development in line with international standards and practice. The UN Agenda for Development, for example, describes participation as “an essential component of successful and lasting development”. Agency donors, including the European Union, the Swiss Development Cooperation, and the UK Department for International Development all recommend participatory approaches to development. The draft policy is also consistent with UN efforts to mainstream human rights-based approaches throughout the UN system. As a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly, UNRWA is obligated to observe human rights and associated international standards and good practice in its programmes. The added value of a human rights-based approach is that it provides a set of transparent and universal standards to guide the Agency's approach to human development and it brings a measure of
accountability into UNRWA's relationship with the refugee community. The draft policy thus includes a list of accountability mechanisms to ensure that UNRWA fulfils its obligation to facilitate the participation of refugees in decisions that affect their lives.

UNRWA's developing approach to stakeholder participation represents a significant shift in the Agency's top-down approach to human development. The characterization of stakeholder participation as an "active, free and meaningful partnership" between the Agency and the refugees it serves suggests a fundamental reorganization or devolution of power in the relationship between UNRWA and the refugee community. In contrast to the hierarchical or vertical relationship of the past, where decision-making authority remained firmly ensconced within a small group of international civil servants, partnership suggests a "repositioning" of the vertical relationship between UNRWA and the refugee community to a horizontal one characterized by mutual co-operation, collective decision-making, and shared responsibility.

UNRWA's shift away from its long-held top-down approach to development is further reflected in its commitment to mainstream stakeholder participation in all stages of its programming cycle, including emergencies to the extent possible, and to acknowledge and utilize outcomes of participatory processes as long as they do not conflict with the Agency's mandate, values, and other UN principles. UNRWA's current organizational development plan further outlines a series of reforms that will shift the Agency towards a more flexible and decentralized approach to programme management. Finally, the focus on inclusion along with measures to ensure that vulnerable groups in the refugee community are adequately represented in participatory processes suggests a concern for the way power operates not only in the Agency's relationship with the refugee community, but also within the community itself.

Stakeholder participation also represents a certain convergence about the role of participation between UNRWA and the refugees. For most of its 60-year history, UNRWA has promoted participation primarily as a means of programme implementation, in the context of initial efforts to facilitate a solution to the refugee crisis through their economic reintegration in the region, and then in the context of promoting self-reliance and personal independence in the absence of a solution to the refugee predicament. For refugees, participation was, from the beginning, both an objective and a means to address and remedy the underlying causes of their predicament, namely, the denial of a right to determine their own future and the denial of their right to return to their homes, villages, and towns of origin. Stakeholder participation is both an objective and a means by which refugees can realize their rights, and for UNRWA, it is an opportunity to enhance its mandate and improve its programmes.

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85 UNRWA acknowledges that the Agency's management system has contributed to a weak culture of accountability and that "without accountability, there cannot be effective empowerment; and without effective empowerment, there cannot be trust". UNRWA, *Serving Palestine Refugees More Effectively*, op. cit., 14.

86 The draft defines the roles of responsibilities of Agency staff at all levels – headquarters, field, and programme – to implement stakeholder participation. It also recommends the development of indicators and procedures to monitor and evaluate the Agency's commitment to stakeholder participation, and report and disseminate lessons learned. A more detailed strategy and implementation plan will be developed at the Agency level in consultation with Programmes, Fields and primary stakeholders. UNRWA, "UNRWA Policy on Stakeholder Participation", *op. cit.*, paras. 15-28.


88 UNRWA, "UNRWA Policy on Stakeholder Participation", *op. cit.*, paras. 10, 12 and 13. The Agency's Quick Response Plan to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza stemming from Israel's January 2009 military invasion thus states that "[a]s far as feasible, refugees' views and perspectives will be sought and incorporated in the process of recovery and reconstruction, including through systematic and representative participation in assessments". UNRWA, *Quick-Response Plan to Restore Critical Services to Refugees in Gaza*, Gaza City, 2009, 6.

89 UNRWA, "UNRWA Policy on Stakeholder Participation", *op. cit.*, paras. 14 and 18.
rights to development and participate in decisions that affect their lives. 90 UNRWA nevertheless acknowledges that if the Agency wants to bring about change it will have to do more than introduce new policies, improved management tools, and structural changes; it must also address the Agency’s organizational culture, that is to say, “the collectively held beliefs and ways of working, the norms and patterns of behaviour that act as the glue that maintains the status quo”. 91 UNRWA’s organizational development plan thus recommends that the Agency “evolve” to a culture based on fairness and consistency, flexibility and adaptability, responsiveness and results orientation, respect for staff, cohesion and collaboration, trust and transparency, commitment and hard work, and accountability, while maintaining the Agency’s long-held qualities of resiliency and stoicism.

The fundamental test for the success of stakeholder participation, however, may well lie in its ability to enhance the capabilities of refugees to project their agency beyond the specific context of UNRWA services in ways that transform the underlying processes of exclusion that have kept them in exile for more than 60 years. 92 The Agency’s education programme has long played an important role in the empowerment of refugees. In this sense, UNRWA should consider expanding its human rights curriculum to include a discussion of refugee protection and durable solutions. Education and awareness-raising should be approached as more than simply conveying a simplified version of the law, but rather as a process in which refugees “translate their needs and aspirations for a better life into demands [rights] and enforceable commitments [duties] by states”. 93 The benefit of this approach is that it provides a practical connection between the day-to-day lives of refugees and the law, it enhances refugees’ “sense of themselves as citizens and subjects of rights” and it contributes to “building active constituencies or sustained support for change”. 94 In recent years, UNRWA has also begun to raise awareness about the inclusion and representation of refugees in a negotiated solution to the conflict. 95 Refugee statements to the 2000 all-party parliamentary commission on Palestinian refugees, the Civitas initiative discussed in this volume, and the specific example of developing community-based models for return and restitution like the Bir’im/Bar’am initiative where internally displaced Palestinians and members of a local kibbutz addressed their conflict over rights and claims to the same land provide useful examples of how direct participation of refugees in the search for durable solutions may provide creative solutions that are “out of reach” of official negotiators. 96 In other cases where refugees have

90 Ibid., para. 9.
91 UNRWA, Serving Palestine Refugees More Effectively, op. cit., 32.
94 Ibid.
participated in peace processes, including Guatemala, Burundi, and Liberia, the role of the UN has been critical to facilitating their inclusion in both direct talks and parallel second track processes. UNRWA should thus consider ways to facilitate refugee inclusion within the context of its mandate.

5. Conclusion

UNRWA's approach to refugee participation has evolved over the past 60 years from participation as a means of programme implementation towards an active, free, and meaningful partnership between the Agency and the refugees it serves. During UNRWA's first decade of operations, the Agency promoted participation in its works' programmes as a means of facilitating solutions for Palestine refugees through their economic reintegration in the Middle East. Since the 1960s UNRWA has increasingly relied on refugees to manage and deliver its core programme of essential services to the refugee community. Participation has also provided a means of encouraging self-reliance and community development in the absence of a solution to the conflict and later in the context of the Middle East peace process. In the 1980s UNRWA began an incremental shift towards the participation of refugees in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Agency programmes. The Agency's developing approach to stakeholder participation acknowledges that participation is both an objective and a means by which refugees can realize their rights and improve social equity.

Stakeholder participation as an active, free, and meaningful partnership between UNRWA and its primary stakeholders, the Palestine refugees, begins to address the original cause of their ongoing predicament, that is, the denial of their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives both as individuals and as a people. In a sense, the draft policy provides a measure of reparation for the UN's initial decision more than 60 years ago to override the fundamental right of Palestinians to determine their future. Stakeholder participation also provides a means for Palestine refugees to realize their rights to development, including their right to an adequate standard of living, the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to education. The draft policy beings to restore the link between refugee needs and refugee rights that was broken nearly 60 years ago following the cessation of UNCCP efforts to protect the refugees. Finally, stakeholder participation provides a potential mechanism for Palestine refugees to realize their rights of return, restitution, compensation, and other durable solutions to their long-standing plight. The challenge will be to find ways to enhance the capabilities of refugees to project their agency beyond their participation in UNRWA's core programme of essential services.