Strengthening Palestinian universities' capacity for peace, conflict transformation, and reconciliation (PALUNI PEACE)

Project duration in months: 18 months

Starting date: January 2022

Project leader: Prof. Laurent Goetschel

Lead Institution: swisspeace / University of Basel

Swiss and MENA Partners :

1) Islamic University of Gaza
- Prof. Waleed Al Modalal, Professor of Political Science
- Amani Al Mqadma, Director of the International Relations Dep., researcher & lecturer in entrepreneurship

2) swisspeace / University of Basel
- Prof. Laurent Goetschel, Professor of Political Science and swisspeace director
- Ursina Bentele, program officer and project coordinator
- Roland Dittli, Head of Analysis and Impact program, Palestine focal point

Context
- conflict in Palestine, especially Gaza.
- society struggles with the effects of direct, structural, and cultural violence, threatening the unity of Palestinians
- universities traditionally played an important role in political socialization
- since 2007, universities are affected by the split between the West Bank and Gaza, leaving institutes of higher education in Gaza isolated
- students in Gaza are particularly affected by the occupation, restrictions of movement hinder their potential of engaging meaningfully with conflict transformation and reconciliation.
- surprisingly, there are currently no (university) curricula focusing on peace and conflict resolution in Gaza.

General aim: contributing to filling the gap of Palestinian inputs to academic research in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Need: A 2019 study showed a significant interest and need for studies in these fields, but identified a lack of courses, infrastructure and staff to teach these topics.

Objectives

With PALUNI PEACE we want to address these challenges. By **strengthening the Palestinian higher education institutional capacities for peace and conflict resolution**, the project will:

1) strengthen South-North networking, knowledge sharing, and intercultural understanding and contributing/strengthening a **community of practice on peace/conflict studies** in the HE sector;
2) enhance **students' understanding** of peace and conflict resolution concepts, strategies and comparative lessons learned;
3) boost IUG staff **skills in teaching and research peace and conflict** resolution and
4) building on the experiences made during the lock-down when teaching was remote, strengthen staff and students' skill in designing and using in **blended learning modalities**, such as remote teaching combined with in-person workshops, self-study and student exchange on online platforms.

Main activities / Work Packages

1) **Inception** and design phase – remote

2) **Capability building** phase – in-person in Switzerland or Gaza and remote
a) training for IUG staff in teaching conflict resolution and peacebuilding to enable them to prepare teaching material for a peace and conflict course at IUG.
b) The trained staff develop jointly with swp a conflict transformation curricula for undergrad students

3) **Course delivery & feedback loop** – in-person in Gaza, with remote support
- Conduct pilot course in 1st semester of 2022/23, assess students' learning and conduct course evaluation

4) **Dissemination & communication –** remote
-    Conduct a workshop to discuss and disseminate experiences and feedback of pilot course.
-    Publish some of the material online, since there is a lack of Arabic course material on peace & conflict studies.

Potential **follow-up** activity: A feasibility study to assess the possibility of a new master's degree at IUG in the field of conflict resolution through both studying the potential political barriers as well as surveying the interest of students and future employers.

Theory of Change
- if universities are better equipped to teach and train students in conflict transformation and graduates are better skilled and educated in peace and conflict studies,
- they will contribute to knowledge generation in peace studies in Palestine and
- thus, better inform decision makers, and
- they are better set-up to contribute to non-violent conflict transformation in their professional and private spheres.

Expected Outcomes
1) Enhanced **institutional capacity and space for peace, conflict resolution** and reconciliation:
• Faculties are better equipped to develop a peace & conflict course, with a specific gender lens, informed by the needs and interests of future students and by the international state-of the art of peace and conflict research/teaching.
• Students of the participant institutions are better qualified and skilled to reflect, research and constructively deal with violence and conflict.
• Partner institutions have improved capacities in teaching using digital technologies.

2) **Strengthened network for HEI cooperation**
• Scientific dialogue culture and cooperation between the participating institutions is established as well as exchange with stakeholders is strengthened.
• The SDGs concept is promoted among participating institutions.

Risk Management

Macro level socio-political fault lines relevant for the project
1) Political polarization of Universities in Gaza the two political factions. Consequently, a peacebuilding course held only in one of the universities could further polarize and give the impression of a field owned by a specific political party.
→ explore **potential partnerships** with others, liaise will local stakeholders to **ensure a common understanding** of the aim and objectives of the course.

2) Connotation of the word "peace": In the context of the broader Israel-Palestine conflict, the term "peace" is often connotated with giving up Palestinian rights. A peacebuilding course could be interpreted as pushing a normalization agenda.
→ Carefully work on **framing of the course** under the reinforcement of Palestinian future

3) Resistance by the Ministry of Higher Education to the long-term goal of establishing an MA program. The IUG has previously faced challenges in having MAs accepted by the MoHE, based in Ramallah and lead by Fatah. The political aspect of an MA in this field could prove to be even more challenging.
→ The development of a master's degree (which would require MoHE's approval) will only come as a follow-up step after the pilot course has been launched and evaluated together with stakeholders and does not directly influence this project.