Executive summary

Evaluation of the Resilience in Schools of East Jerusalem

'RiSE'

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Presentation of the evaluation

The education system in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem faces significant challenges, severely affecting students, teachers, and infrastructure. The region suffers from a learning crisis due to poor-quality education. Inadequate pre-primary education hinders cognitive and socioemotional development, while low reading proficiency in primary education limits students' ability to excel in STEM subjects. The shortage of qualified STEM teachers and outdated teaching methods further disengage students, reducing the number who pursue STEM fields in higher education, where job opportunities are already scarce.

Palestinian students also face frequent learning disruptions caused by ongoing conflict and external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, violent escalations, economic instability, infrastructure deficits, and teacher strikes. In vulnerable areas like Area C and East Jerusalem, political instability and funding shortages create additional barriers to educational continuity.

In East Jerusalem, the educational landscape is particularly dire, with severe classroom shortages, inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns, high dropout rates, and fragmented coordination among stakeholders. The annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967 led to a critical shortage of educational facilities, with an estimated need for 1,200 additional classrooms. Restrictions on building permits and competition from better-resourced Israeli municipal schools exacerbate these challenges, threatening the preservation of Palestinian cultural identity in education.

In response to these challenges, the RiSE project was launched to strengthen the resilience of the Palestinian community by improving access to education, upgrading school infrastructure, and revitalizing semi-public spaces. RiSE adopted a comprehensive area-based approach that addressed not only physical school conditions but also the overall well-being of students. The project focused on alleviating chronic classroom shortages, enhancing the competitiveness and appeal of schools, and creating semi-public spaces for extracurricular activities to foster a more conducive learning environment both during and after school hours.

The evaluation of the RiSE project centered on two main objectives: accountability and learning. Accountability assessed the project’s success in meeting its goals as required by donors and stakeholders, while learning identified successful strategies and areas for improvement. The evaluation provided insights for scaling or replicating similar projects using evidence-based decision-making.

A non-experimental, theory-based approach was used for the evaluation, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Triangulation—through interviews, observations, document reviews, and quantitative analysis—strengthened the reliability of findings. Coding checks were applied to ensure consistency during interview analysis. The utilization-focused evaluation promoted stakeholder engagement and participatory methods, contributing to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

The RiSE project evaluation adhered to the OECD-DAC criteria, which provided a structured framework to assess relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. These criteria ensured a comprehensive evaluation of both project outcomes and processes, delivering accountable, high-quality results for all stakeholders.

Data collection methods included reviewing key program documents such as the Contribution Agreement, Annual Progress Report 2022, and Mid-Term Review. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with representatives from the Ministry of Education, Jerusalem Directorate of Education, and Enabel staff further enriched the understanding of the project's performance and impact. Together, these methods offered a holistic assessment of the project's successes and areas for improvement, providing a strong foundation for future initiatives based on the lessons learned from this evaluation.

Findings and conclusions

Coherence	B	RiSE effectively aligned with ongoing projects and leveraged synergies to address needs in East Jerusalem, complementing EU-supported initiatives like the TDH project and Enable's "Schools 4" initiative. Its pioneering Fab Lab components sparked discussions on STEAM education and new "STEAM Labs." While the project benefited from Belgium's Fab Lab expertise and partnerships with CSOs, it faced challenges with governance and resource management due to limited engagement with the Ministry of Education and a lack of a national partner for R3. Despite these issues, the collaboration with TDH proved successful, expanding environmental initiatives, and demonstrating the project team's resourcefulness and ability to overcome obstacles.
Relevance	B	The RiSE program is a highly relevant multisectoral infrastructure initiative focused on developing schools and semi-public spaces in East Jerusalem. From a technical perspective, R2's emphasis on education, STEAM, and technology, as well as R3's focus on semi-public spaces, are crucial. From the perspective of the priorities and partner country's needs, donor, and global priorities it is also relevant. However, the project did not manage to forge strong partnerships with national actors such as the Ministry of Education or with other institutional partners that may be involved in public space development.
Efficiency	B	The project commenced its first three years of implementation with a primary focus on R1, without making significant progress on R2 and R3. This can be attributed to two main factors: 1. The substantial and extensive nature of R1, which constituted over 75% of the project's direct costs, in contrast to R2 and R3, which accounted for less than 25%. [1] 2. Limited human resources, which made it impractical to address all three results simultaneously. These factors have contributed to a 1 year no cost extension, a short second one to enable holding the inaugural event is likely to be requested.
Effectiveness	B	Despite many hindering factors the project, especially the infrastructure outputs, under R2 and R3 were delivered with a large degree of successes. The activities carried out under R2 and R3 have significantly contributed to strengthening the resilience of the community in East Jerusalem by improving access to education and school infrastructure. The Fab Labs in East Jerusalem schools are equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including 3D printers, CNC machines, interactive smart boards, basic robotics kits, and a variety of fabrication tools. These resources align well with the MoE's vision of fostering creativity, design thinking, and the application of theoretical concepts. It also supports their approach to shift from STEM to STEAM. However, these labs have not been utilized to date. Limiting the capacity of the evaluator to evaluate the effectiveness of the Lab and the provided

[1] Calculation based on Annual Result Report 4.

		equipment. Two Labs have been partially used during summer camps. This underutilization stems from several factors, including the lack of an official handover, incomplete setup, and insufficient teacher training. The project aimed to create 5 to 6 semi-public spaces as outlined in Amendment 2, Output 3. The project successfully created six semi-public spaces, facilitating the participation of thousands of people, including many students. The shift in focus from public spaces to semi-public spaces, as outlined in Amendment 2 and later agreements and progress reports, indicates a strategic adaptation of the project to better align with emerging challenges or opportunities. These semi-public spaces included community centres, sports clubs, and have been vital in fostering community engagement, recreation, and educational activities, contributing significantly to the local community's resilience
Sustainability	B	The sustainability mechanisms for the Fab Labs have been effectively integrated, offering a strong foundation for their continued operation beyond the project's duration. The project's alignment with local educational structures, particularly MoE's future focus on STEAM and that JDoE have demanded all schools with a FabLab to give six classes in them, plays a crucial role in ensuring the Fab Labs' long-term sustainability. Public and semi-public spaces demonstrate high levels of sustainability due to the strong sense of ownership exhibited by their partners. These partners are more likely to manage and maintain these spaces sustainably, as they are an integral part of the limited space available to them.
Impact	B	As of now, the Fab Labs have not shown measurable impacts on students' engagement in STEAM subjects and project-based learning. This is primarily because the labs have not yet been fully operational or utilized. Consequently, there has been no opportunity to assess their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. Once these issues are resolved and the labs are fully operational, a more accurate evaluation of their effects on STEAM engagement and project-based learning can be conducted. Key informants have hypothesized that Fab Labs serve as creative spaces equipped with fabrication tools such as 3D printers, laser cutters, and CNC machines. These labs provide hands-on learning opportunities for students, fostering skills in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM). Access to Fab Labs can stimulate students' interest in these fields and enhance their educational and life outcomes. By providing a practical, engaging learning environment, Fab Labs help students develop critical thinking, creativity, and technical skills that are essential for future success. Soft components related to greening and art activities at schools have engaged students in school enhancement projects, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. This engagement has strengthened student ties to their schools, potentially leading to better retention rates and making the schools more appealing to students. These projects contributed to creating a positive and inviting school environment, which is critical for student engagement and success.

Main Conclusions

1. **Early and Integrated Project Phases**: The project would have benefitted from parallel rather than sequential implementation of its phases (R1, R2, and R3), optimizing both time and cost.

2. **Specialized Human Resources**: The inclusion of specialists in education and public spaces alongside the project infrastructure team is crucial. Education experts can guide curriculum integration and teacher training, while public space experts can ensure effective use and management of community spaces. This specialized input is essential for addressing sector-specific challenges and enhancing the overall impact of the project.

3. **Infrastructure and Resource Management:** Challenges related to infrastructure, such as incomplete setup and unresolved issues (e.g., ventilation for CNC machines), have hindered the effective use of Fab Labs. Ensuring that all technical and infrastructural aspects are addressed before full-scale implementation is essential for the functionality and success of these labs.
4. **Official Handover and Coordination**: Delays in the official handover process between the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Jerusalem Department of Education (JDoE) limited the full utilization of Fab Labs. Better communication between these entities is crucial for successful implementation.

5. **Impact of Public and Semi-Public Spaces**: The rehabilitation of semi-public spaces provided important learning and community environments, highlighting the value of these spaces in addressing educational and social needs.

6. **Community Engagement and Ownership**: Strong involvement from key stakeholders such as the MoE and JDoE contributed to project sustainability and ownership, underlining the importance of early stakeholder engagement.

7. **Challenges and Flexibility**: The project demonstrated significant adaptability in overcoming political, financial, and resource challenges. Flexibility in planning was necessary to respond effectively to these obstacles.

8. **Risks Associated with Municipality Engagement**: Engaging with the Jerusalem municipality introduced risks, such as political tension and potential disruption to international relations with the Palestinian Authority. Careful navigation of such political contexts is essential.

9. **Legal and Ownership Challenges**: The project experienced delays due to legal complexities and space identification. Streamlining these processes in future projects will help avoid delays and ensure timely completion.

10. **Training and Capacity Building** Initial teacher training programs were insufficient, focusing on theory rather than practical use of the Fab Labs. Future training should be extensive, hands-on, and better aligned with teachers' schedules.

11. **Institutional Partnerships**: Building strong partnerships with relevant institutions is crucial for successful public space development. In areas like East Jerusalem, where public space management is complex, institutional support is necessary.

12. **Governance**: Governance challenges played a significant role in limiting the full potential of the project. The absence of clear governance structures, such as dedicated steering committees and technical working groups, reduced the effectiveness of coordination and accountability across the project's components. Political constraints, such as the restriction on direct engagement with MoE, further complicated governance, resulting in insufficient national ownership and integration with broader educational strategies.

Recommendations

1. In the current RISE II project, as well as in any future or ongoing projects, the project team should regularly and carefully sequence the execution of different phases and components to optimize resource utilization, accelerate progress, and ensure a more integrated implementation of project activities.
2. Integrate specialists in education and public spaces into the project team. This would enhance the technical dimensions of the projects. For example, the education expert should focus on curriculum integration and teacher training, while public space experts should manage and optimize community spaces. Specialized input will address sector-specific challenges in a technical manner more effectively and enhance the overall impact of the project and ensure alignment between soft components, infrastructure and equipment.
3. Develop comprehensive, practical training programs for teachers, focusing on hands-on experience and aligning with their schedules. The training must be owned and rolled out by the Ministry through its official training body. Teachers also recommended incorporating ongoing training to build confidence and competence in using Fab Labs. Improved training will enhance teachers' ability to utilize Fab Labs effectively, thereby maximizing their educational impact.
4. Officially adopt and integrate the Fab Lab curriculum into the educational system. Ensure that curriculum materials are available in Arabic to facilitate better understanding and usage. Official integration and adoption by the MoE will bridge the gap between the labs' potential and their actual use, optimizing their benefits in education.
5. Streamline the official handover process by improving coordination between the MoE and the JDoE. Establish clear communication channels and alignment efforts. Effective coordination will resolve handover issues and ensure that Fab Labs are fully operational and utilized.
6. Address all technical and infrastructural aspects before full-scale implementation. Ensure that issues like ventilation for CNC machines are resolved to enable effective use of Fab Labs. Proper infrastructure management will enhance the functionality and success of Fab Labs.
7. Continue to invest in and support the development of public and semi-public spaces, recognizing their role in providing safe environments for learning and community engagement. These spaces contribute significantly to educational and social needs, particularly in areas with suffering from marginalization.
8. Engage key stakeholders, such as relevant actors within MoE and the JDoE, early in the process to secure their commitment and support. Under R2 and R3 this entails building relevant governance structures that involve relevant actors. Under R3 Foster community buy-in and manage opposition constructively. Strong stakeholder involvement and community support are essential for the project's long-term success and sustainability.
9. Maintain flexibility in project planning and execution. Continuously assess and adjust project plans to address political, financial, and resource-related challenges. Flexibility and adaptive strategies will help navigate obstacles effectively and enhance the project's overall effectiveness.
10. Streamline processes for space identification and legal verification. Develop clear protocols and allocate resources to resolve these issues efficiently. Efficient management of legal and ownership processes will prevent delays and facilitate timely project completion.
11. For any future project, adopt flexible governance structures tailored to the project's context, such as technical committees or joint planning groups, ensuring community representation, clearly defined roles, proper documentation, and inclusion of relevant stakeholders to enhance transparency and accountability. This approach ensures that governance structures are tailored to the specific needs and context of the initiative while maintaining transparency and accountability
12. Build and secure robust institutional partnerships to support public space components and other project elements. Seek out institutions with the capability and willingness to collaborate. Strong partnerships will provide the necessary support for successful implementation and expansion of public space initiatives.

Lessons learned

1. **Officialization, Institutionalization, and Adoption**
   For long-term sustainability, the project should prioritize using Ministry of Education (MoE) resources rather than relying on external consultants. Involving the MoE in key areas like curriculum development and teacher training enhances project outcomes and fosters greater ownership. The lack of official adoption of the Fab Lab curriculum has hindered its integration, and formal MoE adoption could improve both the immediate impact and sustainability of the project.
2. **Project Adaptability**
   Flexibility and adaptability are critical for overcoming unforeseen challenges. The project's ability to continue despite setbacks demonstrates the importance of adjusting strategies when faced with external disruptions.
3. **Technical Human Resources**
   Specialized expertise in education, public spaces, and infrastructure ensures effective management of project components:
   Education Expert: Provides insight into curriculum development and the integration of Fab Labs, ensuring alignment with best practices.
   Public Space/NGO Expert: Guides the design and implementation of community spaces, ensuring they meet local needs and regulations.
4. **Holistic Development**
   A comprehensive approach that integrates education and public spaces in the same area creates synergies, addressing diverse community needs. For example, enhancing educational facilities alongside recreational spaces enriches the community environment, especially in East Jerusalem, where schools often lack extracurricular activities.
5. **Clear Governance Structures**
   Strong partnerships with national institutions, such as the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs, are essential. While these institutions may have limited capacity in Jerusalem, their involvement ensures relevant, cohesive outputs and prevents further fragmentation. If collaboration with official Palestinian Authority bodies is challenging, alternative governance structures, like steering committees with representation from legitimate actors, can ensure accountability and consultation.
6. **Politicization of Aid**
   Belgium’s decision to limit direct contact with the MoE hindered sector-wide policy dialogue and national ownership, isolating Enabel from broader coordination efforts. This limited the project’s coherence and the effective use of digital materials on environmental awareness.
7. **Partnerships**
   Strong partnerships with credible national institutions, including the Ministry of Local Government and Jerusalem’s governing bodies, are critical for ensuring local ownership and sustainability. If official Palestinian institutions are unable to fully participate, alternative structures, such as governance committees with NGO and community representation, can ensure inclusivity and alignment with national priorities.