

## Creating a culture of leadership and results for Palestinian civil servants

Picture this: Groups of students huddle around a large piece of paper. The papers are adorned with bright colours and complex diagrams. One teacher praises the students for their hard work. Another teacher walks around the room and tears up the students' work.

The students are shocked and upset but that was the point of the exercise. This learning activity served as an introduction to understanding crises as part of the conflict management section of UNDP's comprehensive "Civil Service Leadership Development Programme".

The instructor from Birzeit University's Centre for Continuing Education went on to demonstrate how wise management of such an incident can foster good relations between staff and avoid escalation of tensions.

Funded by the Government of Italy and implemented by UNDP, the Civil Service Leadership Development Programme trained 1200 senior civil servants, between 2009 and 2011, in ten key areas of competence, including legal awareness and strategic planning, through a combination of online and classroom instruction.



Group photo at the 2011 graduation ceremony with UNDP Special Representative Mr. Frode Mauring, Ramallah

The Programme represents a first step towards establishing a common training programme for 80,000 staff and 6000 senior managers employed in the Palestinian civil service. Now, courses developed for the programme will be carried on by the Palestinian Authority directly.

Hanadi Abu Bakr, 35, is the head of recruitment at the General Personnel Council, which oversees the recruitment of all Palestinian Authority civil servants. She has just completed her training, which took place one day a week for 14 weeks.

She said that in the past there was no standard civil service training and what was offered by individual ministries varied in quality. "There was no quality control. In this training, we are constantly being asked to assess the quality of the training. I like these particular courses because they contain theory and practice and are rooted in the Palestinian context," she said.

Abu Baker said her favourite courses were on communication skills and human resource management. "In communication skills I learnt how to deal better with colleagues, from supervisors to ministers and with different audiences such as the general public. It gave me a lot more confidence. Human resource management is central to my work and I learned many new interview strategies which have been very useful," she said.

The leadership programme is managed by Maha Abusamra who monitors the courses on a constant basis. "In the training centre, I have a book in which all trainees are invited to make complaints, write comments, give feedback or offer recommendations. I look at the book each evening and reply to each point the next day. It is vital that the training responds to the needs of the civil servants," she said.

Fadwa Sha'ar, 47, has also just completed the Programme. She has had several jobs with the PA and is now a director-general in the Ministry of the Interior in Ramallah, dealing with international non-governmental agencies. She said that the training helped her organize some of the knowledge she had accumulated over her career and gave her new insights in other areas.



"I learnt many new things. The legal awareness course gives me the confidence to deal with the ministry's lawyers more assertively. The training focused on the most significant aspects without getting lost in details," she said.

In Sha'ar view, improving civil service training is critical "to building a strong, independent civil service."

Over the years, UNDP has assisted the Palestinian Authority in their efforts to strengthen and develop their governance systems and administrative institutions. Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad outlined the importance of Palestinian institutions to strive for excellence in the 2011-2013 Palestinian National Plan. It affirms: *"The Government envisions a public sector that enjoys a reputation of integrity, good performance and responsiveness through the cost effective delivery of high quality public services to citizens and efficient and effective management of national resources."*

The Civil Service Leadership Programme is an important contribution to meeting these goals and to ensure that civil servants are provided with the necessary skills to carry out their roles effectively in preparation for eventual statehood.

Additionally, UNDP is supporting the General Personnel Council in establishing a new information portal, which should transform the way in which information on civil service within the Palestinian Authority, is stored and retrieved, including personal data and salary information of 86,000 civil servants.

Through such initiatives, UNDP is helping Palestinians build effective and efficient state institutions, and retain their hope of a free state –a pursuit that has eluded them for over 60 years.