

“A commitment for the future”

promoting
environmental
issues in
education



Mainstreaming environmental issues has been identified as a major goal of the Palestinian education system. In association with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education has incorporated issues such as biodiversity into the national curriculum, to raise awareness of the problems facing the environment and to highlight solutions.

Travelling through the hilly West Bank terrain or along Gaza's Mediterranean coastline, it is hard to ignore the beauty of this unique environment. Yet, it remains under threat from a range of problems including

pollution, environmental degradation, and rapidly decreasing water supplies. The Israeli occupation has also had an immensely detrimental effect on the environment, with the uprooting of native trees and the clearing of land for settlement expansion and for the construction of the West Bank barrier and accompanying infrastructure. Although attachment to the land is not in question, fully understanding the effect of issues such as pollution and excessive farming is vital for the future.

In an effort to combat these problems, the Palestinian Ministry of Education has

incorporated an environmental-perspective into the Palestinian national curriculum. Before the launch of the national curriculum in the 2000/2001 academic year, teachers taught environmental studies from textbooks that used examples of foreign environmental issues. It was deemed fundamental for students to relate to the issues facing their indigenous environment and accordingly, an environment-related course was developed and launched as part of the national curriculum in 2000.

“One of the main features of our new curricula was to introduce a new subject called ‘The Science of Health and the Environment’ as an elective in Years 7 to 10,” explained Dr. Saleh Yassin, Director General of the Curriculum Development Centre at the Ministry of Education. “We have so far produced four textbooks relating to the environment, which are taught to a total of around 450,000 students each year and currently 60% of students in Years 7 to 10 are enrolled in the course. This is having a wide-reaching impact not only on the children, but entire communities as well.” In addition to class-time,



schools also offer complementary activities including agro-biodiversity clubs and projects such as the upkeep of school gardens and school clean-ups. Other subjects also complement the core environment curriculum, such as National Education, which specifically highlights national environmental issues with campaigns such as 'keep Palestine green,' and in Civic Education, students are encouraged to respect the environment and not to damage Palestinian natural heritage. Additionally, environmental summer camps are held annually.

"The Palestinian national curriculum is one of the only in the Arab world that teaches environmental studies within the core curricula. It is not only in the core textbooks; we also cover all concepts related to the environment in the science subjects, from Years 1 to 12. We also encourage the children to keep our land clean and respect Palestine's rich history and heritage. The Ministry of Education is very concerned with promoting environmental issues as a commitment for the future," explained Dr. Yassin.

In association with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP/PAPP has provided support to curriculum development with an environmental perspective. Given that diversity within the Palestinian environment is constantly declining due to a range of issues such as environmental degradation and over-cultivation of natural rangelands, educating the young about these issues is seen as essential. One of the main components of the GEF programme in the oPt is building public awareness through the education system. It is seen as key to promote concepts of agro-biodiversity and biodiversity within schools and universities, so that they become part of the mainstream and accepted as the responsibility of all.

Through promoting these issues in schools, it is hoped that students will be encouraged to take the study to the tertiary level, providing the occupied Palestinian territory with much-needed human resources in the field. In association with the Ministry of Agriculture and funded by the GEF programme, UNDP/PAPP has also provided scholarships to five students enrolled in the MSc programmes in Biodiversity Conservation at Al Najah University and Al Quds University - Abu Dis.

Through these efforts, UNDP/PAPP is working to help strengthen capacity within the Palestinian education system and to increase awareness of conservation and environmental issues that will have a lasting impact. It is hoped that long-term, these efforts will aid in the in the conservation Palestine's unique, beautiful landscape and environment.

