



The Culture and Free Thought Association

**Annual Narrative Report
2014**

Context

CFTA operates in a conflict area - under occupation - facing political division and high poverty and unemployment rates with all the socio-cultural implications that this has on society as a whole. Within the years of its existence, CFTA lived together with the community of the Gaza Strip through three different large scale military operations, several invasions and ongoing instability. In addition, lack of access to resources, closures, restriction of movement and the isolation of the Gaza Strip, especially the southern area, has left the Gaza Strip with severe economic, health, education problems and has resulted in new socio-cultural situation demonstrated by the rise of conservatism, less community participation particularly for girls and women. At the level of CFTA, the environment in which it operates makes it difficult to predict evolutions of the context and even to implement operations as planned sometimes. At the time of writing this strategy people in the Gaza Strip were experiencing a relatively quiet 'ceasefire' period but not without concerning for what may be looming ahead.

Introduction; description of the programmes and its intervention strategy

The Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) was established in the south of the Gaza Strip in 1991 by five female activists from what was then known as the "Women's Committee" who at the time, represented the five different political parties of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Despite their political differences; it was their aspiration, their mutual belief in independent thinking and the right of women to participate and be leaders, as well as their commitment to people's rights that was the pillar stone of their success. The Culture and Free Thought Association officially took up its name in 1996 when it was registered as an NGO soon after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. Since then CFTA is governed by a gender balanced board of directors who are elected by the general assembly every three years.

CFTA has a holistic intervention to provide services as well as capacity building for its target groups to empower them to become self-advocates. CFTA works in 4 major fields as follows:

Capacity building program: CFTA targets children, youth and women with the aim of building their capacities and equipping them with tools and skills to benefit them in their lives. With children, CFTA focused on improving their academic achievement levels through remedial classes using active learning techniques. With youth, CFTA provided training programs for talented youth in different fields especially media such as videography and photography.

Psychosocial support: CFTA is embedding psychosocial support as a component in each of its services provided for children and women, which is highly required for vulnerable groups. CFTA provides psychosocial support through expressive arts, recreational activities as well drama sessions. The need for psychosocial support has increased after the last Israeli aggression, which forced CFTA to increase its activities in this regard in order to alleviate the negative psychological effects of the aggression. CFTA had to use volunteers to help in providing psychosocial support and recreational activities for the huge numbers of children who visited the centres after the aggression.

Awareness raising: in order to sensitize the community towards its target groups' issues, CFTA focused on awareness raising activities such as public meetings, advocacy campaigns, and publications to shed light on specific issues. CFTA used different media tools for such purpose including radio programs, brochures, banners, photo galleries and short films. In addition, CFTA included parents and local community in most of the activities such as the Cultural Festival, education support program, discussion sessions and parents' meetings in order to be part of the process and promote their sense of ownership.

Advocacy: In this regard, CFTA strategy is to raise awareness of its target groups especially children, youth and women about their rights and build their capacities in different tools such as photography, videography and social media for those target groups and supports them in highlighting issues of concern using media tools. Such strategy proved to be effective in terms of increasing target groups awareness and abilities to defend their rights and advocate for their issues. During 2014, target groups conducted different advocacy campaigns using photo galleries, theatre, and radio productions to advocate for their issues such as the advocacy campaign conducted and led by the children to raise the age of free health insurance up to 6 years instead of 3.

Strategic Review and Outlook; Main results achieved and implementation performance of the programmes.

- **SG1: Improve quality of CFTA services:**

CFTA continued working on its capacity building plan with support from Al Athar Company, where it accomplished developing its manuals in human resources, administrative work, finance and procurement.

CFTA also started developing its MIS system which has entered testing phase, and expected to computerize all of CFTA administrative work, reporting, documentation and record keeping.

CFTA developed its communication plan and activated its social media accounts including Facebook and YouTube channel which are used to publish CFTA news. A new website is now under construction which will better reflect CFTA's vision, mission and work.

- **SG2: Develop abilities of children and other disadvantaged groups:**

CFTA succeeded in building children, youth and women capacities to become self-advocates who use different media tools to express their opinions and advocate for their issues.

CFTA promoted its cooperation with MoE to the benefit of students in terms of extra-curricular activities as well as adoption of active learning strategy.

CFTA trained children as leaders and gave them opportunity to lead their activities and represent their peers through the leadership program where they learned to cooperate, lead, design and implement activities and initiatives in teams.

- **SG3: Women empowerment:**

Through WHC and Wessal Network, CFTA managed to inform women and defend their rights through awareness raising activities and advocacy campaigns.

CFTA through Wessal Network published research studies about women and girls issues and highlighted gaps in the provided services as well as violations of their rights.

WHC provided quality RH services to around 1100 cases on monthly bases increasing its service rate by 18% cases compared to 2013. Such increase provided access to services for a large portion of people who couldn't benefit from such services before. WHC provided integrated services including health, reproductive health, psychosocial support, legal counselling and physiotherapy.

- **SG4: Youth empowerment:**

The Cultural Centre has become the destination of youth where they can learn and participate effectively in the civil society.

Beneficiary youth are capable of communicating their issues and concerns through modern media tools and arts such as photography, videography, theatre, and drawing; which is considered a step towards promoting such tools as peaceful ways of expression.

- **SG5: Community sensitization:**

Community and parents have become more aware of children's issues as a result of their involvement in the activities conducted in CFTA as well as the awareness raising meetings.

CFTA managed to promote the use of media and arts among children, women and youth as tools to express their opinions and advocate for their issues. The use of such tools made it easier for those groups to reach more audience and voice their demands.

Advocacy campaigns led and implemented by children, women and youth contributed to highlighting their issues, attract community attention towards their demands and promoted their roles as active citizens.

- **Crisis intervention:**

CFTA reached new marginalized areas and provided humanitarian aid to more than 9500 of the affected people within a limited period of time.

CFTA response was based on rapid needs assessment which helped address people's needs and respond to their requirements.

CFTA intensified its psychosocial support activities inside and outside its centres where it reached more than 24,000 people in order to alleviate the negative psychological effects resulted from the Israeli aggression.

Update of the stakeholder analysis

CFTA works with the vulnerable groups including children, women and youth who are underprivileged and require special care due to their sensitivity. CFTA serves children and youth in Khanyounis area in the south of the Gaza Strip where its Cultural Centre and its three children centres are located. In addition CFTA serves women in the Middle area through its Women Health Centre which provides RH services. Those areas are considered marginalized where the target groups lack essential services such as friendly spaces and services related to culture, special education, and reproductive health. The high number of children women and

youth in such areas combined with limited number of service providers, makes it difficult for CFTA to respond to their needs given its limited resources. However, CFTA is doing its best to provide the most essential services and cooperates with other service providers and organizations to bridge the gaps as possible. The last Israeli aggression with its effects have resulted in increasing needs of the target groups especially in terms of psychosocial support, which add to the burden CFTA already have.

Description of achievement 2014 of outcome indicators measured against baseline and target values

- **SG1: Improve quality of CFTA services:**

CFTA improved its performance in quality assurance after establishing quality assurance unit with specialized functions for M&E, and internal auditing. New manuals were developed and adopted for finance, procurement, and good governance. CFTA has developed a capacity building plan for its staff, also trained its finance department staff on budgeting.

- **SG2: Develop abilities of children and other disadvantaged groups**

CFTA through its 3 child centres has reached approximately 42,000 children aged 6-16 years, through education services (5564 children), psychosocial support services (22,247 children), arts (2996 children), sports (2209 children) and other services. CFTA services included daily activities which are provided for an average of 800 children (52%, boys, 48% females) members of the centres. CFTA provided psychosocial support for children inside the centres, schools and through the community, such activities were conducted in response to the last crisis resulted from the Israeli aggression on Gaza in summer 2014. Such intervention contributed to alleviating the negative psychological effects of the aggression on children as well as help re-integrate them in schools. Art and media were promoted among children to be used for advocacy purposes, where children used their artistic products in favour of their issues of interest and presented them in galleries and through social media. This has made children self-advocates who are aware of their rights and equipped with tools to be used as advocacy means. Integration and cooperation with schools was further promoted in favour of the students, this was realized through integrating centres' activities with curriculum, as well as cooperating with 45 schools and more than 190 teachers to conduct extra-curricular activities. Children's self-perception and self-esteem were promoted due to the leadership program and engagement of children in the different activities as partners in design and implementation. 101 children are identified as leaders who came out with initiatives for serving the community.

- **SG3: Women empowerment:**

CFTA provided quality reproductive health services for 3498 cases including gynaecology, family planning, pre and post-natal, physiotherapy, psychosocial support, legal counselling, and laboratory tests. CFTA increased its monthly-average of beneficiaries of such services by 18% compared to 2013. WHC provided health awareness raising services for 9676 people and conducted 2 conferences for combating GBV and victims of breast cancer. CFTA published

two studies about women rights violations because of the Israeli siege and last aggression, which focused on the gap in protection services and suggested steps to bridge such gaps.

- **SG4: Youth empowerment:**

The Cultural Centre has become the destination of talented and enthusiastic youth, where they can practice, learn and have an active role in the community. This is reflected through youth feedback as well as the demand on the centres' services. The centre receives an average of 80 youth on daily bases. Female youth has increased to almost 46% of the beneficiaries of the centre services which is considered a good step in increasing females' participation. Beneficiary youth have become more capable of voicing their demands and opinions through the tools the centre is providing. The centre hosted 3 photo galleries, produced 4 short films, and published 3 books for youth. One of the best examples, is Kalket Radio which is managed and operated through youth themselves who use it to present and talk about their issues of concern through 5 radio programs which are broadcasted regularly.

The Cultural Centre is now perceived as a platform or an incubator for youth talents and initiatives where they get the necessary support, training and tools to present their art and thoughts.

- **SG5: Community sensitization**

CFTA succeeded in building children's capacities in advocacy and encouraging them to be self-advocates, as they started advocating for their issues by implementing advocacy campaign which used blogs, art galleries and social media. One of the best examples on this was the advocacy campaign led and implemented by the children who advocated to raise the limit for free health insurance provided for children to be up to 6 years instead of 3 years, and they succeeded in acquiring approval for this from MoH as well as the legislative council.

5223 parents have become more involved and aware of their children problems, which is a result of involving those parents in the activities of the centres, as well as targeting them through awareness activities, which helped them to better understand their children's issues, interests and ambitions. CFTA held more than 20 advocacy campaigns and events in favour of highlighting children, women and youth issues such as health insurance for children GBV for women, and unemployment for youth. The events varied from photo galleries, publications, films, conferences and workshops.

- **Crisis intervention:**

CFTA managed to provide humanitarian assistance for more than 9500 people from the affected areas as well as those in shelters. CFTA designed its interventions based on rapid needs assessments in order to address target groups' needs. CFTA provided a good example in crisis intervention through coordination with MoSA and Shelter and Protection Clusters where beneficiaries' lists were circulated in order to avoid duplication of services. Also, CFTA provided its assistance in a respectful manner avoiding humiliation or conflicts at distribution centres.

Critical assessment of outcome achievement

Capacity building plan: CFTA managed to achieve most of its tasks under the capacity building plan, while the remaining tasks were postponed to 2015 because of the last Israeli aggression and CFTA engagement in crisis intervention. The remaining tasks include developing manuals and policies for M&E, completion and implementation of MIS system and enhancing internal financial and auditing practices. However, CFTA has made significant progress in improving its services and its internal procedures which results were materialized in the produced reports and overall performance.

CFTA Strategic plan and external review: CFTA was supposed to have an external review and develop its new strategic plan, which all was delayed due to the last Israeli aggression. As a result, CFTA will extend working on its current strategic plan till the end of 2015 and will have the external review in beginning of 2015.

Empowerment of target groups: CFTA has succeeded in promoting the capacities of its target groups and enabling them to become self-advocates, which was realized through the activities and initiatives led and implemented by those groups. However, CFTA believes that this success is still limited to its direct beneficiaries and needs further promotion.

Combating GBV: Even though CFTA has been active in combating GBV issues and achieved notable progress in advocating against it, and in mobilizing the community. But the cooperation from the decision makers especially in MoH is still limited to participation in training programs, CFTA believes that MoH should have more effective role in this issue and will continue targeting them to reach such level of cooperation.

Summary of output delivery based on a comparison with the planned outputs, and its contribution to outcomes

In general: CFTA through its 5 centres has reached approximately 42,000 children, 16,000 women, 1,800 youth and 30,000 community members (beneficiaries per service), who benefited from its services inside and outside the centres.

Improving CFTA services:

CFTA developed manuals for finance, procurement and good governance. CFTA started developing MIS system which will computerize all CFTA internal processes. The system will be piloted and tested in 2015. However some of its functions are already in place such as employee's portal, human resource system, and assets management.

CFTA conducted a training needs assessment for its staff and developed a capacity building plan based on the results. The developed plan is expected to be implemented starting from 2015.

- **Education:**

CFTA provided education services for 5564 children (2576 boys, 2988 girls) which included remedial classes, educational support and extra-curricular activities. 1045 children (476 boys, 569 girls) benefited from remedial classes which was conducted inside CFTA centres as well as other 10 schools. The classes used active learning techniques in the four basic subjects: Math, Science, Arabic and English. CFTA centres provided extracurricular activities such as

scientific experiments in addition to 18 training courses which included computer literacy, first aid and programming as well as 3 study trips.

- **Psychosocial support:**

After the Israeli aggression, CFTA intensified its psychosocial support interventions. 22,247 children, 2583 women, and 400 youth benefited from the psychosocial support activities implemented inside CFTA centres, shelters and neighbourhoods. In response to a request from MoE, CFTA conducted open days for 6872 children in schools in order to rehabilitate them before starting school semester. Inside its centres, CFTA conducted open days, recreational and psychosocial support activities which benefited 800 children on daily bases.

35 drama sessions as well as 22 counselling and support sessions were conducted for 98 children who needed further interventions.

Arts:

CFTA benefited 2996 children (1246 boys, 1750 girls) through art activities, in addition to around 700 children who practiced open arts activities on daily basis including free drawing and hand crafts. 15 training courses were conducted for 274 children on portrait, drawing with coal, theatre, and Dabka. The trained children produced different artistic products from their own work such as drawings, murals, and theatre plays. 651 children (289 boys, 362 girls) participated in 27 art workshops and meetings where they produced different art works which were presented in galleries such as “Our life is yours” gallery and the mural they did representing their feelings after the Israeli aggression.

- **Cultural activities:**

9745 people including 3040 children benefited from different cultural activities such as competitions, training courses, folklore, and workshops. CFTA conducted the second season of “Turatheyat” competition for Dabka and folklore where 31 teams (11 children teams, 20 youth teams) competed by presenting folklore dance. 12 cultural competitions were organized in the different centres in cooperation with local community and organizations. Cultural programs were implemented such as “Mobile Case” and “Innovators on the road” which promoted the cultural sense among the children.

- **Sports activities:**

2209 children (1604 boys, 605 girls) benefited from the sports activities in addition to more than 300 children who benefited from the daily sports activities inside the centres, which included football, volleyball, and ping pong. CFTA conducted sports competitions in domino, chess and football among children which were well attended. In addition a marathon for children was conducted with participation of more than 200 people. CFTA conducted a festival for folkloric sports and games with participation of 40 schools and 255 children which aimed at reviving old sports and games.

- **Leadership program:**

CFTA trained 101 children leaders (45 boys, 56 girls) through its leadership program which included training on communication skills, time management, and leading activities. The leaders’ role is to help in activities’ design and implementation as well as representing their

peers in front of the centres management. The biggest experience, the leaders had, was leading the summer camps on their own. Leaders conducted different initiatives to help their society and advocate for their issues such the initiative for lighting houses and open days in schools.

Reproductive health services:

CFTA through its WHC provided health and reproductive health services for 3498 cases (11278 services). The services included gynaecology, family planning, per and post-natal, physiotherapy, psychosocial support, legal counselling, laboratory tests. WHC served 1127 cases on monthly basis compared to 950 cases last year. WHC provided health awareness raising services for 9676 people (1260 males, 8416 females) through 480 workshops. The issues covered were reproductive health, family planning, women rights and protection from epidemic diseases in shelters. WHC organized a conference about breast cancer under the title of “Early detection saves life” where many papers were presented about the situation of breast cancer, its victims and ways of prevention and detection.

- **Combating GBV:**

CFTA through its membership in WessalNetwork conducted two research studies about the conditions of women and girls in shelters as well as the effects of the Israeli siege on Gazan women. The research helped in highlighting the suffering of women and girls and provided a set of recommendations to improve their conditions. In cooperation with PRC, and UNFPA; CFTA conducted the 16-days campaign in the favour of combating GBV, which included different activities such a photo gallery, radio programs, and aconference; all addressing GBV forms and issues.

- **Youth empowerment:**

CFTA through its Cultural Centre benefited 1441 youth (777 males, 664 females) through capacity building programs and cultural activities. Youth received training courses in photography, videography, theatre, radio production and creative writing; where they used their skills to advocate for their issues through different products that included 3 photo galleries, 4 short films, and 5 radio programs. The Cultural Center has supported an initiative of a group of 9 youth (2 males, 7 females) which is about surveying the issues of priorities for women and girls then conducting advocacy campaigns in favour of such issues. The youth were supported through providing them with training, orientation and logistics to conduct their initiative which is expected to continue in 2015.

- **Crisis intervention:** CFTA provided humanitarian aid for more than 9500 people who were affected by the Israeli aggression, where they received food packages, hygiene kits, clothes and kitchen sets. Most of the beneficiaries were from the most affected areas such as Koza’a, Zanna, East of Khanyounis, Johr El Deik and El Bureij refugees’ camp.

Implementation constraints and ways to overcome them

Mixing genders in activities especially among youth as well as teenagers is a challenge in the Cultural Centre and BunatIlGhad Centre. The local community still have a negative attitude

towards such mixture. In response, BunatIlGhad Centre allocates certain days for girls and certain days for boys, while the Cultural Centre tries to overcome such taboo by conducting some activities with participation of males and females as well as encourage female participation through providing them with opportunities to lead activities and initiatives.

The cultural aspect is not considered a priority in the local community, due to other reasons such as the poor economy which is the main priority for youth to work in order to provide for their families. Such orientation results in poor participation in the cultural activities. In this regard, CFTA through the Cultural Centre focuses on youth with talents who are more willing to participate and produce arts. In the same time, the centre focuses on awareness raising activities to encourage the community to adopt such activities and promote its participation.

Due to the limited number of entities providing reproductive health services, WHC has a heavy burden to respond to the huge demand on such services. Combined with limited sources, WHC is not able to respond to such demand, but it tries to network with other service providers in terms of case referrals and in the meantime, focuses on increasing its service quality.

CFTA children centres are located in marginalized areas where there are no other service providers offering the same services. In addition, those areas lack friendly spaces for children, which makes CFTA centres the only places where children can access friendly spaces and receive educational, recreational and psychosocial support services. Moreover, after the last Israeli aggression, the number of children visiting the centres have doubled, which increased the burden on the centres. In this regard, CFTA recruited volunteers to provide services for such huge number of children.

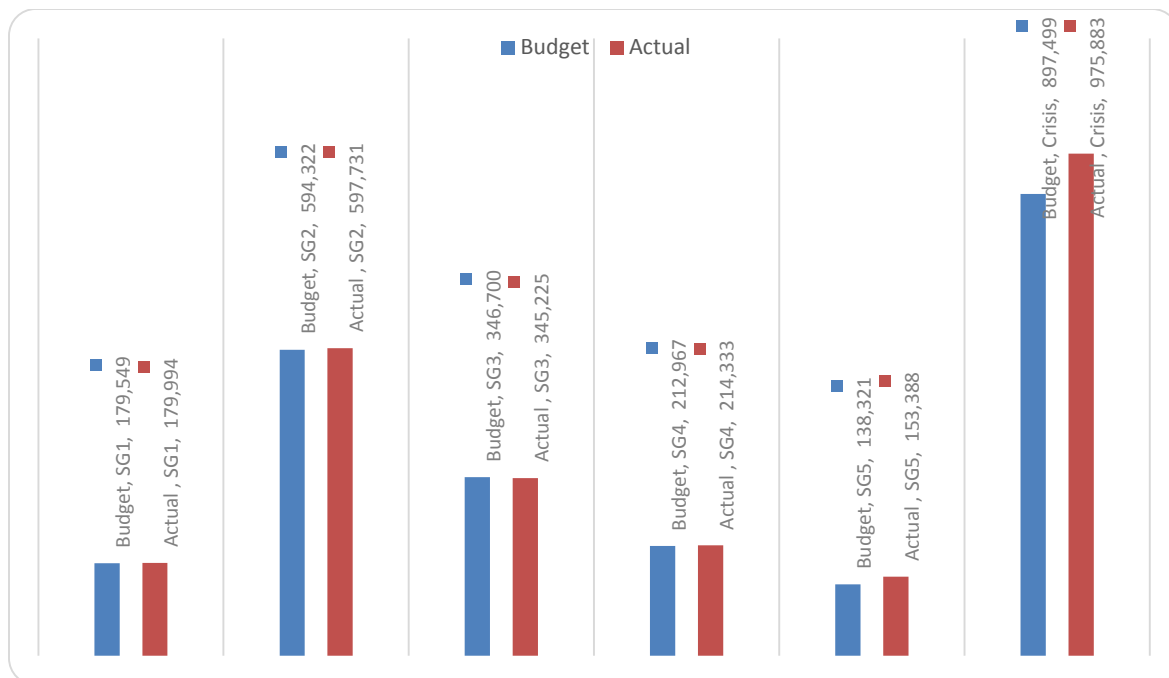
Although their crucial part, fathers' participation in CFTA centres' activities is still limited due to their work conditions as well as the local culture that mothers should cover this part. However, CFTA tries to focus more on fathers through inviting them to attend and participate in activities as well as including them in awareness raising sessions.

The repetitive Israeli aggressions on Gaza, diminish the progress CFTA achieves with children through psychosocial support and contribute to deteriorating their psychological wellbeing, which forces CFTA to intensify its psychosocial support interventions on the expense of other developmental interventions.

Percentage of budget spent vs. planned per outcome

Due to the last Israeli aggression, CFTA started its crisis intervention program and received 975,883 USD fund for such purpose. Such fund was an addition to the original budget, which as result was increased by 65% to become 2,466,554 USD instead of 1,490,671 USD (amounts are based on actual expenses).

The following is a graph of actual spent vs. planned budget:



Comments on budget

There is no significant deviation in the budget.

Appraisal on how efficiently inputs were converted into outputs

CFTA was committed to implementing all the projects approved by donors in light of the allocated budgets. CFTA as part of its capacity building plan, developed its financial and procurement manuals in order to promote its internal financial procedures. In addition, the financial department staff received a training on budgeting.

Reference to activities and brief explanations if there were major differences between the executed and the planned activities

Due to the Israeli aggression in July and August, CFTA had to stop most of its usual activities and adopted a new action plan from crisis intervention. Such shifting, resulted in holding many activities and focusing on psychosocial support and expressive arts activities. In addition, implementing the capacity building plan was affected and some of its tasks were delayed till 2015. However, CFTA succeeded to implement all its committed activities and rescheduled the remaining activities to be completed in the beginning of 2015.

Human Resources and Diversity Management

After adopting the new organizational structure which changed some jobs and introduced some new functions such as M&E and fundraising, CFTA witnessed an improvement in performance especially in the managerial levels related to quality assurance and fundraising. However, as a result of changing the salary scale, employees were not very satisfied with that change. Also, some of the jobs that was changed from full to part time jobs resulted in decreased output such as the computer department animator. CFTA has conducted a

training needs assessment for its staff and developed a capacity building plan for its staff which will be implemented in 2015. It was supposed to have a review for the new organizational structure after its implementation, but it was delayed due to the Israeli aggression and involvement in crisis intervention activities.

Good practice and innovations working with key partners and target

Good planning, designing and provision of necessary resources, guarantees successful implementation of activities as well achieving its intended goals. Strengthening relations between CFTA centres and local community (especially parents) promotes the sense of ownership and increases the demand on CFTA services. Integration of activities and cooperation in implementation provides better chances of success. Inclusion of governmental organizations such as MoE and MoH in designing, planning, and implementation of activities promotes their sense of ownership, increases their cooperation and maximizes the effects. Interventions based on needs assessments are very effective and efficient in achieving its intended results. Promoting CFTA internal processes and quality assurance practices is the key to increasing its efficiency and effectiveness. Focusing on the developmental approach is a challenge in the light of the Palestinian changing and insecure context.