

Department of Infrastructure and Camp Improvement



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In our house we don't have any big rooms for family gatherings or celebrations. I attended meetings with the local committee to tell them the kind of project we would like. We wanted a plaza for social events and for the children to play in and that's how we plan to use the space. It's a wonderful project.”

-Oum Ra'ed, Fawwar Camp

Department of Infrastructure and Camp Improvement

The Department of Infrastructure and Camp Improvement (DICI) was created in response to calls at the *Geneva Conference on UNRWA (2004)* to address the deteriorating living conditions of Palestine refugees in camps where UNRWA operates¹. Through the department, UNRWA is adopting a community-driven approach focusing on strategic, participatory urban planning relating to the environmental infrastructure, UNRWA installations, shelter, camp improvement and community development. The department's budget for 2008-2009 is \$21.3 million.



Shufat refugee camp, East Jerusalem, West Bank.

What gave rise to the idea of camp development?

- Over the last six decades, urban improvement and community development in refugee camps saw no or very little planning and participation of the camp residents. Camps developed from temporary tent cities to hyper-congested urban sprawls characterised by extreme poverty, rapid population growth and overcrowding.
- Recent surveys, most notably by the University of Geneva (IUED), have shown that living conditions had clearly deteriorated and that camp residents were increasingly suffering hardship due to their physical and socio-economic environment.

Will the Department of Infrastructure and Camp Improvement contribute towards making the camps permanent?

- No. At the 2004 Geneva Conference, all stakeholders, including UNRWA, the Arab League, the host countries and Palestinian organisations agreed that the time had come to improve the refugees' living conditions based on the assumption that 'living with dignity' is a human right.
- Any improvements to the camp do not pre-empt or preclude any political decision regarding the refugees' right of return. As the participatory approach is the major driving force in identifying the needs, no improvements will be undertaken without the communities' consent.

What steps have been undertaken since the Geneva Conference?

- The Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme was started at UNRWA's headquarters in Amman, Jordan in 2007.
- To launch this new programme, a European Commission-

funded pilot project was initiated in three West Bank camps (Deheisheh, Amari and Fawwar) in cooperation with the University of Stuttgart. This project examined the spatial, physical and socio-economic conditions of camp residents in order to better understand how refugees use the space, their social networks, institutions and coping strategies.

- UNRWA then piloted the implementation of the community-driven planning in Fawwar camp near Hebron, in the West Bank. The process allowed residents to work out their own planning vision, including for the use of public spaces, better access and infrastructure, for example.
- As a follow-up to the first pilot project, funding was received from the German Ministry for Cooperation (BMZ) to implement this new approach in Deheisheh camp (West Bank), Talbiyeh camp (Jordan), Neirab camp (Syria) and Nahr-el-Bared camp (Lebanon).

What are some examples of concrete changes on the ground?

- In Fawwar camp, UNRWA is upgrading a public square for use by the residents as a safe playground and for wedding celebrations, as well as improving the roads leading to this space.
- In Neirab camp, UNRWA upgraded sub-standard housing following a design worked out jointly by UNRWA and the camp residents, as well as building a public space, again following a participatory design.
- In Nahr El Bared camp, the European Commission has funded the establishment of the assessment and planning unit for the camp's reconstruction. This unit successfully guided the camp residents in the participatory process to develop the Master Plan for the reconstruction of the camp that now has the full ownership of the community.

¹ Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank and Gaza Strip)

About UNRWA

Some 4.6 million Palestine refugees in UNRWA's five fields of operations – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – are eligible for Agency services, including education, healthcare, social services, shelter, micro-credit loans and emergency aid. UNRWA employs nearly 30,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees. UNRWA's operations are financed almost entirely by voluntary contributions from donors. The Agency's regular budget for 2008-2009 is \$1.1 billion, which covers the recurrent costs of the Agency's education, health and relief and social services activities. UNRWA's headquarters are in Gaza City and Amman.