

## Promoting youth engagement in innovation and entrepreneurship in the Gaza Strip

Addressing challenges in agriculture and food security via a HUB for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

November 2018



Life for many young people in Gaza is beset by oppression, violence and deprivation. With the unemployment rates among youth in Gaza reaching 70%<sup>1</sup>, many young Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are increasingly disillusioned with life, unable to secure employment and struggle to fill their free time.

Recognising the specific nature of youth issues, and the overall political, economic and social challenges faced by Palestinian society, [DanChurchAid](#), [Norwegian Church Aid](#) and local NGO [MA'AN Development Centre](#) have responded to the challenge and placed youth issues centre-stage of their Gaza work.

The **HUB for Innovation and Entrepreneurship** provides opportunities for young Palestinian entrepreneurs in Gaza to work with project managers, academics and experts in business and agriculture, to design and build products, services, businesses and social ventures to address daily and immediate gaps in agriculture and food safety in the Gaza Strip.

The agricultural sector is an important and valuable sector in the Palestinian Territories, employing more than 100,000 people, including more than a fifth of working women<sup>2</sup>. However, the inadequate investment in the sector, constraints due to the blockade and severe lack of infrastructure, resources and capacity, leaves agricultural workers with low productivity, low profitability and high vulnerability

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Report, 2018

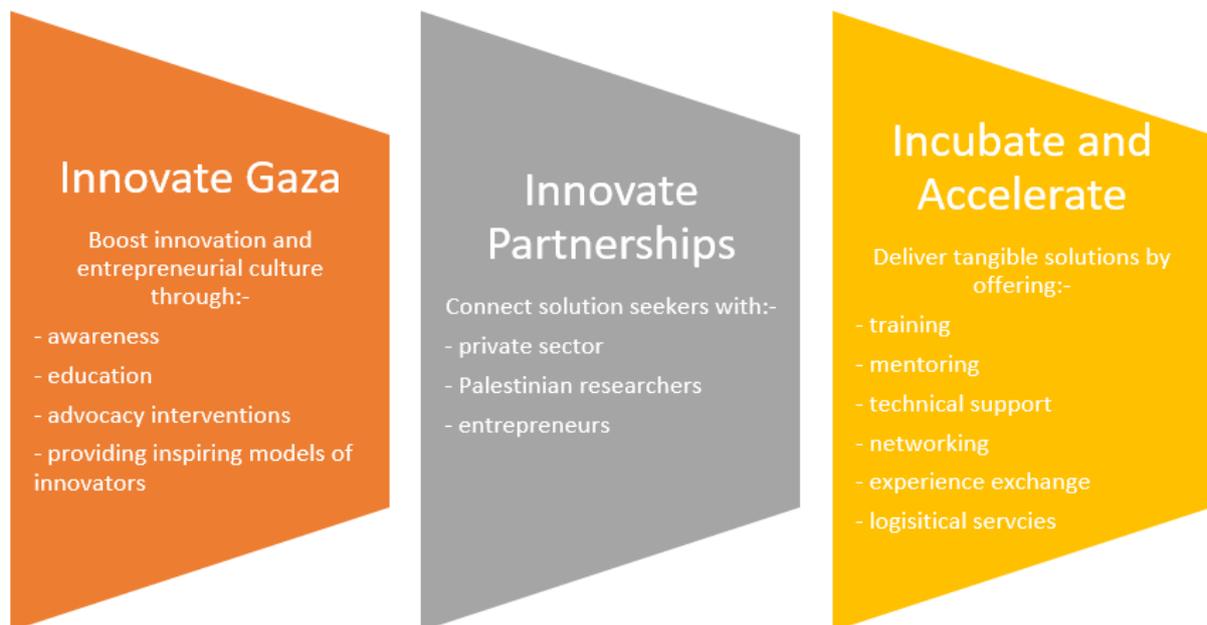
<sup>2</sup> National Agriculture Sector Strategy, 2016

- more needs to be done to encourage partners, project managers and parts of the population in Gaza to think creatively: outside the box.

With the vision to create an ecosystem of innovation, the HUB supports business incubation and acceleration by offering training, mentoring, technical support, networking and logistic services. To get projects started, DCA-NCA helps to mobilise resources through seed funding, crowdsourcing and online fundraising. Partnerships with national and international academic institution, advisors and experts, are fostered to leverage a global network in innovation, research, agriculture and agri-business.

The HUB runs as a social enterprise, which helps to improve sustainability by covering overhead costs and generating income that can be reinvested into providing more support to more innovators and entrepreneurs: resources are reinvested locally; projects are run locally; and solutions are developed locally.

HUB activities operate under three strategic areas:



## Phases of project development

In the first phase of the HUB project – **the training phase**, 25 entrepreneurs and potential innovators received 30 hours of training in entrepreneurship, innovation and business management skills. After which they were required to present their innovative ideas for addressing agricultural and food security challenges in Gaza.

October 2018 marked the start of the second phase of the HUB project. A total of 7 innovation ideas were selected to enter phase two – **the incubation phase** (see box on page 3 for examples).

During the incubation phase, these ideas will be further discussed, elaborated and developed. A committee of technical advisors will provide mentoring to the youth to develop a detailed technical, operational, financial and marketing plan for each idea.

The aim is to ensure these ideas are viable, feasible and can be commercialised.

**Refining the ideas:** three examples of projects which qualified for the **incubation phase:**

**1. Project: modelling a new irrigation system to address water salinity.**

The proposed innovation uses magnetic technology to eradicate the salt in the water by passing water from a pond through an electrical field. The magnetic field changes the properties in the water, making it more easily absorbed by a plants roots. Solar energy is used to pump the water through the magnetic device, which helps overcome the unreliable electricity supply in the region. Less iodised water enables farmers to use their land for new crops, such as cucumbers.

**2. Project: using olive-oil residue to produce bio-energy.**

Capitalising on bioenergy provides a way to use waste streams, helps reduce energy costs and adds a new revenue stream by selling the biomass-derived electricity. The innovation has developed a product for processing the olive residue, which is collected from the olive squeezers by special trucks, added with starch and gum mixture, pressed, dried and packaged.

**3. Project: developing new mixtures of locally produced fodder for poultry farms.**

A market analysis assessment revealed that poultry farmers pay high prices to important fodder or face poor quality, locally produced, fodder. The innovation project mixes a range of raw materials found in the local area to give poultry farmers high-quality, low-cost fodder. The mixture consists of vegetarian protein and is fortified with minerals, vitamins and amino acids. The fodder is mixed, ground and packaged to be either stored or moved to poultry farms.



The third, and final, phase of the HUB is – **the acceleration phase**. In early November 2018, one project will be selected by a committee made up of members from DCA-NCA and MA’AN, as well as technical, financial and market experts.

The selected project will receive a start-up business grant to help fund prototyping and piloting activities for 2019. Further mentoring and coaching from technical experts will continue to take place to ensure the idea is well developed and materialised on the ground. Youth will be introduced to crowd funding skills and will be linked to big investors in the market, so they can get funds for their ideas and penetrate the market.

For the other projects and ideas which did not receive funding in the acceleration phase, DCA-NCA and MA’AN will link the youth to financial institutions and the private sector, to encourage donations to further support their ideas.

## Where to from here?

The HUB for Innovation and Entrepreneurship has been a one-year pilot project. Given the success of the pilot phase, DCA-NCA would like to extend – and scale – the HUB project; transforming activities from running as *project based* to running as mainstreamed *programmes*.

### **2019 - supporting an ecosystem of innovation**



By running the HUB projects under a wider innovation programme, DCA-NCA Palestine and partners will seek to further embed and foster a culture of innovative knowledge, skills, tools and techniques into future HUB initiatives and across DCA-NCA Palestine.

In 2019 and 2020, DCA-NCA Palestine plan to expand the HUB – aiming to train 150 young entrepreneurs, farmers and livestock breeders in 2019 and 200 young entrepreneurs in 2020. Mentoring, coaching, technical support and experience exchange will be expanded from 25 young entrepreneurs in 2018, to 50 young entrepreneurs in 2019 and 2020. 3 innovative business models will be provided seed funding in 2019 and 2020, of which 2 will enter the acceleration phase in 2019 and 3 will be supported in 2020. DCA-NCA Palestine will work strategically to develop these ideas and identify additional resources.