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INFORMAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF REDUCING GAPS IN EAST JERUSALEM

Maliha Zugair, Elisheva Milikowsky

Executive Summary



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Maliha Zugair and Elisheva Milikowsky

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The Hay Elyachar House
20 Radak St., 9218604 Jerusalem
jerusalemstitute.org.il
info@jerusalemstitute.org.il

Executive Summary

The five-year plan for the reduction of socio-economic gaps and promotion of economic development in East Jerusalem was approved by Government Decision No. 3790 in May 2018. This important, historic decision provides a budget of NIS 2.1 billion, to be allocated over the course of five years across a range of areas, including welfare, education, employment, and infrastructures. The decision grants informal education a particularly significant position. It marks an unprecedented move substantively and budgetarily, given that this is the first government decision to invest broadly in the development of informal education in East Jerusalem.

When properly adapted and implemented, informal education can effect deep, meaningful change in the lives of children and youths. It can provide a place where all children receive special attention and learn how to express themselves as part of a social system; a place that cultivates a children's society based on mutual respect, listening, and acceptance; a place that is experienced as a significant developmental stage in the lives of children and youths, empowering them and strengthening the entire community.

Informal education is a diverse, flexible, and multi-dimensional field, with many definitions. It encompasses a broad range of activities, most of which are intended for children and youths, although as a matter of principle it is suited to all stages of life. Although informal education typically takes place outside of the formal education system, it maintains a certain degree of systematization and organization. It is based on active participation and ascribes great importance to social relations. The general consensus among scholars and specialists is that informal education can contribute significantly to the achievement of educational goals, particularly those that formal education is unable to reach. As such, informal education is perceived as "complementary education."

Recent decades have seen a growing recognition of the importance of informal education and of its potential to facilitate social change and the reduction of social gaps. Institutions and organizations across Israel and the world have researched the issue, and international bodies have called for further

development of and investment in the field given its vast inherent potential to promote social mobility, facilitate social integration, and reduce gaps.

Informal education helps reduce gaps through various means and in different ways, including by:

- Improving scholastic achievements and increasing the rates of successful integration into higher education;
- Assisting in the acquisition of skills demanded by the labor market;
- Contributing to self-development and enhancing family, community, and social relations;
- Helping reduce unwanted behavior;
- Reinforcing and empowering the community as a whole.

It follows that informal education has enormous potential to advance the diverse issues and areas encompassed in Decision No. 3790. To untap the full potential of informal educational activities and enhance their effectiveness, however, care must be taken to ensure the proper implementation of plans. Programs and activities that are not implemented in an appropriate manner will not yield the desired results.

Before implementation of the five-year plan began, informal education had almost no presence in East Jerusalem's official education systems. Although community councils held some activities, and non-profit or private organizations operated various types of programs, generally speaking most of the population was not exposed to informal educational programs. **Decision No. 3790, which led to the formulation and execution of the five-year plan to reduce socio-economic gaps in East Jerusalem, has fostered substantive change and made it possible to redirect efforts in this field.** The results in the field are already evident: there has been a dramatic increase in the range of programs, from which approximately 25,000 children and youths now benefit.

Realizing the aims of Decision No. 3790 – namely, the reduction of socio-economic gaps in East Jerusalem – requires more than allocating resources and establishing quantitative indicators of participation. It is also necessary to examine the ways in which informal education can help reduce gaps, and to identify the elements of informal education programs necessary for success. **Addressing these questions is essential in order to**

clarify and highlight the importance of informal education, formulate a strategy, objectives, and action plans that are suited to these avenues of change, and establish indicators to assess whether the plans are achieving their aims.

When informal education is implemented appropriately, it fosters the development of **skills** such as teamwork, public speaking, independence, and perseverance, among others. Moreover, it cultivates psychological resilience among children and youths, which allows them to better cope with transition or crisis. Regular participation in informal education programs also improves participants' social skills and increases their **social capital**.

Such substantive outcomes are possible when the programs include certain elements: diversity and creativity, perseverance, learning from role models, taking responsibility, safe experimentation, and freedom of choice.

In addition to ensuring these important elements, observing the following principles is also key to the success of informal education programs:

- Adopting a holistic view of the student, in which education is seen as a continuous process that takes place in different places at different times;
- Understanding the needs of the target audience and practicing cultural adaptation and inclusion. This is a principle of utmost importance, especially when working with minority groups that differ culturally from the majority;
- Investing in the development of social capital and the training of a qualified workforce.

This preliminary study indicates that, notwithstanding the national and international inclination to attribute great importance to the development of informal education, **before implementation of the government's decision began, informal education in East Jerusalem's official school system comprised only a limited scope of activities and suffered from a lack of infrastructures as well as substantive deficiencies.**

Civil society organizations and private bodies that operate a diverse range of informal educational programs and activities have stepped in to fill this void. For a variety of reasons, however, they cannot meet all of the population's needs. Nor are they a substitute for official institutions.

Decision No. 3790 has led to substantive change and made it possible to redirect efforts in this area.

During the 2019-2020 school year, 24,375 students participated in informal educational programs in East Jerusalem, out of a total of roughly 74,000 students across grades 1-12 who attend official or “recognized but unofficial” schools. **The main goal of the five-year plan is to substantially increase the number of students participating in informal educational activities.** To date this goal is being maintained and the quantitative indicators of participation are being met. Aside from quantitative indicators, however, evidently there is no strategy that offers clear goals and objectives for identifying the manner in which informal education can serve as a tool to reduce socio-economic gaps in East Jerusalem, as well as the measures necessary to attain these goals and objectives.

The report lists a number of significant barriers that prevent widespread participation on the part of children and youths in informal education programs:

- Structural barriers – a dearth of programs (especially before implementation of the five-year plan), lack of continuity between the programs, deficient physical infrastructures, and an insufficient number of youth groups.
- Substantive-cultural barriers – low prioritization of informal education and lack of awareness regarding its advantages, subject matter that is not suited to the population of East Jerusalem, parents’ lack of faith in the Israeli education system, the municipality, and the community councils, and the general weakness of community councils.

The five-year plan to reduce socio-economic gaps in East Jerusalem embodies great promise and potential to improve the current situation. Informal education has a decisive role in the realization of this promise. Its properly adapted implementation can effect deep and meaningful change in the lives of children and youths. This field has the potential to serve as complementary education system that supplements the formal education system, and to help children and youths develop a set of values that fosters self-actualization, a desire to contribute to society, and community leadership. The study highlights a number of processes and offers recommendations that we believe should be implemented in order to realize the immense potential of informal education.

Recommendations

1. **Understanding the needs of the target audience and practicing cultural adaptation.**

Given its unique nature, informal education must be adapted to the community it aims to serve. Accordingly, it is necessary to understand the unique characteristics and needs of East Jerusalem residents.

- An in-depth, comprehensive survey should be conducted to identify the needs of students, parents, and other community actors, so as to better understand what is lacking and to ascertain the requirements and wishes of the various communities in East Jerusalem.
- We recommend the establishment of a collective learning process that would include all the leading actors in the field of informal education, in order to develop a deeper and broader understanding of the target audience. The diversity across different neighborhoods and communities, in particular, deserves attention.

2. **Inclusion of the target audience.**

Parents are major agents of change in any process. Raising their awareness regarding the advantages of informal education and its benefits for the individual and society is a necessary condition for assimilating informal educational activities within the community and increasing the number of participants.

- A proactive public relations effort should be initiated, making use of schools and community councils to convey the importance of informal education. We recommend that key figures in the community and local neighborhoods take part in these explanatory efforts, which should be adapted to cultural and political sensitivities.
- Parents' committees or other representative parental bodies should be included in the processes of collectively thinking about and developing informal educational programs.
- Ways should be found to include the students themselves in the collective thought process for the development of programs.

3. Physical infrastructures. Without suitable physical infrastructures, the field of informal education cannot be further developed.

- In coordination with neighborhoods' community councils, the gap between the real and the ideal should be examined in terms of all aspects related to the infrastructures of community councils, public structures, and other outdoor spaces, and these structures and spaces should be adapted to the community's needs.
- Attention should be paid to ensuring that appropriate budgetary resources are allocated for the operation of these structures, public spaces, and sports facilities.
- In coordination with school principals and assuming the necessary resources are available, consideration should be given to the possibility of making sports facilities and courts that are located on school grounds accessible to the general public throughout the day, including after the school day has ended.

4. Strategy and goals. Having a clear definition of the goals of informal education in East Jerusalem and understanding the ways in which it can use these goals as a tool to reduce gaps will facilitate the informed use of existing resources.

- The field of informal education needs a consolidated, comprehensive strategy based on an understanding of the ways in which informal education can help reduce gaps.

5. Management and evaluation. Education in general and informal education in particular are very difficult to measure and evaluate on the basis of currently available direct quantitative results, such as grades or the numbers of students participating in an activity. This area requires further development.

- Clear objectives should be established for the field of informal education, as were established for formal education, through a collective thought process.
- It is recommended that the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research develop indicators as a measurement tool for informal education.
- Organizational diagnostic tools should be used to assess whether the characteristics that help reduce social gaps are present in the existing programs.

- Questionnaires should be used to examine the acquisition of skills, cultivation of resilience, and improvement of social capital.
- Satisfaction surveys should be conducted among students and parents to examine the suitability of the subjects and activities to the target audience.

6. Human capital. Human capital is a core element of – and necessary condition for – a successful program. Our recommendations focus on training a professional workforce in the field of informal education and on cultivating the local workforce.

- In the near term we recommend instituting a training process for all workers in the field of informal education in East Jerusalem, with a view to enhancing their skills and enriching their professional knowledge in the relevant areas.
- In the long term we recommend establishing in-depth training aimed at creating a cadre of highly skilled professionals in the field of informal education in East Jerusalem; in other words, they would be able to acquire an academic education at teacher training colleges. East Jerusalem residents should be encouraged to take part in such training programs so as to create a local cadre to fill the positions required by the informal education system.

7. A holistic educational continuum. Recent years have seen increased awareness of the importance a holistic approach that takes into account all the educational programs in which children and youths participate.

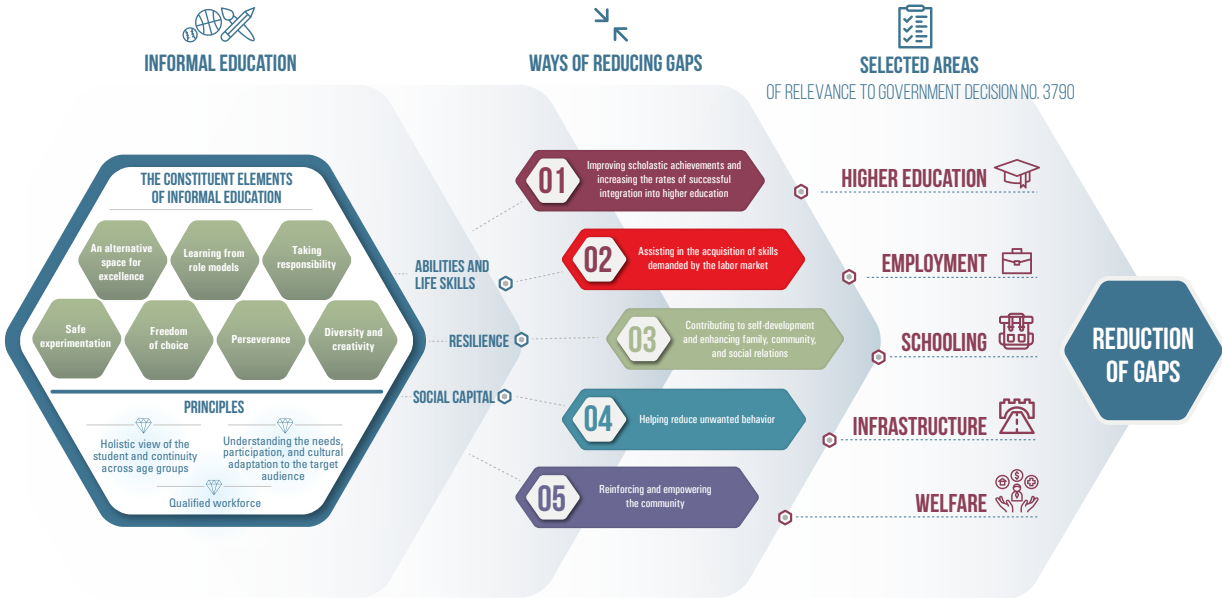
- In the near term it is necessary to expand, reinforce, and clearly define the roles of the community coordinators tasked with maintaining the interface between formal and informal education at the schools.
- Interfaces should be developed that will allow for comprehensive and detailed coordination and synchronization among the various entities relevant to the lives of children and youths: in the formal education system, in informal education, in the welfare system, and with other community actors.
- Consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing “community” schools – schools that provide a comprehensive, holistic platform for addressing the educational, social services, and community needs of children and youths.

- 8. Strengthening community councils.** To date, nearly all the new programs that have been implemented as part of the five-year plan were developed without the participation of community councils. We recommend that this situation be changed.
- The directors responsible for children and youths within community councils should be included in consultations regarding the continued implementation of the five-year plan.
 - A dedicated budget should be allocated for strengthening community councils, and they should be empowered to offer a wide range of programs so that they can provide an important anchor in community life.
- 9. Cooperation with civil society and private bodies.** East Jerusalem has a variety of organizations, non-profits, and private bodies that operate informal education programs and have already accumulated significant knowledge and experience in running such programs.
- The Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research has produced a mapping of civil society in East Jerusalem, which should be used to identify organizations and non-profits that operate informal education programs and to examine the possibility of working collaboratively.
 - Initiatives from the field should be examined and supplied with tools and resources for their development.
- 10. Youth groups.** Youth groups have tremendous potential to provide an important platform for the optimal implementation of the five-year plan, and to help reduce socio-economic gaps in East Jerusalem.
- In coordination with the entities and actors responsible for implementation and the professionals on the ground, consideration should be given to expanding and allocating additional resources for youth groups.
- 11. Transportation adapted to the needs of informal education.** Some students are unable to participate in informal educational activities because they have no means of returning home afterwards.
- The transportation system should be adapted to informal education programs so as to provide participating students with transportation to their homes after the activities have concluded.

12. Nutrition. The unavailability of lunch prevents many students from participating in informal educational activities.

- It is necessary to address the nutritional needs of students who remain at school until the late afternoon, so as to enable them to participate in informal activities.

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The study was conducted as a means of supporting the implementation of Government Decision No. 3790 and the five-year plan for socio-economic development in East Jerusalem, led by the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage.

Maliha Zugair, who joined the Jerusalem Institute in early 2019, is an architect, researcher, and urban planner. Maliha has a master's degree in urban planning from the Hebrew University. She was previously employed at the Jerusalem-based architectural firm of Bassam Alyan, a leader in its field, where her work included planning residential buildings and schools, issuing building permits, and preparing detailed construction plans.

Elisheva Milikowsky is a social worker by training, with a specialization in the processes of change and policymaking. She has developed and directed projects for asylum seekers, migrants, and other communities residing in Israel. Her work includes addressing the interfaces between welfare, education, and community. Elisheva, a Jerusalemite, has years of experience with East Jerusalem residents and their diverse concerns.

The Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, which was established in 1978, is a leading and influential think tank that promotes Jerusalem's social, economic, and urban sustainability. The Institute is where reality shapers turn to in order to promote and define policy issues in Israel in general and in Jerusalem in particular. The Institute's activities and research helps institutions and bodies shape and implement innovative and effective policy. They bring Jerusalem, with all its various components, to the world - and the world to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a source of inspiration, a research field, a laboratory, and a space of influence for the Institute. The Institute's agenda includes developing the city for the benefit of its residents, enthusiasts, and believers and strengthening the city's global standing and leveraging it. The Institute's work in Jerusalem reaches a wider national and global scale, and then is implemented in Jerusalem for the benefits of the city and its residents.

THE JERUSALEM INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

RADAK 20 REHAVIA, 9218604 | PH 02-5630175 | FAX 02-5639814

INFO@JERUSALEMINSTITUTE.ORG.IL

JERUSALEMINSTITUTE.ORG.IL