

Post Campaign Editorial: ‘Shofoo bi Oyouni’ (See Through My Eyes)



The ‘Shofoo bi Oyouni’ (See Through My Eyes) campaign, spearheaded by The Palestinian Network for Early Childhood Development and Juzoor for Health and Social Development in collaboration with The Moving Minds Alliance (MMA), Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD), and AMNA, has illuminated the human toll of the Gaza war while showcasing the resilience of children amidst adversity. Running from November 25-29, 2024, this initiative amplified the voices of Gaza’s children, offering a poignant reminder that the repercussions of war extend beyond the cessation of hostilities.

The campaign’s launch featured a comprehensive op-ed that delved into critical issues facing Gaza’s children, including mental health, education, disability, and trauma. It advocated for immediate action, calling for a ceasefire, increased funding of local organizations, unimpeded humanitarian aid delivery, infrastructure reconstruction, and long-term psychological support programs.

Dissemination of the campaign’s message was widespread, leveraging both mainstream and social media platforms. The campaign gained significant traction when the co-editors of “Daybreak in Gaza” shared it with their global network, recognizing the synergy between their work and the campaigns goals.

A notable endorsement came from a leading American professor in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation, who pledged to share the op-ed with influential figures working on global projects impacting civilians in war zones.

Thereafter, The Palestinian Network for Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with Gazan youth, produced four impactful videos highlighting different aspects of children's lives in Gaza:

DANCE: Showcasing the resilience of Gazan children through traditional Dabke, preserving their heritage despite adversity.

EDUCATION: Demonstrating the unwavering determination of teachers and students to continue learning, even after 13 months without formal classrooms.

DISABILITY: Highlighting the strength and hope of children facing physical challenges, including disability and amputation.

WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene): Depicting the struggles and resilience of pregnant women and new mothers in ensuring clean water for their families.

These videos were widely distributed through various platforms, effectively sharing the stories of Gaza's children with a global audience.

Truth be told - the harsh realities faced by children in Gaza are devastating. The destruction of schools, hospitals, and basic infrastructure has left an entire generation without access to education, healthcare, and clean water. The long-term effects of this war are staggering, with reports suggesting that the impact of the war and trauma will set Gazan children's education back by up to five years. Bart Witteveen, ICR Country Director for the occupied Palestinian territory, warns, "Prolonged toxic stress and displacement can lead to long-term health challenges for children. Without support through psychological activities or safe spaces for children, there is significant risk of long-term developmental impacts, including on brain development".

Mental health experts caution about the profound and potentially lifelong impacts of prolonged exposure to violence and trauma. One mother's heartbreaking testimony underscores the urgency of the situation: "I wouldn't even say that their mental health has deteriorated – it's been obliterated. Complete psychological destruction".

Difficult as it may seem, the campaigns objectives were to:

1. Raise awareness
2. Advocate for immediate action
3. Showcase locally-led solutions.

By highlighting initiatives like the Palestinian 'Dabke', the campaign demonstrates the power of community-driven efforts to provide a semblance of normalcy and hope. These initiatives are

crucial, as they provide not only immediate relief but also contribute to the preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage, which has been severely impacted by the ongoing war. They serve as a testament to the reliance of the human spirit and the power of community in the face of adversity.

Local initiatives in Gaza are making significant strides in addressing the humanitarian crises, but they are not enough to meet the overwhelming needs of the population. These efforts are commendable and demonstrate resilience, yet they require enhanced resources and technical support from the international community to scale effectively.

The campaign therefore calls for urgent action on multiple fronts.

First and foremost, it demands an immediate and lasting ceasefire to prevent further harm to civilians, especially children.

Secondly, the campaign emphasises the need for unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza. The current rate of aid is woefully inadequate to meet the basic needs of the population. Essential items such as clean water, food, and medical supplies are either running out or completely depleted.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need for psychological support and safe spaces for children. The long-term mental health aspects of the war cannot be overstated, and immediate intervention is crucial to mitigate these effects. This includes not only professional mental health services but also community-based programs that can provide a sense of normalcy and support.

Fourthly, the campaign calls for the restoration and protection of educational facilities. With over 80% of schools damaged or destroyed, rebuilding the educational system must be a priority to prevent a lost generation.

Lastly, the campaign emphasises the importance of addressing the underlying issues that contribute to cyclical wars in the region. This includes lifting the blockade on Gaza, which has been in place for nearly 17 years and has severely limited economic opportunities and access to essential services.

Nevertheless, the op-ed and video campaign achieved significant impact and produced several key outcomes:

1. Increased awareness: It successfully brought the experiences of Gaza's children to the forefront of public consciousness, offering a nuanced and deeply human portrayal of life in a war zone.
2. Fostered empathy: By presenting stories through children's eyes, the campaign challenged preconceptions and humanized the crises, resonating deeply with audiences across cultural and political divides.
3. Highlighted resilience: The campaign showcased locally-led solutions and the ingenuity of Palestinian communities, inspiring support for grassroots initiatives.

4. Generated engagement: The campaign saw significant engagement across various platforms, with related hashtags trending in multiple countries.
5. Shifted narrative: The campaign moved beyond statistics and political rhetoric, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the situation faced by Gaza's children.

These outcomes demonstrate the campaign's effectiveness in raising awareness, fostering empathy, and inspiring action to support children affected by the war in Gaza.

Overall, the "Shofoo bi Oyouni" campaign has laid a foundation for future initiatives aimed at supporting children in war-torn regions. It opens avenues for expanding its reach and impact, with a key focus on developing sustainable support systems for early childhood education in Gaza. This approach aims to mitigate the long-term effects of trauma on children and builds momentum for establishing resilient educational infrastructure capable of withstanding the challenges of ongoing conflict.

The campaign's impact extends beyond immediate aid, underscoring the need for a more integrated approach to humanitarian assistance. This holistic perspective recognizes the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and educational needs, potentially influencing future policy decisions and aid distribution strategies to provide more effective and sustainable support for children in war zones.

Looking ahead, "Shofoo bi Oyouni" has the potential to serve as a model for similar initiatives in other conflict-affected areas. Its success in humanizing a complex political situation and mobilizing support for locally-led solutions could be replicated to address other protracted crises worldwide.

This campaign reminds us of the transformative power of perspective. By allowing us to see through the eyes of Gaza's children, it challenges us to confront the human cost of war and to recognize the resilience and potential that exists in the most challenging circumstances.

"The 'Shofoo bi Oyouni' campaign exemplifies the power of collaboration in amplifying the voices of Gaza's children. Through the unwavering partnership between Juzoor, PNECD, and global allies like the Moving Minds Alliance, ANECD and AMNA, we were able to illuminate the human toll of the Gaza war and showcase the resilience of our children in the face of unimaginable adversity. This campaign is more than a testament to their strength; it is a call to action for the world to stand with them, invest in their future, and recognize their stories as a beacon of hope and a roadmap for change."

Majd Hardan from Juzoor for Health and Social Development - "As we move forward, it is crucial that we continue to amplify these voices and supporting initiatives that prioritize the well-being of children caught in the cross-fire of adult wars. The campaign's success demonstrates that there is a global appetite for narratives that go beyond the simplistic portrayals of war and instead focus on the human stories that connect us all. The children of Gaza, through their courage and dreams, have shown us a path forward. It is now up to us to heed their call and work towards a future where every child, regardless of where they are born, has the opportunity to thrive."

The campaign was not just about seeing through the eyes of Gaza's children; it was about opening our own eyes to the possibility of a more compassionate and just world.

As we reflect on this campaign, we must consider:

1. How can we continue to support and amplify the voices of children in war?
2. How can we translate the empathy generated by the campaign into concrete action and policy changes?
3. And, how can we ensure that the next generation grows up in a world where such campaigns are no longer necessary?

The answers to these questions are complex, the campaign has shown us that change is possible when we open our hearts and minds to the perspectives of those most affected by war. It is a testament to the power of storytelling and the enduring strength of the human spirit.

As we move forward, let us carry with us the lessons learned from Gaza's children. Let their resilience inspire us, their hopes challenge us, and their dreams guide us to a more peaceful and equitable future for all. For in seeing through their eyes, we have caught a glimpse of the world as it could be – a world where every child's potential is recognized, nurtured, and allowed to flourish, regardless of the circumstances of their birth.

The 'Shofoo bi Oyouni' campaign has planted seeds of empathy and understanding that have the potential to grow into lasting change. As we continue to grapple with the complexities of the Gaza war and other conflicts around the world, let us not forget the simple yet profound message at the heart of the campaign: that by truly seeing one another, we can begin to heal the wounds of division and build a better world for all our children.