What is the Palestinian vision for development that would bring about liberation? How can this vision be realized freely of donor-imposed conditions and restrictions? Specifically, how can the health and education sectors—which have been grossly neglected by Palestinian authorities in recent years—be developed by Palestinians in a way that promotes a collective vision for the future? A diverse group of 19 Palestinian scholars, activists, teachers, engineers, lawyers, doctors, shopkeepers, construction workers, and students in the West Bank, Gaza, behind the Green Line (Palestinian citizens of Israel), and in the diaspora were interviewed to answer these questions.

The Palestinian health system is in a state of crisis. While donor support has allowed the Ministry of Health (MoH) to boast of quantitative improvements in vaccination rates and life expectancy, there remain significant problems which impact the sector, not least of which is the ongoing fragmentation of the ministry between the West Bank and Gaza. The interviews revealed three themes that limit internal development in Palestinian health across the West Bank and Gaza: 1) dependence/outsourcing for many health services, 2) an overly paternalistic and medicalized healthcare establishment, and 3) lack of opportunities for a future in medicine.

While the realities of occupation limit Palestinian health in unique ways, there are initiatives that could begin to build a healthier populace and a more responsive health system, including:

• Emphasizing preventive and holistic wellness—including mental and physical health, children’s health, women’s health, and the health of people with disabilities—to bring health and well-being back into community spaces.

• Reforming medical education to reflect the realities of where these doctors will work. Trauma medicine, and even advanced training for first responders and emergency medical technician (EMTs), would reduce mortality for Palestinians injured as a result of Israeli state or settler violence.

• Incentivizing Palestinian doctors and other medical personnel who train abroad to return to practice medicine by guaranteeing them a secure job and salary.

• Engaging with the medical establishment, including the MoH in the West Bank and Gaza, to develop a new and independent model for Palestinian medicine, public health, and wellness. This would engage stakeholders outside of the calcified health system who can advocate for underserved populations, and, importantly, decrease Palestinian dependence on Israeli and foreign health systems.
The importance of education was also emphasized by all interviewees; however, some pointed to the cynical reality of this perspective, which, in recent years, has led to a highly educated Palestinian society with very few opportunities for employment or continued education.

Four themes emerged as the primary barriers to the development of a “liberation education” in the West Bank and Gaza: 1) outdated approaches to pedagogy, 2) outsized influence by donors, 3) a view of education primarily as a path to employment, and 4) opposition to reform within the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas.

Many interviewees criticized the “laziness” of Palestinian authorities when it comes to educational reform. Several also critiqued the education system for being heavily skewed by donor interference, including in textbook content. While the deficits in the education system are exacerbated by Israeli movement restrictions, which limit the recruitment of faculty and other needed professionals, the ability of students to engage with diverse speakers or travel across their territory for events, and overall opportunities for critical engagement, there are areas where internal transformation is possible:

- Palestinian leadership must invest in curricular development that restores a sense of agency among students, modeled after approaches such as abolitionist education and the community education practiced during the First Intifada. The education system must be inclusive, it must incorporate lived experience, and it must raise the consciousness of the individual.

- Communities should supplement traditional education with cultural education, including plays, talks and debates, olive harvesting events, traditional dance troupes and bands, and so on.

- Concerted efforts should be made to create legitimate and credible content on social media to engage youth with their history and identity.

- Palestinian leadership should invest in vocational and non-traditional schooling and push donors to meet existing educational gaps.

- Palestinian leadership and civil society should incentivize and encourage Palestinians who go abroad for education or training to return and work in Palestine, even if temporarily.

The idea that Palestine could not merely change but could serve as a center for a new kind of liberation was a hopeful note that came up in several interviews: “We should be the ones to solve these kinds of problems internally and ‘sell’ our solutions abroad.” The consensus, however, was that meaningful change is not going to come from the outside and that Palestinians must have a clear and collective vision for their future in order for this change to occur.