

FINAL REPORT

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE GENEVA INITIATIVE 2010-2020

FOR THE FEDERAL
DEPARTMENT OF
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PHILANTHROPY ADVISORS



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The views expressed in this independent evaluation are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the FDFA or the Geneva Initiative.

List of Acronyms

BDS	Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
OECD-DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DwP	Dealing with the Past
EU	European Union
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs
GA	Geneva Accord
GI	Geneva Initiative
HLEP	Heskem/H.L.Education for Peace
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MK	Members of Knesset
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
oPt	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
PACBI	Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel
PHRD	Peace and Human Rights Division
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PPC	Palestinian Peace Coalition
PCPSR	Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research
P2P	People-to-People
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
ToC	Theory of Change
TSC	Two-State Solution Coalition
TSI	Two-State Index
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
USP	Unique Selling Proposition
WB	West Bank

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Geneva Initiative (GI), a joint Israeli-Palestinian political initiative developed to serve as a model for a permanent status agreement to help end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was launched in 2003 with the support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). Two cooperating NGOs were set up in 2003 to follow up on the Accord and its spirit by promoting the GI through local, regional and international activities: Heskem on the Israeli side and the Palestinian Peace Coalition (PPC). Switzerland has been a firm supporter of the GI since its inception, continuing ever since with financial and political support to Heskem and PPC.

However, due to unfavourable evolutions, and informed by recommendations from an external evaluation, the FDFA has been gradually phasing out its support since 2010. Now, against the backdrop of a new foreign policy strategy and a revision of the operational orientation of Switzerland's engagement in the region, the FDFA is reassessing its support to the GI. This evaluation was therefore commissioned by the FDFA to inform decision-making on their future engagement/disengagement with/from the GI.

Methodology

The GI is assessed on its relevance (to the political context and Swiss foreign policy), its effectiveness and its impact (on the political context and on Swiss foreign policy) during the evaluation period, 2010-2020.

Due to travel restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation took place entirely remotely. The evaluators reconstructed the Theory of Change (ToC) of the GI in order to assess the underlying logic and assumptions and to guide the evaluation. An extensive desk and literature review was carried out, over ninety semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted and an online survey of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was administered.

Findings - Relevance to the Political Context

The GI's relevance to the political context in Israel is considered to be poor overall. Based on the final status negotiations paradigm of the Oslo period, the ToC of the GI now seems out of touch with the ground reality to many stakeholders. The GI fulfilled the original goal it set for itself in terms of showing that bilaterally negotiating a Track Two final status deal was possible. But it has failed to reach the overall objective of contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian final status agreement, because the challenge now lies elsewhere; in disrupting the status quo and contributing to the origination of conditions which would allow the two-state solution along GI lines to be adopted and implemented. Even as several key assumptions have been challenged, the GI has not significantly reviewed its overall model and approaches, and its capacity for strategic innovation has been limited. The original blueprint is also no longer considered implementable or realistic, mostly due to a lack of political will.

The GI has no official political support in Palestine and is poorly perceived by much of the Palestinian civil society community. In Israel, support comes principally from the political left and centre-left as it did in the GI's early days. These groups have been marginalised over the evaluation period. Heskem has an excellent reputation within the Israeli peace camp of CSOs, but little echo outside of this.

Findings - Relevance to Swiss Foreign Policy in the Near East

The relevance of the GI to Swiss foreign policy in the Near East is considered to have been fair since overall objectives have been strongly aligned throughout the period. However, current Swiss priorities in the region in terms of innovation are not served by the GI, whose activities and network have also been of limited relevance to Swiss diplomatic engagement in the evaluation period.

Findings - Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the GI is assessed to have been poor overall in the evaluation period. This is not to discount the significant amount of work and effort undertaken by the organisations during the decade. However, there has been a marked lack of observable results. The monitoring of actions and follow up on their wider impact has been insufficient, undermining the tracking of results.

Although the difficult operating context has also been challenging, the lack of adaptation in the face of current realities and challenges is considered to have been a key factor in the non-achievement of outcomes. While the GI has managed to maintain some access to local and especially international stakeholders, this has not been translated into influence and outcomes relevant to the resolution of the conflict.

Findings - Impact on the Political Context

The impact of the GI on the political context is rated poor overall. No perceptible changes which have had an impact in terms of conflict transformation have been recorded in this evaluation period, either in terms of public opinion or decision-makers. More in-depth reflection on how the outcomes of activities were leading (or not) to wider impact goals was necessary.

Findings - Impact on Swiss Foreign Policy in the Near East

GI impact on Swiss foreign policy is considered to be poor over the evaluation period. The partnership with the GI has had little impact on Swiss foreign policy in the region. Despite efforts to maximise the partnership, frustrations have built and the quality of the partnership has diminished over time. Switzerland has also contributed to the maintenance of the ToC by continuing to fund the partner organisations based on this model.

While Switzerland has a good reputation in the region as a neutral actor committed to international law, the GI is not thought to have contributed significantly to this image.

Recommendations - Future FDFA-GI Relationship

This evaluation discusses three possible scenarios of action for the FDFA's future relationship with the GI. The scenarios presented are: 1) the FDFA disengages from the partnership over a period of two years, 2) the FDFA continues its engagement for now by providing core funding with some improvements in terms of the partnership approach, reassessing this again in three years, or 3) the FDFA invests in supporting the GI to review and redefine their ToC before deciding whether to support further. The evaluation team has not proposed a scenario for the immediate withdrawal of funding as this is not considered a responsible and fair option in line with good practice.

Based on the evaluation findings, accountability considerations and a weighing up of potential risks, the recommendation of the evaluators is that the FDFA disengage from the partnership with the GI. GI was given a poor rating for relevance to the political context, effectiveness, impact on the political context and impact on Swiss foreign policy during this evaluation period. Relevance to Swiss foreign policy was considered to be fair. It is not, therefore, recommended that the FDFA continues to support the GI to do more of the same work. The ability of the initiative to put in place the necessary strategic revision process is doubted based on their previous limitations in this regard. Continuing to fund the GI based on the same model which has not produced results over the past decade would be difficult to defend from an accountability perspective. The risks associated with disengaging from the FDFA are considered to be manageable. Although bringing the partnership to an end and withdrawing core funding risks the GI closing down, the FDFA has provided significant funds and support for nearly twenty years and cannot be held indefinitely responsible for the survival of the initiative.

Recommendations - FDFA Engagement in Political Initiatives

Recommendations for Swiss support of political initiatives more generally are extrapolated from lessons learned from the partnership with GI. The main recommendations are related to the FDFA's partnership approach, including maintaining a healthy distance from partners to facilitate objective decision-making, documenting and institutionalising strategic feedback, and putting in place appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks which allow for success to be defined and results to be tracked.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Evaluation Background

The Geneva Initiative

The Geneva Initiative (GI) is a joint Israeli-Palestinian political initiative that was developed to serve as a model for a permanent status agreement to help end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the world's longest-running disputes in contemporary history. The GI was launched in Geneva in 2003, with the Geneva Accord (GA) at its core. The Accord came about after behind-the-scenes negotiations on all final status details were held between prominent Palestinian and Israeli officials and individuals in the wake of the failure of the Camp David Summit and the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

The GI offers a detailed blueprint for a peace agreement, based on a two-state solution model, which could serve as a reference document for future negotiations. The GI additionally aims to contribute to a political solution by connecting relevant figures on both sides to lay the ground for Track One negotiations, by educating and mobilising members of both societies to ensure public and political support for a negotiated two-state solution, and by encouraging the international community to support the conditions necessary for the resumption of peace talks.

Two cooperating NGOs were set up in 2003 to follow up on the Accord and its spirit by promoting the GI through local, regional and international activities: Heskem/H.L.Education for Peace (Heskem) on the Israeli side and the Palestinian Peace Coalition (PPC).

Switzerland and the Geneva Initiative

Switzerland has been a firm supporter of the GI since its inception, beginning with logistical and financial support leading to the conclusion of the GA, and continuing ever since with financial and political support to Heskem and PPC.

During its early years, the GI was widely recognised as one of the most well developed model agreements. The original Accord was further supplemented with additional annexes between 2009 and 2011 which outline concrete measures required for implementation. However, a growing lack of public acceptance on both sides of various key issues, significantly changing dynamics on the ground and the loss of political influence of the two leading figures behind the GI means the GI has progressively lost its momentum and convening power.

Due to these unfavourable evolutions and building on lessons from the 2009 external evaluation, the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has been gradually phasing out its support for the GI, decreasing its yearly contributions and concentrating on specific projects/thematic areas and programme activities. Finally, in 2020, the FDFA ended its project funding and only supported the GI with core contributions. Against the backdrop of a new foreign policy strategy, the changed political

context as well as a recent revision of operational orientation of Switzerland’s engagement in the Near East, the FDFA is reassessing its support to its partners in the Near East, including the GI.

B. Evaluation Methodology

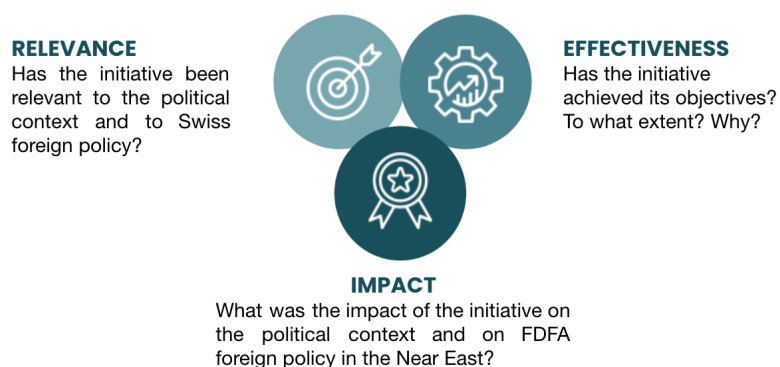
Evaluation Framework

With both **learning** and **accountability** purposes, the Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) at the FDFA (MENA-Peace) has commissioned this retrospective (2010-2020) and prospective external evaluation of the GI. The purpose of this evaluation is twofold: 1) accountability: to assess the socio-political relevance and impact of the GI and, 2) learning: to generate lessons for improvement. The emphasis is on the learning side, with the view of informing the FDFA’s decision on future engagement/disengagement with/from the GI.

This evaluation covers the GI over the ten-year period **2010-2020**, from the finalisation of the previous external evaluation to the present.

The evaluation was guided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria, focusing on **relevance** (to the political context and to Swiss foreign policy), **effectiveness** and **impact** (to the political context and to Swiss foreign policy).

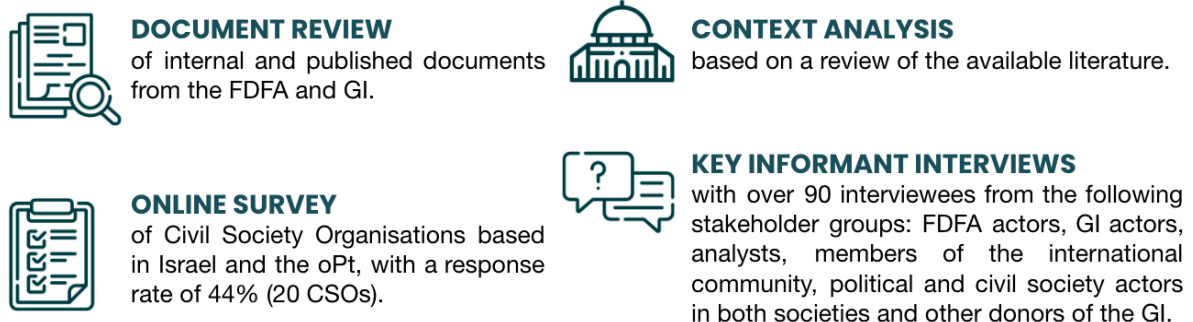
Figure 1: OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria



Methodology

The methodology was based on a mixed-methods approach which involved the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Due to travel restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation was conducted entirely remotely from March to August 2021.

Figure 2: Evaluation Methodology Overview



A bibliography of selected literature is in Annex A. The full results of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) survey can be found in Annex B and a list of stakeholders interviewed is provided in Annex C.

Limitations

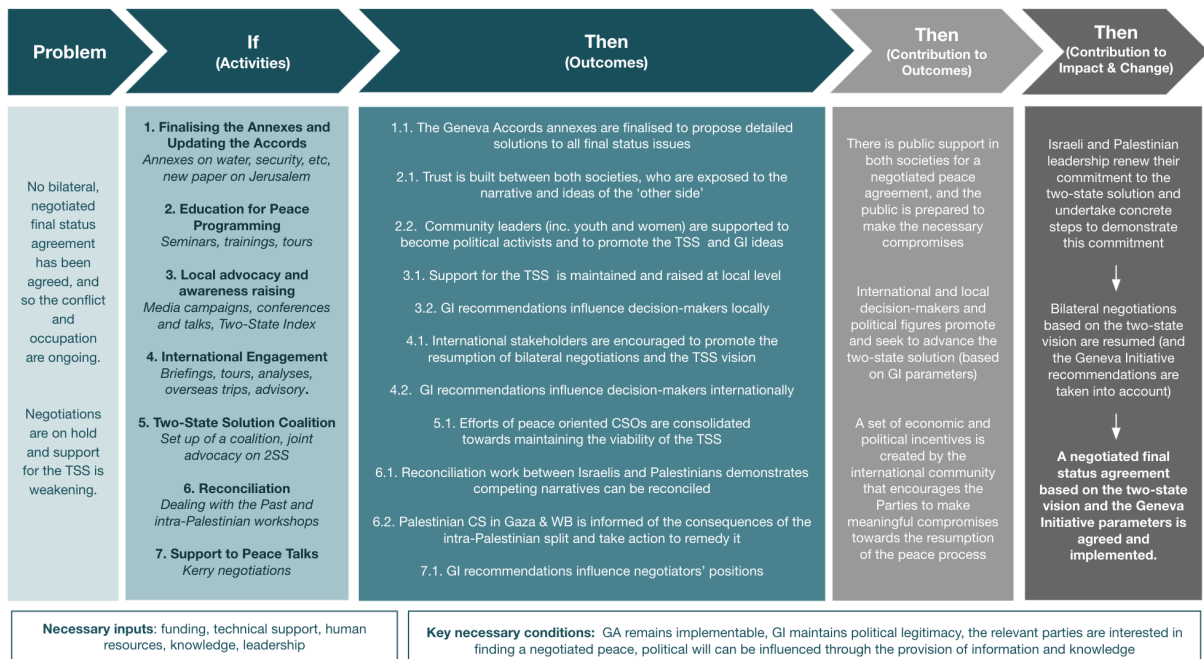
There are some key limitations of this evaluation, highlighted below:

- Due to the Covid-19 sanitary crisis and resulting border closures, the evaluation took place entirely remotely, meaning the evaluation team was not able to observe activities or interview activity participants.
- To mitigate the effect of not being able to visit the region of implementation, an online survey of CSOs was conducted, which assisted in the triangulation of data and added a quantitative component. It should be recognised that many of the CSOs identified were from the networks of Heskem and PPC. However, efforts were also made to send the survey to actors not traditionally supportive of the GI. 25% of final survey respondents were neither partners nor supporters of the organisations. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with analysts and stakeholders from outside of the networks of the GI were also carried out to triangulate results and counter any bias introduced.
- KIIs were based on purposive sampling, meaning that only those invited and willing to participate were interviewed. Efforts were made, however, to reach out to various parts of societies in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), and to maintain a representative sample across the different stakeholder categories.
- Respondents' views of the GI tend to align with their ideological position and worldview, meaning that few interviewees were completely objective in their assessments, as is normal in the evaluation of advocacy and political initiatives in complex contexts. To mitigate this, PA made efforts to identify and include stakeholders from differing political backgrounds, as well as speaking with multiple independent political analysts and considering the available literature. The different backgrounds and perspectives of interviewees was also taken into account when analysing interview data.
- The evaluation took place at a time during which there were many ongoing political events which may or not have shifted the context to some extent, the full influence of which is not yet known. Legislative elections were held in Israel in March 2021 and a new coalition government formed in June 2021.
- The evaluation is large in scope, covering ten years, two organisations and multiple projects as well as an ever-evolving context, meaning that it has not been able to deep dive into each of these elements. Rather, the evaluation paints an overall picture.

C. Geneva Initiative Overview

The GI does not have an explicit Theory of Change (ToC). In order to aid the understanding and assessment of the GI's activities and logic model, the evaluation team reconstructed a ToC based on a review of internal documents and conversations with GI and FDFA stakeholders. This tool represents a broad overview of the ToC as expressed in project proposals and reports. It is used to guide the evaluation and to interrogate the overall model and its underlying assumptions but remains the work of the evaluation team rather than that of the GI. It also covers activities undertaken as part of the partnership with the FDFA rather than the initiative as a whole.

Figure 3: Reconstructed Theory of Change for the Geneva Initiative



The ToC can be found in Annex D. Areas in grey represent higher level and longer term changes to which the GI model aims to contribute rather than impact directly.

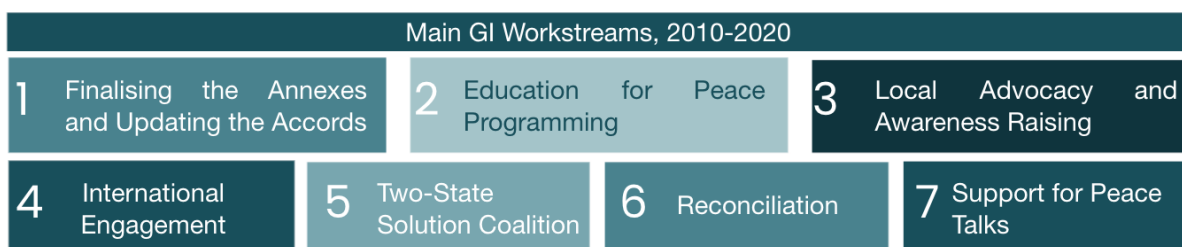
The report is structured in response to the evaluation questions set by the FDFA. This first section of the report responds to two evaluation questions regarding the work conducted by GI and its future strategic priorities, before moving on to provide findings per evaluation criteria.

What work has the GI conducted during the evaluation period (with and without FDFA-support)?

An overview of the work carried out by the GI over the past decade is provided below. While this evaluation focuses on the work supported by FDFA, it has attempted to look into the broader scope of what the GI has done, including activities supported by other donors. This is not an exhaustive summary and is based on internal and donor documentation shared by Heskem and PPC.

In order to deal with the volume of work from the past ten years, activities have been organised into seven main categories, which are reflected in the reconstructed ToC and shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Overall GI Workstreams, 2010-2020



A summary of the work conducted under each category is provided below. The effectiveness and impact of these activities is analysed in later, dedicated sections.

1. Finalising the Annexes and Updating the Accord

Time at the beginning of the decade was spent finalising the remaining three annexes of the Accord (on refugees, prisoners and electromagnetic sphere/security) through unilateral and bilateral meetings and workshops to negotiate solutions. The annexes were finalised in 2011. As well as FDFA funding, the GI received funds for the development of the annexes from various private funders in the United States (US) and Europe.

Since then, the GI partners have also worked on updating, or adding to, some of the original annexes, such as the water annex. In 2018, the GI began working on updating the Jerusalem annex with the support of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and produced a first draft in 2019 after various meetings and expert consultations. The final version was published in March 2021 under the GI name, but as an additional commissioned piece rather than a replacement of the existing GA documents.

2. Education for Peace Programming

The backbone of the GI's work in both Palestine and Israel, PPC and Heskem have carried out many activities over the past ten years which have aimed to inform and educate various stakeholders in both societies. The central messaging of this work has been that peace is possible, there is a partner and there is a plan. Much of the financing provided by donors other than FDFA focused on this pillar of the GI's activities.

A core focus of this work has involved People-to-People (P2P) activities; joint political meetings, conferences and seminars between Israelis and Palestinians, including women, youth and members of civil society such as activists, political actors and journalists, have been organised jointly by Heskem and PPC and held locally or abroad.

In Israel, Heskem's education activities have included running several rounds of their political leadership course (which takes place fortnightly over several months) which targeted public opinion leaders from various areas of Israeli society. They have run the "A Day in Town" project for mayors and city councillors all over Israel, including local leadership assemblies, and panels around topical subjects. They have also organised numerous tours led by GI experts, including to the separation barrier and around the greater Jerusalem area.

In Palestine, PPC has proposed meetings, seminars and conferences on topics related to the conflict across the West Bank (WB) and occasionally in Gaza. PPC has provided multi-day capacity building seminars for youth and rounds of their "Advanced Course on Leadership Skills" targeted to youth and women leaders. PPC has also put in place local and municipal leadership assemblies. Seminars have been held for the wider public, including some in rural or defavoured areas including Area C, refugee camps and The Jordan Valley.

3. Local Advocacy and Awareness Raising

Like education programming, local advocacy and awareness raising has been a staple of the past decade and has been maintained across the evaluation period, if less intensely than education projects. This work has included open conferences and local assemblies, and occasional campaigns.

Heskem's activities have included developing editorials and op-eds as well as occasional billboard, social media and print campaigns, especially around elections or major political developments. They have undertaken intermittent polling and conducted three media and PR campaigns in this period, funded by the FDFA, the United Kingdom (UK) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

The PPC has been less focused on large-scale media campaigns. They carried out a public campaign in 2015 as part of the "Towards Maintaining the Two-State Solution" advocacy project with the FDFA, the aim of which was to confront skepticism on the Palestinian side regarding the existence of a partner for peace. They have put out various position papers and editorials over the evaluation period.

The Two-State Index (TSI), funded by the EU, ran from 2018 to 2021 and provided a monthly analysis of developments and whether they created progress towards a two-state solution or represented a regression away from it, giving a score out of ten on a scale of how feasible or not the two-state solution is seen to be each month.

4. International Engagement

The engagement of international actors has been a key pillar of the GI's work during the evaluation period. They have provided briefings, information and advice to foreign leaders and diplomats locally and abroad, and participated in international fora, focusing mostly on the US and European nations. PPC and Heskem have also developed some policy papers, proposals and recommendations on how the international community should engage in the conflict.

After a sustained period in which negotiations were not on the table and the involvement of the international community waned, the FDFA funded Heskem for the "Engaging the International Community" project (2015-2016), to push for their re-engagement by developing fresh proposals for their involvement.

After Donald Trump's election to the presidency in the US in 2016, the GI began to focus on China and Russia (producing policy proposals and sending GI delegations to Beijing and Moscow) while minimally maintaining contacts with US representatives. Soon after the publication of the American Peace Plan in 2020, the GI released a policy paper analysing different aspects of the plan and comparing it to earlier negotiation positions and proposals. Since the change of administration in the US, the GI has been in touch with contacts made during the Obama presidency.

5. Two-State Solution Coalition

The Two-State Solution Coalition (TSC) was established as a joint Heskem-PPC pilot project in 2018 with funding from the EU and a small amount of co-funding from the FDFA. Led by the GI, the Coalition is a cooperation platform of twenty-five peace-oriented CSOs based on both sides of the "Green Line", which aims to strengthen their voices by speaking in a coordinated manner in favour of the two-state solution, from different perspectives. The idea is also to create space for discussion and innovation, and to build capacity, advocacy and policy shaping efforts of members, as well as consolidating their peace promotion efforts and enabling and encouraging the exchange of information and knowledge between actors.

In this evaluation period, the coalition was established, with a management team and Joint Secretariat of 6 CSOs appointed, and members recruited. A strategy has been put in place along with a communication and coordination mechanism.

6. Reconciliation

Work on the theme of reconciliation has been two-pronged, encompassing efforts on bilateral Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation and a focus on intra-Palestinian unity.

Reconciliation: Dealing with the Past

Dealing with the Past (DwP), focused on reconciliation of the differing narratives of Israelis and Palestinians, began in 2010 and has been fully funded by the FDFA, with technical support from the Special Envoy and Head of the Task Force for Dealing with the Past and Prevention of Atrocities. The idea was to create a mutually agreed framework of justice and reconciliation issues which should be dealt with in any future peace treaty.

During the initial phases from 2010 to 2013, the participants analysed previous transitional justice projects around the world and met with experts with relevant knowledge in the field of law, public policy, psychology, etc. Multiple meetings were held unilaterally and bilaterally, and locally as well as in neutral foreign locations. The text was discussed and adapted until its finalisation in 2017. Further project funding from the FDFA has supported the dissemination of the work and building support for it, although the work has not been fully released in either society. In 2019, the EU funded the GI to produce a reconciliation guide, to be used by project participants as part of their activism. The GI now includes reconciliation as a key theme in its education activities.

Reconciliation: Intra-Palestinian Unity

An objective specific to PPC has been to contribute to the Palestinian civil society's efforts to promote internal reconciliation between the WB and Gaza Strip. This has included holding discussions and workshops for youth and civil society in Gaza and on providing opportunities for dialogue on political subjects between Palestinians in the WB and those in the Gaza Strip.

7. Support for Peace Talks

When peace talks began again under US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2013, the FDFA and GI adjusted the objectives of the Geneva 2.0 project to focus on developing ideas which could assist and support official negotiating teams, as well as trying to create support for the peace process within their respective societies through seminars, conferences and position papers. Additional funding was provided by the FDFA to both organisations and the GI briefed the US team, facilitated by the FDFA.

What are GI's strategic priorities and goals for the next five years?

The strategic objectives of the GI overall, and Heskem and PPC specifically, in the next four years (through to the end of 2024, and President Biden's first term) are shown in Figure 5 below. These were provided by Heskem and PPC.

Figure 5: Geneva Initiative Strategic Priorities, 2021-2024

Geneva Initiative Joint Strategic Priorities, 2021-2024			
Revising, updating and publishing the GI two-state solution model, which will include the DwP document and additional innovative proposals.	Building on current relations with key players in the US, and adding others, along the lines of the GI's "Re-engaging with the Two-State Solution" document and additional future proposals.	Enhancing current, and creating new regional ties in order to obtain the support, engagement and partnership of relevant countries in the new regional geopolitical reality.	Keeping the two-state solution alive in the political, international and public discourse, while increasing the civil Israeli – Palestinian dialogue and encounters between relevant members of both societies.
HLEP: continue and expand activities in Israel, taking into consideration political developments and focusing on decision makers, politicians, journalists, influential religious figures, Russian-speaking Israelis, leading women and youth.			
PPC: continue and expand current activities in Palestine; including work with youth and women and dialogue between the West Bank and Gaza, as well as reaching out to new political power actors which emerged following the recent call for elections.			

III. FINDINGS

A. Relevance (Political Context)

To what extent has the GI been relevant to the political context of the Near East conflict?

Key Findings

- The core problems to which the GI responded are no longer the main issues which present an obstacle to peace today.
- The original Accord lacked inclusivity, which undermines its relevance today.
- Support for the two-state solution has declined as belief in its feasibility has dropped, meaning the proposals of the GI are now relevant/acceptable to the views of fewer Israelis and Palestinians.

The GA was born out of the crisis of Camp David, when Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were ill-informed and unprepared for some of the major questions they faced, and especially the question of Jerusalem and the refugees. The Accord came out of a desire on the part of prominent Israeli and Palestinian figures who had been involved in these previous rounds of failed negotiations to demonstrate that a negotiated peace settlement was possible and the conflict solvable in the post-Oslo Accords period. First and foremost, the GA was meant to prove to Israelis - who held the cards in the negotiations - that there is indeed a meeting point between them and the Palestinians, and to demonstrate what this point is.

The Accord aimed to agree on the details of peace, end future claims and affirm the viability of the two-state solution. The document begins with mutual recognition and provides comprehensive proposals for the resolution of five core final status issues: territory and borders, Jerusalem, international supervision, security, and refugees. The document was later supplemented with further details, for example on roads, border crossings and environmental issues, and annexes on water, economic relations and legal cooperation were eventually added.

The GA is considered to be one of the only mutually agreed models for peace which provides comprehensive proposals for final status issues based on a two-state framework. There is a fairly

high level of consensus among stakeholders interviewed (including those broadly supportive of the GI and those who do not consider themselves supporters) that no other draft agreement, official or unofficial, has since provided a more comprehensive set of negotiated proposals for the resolution of the conflict. The GA has by many accounts become a reference point for the “classic” two-state solution.

*“The Geneva Initiative is one of the best articulations of the two-state model.”
(Interview with an international analyst)*

However, the comprehensiveness of the document did not equate to its acceptability. Although the Accord was considered by many, especially within the “international community”, to be a brilliant effort and contribution which became a reference point for the “classic” two-state solution, it was not formally accepted by either the Israelis or the Palestinians in 2003, and has not been adopted since.

The GA was mutually agreed between representatives of the two societies but these negotiators were not fully representative of their own constituencies. The process through which the Accord was arrived at has been criticised by multiple respondents of this evaluation as not being inclusive enough, contributing to a lack of sufficient public and political ownership of the initiative on both sides. Although understandable given the circumstances under which talks took place and the associated time pressures, the negotiations were not carried out by representative coalitions from each society and so the resulting Accord is strongly associated with a segment of the Israeli opposition (who are now politically marginalised) and a small group of Palestinian officials and members of the nationalist movement Fatah.¹

*“It had limitations: they engaged people saying ‘here is the solution’ rather than asking them ‘what is the solution?’ and talking about something jointly. They made a mistake when they disseminated the document instead of a conversation starter. It came to the public as a definitive product that just needed to be signed.”
(Interview with an Israeli analyst and CSO actor)*

*“The Geneva Accord was dead on arrival.”
(Interview with a Gazan CSO actor)*

This early period of the GI is out of the scope of the current evaluation, but it is significant in that it has an impact on the reputation of the GI today as not representing the views of the majority on either side. The challenge has grown over time as the people associated with the original agreement became more politically irrelevant in their respective communities.

The GI fulfilled the original goal it set for itself in terms of showing that bilaterally negotiating a Track Two final status deal was possible. But it has failed to reach the overall objective of contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian final status agreement, because the challenge now lies elsewhere; in disrupting the status quo and contributing to the origination of conditions which will allow the two-state solution to be formally adopted by both parties, and then implemented. In the two decades that passed since the Camp David Summit (widely regarded as the peak of the peace process, when all leaders had both desire and legitimacy to advance it), the occupation has become entrenched, and the temporary arrangements of the Oslo Accords, originally limited for a five-year period, are now seen as permanent or semi-permanent by most analysts. This is what many refer to now as “the one-state condition” or “one-state reality”.

¹ Shikaki, Khalil. ‘The Geneva Accord and the Palestinian Response’. Palestine-Israel Journal. 2004.
<https://www.pij.org/articles/16/the-geneva-accord-and-the-palestinian-response>

Furthermore, some see the initiative today as counterproductive and even harmful. This is because the one thing Israel lacks currently is international legitimacy. By offering legitimacy “in advance” through informal contacts or negotiations, many Palestinians think they actually assist Israel in deepening the occupation and all that comes with it; settlements, displacement, and so on. Anti-normalisation and severing ties with Israel and Israelis is seen not only as a way of rejecting the occupation, but also as a way to create more agency for Palestinians, and to accumulate soft power. The GI is seen as undermining this approach, which is adopted by the majority of Palestinian CSOs. Whether one accepts this idea or not, it has limited and challenged the work of the PPC in recent years, and might continue to do so in the future.

Declining Support for the Two-State Solution

The two-state solution and, in turn, the GI proposals, are now less aligned with the priorities and views of the public on both sides. According to opinion polling and political analysts, levels of interest in peace have fallen during the period, as has support for the two-state solution. A breakdown of results from the most recent (October 2020) joint poll from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) and Tel Aviv University, shows that only 43% of Palestinians and 42% of Israeli Jews support the concept of the two-state solution; 56% of Palestinians and 46% of Israeli Jews opposed it.² This is related only to the general principle, noting that support falls further when details such as the GI or other parameters are presented.

Among Israelis, this support was strongest among left-wing, secular and older Israeli Jews, as well as Palestinian citizens of Israel (although this support fell dramatically from 82% in 2018 to 59% in 2020). Secular Israelis make up around 44% of the population but secularism has been losing ground, especially among younger Israelis, who also tend to be more right-leaning.³ Opposition was strongest among national religious and Haredi Israelis, as well as among 18-34 year olds. Younger Palestinian citizens of Israel are also less supportive, but religiosity is less of a factor than among Jewish Israelis.

Among Palestinians, support has varied but has been in continual decline since July 2018. Support is higher among Palestinians in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip; 45% and 38% respectively, among Fatah voters, and among those who define themselves as “not religious” or “somewhat religious.”

A recent RAND Corporation study, based on focus group discussions rather than surveys, offered five options (the status quo, the two-state solution, a confederation, annexation, and a one-state solution). It found that most Israeli Jews preferred the status-quo. West Bank Palestinians' preferred alternative was the two-state solution, while Gazans ranked a one-state solution slightly above the two-state solution. However, the two-state solution was the second preferred solution for these groups meaning none of the other alternatives garnered anything close to this breadth of support.⁴ It has also been shown widely that support for the two-state solution is strongly linked to belief in its feasibility, suggesting that if the viability of the vision is improved, the proposals of the GI will become more relevant to more constituencies.

These results paint a mixed picture. Support for the two-state solution has decreased (and is most acceptable to left-wing, secular and older Israeli Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel) but to some

² PCPSR. 'The Palestine/Israel Pulse, a Joint Poll Summary Report'. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. 2020. <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/823>

³ Chabin, Michele. 'Israel's Secular Population Up, But On Decline Among Youth'. *The New York Jewish Week*. 2018. <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/israels-secular-population-up-but-on-decline-among-youth/>

⁴ Egel, Daniel *et al.* 'Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict'. *Rand Corporation*. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR725-1>

extent has been maintained as the majority preferred option. However, this new study shows that Israelis across the political spectrum prefer the status quo to the two-state solution, and that the requirements of Palestinians and Israelis in terms of a two-state solution are divergent.⁵ Additionally, the prioritisation of a negotiated peace agreement has dropped over the evaluation period. For the public in both societies, the two-state solution and ergo the GI proposals are now seen as less feasible, less relevant to their priorities and, for many, less acceptable to their views.

Is the GI blueprint still realistic/implementable given the developments since it was established?

Key Findings

- Most evaluation respondents believe the GI blueprint is no longer implementable under current conditions.
- The primary reason for this is the lack of political will on the Israeli side and political legitimacy on the Palestinian side, but the creation of ‘facts on the ground’ has seriously undermined the physical feasibility of the blueprint.
- The blueprint could be updated - but would need to avoid just adapting to (and thereby accepting) realities on the ground.

A key assumption underlying the ToC of the GI is that the GA provides a realistic and implementable blueprint for the negotiated resolution of the main final status issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, the context has evolved significantly since 2003 and even since the annexes were finalised in 2011; realities on the ground are increasingly complex, peace camps have been weakened by political trends, talks have stalled, and historic paradigms on negotiations and final-status issues are in question.

The question of the implementability of the Accord is intimately tied up with the question of the viability of the two-state solution as a model, about which there has existed intense debate for some time. For many, including the majority of stakeholders interviewed, the two-state solution remains the *only* viable solution which can provide more or less satisfactory conditions for each party. However, proponents of the model have been accused of conflating what they see as the moral necessity of such a solution with its feasibility.⁶ A recent survey of scholars on the Middle East revealed 52% thought a two-state solution based on 1967 borders was no longer possible. 42% thought it was possible but not in the next ten years.⁷

The creation of ‘facts on the ground’ and the subsequent fragmentation of the Palestinian territory available for a Palestinian state is seen by many analysts and commentators as a serious hurdle to the implementation of the GI blueprint. At the beginning of this evaluation period, in 2010, the settler population resident in the West Bank was around 311,000. This increased year-on-year, reaching more than 441,000 by 2019, representing around 14% of the total population of the West Bank; an increase of 42% since 2010. The number of Israelis residing in East Jerusalem has also increased steadily over the period.⁸

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Lustick, Ian S. ‘Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality’. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2019. <https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/4306.html>

⁷ Telhami, Shibley & Marc Lynch. ‘Middle East Scholar Barometer’. *A Joint Initiative of the University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll and the Project on Middle East Political Science at George Washington University*. 2021. <https://criticalissues.umd.edu/sites/criticalissues.umd.edu/files/Middle%20East%20Scholar%20Barometer%20Questionnaire.pdf>

⁸ Peace Now. ‘Settlements Watch’. *Peace Now*. n.d. <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>

Even the most vocal proponents of the two-state solution recognise its extremely limited feasibility today, and under the current geo-political conditions. Some observers see physical-spatial issues as key, arguing that the minimum standards for a Palestinian state could not now be met. Others argue that infrastructure could be dismantled and land swaps made.⁹ However, all respondents to this evaluation agreed that the key barrier was political will. Within the current political context, no respondents to this evaluation believed that the GI blueprint is realistic. This was not exclusive to the GI proposals - they did not believe that other existing parameters were implementable either. Many commentators and interviewees believe that if and when any agreement on a two-state solution is found, it is likely to be similar to the parameters laid out by the GI. However, there is very little optimism that the peace process will be rebooted in the near future in a genuine way, or that a peace process along the lines of previous efforts would result in a desirable outcome for both parties.

The majority of respondents thought the blueprint would need to be updated to take evolutions on the ground into account, in order for the blueprint to be implementable. However, many identified this as risking adapting the blueprint to facts on the ground - for example by including illegal settlements - which would to some extent legitimise these elements and undermine the call for their dismantling or evacuation.

How have the overall strategy, approach and working assumptions of the GI evolved since 2010? To what extent did the GI demonstrate a capacity for innovation to the changing political context during the evaluation period?

Key Findings

- There have been micro-level adaptations in focus areas but at the macro-level, no evolution in terms of the overall strategy has occurred.
- For many evaluation respondents, the GI model and objectives are linked to paradigms which have lost relevance.
- The GI has lacked capacity for innovation and failed to revisit original assumptions and the theory of change.

At the macro level, the overall strategy, approach and working assumptions of the GI has barely evolved little over the past ten years. At the more micro level, there have been adaptations in terms of target groups (pivots towards different political parties, for example), with tailored strategies for these populations. However, the overall logic model of the GI has remained stable throughout the evaluation period, including the problem which the GI is trying to address, the change it wishes to bring about and the underlying assumptions. This has undermined its relevance to the political context as this has evolved over the decade.

For some, the objectives of the GI are simply the wrong ones, founded on a ToC based on a now failed paradigm and the Oslo period. The goals are attached to final status negotiations as a path to a solution, which is strongly tied to liberal, secular ideas of peacemaking. This tradition sees peacemaking as getting the involved parties to agree to a treaty under international law. This has been the policy of Switzerland in the region, and of the international community in general, and was the basis for the Oslo Accords. The GI was grounded in the same assumptions, which have continued to underscore its work until today.

⁹ Shaul, Arieli. 'Some Inconvenient Facts for One-State Advocates'. *Times of Israel*. 2020.
<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/some-inconvenient-facts-for-one-state-advocates/>

“The problem, in hindsight, is that the ToC was limited exclusively to final status negotiations as the path to the solution. It has been the main flaw of the Geneva Initiative, the paradigm. Most of the failings of the Geneva Initiative are not because they were implemented by the organisations but because of paradigmatic inefficiencies and failures: one of them was the notion that you can reach an agreement out of a gradual process of narrowing differences, this is not self-evident. It’s been a strong assumption that looks increasingly implausible....accountability through legal means is increasingly viewed as delusional by most Israelis.”
(Interview with an Israeli analyst and CSO actor)

As they were with the GI, non-liberal or secular actors tend to be excluded from peace processes or to reject them for their inextricable linkage to liberal ideals such as international law which they may see as an attempt to override religious law. While the religious-political element is not the whole picture of the conflict, it is part of it, and has arguably become more so since the launch of the GI.¹⁰

For many context analysts and commentators, including several respondents to this evaluation, the focus on final status negotiations is not in step with the reality of the current situation or the priorities of either party. Although there is widespread consensus that the conflict will ultimately be solved through negotiations, the idea that a peace process along the same lines as previous attempts will result in a solution which is acceptable to both sides is now seriously undermined. The GI addresses a problem - the lack of an agreed-upon solution - which no longer seems relevant to many, while not effectively tackling the main issues that maintain the conflict, i.e the lack of political incentives, will, and on the Palestinian side, legitimacy.

While the original idea of the GA can be seen as innovative - bypassing a deadlock in the talks, engaging major stakeholders and presenting a “proof of concept” for a final status agreement - the initiative organisations cannot be said to be especially innovative since they have to some extent been on “cruise control” in terms of the overall strategy for the past decade, failing to revisit original assumptions and theories, and to a large extent, original outputs. There have been several key moments where more critical self-reflection on the GI strategy would have been expected from the partners but this did not occur, demonstrating weak capacity for innovation. These will be discussed throughout the report.

Which decision-makers and relevant political figures support the initiative in Israel and the oPt?

Key Findings

- Enduring associations of the GI with its founding figures have been problematic. However, their loss of position presented an opportunity for renewal which was not seized.
- The GI has made efforts to diversify its political support in Israel but it is largely still supported by the same actors as in its early days; Meretz and Labor, who have been politically marginalised. The recent change in government in Israel has given the GI stronger political access than previously but the new coalition is likely to maintain the status quo.
- The political challenges in Israel and the oPt are very different, putting in question the dual model.
- No Palestinian politicians openly support the GI, although unofficial support from Fatah leadership is reported.

¹⁰ Reiter, Yitzhak. ‘Religion as a Barrier to Compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’. *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. 2010.
https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=4cb0072a-4282-bf4f-a40d-1e2186ac72af&groupId=252038

- The GI cannot be said to be a 'political initiative' in the same way as in 2003, not having been able to renew its political support.

GI Founders' Loss of Relevance

The GI's enduring association with its leading figures; Yossi Beilin on the Israeli side and Yasser Abed Rabbo on the Palestinian side, has added to the reputation of GI as being an echo of the past, linked to the Oslo period and some of its key personalities. Although the involvement of these high-level politicians was important in the early stages of the initiative, in ensuring its legitimacy and contacts, they have both since become marginalised within their respective societies. Beilin had already left politics during the previous evaluation period, although he remained a well-known figure of the left. Abed Rabbo was diminished as a political figure in the previous evaluation period but he has now been completely removed from the Palestinian political scene after being dismissed by President Abbas in 2015 and losing his position on the PLO's (Palestine Liberation Organization) Executive Committee in 2018.

This had significant operational consequences for the PPC; Abbas ordered the closure of PPC's activities in a Presidential decree soon after. It became clear at this point that the PPC would need to reflect on what this meant for the initiative, and how they would maintain or reboot their positioning. FDFA interviewees report that this was discussed at the time with the PPC. However, the initiative was not willing or not able to renew their political leadership. A change of direction in terms of approach, strategy and messaging was also not put in place despite this watershed moment for the organisation. The opportunity to renew political positioning with the diminishing political clout of the GI's founders was not seized (or possible) and the GI on both sides has not been able to regain support and endorsement from the higher echelons of current political constellations.

Political Support in Israel

The recent fall of Netanyahu's coalition after twelve years and the forming of a new government in June 2021 which combines left-wing, centrist and right-wing forces, has brought back some of the political access the GI enjoyed in its early years. Heskem now counts two current Ministers of the inner cabinet as GI Steering Committee members: Omer Bar Lev (Labor), Minister of Public Security, and Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz), Minister of Health. Merav Michaeli (Labor), current Minister of Transport and Road Safety, is not officially a Steering Committee member but has participated in regular meetings and consultations. Alon Schuster (Kahol Lavan), current Deputy Minister of Defense, participated in and hosted GI events as head of a regional council in recent years. His predecessor Micheal Biton (Kahol Lavan), who served as Minister of Strategic Affairs in the Ministry of Defense under Netanyahu, also hosted GI activities when mayor of Yeruham.

Participants of GI activities, according to information Heskem has provided, have included forty current Members of Knesset (MK), Ministers or Deputy Ministers. Of these, Heskem suggests that thirty one are supporters of the GI: 8 from Meretz, 7 from Labor, 5 from Yesh Atid, 4 from Kahol Lavan, 3 from Shas, 1 from Likud, 1 from New Hope and 1 from the Joint List. This evaluation has not been able to independently verify the level of support of each of these political figures.

However, even if we take these self-reported numbers, this provides an interesting picture of the political support for the GI in Israel. Nearly half of these supportive politicians (15 of 31) are from traditional two-state solution supporters on the left and centre-left; Meretz and Labor. Another thirty percent come from centrist parties who have previously said they support a two-state solution; Yesh Atid and Kahol Lavan. This demonstrates that (self-reported) support for the GI remains mainly in the realm of left, centre-left and centre politicians with pro two-state vision policies.

The most explicit support has been from Meretz who has endorsed the GI model as the vision for their two-state aspirations. However, both Meretz and Labor have been historically pro-peace and supporters of the two-state solution; part of the “convinced” group. Both parties have also been sidelined over the evaluation period and currently hold only 6 and 7 seats respectively in the current Knesset, compared to 30 for Likud and 17 for Yesh Atid. Although both increased their seats from 3 in the past Knesset, and are now part of the Coalition government rather than in opposition, they remain fairly marginal political voices. Yesh Atid and Kahol Lavan’s level of active support for the two-state solution is also considered to be ambiguous.

In this evaluation period, Heskem has managed, to some extent, to penetrate the far-right and ultra-Orthodox party Shas; Israel’s third largest party in the Knesset (now in opposition). Several party members have previously expressed support for the GI, although the issue is not a priority for the party and Shas does not have an official policy on the conflict.¹¹ The GI counts only one supporter among the biggest party in the Knesset, Likud, and none within right-wing parties Yamina, United Torah Judaism, Religious Zionism or Yisrael Beiteinu, which have a combined thirty six seats currently. While the GI has made efforts to diversify its political support in Israel, it is largely still endorsed by the same actors (Meretz and Labor) and constellations (left, centre-left) as in the early phases of the initiative.

It should be noted that the current, unusual government in Israel was formed around the desire to bring down Netanyahu, and that the pro-settler right has a veto power in government. In fact, its Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, was the head of the Yesha Council, and in the past put forward plans to annex Area C in order to prevent a two-state solution from ever existing, also rejecting the unbalanced Trump Plan.¹² The new government was formed around an agreement between all coalition partners to avoid changing the status quo (“no annexation, no Palestinian state” principle).¹³ All this makes the participation of pro-GI politicians in the government less promising than it might seem, at least from a conflict-resolution perspective. Instability in the Israeli political system (evidenced by four elections in two years) also means any left-wing gains are not necessarily secured for an extended period.

Perhaps the fact that the GI did not update its messaging during the period undermined its ability to attract more diversified political support. However, an updated message that challenged the status quo might actually have diminished political support for the GI, while assisting its impact on the ground, as is the case for the human rights organisations. The problem is not that the GI was not able to court the Israeli right when they came to power, but that it didn’t challenge the rise of the right. In other words, the access-based model of the GI failed because the system moved to the right and the GI seems to have made a choice between giving up its limited access or giving up its voice.

Political Support in Palestine

The situation in Palestine is different to Israel in that the PPC is operating in a non-democratic space in which there is a vacuum of strategic vision and leadership.¹⁴ The leadership, or leaderships, in place also have much more limited agency to affect change in terms of the status quo and the relationship with Israel. As described previously, Israel currently holds almost all of the bargaining

¹¹ Eldar, Akiva. ‘New Knesset supports two-state solution’. *Al-Monitor*. 2015.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/05/israel-new-government-two-state-solution-knesset-opposition.html>

¹² Azulay, Moran. ‘Israel should annex 60% of Area C’. *Ynetnews.com*. 2012.

<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4193978,00.html> & Sharon, Jeremy. ‘Bennett rejects Trump plan for Palestinian state, demands annexation now’. *The Jerusalem Post*. 2020.

<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/bennett-israelis-history-is-knocking-at-the-door-615717>

¹³ Mitvim Institute. ‘Israel’s New Government; Initial Commentary by Experts at the Mitvim Institute’. *Mitvim Institute*. 2021.

<https://mitvim.org.il/en/publication/israels-new-government-initial-commentary-by-experts-at-the-mitvim-institute/>

¹⁴ Rahman, Omar H.. ‘The real threat to Palestine is a crisis of leadership’. *Brookings Institution*. 2020.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/13/the-real-threat-to-palestine-is-a-crisis-of-leadership/>

chips and decision-making power. This means the challenges for the PPC are different to those of Heskem; a fact which raises questions regarding the feasibility or effectiveness of the entire dual model since they employ a joint overall approach, strategy and messaging.

In Israel, the focus has been on building political support within the vibrant political ecosystem in order to influence policy at the highest levels. In Palestine, the challenge is that leadership is weakened, both internally and externally. Externally, President Abbas is accused of not being a legitimate representative of the Palestinians given that the Gaza Strip is under the control of Hamas, with whom Fatah has not been able or willing to reconcile.

Internally, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is held in contempt by many Palestinians who see it as a collaborating entity which implements elements of the occupation. Although both Fatah and Hamas still have loyal constituencies, including among youth (usually linked to patronage systems), Fatah is increasingly disliked in the West Bank for what is seen as its years of collaboration, ineffective leadership and corruption. The internal fracturing of Fatah has only served to weaken the faction further and observers point to an escalation in authoritarianism which is eroding remaining trust. Although support for Hamas in Gaza has also been weakened due to the tremendous toll repeated rounds of violence and the blockade have taken on Gazan society, Hamas is said to have emerged with more standing among Palestinians after the violence of May 2021.¹⁵ Many political movements, especially but not only among younger generations, are rejecting established movements and leaders and anything associated with the Oslo agreements.¹⁶

The expulsion of Abed Rabbo means that the initiative is not now publicly endorsed or carried by another political personality of similar standing. The PPC has access to leadership but since the PLO is already broadly supportive of the GI's aims in terms of the two-state solution, the PPC would need to bring something radically new to the table in order to engage meaningfully with these decision-makers.

"Israel is more active than us with their officials. Here we're not because of the difficulty between the leadership and Abed Rabbo. He is not in good relations with them and it is not helpful. It's not difficult for me to meet Abu Mazen but we need some new ideas to bring to him."

(Interview with a Palestinian politician and GI member)

Several expert analysts interviewed for this evaluation suggest that the leadership both in the West Bank and Gaza would be closer, unofficially, to the position of the GA now than they were in 2003. Fatah leadership figures, including members of the Fatah Central Committee and PLO Executive Committee are also said by the PPC to be supporters. However, the fact that this evaluation is not able to publish their names demonstrates the lack of acceptance of the GI in the oPt. PPC operates under a different name in the Gaza Strip to avoid association with the GI and is now reportedly tolerated but not accepted by Hamas after an attempted closure of their activities earlier in the decade. The GI does not have any political support within Hamas. The GI is also said to have little support among newer generations of active political actors, who are focused on equal and human rights and opposing the occupation, and who are also sidelined by a leadership increasingly turned in on itself.

¹⁵ Witte, Griff & Sufian Taha. 'Palestinian support for Hamas surges after its confrontation with Israel'. The Washington Post. 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/hamas-israel-west-bank-abbas/2021/06/03/cf19f2cc-c275-11eb-89a4-b7ae22aa193e_story.html

¹⁶ Anabtawi, Samer & Nathan J. Brown. 'Palestine's Emerging National Movement: "Questions On My Mind"'. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/84717>

“Everyone knows them but I don't think the Geneva Initiative had an impact on leadership here, none from my (younger) generation. It is basically reserved for former officials, people in their 60s... Don't get me wrong, if Israel offered the Geneva Initiative tomorrow, I would take it. But what I don't understand is the Geneva Initiative not realising we are moving much faster than this...the conversation is not about the two-state solution now, it is about apartheid, equal rights, human rights. They know about it, but then what I see from them is an email to talk about dialogue.”

(Interview with a PLO stakeholder in the Negotiations Support Unit)

“Geneva is very one-sided. It's an Israeli initiative with Palestinian accoutrements. Look at their monthly newsletter, I've never heard of the Palestinian participants. In a recent feature on the meeting of the GI Palestinian group, they had blurred faces in the photo: tells you everything you need to know, their embarrassment to be affiliated with such a thing.”

(Interview with an international analyst in Jerusalem)

The vocal endorsement of establishment leaders may not in any case be desirable for the GI considering the leadership's poor reputation amongst many Palestinians. Additionally, the leadership's position is so weakened that they would reportedly not be able to build support for the type of concessions which would likely need to be made for a deal along the lines of the GI to be made. The challenge on the Palestinian side is therefore less about convincing leadership about the validity of GI proposals and more about a lack of real leadership with a strategic vision and the ability of leadership to sell these proposals to the public. It is also that negotiations within the current political dynamic are seen as unlikely to bring about a viable Palestinian state or anything resembling the GI.

Still a 'Political Initiative'?

Essentially, due to the loss of political position of the main architects of the GI over time, and the GI's inability to renew their political positioning, the organisations have become two collaborating local NGOs (albeit with excellent international connections), who have the usual level of leverage and limitations associated with such organisations. Other than some very well-connected active advocates and members on the Israeli side, who are most usually former MKs or Ministers rather than those currently in office (although this has improved somewhat very recently), and some supporters among the old guard of the political sphere in Palestine, the GI does not have the same political clout which it held at the beginning, noting that this was already undermined even in 2003.

How is the GI perceived by other civil society actors in Israel and the oPt?

Key Findings

- The GI in Israel has a very good reputation among the peace camp and is seen as a cornerstone of this group. Outside of these networks, the GI is little known and not seen as politically relevant.
- The reputation of the GI among civil society actors in the oPt is poor. PPC is perceived as an organisation which normalises relations with Israel, pitting it against the CSO consensus on anti-normalisation.
- In Gaza especially, PPC is not perceived as a relevant actor.

CSO Perceptions in Israel

Feedback on the relevance of Heskem from a range of stakeholders - partners, CSOs, other donors and some Israeli analysts - has generally been very positive. While occasionally accused of being part of the “peace industry”, the GI in Israel was mostly seen as being relevant to the context by other CSOs, and even said to be fairly crucial to the wider civil society landscape there.

Data from interviews was confirmed by the survey of CSOs, in which 55.6% of organisations based in Israel said the GI had a “very good” reputation and 33.3% said their reputation was “good”. 11.1% of Israeli respondents (1 CSO) rated the reputation of the GI as “poor” but responded otherwise positively to survey questions.¹⁷ There was no correlation between being a supporter/ally or previous partner of the GI and a positive assessment of its reputation; even those who said they didn’t support the initiative thought it had a “good” or “very good” reputation in Israel.

The peace camp in Israel has increasingly been pushed out as part of a drift to the political right in which left-wing groups are accused of being irresponsible on security issues and untrustworthy. There have also been concerted and coordinated actions designed to weaken and delegitimise left-wing CSOs, their supporters and their donors.¹⁸ At the same time, right-wing CSOs have flourished in the evaluation period and receive significant funding.¹⁹

Within this context, several actors of the peace camp in Israel consider the GI to be a cornerstone of the ecosystem, who is trusted and has clear principles which it has maintained over time. Several said that the GI occupies a unique place within Israeli civil society in terms of their ability to access many different types of stakeholders (political actors, journalists, members of the Russian-speaking community, former army generals, etc) and the legitimacy they have based on the level of expertise of their senior experts and advisors. The GI was considered by several actors to have ‘institutionalised’ the two-state solution by being known as the go-to resource for knowledge on the topic in Israel. There was a good level of consensus that Heskem have managed to position themselves as a centre-left organisation, as opposed to the reputation many peace-oriented organisations have in Israel of being on the extreme left (although their ability to translate access to support and influence is considered to be weak, discussed later).

“The Geneva Initiative is a cornerstone of the peace camp. They single-handedly preserve the two-state solution on the left wing. They are essentially the Ministry of the Two-State Solution.”
(Interview with a United Nations Stakeholder in Israel)

The fact that Heskem works with PPC as its sister organisation is also seen as a significant added value for their relevance considering that contact between the two people’s has been made more difficult over time and few Israeli organisations have such easy access to Palestinian contacts and viewpoints. While the approach of working with Palestinians is appreciated in Israel, the opposite is largely true in Palestine, discussed below.

“Reliability, professionalism, an extensive network of contacts, experience and advancing a clear agenda. The Geneva Initiative is considered a trusted entity that can work collaboratively, advance a clear agenda and assist other organizations in resolving the two-state solution.”
(Israeli CSO survey response, translated from Hebrew)

“I feel free to do what I’m doing because they do the bread and butter work, because they exist. My focus is all the time inspiring people to do ‘out of the box’ work, but to do that you need a box. Geneva is the box, that is their reputation.”
(Interview with the Director of an Israeli CSO)

¹⁷ 66.7% Israeli respondents defined themselves as supporters/allies or partners of the GI

¹⁸ Katz, Hagai & Benjamin Gidron. ‘Encroachment and Reaction of Civil Society in Non-Liberal Democracies: The Case of Israel and the New Israel Fund’. *De Gruyter*. 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2020-0043>

¹⁹ Slyomovics, Nettanel. ‘The U.S. Billionaires Secretly Funding the Right-Wing Effort to Reshape Israel’. *Haaretz*. 2021.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium.HIGHLIGHT.MAGAZINE-the-u-s-billionaires-secretly-funding-the-right-wing-effort-to-reshape-israel-1.9611994>

However, many of these actors are in GI's networks and/or operate within left wing circles of society, meaning they have an interest in maintaining the weakened peace camp. They were also comparing against general peace camp levels of access to political players; very limited on the whole. Civil society actors or activists outside of these networks often did not know the GI was still in operation or have any knowledge of their activities, despite being well-informed players. To some extent, this is reflective of the GI's approach not to invest in self-promotion. It also points to the fact that, despite being generally well-respected by those who know and work with Heskem, the initiative is not seen as having widespread influence and impact outside of the traditional peace camp in Israel.

*"A body that provides reliable but irrelevant information to policy makers."
(Israeli CSO survey response, translated from Hebrew)*

*"They went from zero to below zero in terms of relevance. They are not connected to any influential players in both arenas. You must be supported directly by key players. GI went from 'players with no influence' to 'non-players'. You need one of two alternatives; either associate yourself with powerful players or create a fuss in the media. They do neither."
(Interview with an Israeli analyst and CSO actor)*

Several CSO respondents interviewed thought the GI in Israel was irrelevant because they were not connected to influential political players and because the message was no longer relevant to most Israelis as interest in peace and the Palestinians has faded in favour of other domestic concerns. Feedback from CSO stakeholders also confirmed that the GI was focused on providing information to various stakeholders, an approach which is critiqued elsewhere in this report.

CSO Perceptions in Palestine

The feedback received on the GI from Palestinian actors is much less positive than in Israel. Donors and international actors tend to see PPC as being more relevant than CSOs, governmental actors or political analysts. This perception was seen in data collected from interviews and the survey. For the oPt overall, 18.2% of CSOs surveyed thought the GI had a "very good" reputation and 36.4% rated the GI's reputation as "good". 27.3% of respondents thought the GI had a "neutral" reputation and 18.2% rated it "poor", demonstrating less positive results than in Israel. Compared to results from Israeli-based CSOs, there was increased correlation between supporters or partners of the PPC having a more positive view of the organisation's reputation than non-supporters.

There was also a difference in opinion between survey respondents from the West Bank and Gaza. Most (62.5%) West Bank-based respondents thought the GI's reputation was "very good" (25%) or "good" (37.5%). The remaining respondents rated GI's reputation as "neutral" (37.5%). However, of 3 survey respondents from Gaza, two (66.7%) suggested the reputation of GI was "poor" and one respondent (33.3%) said it was "good", showing a much less positive, although still mixed, impression.

Interviews reveal the reputation of the PPC among other CSOs is severely undermined by their being widely perceived as an organisation which normalises relations with Israelis by engaging in dialogue and other joint activities. The GI's historical legacy of being seen as having given too much away on the refugees issue is also a serious problem. There has been renewed consensus among Palestinian CSOs on the need to oppose normalisation since around 2007, meaning the PPC approach runs counter to the the majority of their peers.²⁰

²⁰ Hawari, Yara. 'The Revival of People-to-People Projects: Relinquishing Israeli Accountability'. *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*. 2021.

<https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/the-revival-of-people-to-people-projects-relinquishing-israeli-accountability/>

“My views on the GI are very negative. I made phone calls to leaders of syndicates, unions and the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) National Committee before this interview to make sure we agreed and I can speak as a representative of wider Palestinian civil society. The PPC is deeply involved in normalising the oppression of the Palestinian people and the GI ignores basic Palestinian rights under international law; the right of return is recognised internationally. Settlements are illegal but the GI normalises this and accepts some of their existence. It is a continuation of the Oslo Accords, which most of us have rejected. Joint activities need to be based on co-resistance rather than co-existence. The definition of normalisation applies verbatim to PPC and the GI. Most of civil society has a very critical view on them..”

(Interview with a CSO actor - Gaza)

Within this context, PPC finds itself isolated. In Gaza, they were not considered to be relevant and active stakeholders of the ecosystem of CSOs considering the challenges of their operations there and their lack of networks and influence.

While the GI does not consider itself to be a normalising organisation as they conduct dialogue on political topics and aim to work with political changemakers, the level of influence of project participants renders this debatable. This assessment also goes against that of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) and the wider CSO community. The GI certainly can not be said to engage widely in co-resistance activities, a key part of the PACBI guidelines for engaging with Israelis. Anti-normalisation has been an operational impediment for the GI, making joint activities more complicated, and so the GI has looked for ways around the movement in order to continue activities. Although the PPC believes that continuing dialogue is crucial, there has not been a deeper reflection on what it means for the GI to be running counter to the prevailing discourse and majority of civil society in Palestine, or on how to more effectively promote the GI ideas within this environment. The PPC have adapted in terms of how they run joint activities, but the activities themselves and overall approach have not changed.

The continuing and expanding occupation, blockade of Gaza, lack of political leadership, political and physical fracturation and the failure of peace talks have led to widespread despair across the oPt and a focus on the seemingly more pressing issue of how to deal with the occupation and what many Palestinians consider to be apartheid conditions day-to-day, rather than final status negotiations and permanent agreements, which feel unrealistic and unachievable for many. A focus on dialogue and reaching permanent solutions has sometimes made the GI seem disconnected from the everyday reality on the ground. Several respondents also wondered why the GI was not more vocal in its condemnation of the negative impacts of the occupation on Palestinians and the feasibility of the two-state solution, as well as of the treatment of Palestinian citizens of Israel and those living in East Jerusalem. Silence on these issues has not helped build GI's legitimacy in Palestine.

“They (PPC) are not representative of Palestinian civil society.”

(Interview with a senior staff member of a Palestinian CSO - West Bank)

“The GI doesn't have a good reputation in Palestine. Its partly anti-normalisation...not only seen as a bunch of normalisers getting together, but they have minimised Palestinian demands. If you mention the Geneva Initiative to political groups, words like ‘colonisation’, ‘betrayal’, ‘dismissal’, ‘surrender’ come up. In terms of perception, not a good reputation. Not only with BDS but also PLO parties.”

(Interview with a Palestinian analyst and CSO actor)

There were some marginal voices among CSOs who appreciated that PPC kept hope about the two-state solution and a resolution alive, and who felt PPC were courageous in speaking up for ideas

which went against the mainstream. This viewpoint was a small minority, however, and not seen as representative of the perception held by wider Palestinian civil society.

To what extent does the initiative address the religious-political dimension of the conflict?

Key Findings

- Religious actors have grown in power and represent key “spoiler” groups.
- Religious actors were not included in the original Accord and have been targeted since only to a very limited extent.
- The GI’s liberal, secular worldview and networks means it is probably not the right actor to work extensively with religious constituencies.

Particularly on the Israeli side, religiosity has been growing, along with religion’s influence on political discourse, and a rejection of liberal ideals including international law and human rights is more and more mainstream. On the Palestinian side, as in the rest of the Arab world, society is actually becoming (moderately) more secular overall.²¹ However, the political discourse on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is “infused with religious symbols and values that incorporate the sanctity of the land, the religious commandment to control and settle it, the holy sites, and the war, terrorism, and sacrifice undertaken for the sake of these religious ideals”.²²

The lack of inclusion of the views of religiously motivated political actors has contributed to the failure of peace processes as these constituencies have gained power.²³ While many argue that when the conflict is framed as a religious conflict that transcends the two nationalist communities, it makes the conflict essentially insoluble, others argue for a more nuanced understanding of the role religion plays in the world views of “spoiler” groups. Issues such as how to deal with Jerusalem have a religious element (arguably weaponised more recently) which cannot be entirely avoided by secular peace processes.²⁴

“The liberal mentality leading both societies, liberal solutions...that’s over. We, as liberals, are a minority on both sides, we must be more inclusive to reality, bring those that are more moderate to compromises that are acceptable and then think about solutions. You need enough inclusivity to get answers. The reality today is all about religious elements. You cannot ignore it. Trump addressed that, but biasedly to Israelis. You need to bring enemies of peace into peace talks, they control the process. Religious people don't believe in the partition of the land.”

(Palestinian analyst and politician)

“The first sentence of the Geneva Accords is about ending all claims. This is Western thinking. A solution for 40 years, 20 years maybe, ok, but we can’t decide for our great grandchildren. Who is Abbas to give up Jerusalem? No Israeli Prime Minister can give up

²¹ BBC. ‘The Arab World in Seven Charts: Are Arabs Turning Their Backs on Religion?’. *BBC News*. 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48703377>

²² Reiter, Yitzhak. ‘Religion as a Barrier to Compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’. *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. 2010.

https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=4cb0072a-4282-bf4f-a40d-1e2186ac72af&groupId=252038

²³ Mason, Simon J.A. ‘Local Mediation with Religious Actors in Israel-Palestine’. *CSS Analyses in Security Policy, ETH Zürich*. 2021. <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse281-EN.pdf>

²⁴ Wallach, Yair. ‘The Violence That Began at Jerusalem’s Ancient Holy Sites Is Driven by a Distinctly Modern Zeal’. *The Guardian*. 2021.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/13/violence-jerusalem-holy-sites-israeli-right-temple-mount>

*Tempe Mount, they don't have the right....Israelis prefer to be without peace than be without Temple Mount.”
(Israeli analyst, politician and religious leader)*

The GI has maintained its secular approach during the evaluation period, in line with its core identity, although Heskem has made attempts to target religious-political actors in their programming. The approach of PPC has been rather to invite all actors to their activities, including “Islamists”, and to address religion’s role as a topic in dialogue. PPC members were wary of the idea of including more of a focus on the religious-political dimension. Heskem members generally saw the need but thought it was important not to overstate the religious element and to prioritise working with those who could be convinced. Part of the problem is that GI offers an already negotiated solution that many religiously motivated political actors wouldn’t necessarily agree to. Their inclusion would need to be in terms of negotiating compromises and solutions rather than convincing them of the existing solutions, which would require an overhaul of GI approaches and methodologies. No organisation can be all things to all people, and perhaps the GI with their liberal worldview, approach and identity is not best placed to work with religious constituencies, which other actors do.

Conclusions

The GI was launched in response to the failure of official peace talks, in an attempt to show that peace was possible through negotiations and a partner for peace existed. Its relevance even in 2003 was limited and the Accord was never formally adopted. However, since then the context has shifted considerably and the situation is considered by many analysts to be that of a “one state condition” in which the status quo is preferred and maintained by Israel. The challenge in this era is not knowledge but political will and incentives - something the GI model hasn’t been effective in bringing about. Based on the Oslo period final status negotiations paradigm, the ToC of the GI now seems out of touch to many stakeholders. Even as several key assumptions have been challenged, the GI has not reviewed its overall model and approaches, and its capacity for strategic innovation has been limited. The original blueprint is also no longer considered implementable or realistic, mostly due to a lack of political will, but also due to ever-increasing facts on the ground which undermine its physical feasibility. GI does not tackle these issues head-on. The GI blueprint and GI activities also do not address the religious-political element of the conflict to a great extent, having come from a secular peacemaking tradition.

The GI has no official political support in Palestine, although unofficial positions have reportedly moved closer to that of the GI over time. PPC has no political relevance in Gaza and is poorly perceived by civil society actors across the occupied territories as a normalising organisation and as presenting a framework which is no longer fit for needs. Very recent changes in government mean the GI in Israel has recently gained higher level political access but, despite efforts, its support base remains similar to its early days; principally on the left and centre-left. The new coalition is also based on a compromise meaning the status quo is not likely to be changed by these actors in favour of the resolution of the conflict. Heskem has an excellent reputation within the peace camp of CSOs, but little echo outside of this. GI’s relevance to the political context in Israel is therefore rated to be poor overall.

B. Relevance (Swiss Foreign Policy in the Near East)

To what extent has the GI been relevant to Switzerland’s objectives in the Near East during the evaluation period?

Key Findings

- The GI has been highly aligned with Swiss objectives in the region over the period.
- Overall relevance/contribution to the achievement of Swiss objectives has been undermined by a lack of impact.

FDFA's support of the GI has been highly aligned with Switzerland's stated objectives in the Near East during the evaluation period, in that the initiative aligns with Swiss objectives by aiming to promote the ideas of negotiated peace and the two-state solution in line with international law, which have consistently been at the core of Swiss policy in the region. Support for the GI also sits easily within the first of four regional priorities laid out in the recently published Middle East and North Africa (MENA) strategy for 2021-2024: peace, security and human rights.²⁵ The strategy confirms that Switzerland "supports all efforts to bring about a fair and peaceful solution to the conflict in accordance with international law",²⁶ reaffirmed in the detailed explanations released just after the MENA strategy.²⁷ Switzerland has also called on all actors to engage in dialogue, which chimes with the aims of the GI.²⁸

The thematic priority for the Near East of promoting the work of DwP has provided an especially strong area of coherence between the GI and Swiss foreign policy. The GI's non-paper on reconciliation was based on the principles of the 'Conceptual Framework on Dealing with the Past' developed by swisspeace and the FDFA: the right to know, the right to justice, the right to reparation and the guarantee of non-recurrence.²⁹

However, the contribution of the GI to the achievement of Switzerland's objectives in the Near East has been undermined by the limited impact created by the initiative, discussed later in this report.

To what extent did the GI's activities and network inform Switzerland's diplomatic engagement in the region during the evaluation period?

Key Findings

- The GI's activities and network have only informed Switzerland's diplomatic engagement in the region to a very limited extent over the evaluation period.

Interviews with multiple FDFA stakeholders, past and present, revealed that the GI's activities and network have only informed Switzerland's diplomatic engagement in the region to a very limited degree over the evaluation period. Those based currently or previously in the region report that they have very occasionally used the GI to get in touch with other stakeholders or for analysis of certain situations. Where solicited, feedback on this type of support has been good. Both PPC director Nidal Foqaha and Heskem director Gadi Baltiansky were described unanimously as skilled political analysts. Some respondents thought that, on reflection, they could perhaps have better leveraged the partnership with the GI but that it was not high on their radar because they were in contact with the GI less than with other partners or interlocutors, due in part to GI being less proactive in making contact or coming with new suggestions. It was also clear that the Swiss diplomatic corps in the

²⁵ FDFA. 'MENA Strategy 2021-2024'. *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*. 2020.

https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/Strategie_MENA_201014_EN.pdf

²⁶ Ibid, p.31

²⁷ FDFA. 'Conflit Au Proche-Orient : Explications Détaillées de La Position de La Suisse (Octobre 2020)'. *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*. 2020.

https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/fr/documents/aussenpolitik/20201014_naher_osten_haltung_schweiz_FR.pdf

²⁸ FDFA. 'MENA Strategy 2021-2024'. *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*. 2020, p.3

²⁹ Swisspeace. 'A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past'. *Swisspeace*. 2016.

<https://www.swisspeace.ch/assets/publications/downloads/Essentials/7bdf926517/A-Conceptual-Framework-for-Dealing-with-the-Past-Essential-16-swisspeace.pdf>

region did not feel that they depended on the GI for contacts or access to high-level stakeholders. This underlines that the GI has had limited relevance for Swiss diplomatic stakeholders.

In reality, the situation seems to have worked in the opposite direction, with Switzerland providing diplomatic support to the PPC when it has faced problems with leadership in the West Bank and Gaza. The FDFA have also provided introductions to the diplomatic missions of other countries and helped to organise events and briefings, for example for the dissemination of the DwP work or in facilitating FDFA access to the US negotiating team during the Kerry talks.

To what extent is the GI relevant to Switzerland’s diplomatic engagement today? Does the GI match Switzerland’s objective to promote innovation in this context?

Key Findings

- The GI is not relevant to Switzerland’s objective to promote innovation in terms of science and technology diplomacy in the region, to be expected considering their mandate.
- More importantly, the GI is also not very relevant to more innovative forms of peacemaking strategies the FDFA has put in place.
- The GI’s strategic priorities as outlined to this evaluation are not in line with the approach the FDFA wishes to take going forward.

Innovation in the MENA Strategy

The Swiss priorities outlined for Israel in the 2021-2024 MENA strategy are peace, security and human rights, economic affairs, science and finance, digitalisation and new technologies and, to a lesser extent, sustainable development. The strategy in terms of innovation in foreign policy towards Israel is linked to scientific cooperation in various areas such as fintech, cybertech, medtech, tech4good, climate, etc. In the oPt, innovation is seen in terms of cooperation with the private sector to create jobs and income-generating opportunities for young people, particularly in the field of new technologies.³⁰

Although the GI is strongly coherent with the peace objectives of Switzerland in the region, it is much less relevant to Switzerland’s objective to promote innovation in terms of science and technology diplomacy and job creation. This is to be expected, probably other initiatives funded by the FDFA under their peace, security and human rights portfolio are not expected to also fulfil all other objectives.

Relevance Today

The Swiss approach to peacebuilding in the region has sought to increase innovation in terms of approach and methodology. Interviews suggest that while finding lasting solutions to the conflict remains a priority, a focus on shorter term, more localised agreements which address conflict flashpoints and help to ensure peaceful co-existence without the signing of permanent solutions are also seen as a necessity. These initiatives also aim to avoid the degradation in the prospects for longer term peace and to be more inclusive of non-moderates. The objectives of these efforts are said to be more loosely formulated, allowing for temporary compromises and de-escalation.

While the majority of respondents did not see FDFA support for the GI within today’s approach as problematic or counterproductive, the GI’s relevance to this new focus is fairly limited considering their identity remains tied to the “ready-made” final status solutions it proposes.

³⁰ FDFA. 'MENA Strategy 2021-2024'. *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*. 2020.
https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/Strategie_MENA_201014_EN.pdf

The current head of the FDFA, Ignazio Cassis, has made it clear that economic development and innovation are key for Switzerland in the region and that grand political maneuvering would no longer be a priority.³¹ He commented directly on the GI on a recent visit to Israel and the oPt, saying "[i]f we had had success with the Geneva initiative, we would not need to find another way. We have learned from the past: some initiatives are not successful, we have to find another path".³²

This is significant in that it paints the GI as having been unsuccessful and suggests that the Minister does not view the GI as representing a realistic path to peace. The GI was launched under former Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey but did not find the same levels of support under subsequent Ministers after her departure in 2011. Calmy-Rey suggested that she is no longer convinced of the feasibility of the GI plan in a recent interview, citing the fragmentation of the territory among other reasons.³³

Swiss support for the GI was attached to the shared assumption that genuine and effective peace talks would resume at some point. GI was therefore relevant to Swiss objectives while this seemed to be more of a realistic prospect. Under the Obama administration, and even to some extent under Trump's presidency, peace talks were a subject with (albeit limited) prospects. With the Biden administration's stated priorities for the conflict not including a peace process and focusing on humanitarian needs, reducing tension and improving lives, the FDFA is no longer willing to work on the assumption that peace talks are just around the corner.³⁴ The GI's strategic priorities for the next four years, outlined in Figure 5 above, with their focus on the Biden administration, are therefore less aligned with FDFA priorities for the same time period and point to a misalignment in the reading of the current situation by the two partners.

Conclusions

The relevance of the GI to Swiss foreign policy in the Near East is considered to have been fair since overall objectives have been strongly aligned throughout the period. However, current Swiss priorities in the region in terms of innovation are not served by the GI, whose activities and network have also been of limited relevance to Swiss diplomatic engagement.

C. Effectiveness

What concrete results did the GI achieve during the reporting period?

To what extent have the set objectives been achieved? What factors have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of GI's objectives?

Key Findings

- The weak results framework of this partnership and the limited M&E capacity of the organisations has hindered the assessment of results.
- Overall, the GI has struggled to reach its outcome objectives and to produce concrete results from a conflict transformation perspective.
- Education for peace programmes and awareness raising have produced no tangible

³¹ Felley, Eric. 'Ignazio Cassis Fâche Les Pro-Israéliens à Berne'. *Le Matin*. 2020.

<https://www.lematin.ch/story/quand-ignazio-cassis-fache-les-pro-israeliens-a-berne-434580178952>

³² RTS. 'Economie et Innovation, La Nouvelle Stratégie de La Suisse Au Proche-Orient'. *RTS*. 30 November 2020.

<https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/11788095-economie-et-innovation-la-nouvelle-strategie-de-la-suisse-au-procheorient.html>

³³ Zürcher, Fanny. 'Micheline Calmy-Rey: "Comment imaginer encore deux Etats qui vivent côte à côte au Proche-Orient?"'. *RTS*. 2021.

<https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/12202882-micheline-calmyrey-comment-imaginer-encore-deux-etats-qui-vivent-cote-a-cote-au-procheorient.html>

³⁴ U.S. Department of State. 'Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Press Availability'. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson. 2021.

<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-press-availability-5/>

results in terms of political and conflict transformation.

- International engagement has been successful in gaining access to international stakeholders but not in translating this into influence and political action.
- The TSC has not (yet) produced any perceptible results in terms of conflict resolution.
- Reconciliation activities by the PPC have been limited and not produced any concrete results.
- The DwP work has not been released; it cannot be said to have had an impact on either society.
- The Kerry negotiations were a test of concept, which did not achieve results. Some moments such as this which should have triggered critical self-reflection on key assumptions have passed without causing a strategic review of the operating model within the current geo-political context.
- There has been insufficient reflection on how activities have been feeding into wider goals, even when limited results have been achieved over the period.

A Weak Results Framework

A key challenge in evaluating the results of the FDFA's partnership with the GI is the weak results framework in place. The ToC which has been loosely articulated between the GI and the FDFA has been weak in that it is ambitious but vague, with a lack of clear and tested impact pathways.

This, combined with the weak monitoring framework, has undermined the ability of the GI and FDFA to track concrete progress towards objectives and results. The objectives agreed between the GI and the FDFA over the period have usually been broad and incredibly challenging to measure and evaluate, without more measurable and shorter-term outcome indicators. Objectives and indicators are, on the whole, not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) and what constitutes a success has usually not been clearly defined. Crucially, there has not been a sufficient feedback loop on how activities were feeding into overall goals.

While Heskem reporting has tried to include case studies and examples which illustrate outcomes over and above outputs, PPC reporting has tended to be very output based (although efforts in the latter part of the evaluation period were noted). Reporting is activity focused and has not been conducted against objectives, probably because these were not measurable, rendering it difficult to assess achievement. Additionally, broad statements are made in reports, especially PPC reporting, with few specifics and little evidence. It is challenging to get a real sense of GI activities and results from their reporting. Although this could partly be to do with reporting being on core funding grants, and so not tied to more specific objectives, the same criticisms are also true of reporting submitted for project grants. An unresolved issue between the FDFA and the GI seems to be to what extent the FDFA can ask the GI to be accountable to it on overall outcomes, when it is only funding a small (but important) fraction of these through core funding for day-to-day operations.

Although both Heskem and PPC carry out evaluations of their activities, for example through feedback forms and following up with participants, evidence from this is rarely included in reports to the FDFA. Systematic tracking of media coverage was also not available. The methodologies in place to follow up on the trajectory of project participants after activities, in order to measure to what extent they become agents of change, are inadequate. There has been a lack of consistent follow up based on indicators which can be tracked over time, and a lack of monitoring over the longer term to understand the sustainability of any changes. This has meant there has been little assessment of the wider contribution to objectives of activities such as workshops and seminars. While follow up appears to have been done informally by GI staff, a clear tracking system is not in place, posing a risk to institutional memory and meaning monitoring is not systematic. Longer-term tracking requires resources which often go beyond the project term (donors should also take this into account), but

follow up could have been included in project proposals or covered by larger sums of core funding received earlier in the decade.

Results and Achievement of Objectives

The activities and results of the GI during the evaluation period are evaluated using the reconstructed ToC as a guiding tool. Workstreams are assessed against their overall outcome objectives.

1. Finalising the Annexes and Updating the Accord

Outcome objective: The Geneva Accord annexes are finalised to propose detailed solutions to all final status issues.

The annexes to the Geneva Accord were completed at the beginning of the evaluation period, fulfilling the objective of this workstream. To what extent the Geneva blueprint remains realistic and implementable was discussed previously.

The work on the paper regarding the division of Jerusalem, “Jerusalem Reconsidered”, was concluded in March 2021. The paper attempts to deal with the evolving situation on the ground and the increasingly challenging prospect of finding a solution for the city.³⁵

The Jerusalem paper represents a move towards the idea of a Israeli-Palestinian confederation, which has been championed by Beilin since around 2015. The framing with this paper seems to have shifted towards a confederate model which would lay the ground for the eventual achievement of the two-state solution, rather than as a replacement for it. The confederate idea is not new or innovative in itself since it dates back to the 1970s, but the GI's move in this direction signals an attempt at innovation on the part of the two partners. However, critics suggest the paper is not convincing overall, and that the main change is the inclusion of Israeli settlements which have been established since the original Accord.

A key premise of the GI's work is that they have a proposal which is realistic and achievable. The inclusion of this piece on Jerusalem (although published as a commissioned piece rather than a GI product) suggests that there have been questions within the GI about the viability of the current blueprint and that even the GI is now not at ease with some of its original proposals. Updates to the Jerusalem blueprint should result in existential questions for the GI. Although an internal GI document on questions to be addressed by their leadership suggests the GI is in the nascent stages of considering a wider shift in strategy, the publishing of the Jerusalem paper should have been accompanied by a wider reconsideration of the GI model or a more fluid communication on what this means for the blueprint.

Revisions, if in line with the Jerusalem model, could mean the GI adapting to realities on the ground, without pushing back on them effectively. This could undermine GI's messaging on the feasibility of the two-state solution and result in a perception that ‘even’ the GI is giving up on certain parameters³⁶ For now, it seems that the Jerusalem paper and the move to a confederate approach has not yet resulted in a serious organisational rethinking process, or that if this process is in progress, conclusions on how to move forward have not been reached.

³⁵ Geneva Initiative. “*Jerusalem Reconsidered: Two Sovereign States, One Undivided Capital*”. Geneva Initiative. 2021.

³⁶ Hasson, Nir. ‘Even This Far-Reaching Peace Initiative Is No Longer Sure That Jerusalem Can Be Divided’. *Haaretz*. 2020.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-even-the-geneva-initiative-is-no-longer-sure-that-jerusalem-can-be-divided-1.8507321>

2. Education for Peace Programming

Outcome objectives: Trust is built between both societies, who are exposed to the narrative and ideas of the 'other side'.

Community leaders (inc. youth and women) are supported to become political activists and to promote the two-state solution and GI ideas.

It is clear from recent poll results, including from the GI itself, that trust has not been built between Israelis and Palestinians over the evaluation period. In a recent poll from Tel Aviv University, the Jewish public expressed very high levels of distrust towards the Palestinians in Gaza (85%) and the West Bank (84%).³⁷ Similar results were found in an October 2020 joint poll: 90% of Palestinians and 79% of Israeli Jews thought the other side was not trustworthy; a continuation of a long-standing trend.³⁸

The most recent GI poll of Israelis showed that of the respondents who opposed the two-state solution (44%), the average score for the reason being “the Palestinians can’t be trusted” was 4.5 (on a scale of 0 to 5, where 5 is ‘agree to a great extent’).³⁹ That level of trust is the most important predictor of support to the peace process among respondents from both sides was confirmed in a recent joint study into the question.⁴⁰ This would seem to support the assumption in the GI’s ToC that improving trust could help build support for a negotiated settlement. However, it was found that on the Palestinian side the most effective element in building trust would be changing the reality on the ground; not something the GI has been tackling head on. On the Israeli Jewish side, the study shows a major societal change is needed to change the state of mind that is supporting distrust, rather than just exposure to the narrative of the other.⁴¹

Although it was not within the scope of GI’s activities to single-handedly build trust and understanding between the two peoples, the dire situation on this front shows there have been no perceptible results of GI’s activities in this regard at the societal level. On an individual level, GI activities seem to have been important and enriching experiences for participants (at least on the Israeli side, the evidence is less convincing on the Palestinian side). Positively, the bilateral activities of the GI have also resulted in some longer lasting relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, even friendships. Some of these relationships have resulted in further collaborations in relevant areas, for example between journalists.

However, this is not considered relevant from a political and conflict transformation perspective. One of the main criticisms of P2P dialogue in this context is that even if they have contributed to transform people on both sides at the individual level and even resulted in friendships, this has never translated into a socio-political impact, for various reasons. First and foremost because often participants on both sides lack political relevance and influence, but also because they are usually reluctant to expose themselves in their respective communities by talking about this personal transformation – or they are not able to relay it to their respective community. Furthermore, some

³⁷ Keyser, Zachary. ‘Large gaps in trust between Israelis, Palestinians and Arab-Israelis’. *The Jerusalem Post*. 2021.

<https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/large-gaps-in-trust-between-israelis-palestinians-and-arab-israelis-671738>

³⁸ PCPSR. ‘The Palestine/Israel Pulse, a Joint Poll Summary Report’. *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*. 2020.

<https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/823>

³⁹ H.L. Education for Peace (Geneva Initiative). ‘Israeli Public Opinion Poll’. *Geneva Accord*. 2021.

<https://geneva-accord.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Israeli-Public-Opinion-Poll-May-2021-1.pdf>

⁴⁰ PCPSR. ‘Joint Palestinian-Israeli Surveys on Trust and the Peace Process: Combined Report’ (p. 5). *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*. 2021.

<http://pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Combined%20Report%20of%20Palestinian-Israeli%20Joint%20Polls.pdf>

⁴¹ Ibid

encounters lead to a repetition of maximalist positions, and actually may entrench the status quo.⁴² In the same vein, a recent report from the Hebrew University found that encounters which aim to bring people closer together do not significantly alter discriminatory views and behaviour. It also found that the measurement of the impact of these types of activities is almost always insufficient; something which is also the case in the GI approach.⁴³

Heskem has targeted early career political actors such as parliamentary assistants and mayors in a relevant strategy to try and influence these actors before they reach power. However, the results in terms of moving the context in a positive direction have again not been seen. One of the most significant examples of this is Michael Biton, who the GI began working with when he was mayor of the small town of Yeruham. He later became the Minister of Strategic Affairs in the Ministry of Defense and remained in touch with the GI. He has previously mentioned the GI, although he referenced it as an example of Israel being able to gain sovereignty over settlements which is not in the spirit the GI might have hoped for.⁴⁴ The GI also suggests that Biton helped to prevent *de jure* annexation under Netanyahu and that while he has done nothing positive for peace, he has helped to prevent deterioration in the situation. That this is a flagship example of GI impact speaks to the fact that the GI have been challenged in convincing relevant political actors to promote a solution along GI lines or the promotion of peace. There have been other examples in reporting of participants going on to organise other events or speak about the GI, but no analysis of the impact of these activities, and no longer term follow up.

The indicator which best suggests Heskem and PPC participants for leadership activities have not been sufficiently influential with relevant networks is that no perceptible results have been recorded due to these leaders' actions. Part of the issue in Palestine has been that participants have often not been keen to share their experiences with GI, or promote its ideas, due to a generally unfavourable environment, suggesting that the model of working with influencers has a serious flaw in its design.

Like P2P activities, while these activities may have resulted in some results at the individual or smaller community level, they have not had an observable wider societal impact. While noting that the time lag for results is mid- to long-term for these types of education programmes, some of these activities have been running for a decade and so some tangible impacts could be expected. The objective of supporting community leaders to become political activists and to promote the two-state solution and GI ideas cannot be considered to have been fulfilled to any extent which would then result in their having an impact on the wider political arena.

3. Local Advocacy and Awareness Raising

Outcome objectives: Support for the two-state solution is maintained and raised at local level.

GI recommendations influence decision-makers locally.

⁴² Maoz, Ifat. 'Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians'. *Journal of Peace Research*. 2011.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022343310389506>

⁴³ Porat, Roni. 'You Can't Train People to Be Less Racist, Israeli Researchers Find'. *Haaretz*. 2021.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-you-can-t-train-people-to-be-less-racist-israeli-researchers-find-1.10004349>

⁴⁴ Geneva Accord. 'Minister Michael Biton: "Sovereignty is part of a diplomatic process... just like in the Geneva Initiative"'. Geneva Accord. n.d.

<https://geneva-accord.org/media/minister-michael-biton-sovereignty-is-part-of-a-diplomatic-process-just-like-in-the-geneva-initiative/>

The objective of contributing to the maintenance and raising of support for the two-state solution in Israel and the oPt cannot be said to have been achieved considering the decline in its support in both societies over the evaluation period, discussed in a previous section.

Population-level interventions aimed at affecting public opinion were, however, not a main focus in the past decade, partly because the GI didn't receive much funding for these ends. This may also be because although both organisations work with social (and occasionally traditional) media, this isn't the GI's unique selling proposition (USP) and is done better by younger and more grassroots, activist organisations. Successful campaigns can also be run with very few resources; an example of this is the "#SaveSheikhJarrah" campaign which gained worldwide attention through social media.

Heskem ran some campaigns during this evaluation period while PPC focused very little on this, in line with recommendations from the 2009 evaluation. The Heskem campaign with the most reach involved three video clips being created and released around the March 2015 election campaign. The clips received some positive feedback and were viewed around 365,000 times, with 19,000 engagements (likes, shares, comments, etc) as well as garnering some positive attention in mainstream media and from some politicians. While positive, the figures mentioned are rather modest (and probably encompass to a large extent the "converted" when it comes to the two-state solution). It did create limited further media attention but the wider results regarding the impact on the attitude of viewers have not been measured.

The influence of GI recommendations on local decision-makers in this evaluation period is judged to be minimal. On the Israeli side, they have been challenged in converting any political access into behaviour change or policy influence. Perhaps the greatest influence has been seen with the Shas party, members of which have said they support the two-state solution as envisioned by the GI. While positive, this has not been transformed into a party policy or priority and no evidence suggests these actors have been seeking to advance the GI proposal, even if they might now be less inclined to veto it, should it ever be a real option. The actors we can imagine would be most likely to advocate for GI ideas, Steering Committee members and now Ministers Omer Bar Lev and Nitzan Horowitz, are both longtime members of the peace camp, limiting how much influence the GI can be said to have had in their positions. It also remains to be seen to what extent they will advocate for GI proposals in their new roles.

On the Palestinian side, the lack of new ideas to take to leadership, as well as all of the challenges described previously, mean the GI cannot be said to have had any notable influence in this period. PPC reports that the Jerusalem Reconsidered paper was well received by Palestinian leadership (in the West Bank), but this evaluation cannot verify this.

The TSI, funded by the EU and launched in 2018, provided a monthly analysis of developments and whether they create progress towards a two-state solution or represent a regression away from it. Until the project closed in mid-2021, the results were shared with local decision and policy makers as well as with international and diplomatic stakeholders, making up a mailing list of 17,000 people, with a good opening rate of 20%. The analysis provided each month is said to be of high quality and well-presented and was appreciated by several diplomatic stakeholders spoken with. The index assisted the GI in maintaining relationships with these actors and in directing their own activities. However, it is said to have less of an echo locally.

More importantly, the methodology of the index has been criticised by informed and knowledgeable experts, including some of those interviewed for this evaluation. The TSI is accused of inflating the feasibility of the two-state solution; the index has never dropped below five out of ten since its

launch (closer to achievement than impossibility), despite many extremely negative developments.⁴⁵ The rigid focus on the feasibility of the two-state solution, despite clear current impediments, contributes to a perception of the GI as failing to fully confront the reality of the current situation and undermines their credibility.

“The Two-State Index suggests the two-state solution is around the corner. The index grew by 2% because a new centre-left party emerged. It creates illusions. I see a need for a voice like the Geneva Initiative which is not negative, to maintain the idea of the two-state solution. There are too many negative voices, too much cynicism. But sometimes they get too delusional in my view, and people roll their eyes.”
(Interview with an international analyst)

4. International Engagement

Outcome objectives: International stakeholders are encouraged to promote the resumption of bilateral negotiations and the TSS vision.

GI recommendations influence decision-makers internationally.

The engagement of international actors has been a key pillar of the GI's work during the evaluation period and is an area in which they have excelled at maintaining contacts. They have become trusted interlocutors for many embassies and have good access to most of the major international players and multilateral organisations, many of whom have also funded the GI. Respondents to this evaluation from the international community have been some of the initiative's most enthusiastic supporters.

The initiative has maintained the contacts made during the Obama presidency and Kerry negotiations. This includes Hady Amr who was appointed as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Israeli and Palestinian Affairs under Biden. Amr recently met with the GI while in the region and has previously written to the organisations to say he is always interested in hearing their analysis and ideas. It is too early to say what sort of results this relationship could bring, but most analysts do not expect the Biden administration to engage in a peace process. In any case, the current intractability of the situation is not a problem of a lack of knowledge and analysis, and the GI has not so far proven itself best placed to come up with “out of the box” ideas.

The GI's focus on Russia, and especially China, appears to have been successful in positioning them as a resource. However, China is not a significant political power in this region and most commentators suggest they will not take a more active role in resolving the conflict any time soon.

While the GI have clearly been able to create and maintain good international relationships and have become a reference for questions on the context and two-state solution on the local diplomatic agenda, the wider results of this international advocacy are less clear; there has been no proactive promotion of the blueprint at Track One level, for example, and no successful reinvestment in finding solutions or providing the necessary carrots and sticks.

Again, this points to a problem in the GI model: a significant focus is put on access to international actors, who have so far been ineffective in brokering peace or creating the conditions which result in an end to the occupation. In other words, the GI is successful in serving as a knowledge hub regarding the two-state model, but lack of knowledge is not the challenge in advancing the

⁴⁵ Lustick, Ian S. 'Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality'. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2019. <https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/4306.html>

implementation of this model, or simply promoting change. In the GI model, too much focus is placed on international actors rather than local dynamics.

*“Our feeling was maybe that they should focus less on us, the internationals, and more on the local arena.”
(Interview with an EU stakeholder)*

Further, the countries and multilateral institutions with whom the GI has worked have all been committed to the two-state solution based on 1967 borders since before their interactions with the GI and have not officially wavered in this approach since. When this support did waver under Trump (although the term ‘two-state solution’ was still employed), the GI were not able to contribute to countering this.

The need to take a more regional approach has been a key theme of FDFA feedback to the GI over the evaluation period and increased outreach to the Arab states was also recommended by the 2009 evaluation.

*“The regional international dynamics are constantly playing out in government and NGO contexts. I’ve said it is important to include the Egyptians, the Jordanians... They said I am right but they were not able to draw the operational consequences of that.”
(Interview with an FDFA stakeholder)*

It is clear that the GI would have been challenged in conducting widespread advocacy work among their Arab neighbours during this period since the region has undergone massive change, with revolutionary movements rippling through the MENA region from the end of 2010. However, there appears to have been no clear strategy on the engagement of Arab states and actors, despite the FDFA reportedly having reiterated that this should be a priority many times over the evaluation period, especially as the situation has begun to improve more recently. This has represented a gap in the GI’s international engagement over the past decade.

*“I am engaged with the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the Saudis, the UAE. I do this personally, not as Geneva. I asked the Geneva Initiative how they wanted to use these contacts and they are not interested.”
(Interview with a Palestinian politician and GI member)*

5. Two-State Solution Coalition

Outcome objective: Efforts of peace oriented CSOs are consolidated towards maintaining the viability of the two-state solution.

The TSC was set up in 2018 with the objective of consolidating the efforts of peace-orientated CSOs who support the two-state solution, thereby promoting a negotiated settlement to the conflict more effectively in both societies. The Coalition includes NGOs based in the oPt and Israel, and is also planning on bringing onboard some international actors.

The logical framework for the TSC does not provide for the measurement of impact and includes “several overambitious results statements with indicators that are not adequate to measure them”.⁴⁶ This means that although outputs in terms of the set up of the coalition appear to have been achieved, the TSC is yet to show and measure how it has influenced policy actions in Israel, Palestine or the international community. The main result so far seems to be mutual support which

⁴⁶ EU ROM report on the Two-State Solution Coalition (shared by PPC)

goes beyond operational aspects and has resulted in organisations not feeling as “lonely in the battle”. The TSC has received some good feedback from members in terms of helping to build a network and share updates. However, even if positive, this cannot be considered a relevant outcome from a conflict transformation perspective, especially when considering the significant costs of this project.

The TSC was active in the anti-annexation movement in 2020, but the stakeholders spoken to for this evaluation, while appreciating cooperation efforts, report they would have been active irrespective of being a member, and were also active outside of the TSC. Additionally, the TSC membership largely represents organisations working within the echo chamber of the GI, several of whom the PPC and Heskem already had relationships and partnerships with. Several Palestinian civil society respondents to the evaluation and expert analysts were sceptical about the model of the TSC, seeing it as potentially part of the maintenance of the status quo and Oslo period frameworks which some international donors, including the EU, are accused of tying Palestinian CSOs to through politically conditioned funding.

Being a pilot and new project for GI, some lag in seeing results may be expected. However, an EU evaluation assessed that after more than two years of consolidation of the Coalition, it was yet to re-examine its organisational structure, ToC and what it can do as a whole, as well as what each member can bring to the Coalition.⁴⁷ This ties in with arguments made elsewhere in this report that the GI has not been sufficiently self-critical in assessing the effectiveness of its strategy, methodologies and approaches.

6. Reconciliation

Outcome objectives: Reconciliation work between Israelis and Palestinians demonstrates competing narratives can be reconciled.

Palestinian civil society in Gaza & WB (West Bank) is informed of the consequences of the intra-Palestinian split and take action to remedy it.

Reconciliation work between Israelis and Palestinians

The first overall objective of the DwP work, developing a joint Israeli-Palestinian annex on reconciliation, has been achieved with FDFA technical support. The annex goes beyond the technical dimension of an agreement and deals with emotionally fraught, differing narratives of the conflict. Despite the difficult nature of the content and major outbreaks of violence during the drafting period, the team managed to deliver an ambitious document which includes some hard-won compromises, testament to their dedication. The work has been seen as a key innovation in GI programming in the past decade (although borne out of an FDFA recommendation) and received praise from many within the Ministry for being creative and original.

However, again, the inclusivity and representativeness of the process can be questioned since very limited members of both societies were included. The relevance of carrying out work on reconciliation while the situation remains far from any sort of settlement or resolution was also questioned by several analysts, with many suggesting that especially given the asymmetry of the conflict and the fact that the issues are current rather than of the ‘past’, it was too early to conduct this work. Processes of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘healing’ are condemned by PACBI who say they

⁴⁷Ibid

“privilege oppressive co-existence at the cost of co-resistance, for they presume the possibility of coexistence before the realization of justice”.⁴⁸

*“DwP is one of the things that is premature; it’s premature to discuss a full solution.”
(Interview with an Israeli analyst and CSO actor)*

*“There will be time for reconciliation, for restorative/repairative justice, but first you must make sure people get their collective and individual rights. You can’t ask people to reconcile when they are genuinely institutionally unequal. There will be a time but it is not now.”
(Interview with a Palestinian analyst and CSO actor)*

There were also concerns from several within the FDFA who attended workshops about how the process was being run and that GI coordinators did not seem prepared, having the potential to cause harm to participants.

*“There was no real preparation from the GI, they had a young coordinator and underestimated how explosive this meeting could be.”
(Interview with an FDFA stakeholder)*

The second overall objective of disseminating the DwP work and demonstrating narratives can be reconciled has not been achieved. The publication of the document was announced on several occasions but never took place because the GI has not been able to build political support for the work on either side. In Israel, the work has been introduced to actors of the peace camp (some politicians, intellectuals and NGOs) and the core ideas presented to journalists and media professionals. In Palestine, the ideas were also presented to stakeholders including PA and PLO officials.⁴⁹ However, no active politician on either side has endorsed the paper publicly.

In response to the inability of the GI to release the paper locally, a strategy was devised with the support of the FDFA for the GI to consult international actors in the hope that support could be built within the international community that would then allow for local publication. Feedback was positive and the importance of such an approach was emphasised by many international stakeholders. However, the strategy has not resulted in enough political support to allow for wide dissemination. This also reinforces the idea that the primary focus of GI’s work has been international rather than local actors, for whom their message is not as acceptable or relevant.

Although the work exists now for future usage, it has been rendered politically irrelevant currently and has had no impact in this evaluation period since there is no widespread openness to it. It has not created any additional political space or support locally as of now, despite its praise by international stakeholders. The fate of the unpublished DwP document should serve as further proof for the basic problem with the model under the current circumstances; that the GI does not have political buy-in domestically and does not represent the views of either society. In bypassing politics in order to create a space for dialogue, GI misses the central challenge of the day. As a consequence, the fruits of these dialogues, as innovative or well-thought as they might be, remain in the realm of theory.

Intra-Palestinian Reconciliation

The PPC has played a very limited role in intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts and is found to be an insignificant actor in Gaza. Although they have included this topic as a theme in their workshops and seminars and provided some opportunities for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to

⁴⁸ PACBI. ‘Israel’s Exceptionalism: Normalizing the Abnormal’. *PACBI: The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel*. 2011.

<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1749>

⁴⁹ final report_PPC_2019_Coalition in Support of Reconciliation

discuss the need for political unity, there is no evidence that this has had any wider impact on the attitudes of influential players. There have been no concrete outputs from this work and other actors have been at the fore when it comes to working with the factions, which the PPC is not well placed to do given its historical links to Hamas critic Yasser Abed Rabbo and the negative reaction to the Accord in Gaza, where many residents are refugees.

Certainly, the operating context in Gaza has been challenging for PPC: the organisation has to work under a different name and has previously been targeted by Hamas for closure. While the GI has sometimes succeeded in having members of different factions participate in its seminars, none of these have been currently politically relevant or influential. Although some respondents to this evaluation saw the value of PPC continuing workshops in an area where civil society is already under enormous pressure and where political dialogue is often sidelined by humanitarian needs, most respondents saw PPC, at best, as an irrelevant actor in Gaza and at worst at a counterproductive force involved in normalising relations with Israel and complicit in maintaining the status quo.

7. Support to Peace Talks

Outcome objective: GI recommendations influence negotiators' positions.

The initiative launched by the US Secretary of State John Kerry in August 2013 was in many ways a golden proof of concept test for the GI. The talks represented a moment when the key variables for GI relevance were in place; talks were happening, brokered by the US, and the GI had good access to the US negotiating team (facilitated by the FDFA) in order to present their recommendations. The GI had finalised its annexes by this point and was well-positioned locally to provide proposals; three members of the GI Steering Committee were part of the Palestinian delegation and the Israeli side of the GI were in close contact with the Israeli negotiations team.

The process showed that the problem of a lack of knowledge and awareness, a key assumption of the GI model, was not the problem during this round of talks. US negotiators came with an extensive team and were well aware of the GI proposals and other parameters.

There is good evidence that GA (especially the maps) was considered relevant to the US team, and that the American paper closely resembled the GI's proposals. However, in the most favourable (to Israel) reading of the failure of the talks, the US approached the Palestinians with something close to the GI, and it was rejected. In a less favourable reading, the Israelis did not accept the concessions proposed by the American team, demonstrating that the GI proposals did not sufficiently resonate with the Israeli delegation. Both readings cast a shadow on the ability to implement the GI model, or on the effectiveness of their ToC under the prevailing geo-political conditions. The challenge in moving towards the implementation of two viable states in an era of the status quo or the one state condition, is not a lack of knowledge or proposals on the Israeli side, but incentives and political will. The Israelis understood the deal the GI offered (or close to it, via the US team) - and they rejected it.

The breakdown of the Kerry negotiations should have represented a key moment for reflection for the GI, and in turn for the FDFA. The proposed deal had finally been on the proverbial table and it was not accepted. It should have been clear now, if it hadn't been before, that the GI model of achieving the two-state solution through the paradigm of final status negotiations was not fit for purpose within the reality of the contemporary context. It was also clear that the agreement, the product of the GI, was not acceptable to either side for varying reasons.

The GI did not address the core issues such as lack of incentives and the power asymmetry head on. There was, for example, no pressure on the Israeli side organised in terms of mass demonstrations or calls for peace. There is no evidence that the seminars, meetings and conferences held in both communities contributed to creating a political environment in which a deal would be reached or a broad support base for its acceptance.

The Trump presidency was another moment at which deeper reflection on the GI model would have been expected. Despite Israel's best efforts, the US had, rather ironically, put the issue of peace back on the table. That a peace process (of sorts) occurred and the GI had no influence on any of the players, and that Israel did not accept even this favourable plan, has underscored the problem with the assumptions underlying the GI ToC: within the current dynamic, the Israelis are largely happy with the status quo, and the Palestinians will not achieve their national aspirations through negotiations based on this worn-out model of a peace process.

That these watershed moments did not represent turning points for the GI in terms of its core proposal - the Accord, its working assumptions and its strategy - points to the fact that although strategic reflection has taken place, these processes have not been successful in finding a pathway to greater relevance and impact. The GI seems to have been stuck in a path dependency pattern in which previously used strategies and methodologies have been preferred over change, experimentation and the risk this brings.

To what extent have the recommendations to the GI set forth in the 2009-external evaluation been implemented and achieved?

Key Findings

- Most recommendations have been partially implemented or achieved

Four key recommendations related to the effectiveness of the GI were given by the 2009 external evaluation. Most recommendations have been partially implemented. General polling has been reduced, as recommended, but questions have not remained unchanged over time, as was also suggested. In line with recommendations, the PPC has not attempted to reconcile Fatah and Hamas directly. As suggested, the PPC has begun working in collaboration with other actors, especially through the TSC, although this represents organisations largely in the GI echo chamber and is counter to Palestinian civil society consensus. They have partnered with some organisations, such as Zimam, but could benefit from partnering with other implementers in Gaza especially. As recommended, PPC has reduced their media and PR campaigns. PPC has not, however, focused its advocacy on the Arab world, although events which occurred since the 2009 evaluation made this incredibly challenging. The recommendation to align target groups with the time horizon of donors, keeping the impact time lag in mind, does not seem to have been implemented. However, much of the funding GI received was provided for two years or less (often renewed) but was also part of a continuum of GI activities which had occurred previously, and continued after, specific grants.

Conclusions

The effectiveness of the GI is assessed to have been poor overall in the evaluation period. This is not to discount the significant amount of work and effort undertaken by the organisations during the decade. However, there has been a marked lack of observable results. The GI has continued with the same working assumptions and strategies, even as these have been increasingly undermined. Although the difficult operating context has also been challenging, the lack of adaptation in the face

of current realities and challenges is considered to have been a key factor in the non-achievement of outcomes.

The non-acceptance of GI proposals at the Kerry negotiations should have been a key turning point at which the model was reviewed and updated. The non-release of the DwP work was another signal that the NGOs did not have the required buy-in from either society to carry on working in the same way. Attempted innovations such as the TSI or TSC have not been convincing; the first due to its criticised methodology and the second because no results have yet been recorded. This is a recurrent theme in the assessment of activities; the monitoring of actions and follow up on their wider impact has been insufficient to track results.

While the GI has managed to maintain some access to local and especially international stakeholders, these have not been translated into influence and outcomes relevant to the resolution of the conflict. International stakeholders have been the group the GI has had best access to but probably too much effort has been invested into this constituency, who have shown little potential to catalyse change, in comparison to domestic actors.

D. Impact (Political Context)

What impact did the GI have on conflict resolution/peace promotion in the Near East?

Key Findings

- The GI has had very little to no perceptible impact on conflict resolution and peace promotion in the region over the evaluation period.
- The GI has failed to sufficiently critically reflect on its underlying theory of change as the context has shifted and has not orchestrated strategic changes, which has undermined its impact potential.

A review of the available evidence suggests that the GI's impact on conflict resolution and peace promotion in the Near East has been very limited in the evaluation period. They have not been able to convince their politicians to make the necessary concessions at the negotiation table or international actors to create the conditions to encourage this. Far from progressing towards the resolution of the conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been in a deep stalemate for most of this decade.

There is no doubt that the challenging context has constrained the ability of the GI to have an impact. Evolving local dynamics have meant GI programming has increasingly gone against the grain domestically. Internationally, the past four years of the Trump administration have been a huge challenge, overturning assumptions about peacemaking in the region and excluding the Palestinians from dialogue. The wider international community has suffered from inertia and failed in its diplomacy efforts over the period. Their interest and influence has proven to be limited, undermining the potential of GI's advocacy towards them.

However, the GI has failed to sufficiently critically reflect on its underlying ToCas the context has shifted. Even at moments where it should have been clear a revision of the overall strategy was required, for example when Yasser Abed Rabbo was ousted, when the GI proposals were rejected in the Kerry negotiations, or when Israel dismissed even the Trump deal, the GI did not significantly change their approach or messaging. More in-depth reflection on how the outcomes of activities have been feeding, or not, into wider impact goals was necessary.

The GI has in some ways been waiting for the conditions conducive to peace to emerge, while it could have been focused more convincingly on contributing to the emergence of these conditions.

They have been timid in calling out developments which run contrary to the establishment of a Palestinian state. The evaluators understand that this cautious approach is taken by the GI in order to maintain its positioning as a mainstream organisation in Israel. However, considering that this positioning has not been translated into impact in terms of advancing peace in any tangible way, it seems worth risking. Taking a stronger position on the occupation and its human rights abuses might also have provided the GI with more legitimacy for its operations in Palestine.

Certainly, an organisational strategic revision process would not have been easy and would have involved risks to the initiative in terms of accrued assets and networks. But it has been done by other organisations in this context. Examples include B'Tselem, which underwent a strategic revision process which resulted in an updating of their ToC and in the recent release of their apartheid report. Long before that, Peace Now also updated its strategy to include the Settlement Watch programme after identifying settlement building as a key obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution. Both of these organisations took risks in the process and have actually lost some of the political/establishment access they previously had, but their impact in terms of the reach of their work and the challenge it presents to the status quo has arguably been higher. The GI is not a human rights-focused organisation as these are, and it has a different model. But it is attachment to this model which is in question and which has been a factor in limiting the potential for impact.

“We realised that our organisation was doing excellent work but that we could carry on doing this for the next 50 years and the occupation was going to carry on. It is incumbent on all of us working in this area not to pretend that this is year one of this reality. It’s not acceptable. We should all be constantly reassessing the strategy. Unless you announce that your agenda is not about changing things and you have no theory of change. But then at least be honest about it or close shop.”

(Interview with the director of an Israeli CSO)

The lack of appetite for this sort of renewal is perhaps linked to the GI’s leadership which, while undoubtedly dedicated and experienced, has remained unchanged since the early days. Despite efforts, the governance of the organisations also remains older and male-dominated (especially on the PPC side). This is also a reflection of the societies within which the partners work. Although the fact that the GI reflects the political constituencies which it reaches out to is useful in maintaining access and some legitimacy, their inability to attract younger, new members poses a threat to their relevance and outreach capacity among the wider public. It has also potentially had an impact on the GI’s potential to come up with new ideas and creative, courageous thinking. The organisations have essentially remained “one-man shows”, with no new leaders emerging or moving up the chain, although Heskem positively reports that they have recently appointed a young female employee as Deputy Director General.

What impact did the GI have on public opinion in Israel and the oPt?

Key Findings

- There is no solid evidence that the GI has had more than a negligible impact on public opinion over the evaluation period.
- Several respondents opined that support would have fallen further in Israel without Heskem actions, but this cannot be confirmed either way.

As discussed previously, polling has shown, and commentators and analysts have confirmed, that support for the two-state solution has declined over the evaluation period, as belief in its feasibility has decreased.

There was fairly broad consensus among actors of the international community who responded to this evaluation, as well as among some Israeli actors spoken to, that support for the two-state solution in Israel would have been lower if the GI had not carried out its activities in this period. This was not thought to be the case in the oPt. While it is conceivable that the GI contributed in some way to a mitigation of further damage to public opinion in Israel, this could be said for many organisations working in this arena.

This evaluation finds no solid evidence that the GI has had more than a negligible impact on public opinion over the evaluation period. The largely qualitative evaluation methodology is also not appropriate to assess attribution of this sort, although independent analysts share this analysis. Activities aimed at the general public have been less of a priority in this evaluation period and not been on a large enough scale for the creation of societal level impact to be a logical outcome. This is a relevant strategic choice since research has shown that while the public is not a driving force for peace on either side, it is not an obstacle to peace either.⁵⁰

The CSO survey shows differing views for Palestinian and Israeli based respondents. Over 70% of Palestinian respondents believed the GI had had little or no impact on public opinion in the country and less than 10% thought the GI had had significant impact. In Gaza specifically, two thirds thought the GI had had no impact on public opinion. In contrast, nearly 45% of Israeli respondents believed the GI had had a significant impact on public opinion in Israel. This probably reflects the fact that the GI in Israel has been more active in attempting to maintain public support than in Palestine, as well as the generally more positive feedback given by Israeli CSOs in the survey.

What impact did the GI have on decision-makers, locally, regionally and internationally? Which decision-makers and relevant political figures at local and international level have been proactively seeking to promote and advance the GI at Track One level during the evaluation period?

Key Findings

- There is no evidence that GI recommendations have influenced decisions at the local, regional or international level in this evaluation period.
- Locally, current decision makers are unlikely to push for final status negotiations.
- Regionally, the GI has had no perceptible impact.
- Internationally, the GI has good access but none of these actors have been pushing for the GI at Track One, demonstrating the difficulty of translating access into impact.

Despite the efforts of the two NGOs and commitment to their work, the initiative can't be said to have aided stakeholders - local or international - in thinking "outside the box", whether it is with regards to the negotiations, the ways to facilitate them, or even the two-state solution itself. The best indicator of this is that no actors with whom the GI has worked have so far advanced new proposals which have moved the situation in a positive direction based on GI recommendations.

Despite the improved access GI has in the current Israeli government - as opposed to more than a decade under Netanyahu - it is understood that this government will not push for a final status agreement, let alone one based on the GI blueprint. In fact, a precondition for the forming of the government was an agreement by all coalition partners to maintain the status quo on this issue. The Palestinian leadership also have little interest in reopening negotiations according to current

⁵⁰ Shikaki, Khalil & Dahlia Scheindlin. 'Role of Public Opinion in the Resilience/Resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict'. *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research*. 2018. <http://pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Final%20policy%20report%20English%20Jan2019.pdf>

frameworks. This fact demonstrates again a major problem with GI's ToC; namely that access isn't translated to impact, and that political hurdles will continue to prevent the implementation of the Accord, if such a solution can be implemented at all, given the developments on the ground.

The GI has managed to position itself as a trusted source for many international actors and has been able to maintain and add to their contact list during the tumultuous evaluation period. However, none of these actors are pushing for the GI at the Track One level currently and have not provided sufficient incentives for peace talks along these lines. While many of them are in fairly regular touch with the GI and are interested in hearing their views, there is no evidence that the GI have influenced international policy in the evaluation period. The lack of desire by international actors to invest political capital in incentivising the Israeli side to enter serious negotiations and to make the necessary concessions demonstrates that access doesn't necessarily result in impact, and should have led to reevaluation of the GI's ToC.

Regionally, the GI has had negligible impact due to complex regional dynamics discussed previously, as well as their lack of strategy and prioritisation of this constituency.

Conclusions

The impact of the GI on the political context is rated poor overall. No perceptible changes which have had an impact in terms of conflict transformation have been recorded in this evaluation period, either in terms of public opinion or decision-makers. More in-depth reflection on how the outcomes of activities were leading, or not, to wider impact goals was necessary.

E. Impact (Swiss Foreign Policy in the Near East)

To what extent did GI's results contribute to the fulfillment of Switzerland's foreign policy objectives? To what extent did the GI inform relevant peace policy developments and/or political decisions/statements conducive to peace promotion and dialogue?

Key Findings

- GI contribution to Swiss objectives has been very limited since it has not been able to have an impact.
- There is no evidence that the GI informed relevant FDFA peace policy developments.

The Swiss partnership with the GI has been aligned with its strategic objectives in terms of the promotion of a negotiated settlement in line with international law. The GI has contributed to these objectives to the extent that it has been able to have an impact, which as discussed above, has been severely limited in this evaluation period.

There is no evidence that the GI informed relevant FDFA peace policy developments and/or political decisions/statements conducive to peace promotion and dialogue in the evaluation period. In fact, the evidence suggests that the Swiss informed GI's approach more significantly than the other way round, for example providing technical support to the DwP work and inputs on documents and recommendations produced by the GI, as well as feedback on the strategic direction of the two NGOs and the wider initiative.

The DwP project was the area of clearest synergy with specific Swiss expertise and their priorities in the region, helping to promote reconciliation according to the Swiss methodology in discussions with international stakeholders. However, its limited dissemination locally has undermined its potential

contribution to concrete results in this evaluation period. The Swiss contribution to this work was also considerable.

To what extent did Switzerland maximize this partnership, how, and what were the results?

Key Findings

- The FDFA attempted to maximise the partnership most notably during the Kerry talks and through the DwP work.
- The partnership was probably maximised to the extent possible.
- The FDFA has sent mixed signals by continuing to provide funding despite recommendations not being integrated by the GI and so bears some responsibility for the lack of success of the ToC.

Attempts to Maximise the Partnership

An area in which the FDFA attempted to maximise this partnership to achieve common objectives was during the Kerry negotiations, when Switzerland encouraged the GI to leverage the opportunity presented by this development and supported the teams in meeting with the US administration. The FDFA also provided additional funding at this point and agreed to redirect an ongoing project in this direction, demonstrating their flexibility and willingness to advocate for the high-level involvement of the GI when it was relevant.

The DwP work is another area in which the FDFA has made a substantial effort to leverage the partnership with the GI over the past decade. As well as technical support throughout and full financing of the project from conception to dissemination, Switzerland also provided strategic and diplomatic support, seeking to strengthen dissemination plans and organising a diplomatic briefing in Bern (hosted by the Secretary of State) with other international actors so the work could be presented.

Throughout the partnership, the FDFA has provided political support to the GI, making requested introductions to the representatives of other countries and organising conferences and meetings for the GI to present at in order to raise their profile. The partnership was probably maximised to the extent possible for Swiss foreign policy in the region in the evaluation period, considering both the challenging context and the difficulty in seeing concrete results from GI activities.

Mixed Messages

FDFA interviewees report they held many phone calls, meetings, workshops and seminars with the GI, and their boards even, in which FDFA views on the shortcomings of their methodology and approach were addressed in a transparent manner by various levels of the FDFA hierarchy.

However, although the FDFA has been transparent in their concerns, they have given the GI actors mixed signals by continuing to fund the organisations even when it was considered that recommendations were not adequately taken into account and the renewal they were asking for was not achieved. The decision to only finance core costs was a relevant one, simplifying things from the FDFA perspective and allowing for a minimal financing approach, but additional project funding on top of core funding has been provided since. Although this was done in an effort to support the organisations, it has further confused the message. That financial support is still being provided in 2021 despite the decision in 2010 to phase out also seems to have created some expectation that funding would carry on. Although a gradual phasing out is good grantmaking practice, a final date for support wasn't provided in advance, leaving the decision-making open-ended.

The FDFA therefore also bears some responsibility for the continued lack of success of the ToC and minimal attempts at innovation since funding was never made conditional on the changes asked for. They have continued to finance the organisations and their projects based on the underlying theory and assumptions, while increasingly questioning the limits of the approach internally. Part of the issue has been the long term nature of the partnership which has caused fatigue from the FDFA in its management, but also complicated objective and results-based decision-making. This was a flagship initiative for Switzerland, of which it was proud, and many of the personalities have been in contact for nearly twenty years now. There has also been much understandable hope that the situation would improve, which has delayed the FDFA taking a clear direction.

To what extent did Switzerland become an acknowledged actor in the region through this partnership, why and how?

Key Findings

- Switzerland is said to have a good reputation and is considered an acknowledged actor in the region.
- The GI is not thought to have played an important role in this positioning.

Interviews reveal that Switzerland has a good reputation amongst the international and multilateral actors spoken with and is widely considered to be a uniquely positioned actor in the region, with their focus on neutrality and ability to speak to all parties, including Hamas. They are seen as independent and committed to protecting humanitarian values and principles.

The survey of CSO organised confirmed this. Other grantees of the FDFA in the region praised the Swiss approach, which was often seen to be more flexible and innovative than other donor countries. They also strongly associated Switzerland with neutrality, which was an important added-value to several partners.

Respondents' first associations with Switzerland were most often neutrality, international and humanitarian law, and then the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). No stakeholders interviewed strongly associated the positioning of Switzerland with the GI, although most were aware of its link to Switzerland and that Switzerland is a donor of the organisation.

“The Swiss have a unique reputation in the world: independent, committed to protecting humanitarian rights and values. I would not associate them strongly with the Geneva Initiative like I would with the ICRC.”
(Interview with EU stakeholders)

Despite the 2015-2018 Middle East strategy mentioning the GI being part of Switzerland's “business cards” in the region, the majority of FDFA stakeholders interviewed thought that while the early years of the partnership may have benefited the acknowledgment of Switzerland as a recognised actor in the region, this was no longer the case.⁵¹

“It has no impact at all (in our discussion with other actors in the region), it isn't a subject.”
(Interview with an FDFA stakeholder)

Conclusions

GI impact on Swiss foreign policy is considered to be poor over the evaluation period. The partnership with the GI has had little impact on Swiss foreign policy in the region. Despite efforts to maximise the partnership, frustrations have built and the quality of the partnership has diminished

⁵¹ 'EDA-Nahoststrategie 2015 - 2018 Bemerkungen BRDB.pdf'

over time. Switzerland has contributed to the maintenance of the ToC by continuing to fund the organisations based on this model.

While Switzerland has a good reputation in the region as a neutral actor committed to international law, the GI is not thought to have contributed significantly to this image.

IV. SWOT

Figure 6 provides an overview of the GI in the form of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, to aid decision making.

Figure 6: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible, experienced and recognised actors • Accords and annexes (they have a product and a reference) • Excellent knowledge within the initiative on core issues, which is not controlled or manipulated by governments/leaderships on either side • Solid operational set up and teams • Some limited relevant connections and contacts in societies on both sides • Good international contacts and access, including with the Biden administration • Good speakers, skilled in relationship maintenance, especially with international actors • Consistent bilateral partnership despite challenges • Ability to bring together groups from both sides • Increasingly diversified donor base (sign of trust) • Excellent reputation of HLEP among Israeli peace camp 	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSS still the preferred option for most in both societies (when status quo is discounted) and of the international community • TSS only solution legal in international law and accepted internationally • TSS supporters from Meretz and Labor in government in Israel rather than opposition • GI contacts within the Biden administration • Increased international attention on the region in recent months and some signs of shifting rhetoric in terms of equal rights • Increased investment in P2P programmes by USA
<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to go beyond access and secure buy-in from the non-convinced/veto groups • Ability to critically reflect on the underlying ToC and renew strategies • Criticism and lack of acceptance of the original Accords, especially regarding the right of return and Jerusalem. Not accepted during Kerry negotiations • Strongly associated with the Oslo period and secular peacemaking approaches • Steering committees with few new faces • Loss of political clout of key founders and some negative associations with them • No renewal or promotion of others in terms of leadership • M&E capacity insufficient to measure results • More credible and recognised among international diplomatic community than locally • Poor reputation of GI within Palestinian civil society • PPC irrelevance in the Gaza Strip • Limited willingness to push back against realities on the ground • Lack of fundraising/M&E personnel • Current reliance on the FDFA for core funding 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some key assumptions of the GI are now challenged • Lack of political will and leadership to resume peace process and hardening views; entrenchment of the status quo • Unstable coalition government in Israel based on compromise of status quo maintenance • Continuing settlement expansion undermining potential for viable Palestinian state • Intra-Palestinian split showing no signs of resolution • Lack of international commitment to finding a solution and encouraging necessary commitments and compromises • Anti-normalisation movement • Belief in feasibility of TSS decreasing, along with the interest in peace and negotiations • High levels of mutual mistrust • Difficult operating environment for CSOs in both Israel (left-wing NGOs) and Palestine • Palestinian movements rejecting established leaders and paradigms • Many funders do not provide core funding • Challenge of proving impact with this type of work • Re-examining of Swiss strategy in MENA and reduction of partner numbers

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Future FDFA-GI Relationship: Scenarios of Action

This evaluation discusses three possible scenarios of action, investigating the strengths and weaknesses associated with each option.

A recommended scenario is then presented based on evaluation findings in terms of the performance of the GI during the evaluation period, rather than the future potential relevance of the initiative, which is outside of the scope set for the evaluation by the FDFA. Nevertheless, these future considerations should be assessed and taken into account by the FDFA in their decision-making.

For all scenarios, the following are recommended:

- 1) An internal workshop with all concerned FDFA stakeholders (both in the region and in Bern) is recommended in order to discuss the future of the partnership in a participative manner. The meeting could take the form of a collective SWOT analysis, for example. The GI being a longtime, strategic partner means that many people at the FDFA have views on the partnership. These views are also fairly divergent: the evaluators discussed with 19 FDFA stakeholders, past and present, for this evaluation. Among the 5 current stakeholders who have been involved with the GI for the longest, there is a split with 2 (40%) broadly favouring remaining engaged and 3 (60%) preferring a disengagement. The favoured form of the continued engagement or disengagement differed from person to person but a key theme in remaining engaged was the potential negative interpretations which could be associated with the decision in terms of support for the two-state solution if Switzerland ends the partnership.
- 2) For all of the scenarios, including disengagement, the FDFA should provide multi-year core funding, in order to allow the GI partners to more effectively plan ahead and make strategic decisions about their future activities. The final decision of the FDFA should be clearly communicated to the GI within a reasonable delay and also include contribution amounts and grant periods of any further funding so that the GI is fully aware of the next steps. A drawn-out process without clear parameters should be avoided.

Scenario One: Disengagement

The first scenario is that the FDFA disengages from its partnership with the GI, over a period of two years. The GI should be a participant in decisions on *how* the scenario would be implemented exactly. The key features and advantages and disadvantages of this option are:

- The FDFA decides to disengage from its partnership with the GI partners.
- The disengagement is planned to take place over the next two years, with core funding provided for the whole period in a multi-year grant.
- The FDFA and the GI partners agree in writing that the core outputs of the initiative produced before the end of the disengagement (Accords, annexes, DwP, etc.) are owned collectively and can be used, reproduced and shared by either party.
- The FDFA uses this period to analyse the risks associated with their disengagement, especially in terms of how it may be received by other actors, and puts in place mitigation strategies including a robust communications strategy, as well as taking legal advice on the continuing usage of the “Geneva” name.
- The FDFA commits to engaging with other donors of the GI in order to explain their decision.
- With the approval of the GI partners and the FDFA, a permanent seat on the Steering Committee is created for the FDFA.

- + Resources can be reallocated by Switzerland to other initiatives that they consider to be more in line with their preferred approaches and to have more potential for impact, ensuring accountability towards Swiss taxpayers.
- + Disengagement is in line with the views of the current Minister and the majority of FDFA stakeholders spoken to, meaning there will likely be less resistance to the decision than was present after the 2009 evaluation.
- + Disengagement takes place in a responsible and planned manner, recognising the long term partnership between the actors and the impact of losing core funding on the GI, and allowing the partners time to plan and fundraise for replacement funds.
- + The planned phase-out over two years allows the FDFA to properly analyse and mitigate risks associated with their disengagement.
- + The FDFA retains a hand in the future direction of the initiative, which will likely continue to carry the name of Geneva, through its Steering Committee seat. This will also permit the easy identification of any future opportunities which merit ad hoc non-financial or financial support, and provide the GI with valuable strategic advice.
- + Should opportunities arise for the GI to become highly relevant and have an impact, the Swiss could re-engage and fund the GI on a project basis in the future.
- + The GI has finished the annexes and DwP work, no project funding is ongoing, and the FDFA is not involved in promoting current GI proposals such as the Jerusalem Revisited paper, making now a logical moment to exit.
- + A final decision is made, providing clarity to both parties and allowing for future planning.
- Even with a communications strategy in place, the financial disengagement of the Swiss from the GI will have symbolic implications. The end of the partnership will very likely be noticed by actors in the region and potentially viewed/construed as a Swiss disengagement from the two-state solution model or at least from the GI parameters, especially by those elements of society not in favour of a negotiated peace. This view was shared by a large majority of respondents to this evaluation of varied stakeholder types, including those critical of the GI.
- The eventual withdrawal of core funding to the GI risks their eventual closing down as core funding will likely be challenging to replace.
- While retaining some limited influence over the activities through the Steering Committee, Switzerland's capacity to effect change in the organisation or direct its programming would be significantly reduced, whilst its reputation would remain somewhat attached to it.

Scenario Two: Continued Engagement Through Core-Funding

The second scenario involves continuing core funding support for the GI while putting in place improvements in terms of the partnership approach and M&E frameworks, and reassessing this support again in three years. The approach is to maintain the partnership at a minimum level, to avoid any risks associated with disengagement and, to a lesser extent, in case the initiative regains relevance. The key elements of this scenario and its strengths and weaknesses are the following:

- The FDFA commits to providing core funding to the GI for the next three years, provided at similar levels as today but in a flexible multi-year grant, to cover the next steps of the Biden presidency and new Israeli government, and to see what results are achieved with this dynamic and recent GI updates.
- The FDFA and GI partners hold a strategic workshop to agree on expectations in terms of goals and results for this period. Considering that core rather than project funding will be provided, this will need to align with the objectives and priorities of other donor-funded projects.

- Specific and realistic objectives (organisational objectives should be considered) for the next round of core funding are agreed, which allow the GI to be accountable to the FDFA whilst also delivering on commitments to other donors. The exact core funding amount is linked to the scope of desired objectives.
 - An M&E framework is put in place with definitions of success and some specific, measurable indicators for the period which will be tracked by GI throughout.
 - A final evaluation will be conducted in the third year of the partnership period (and funded by the FDFA), on the basis of which the FDFA will be able to assess progress against agreed objectives during the period, as well as the relevance of the organisation at that time, and make an informed decision on any future support.
- + Resources invested by Switzerland remain fairly minimal and are tied to specific and measurable organisational objectives, ensuring improved accountability to Swiss taxpayers.
 - + Switzerland avoids negative signals regarding their disengagement from the GI and maintains this symbolic support for the two-state solution and GI vision.
 - + Funding remains limited to core funding; a modality which has enabled the FDFA to simplify its funding streams to the GI and reduce to a minimal funding model.
 - + The GI receives multi-year core funding, filling a gap others don't yet cover, so it can better plan ahead and strategize and has some funding stability for at least the next three years.
 - + The FDFA retains leverage and can influence the future direction and capacity of the GI through putting in place organisational targets (e.g. development of a reviewed ToC or improved M&E and follow up capacity).
 - + Expectations linked to the provision of core funding are clarified between the FDFA and GI.
 - Resources will not be able to be allocated to other projects in the region.
 - Providing continued support is not in line with the current Minister's views and might be difficult to justify based on impact. Justifications for continuing funding in this case would be based on the avoidance of risks related to disengagement, maintaining a symbolic support and/or the future potential of the initiative.
 - The status-quo has not worked in recent years and a change is required by both the FDFA and the NGO partners. FDFA might find itself in the same position as now in three years, having only delayed a decision.
 - Reinvesting in an initiative which had little impact over nearly two decades, without any significant changes in the strategy or model, could be considered negligent conduct, or even mismanagement of public funds.

Scenario Three: Redefinition of the GI Model and Strategy

This third scenario involves providing the GI with increased resources in order for them to put in place a strategic redefinition process, to see if the GI can renew itself and become a more relevant and impactful initiative. This represents a "final chance" investment of the FDFA, to ensure it has exhausted all options. The key components of this approach are:

- Core funding is committed to the GI for the next two years, provided at similar levels as today but in a multi-year grant.
- With the agreement and buy-in of the GI, limited additional funding is also provided for external human resources experienced in the redefinition of strategies and change management. This support is provided for the organisation to go through a rigorous process of reviewing and redefining its model and strategy to face current realities. All options will be on the table during this process, including a renewal of leadership.
- The output of this work will be a revised (and explicit) ToC and impact pathway, based on tested assumptions, a new set of SMART objectives and a strategic plan. The time provided

for such an output would be between 6 months and 1 year. Outputs should be the work of GI stakeholders and not guided by the FDFA. The process may result in no change at all if this is what is decided.

- On the basis of the outputs of this process, the FDFA decides whether to invest in the revised GI model or not, based on an analysis of its likelihood of impact and relevance to Swiss foreign policy objectives.
- + The resources of Swiss taxpayers are reinvested in the initiative, but with the conditionality that the model is reviewed. Any further funding is on the basis that a valid ToC which is likely to produce impact is produced.
- + Financial stability is provided to the GI through core funding while they undertake strategic revision work.
- + An independent organisational change expert with contextual expertise will help to facilitate the strategic revision process; engaging all stakeholders and providing mediation and impartial advice.
- + Switzerland protects and potentially maximises its previous investment in the initiative.
- Fewer Swiss resources will be available for other partnerships which are said to have shown better impact potential.
- Commitment and buy-in for this approach will be required from the GI. The process risks being seen as imposed by the FDFA and therefore lacking in ownership and motivation.
- The capacity of the GI to undertake such a process is not proven as previous recommendations from the FDFA have not been taken into account and the initiative has lacked the ability to be critically self-reflective.
- Providing continued support is not in line with the current Minister's views and might be difficult to justify based on previous impact. Justifications for continuing funding in this case would be made based on wishing to see what was possible with a final strategic investment in the initiative, focused on renewing its model.

B. Future FDFA-GI Relationship: Recommended Scenario

Based on the conclusions of this evaluation in terms of the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the GI over the evaluation period, **the evaluation team recommends adoption of Scenario One: Disengagement.** Based on the evaluation questions set for the evaluation by the FDFA, the GI was given a poor rating for relevance to the political context, effectiveness, impact on the political context and impact on Swiss foreign policy. Relevance to Swiss foreign policy was considered to be fair.

The first set of reasons for the recommendation is related to this past performance of the GI. The FDFA now has nearly two decades of experience with the GI on which to base its decision. A previous evaluation in 2009 already recommended a phase out of support over two to three years. As this evaluation has demonstrated, the GI has further lost relevance in the past decade and its positive impact on the context has been very limited during this time. Although challenging contextual developments have certainly been a factor in this, the GI has not demonstrated an ability to critically reflect on its operating model and guiding assumptions, even at crucial junctures such as the Kerry negotiations, which should have served as moments of deep reflection. Despite encouragement from the FDFA, the GI has not updated its underlying ToC to ensure its effectiveness in the face of current realities. There has also been no renewal in terms of political support and leadership.

This is why **Scenario Three is not recommended**; the ability of the initiative to put in place the necessary strategic revision process is doubted based on their previous limitations in this regard. For best results, this process would also be motivated by GI stakeholders rather than being instigated by

the FDFA. While co-creation is a good practice in grantmaking, imposing change on a partner organisation in this way would be fairly heavy-handed (even though the process would be GI-led and not necessarily result in changes desired by the FDFA, or any change at all).

Although the GI leadership is optimistic that it is currently in a better position to affect change than it has been for many years, very few expert analysts and commentators who responded to this evaluation held the same optimism regarding the potential of the Biden administration to broker a meaningful peace process or reengage in a significant way, or of the newly formed Israeli government (although this is a very new development) to prioritise finding a negotiated solution. Key stakeholders at the FDFA have also not been convinced by recent updates, such as the Jerusalem Reconsidered paper, suggesting further developments in this direction would not be sufficient for the FDFA to consider a continuation of funding based on these elements. While some shifts in the context may or may not bring opportunities for the GI to regain relevance, the current outlook is not considered to be promising enough to warrant remaining engaged (although an in-depth assessment of future prospects is out of the scope of this evaluation). The FDFA would also be able to fund the GI again in the future should it regain relevance.

The second set of reasons to recommend a disengagement is based on considerations of accountability to Swiss taxpayers. From an accountability perspective, doing more of the same and expecting different results would not be tenable. It would represent a “path dependency” approach which constrains advancement and change in favour of continuing down known paths. As the evaluation has demonstrated, some of the core assumptions of the GI are now invalidated or seriously challenged. Continuing to fund the GI based on the same model which has not produced results over the past decade could therefore be viewed as negligent management of Swiss public funds.

It is therefore **not recommended to adopt Scenario Two** since this is effectively a continuation of the status quo (albeit with some improvements in terms of the partnership model), which will very likely result in the same frustrations as are present currently and which is difficult to defend accountability-wise. While it avoids any negative repercussions from disengagement, it represents more of a non-decision than a forward-looking strategy. Although there may be an argument to be made that it is worth keeping a minimum-level partnership with the GI in place, so that Switzerland is well-positioned in case of any increase in relevance, this is not considered enough of a reason to remain engaged currently; again, there would be nothing to stop the FDFA reengaging as a donor in the future.

The third reason for recommending disengagement is an analysis of the associated risks and advantages. After nearly two decades of support, Switzerland has secured its share of ownership of the blueprint, which is in any case in the public domain and a recognised reference. Any Swiss gains from involvement in the initiative (which seem to have been minimal) are now established. The FDFA and GI could even formally agree that the Accord and other outputs were co-owned going forward.

Although the risk in terms of Swiss disengagement being negatively interpreted certainly exists and would need to be managed, the withdrawal over two years would allow for a strategy to be put in place to mitigate this. Switzerland has not wavered in its support for the two-state solution, and is not likely to do so in the foreseeable future, meaning arguments that a disengagement from the GI signal a move away from the two-state vision would not be credible. Additionally, the FDFA is supporting other peacemaking initiatives in the region to which it could point as evidence of its continued engagement on the two-state solution. Furthermore, the FDFA can not commit to indefinitely funding the GI because of this risk when, as stated previously, Switzerland has a responsibility to be accountable for the use of public funds. Although the funds are now at relatively

low levels, they are not insignificant when compared to other FDFA partners in the region who have reportedly demonstrated better results and likelihood of impact within the current context.

Any risk associated with the GI continuing to use the “Geneva” name once the FDFA has little control over its future actions is considered to be minimal. The Swiss reputation in the region is good but the GI has not contributed significantly to this reputation and the association between the two is not especially strong despite the name, which would continue to refer to the historical roots of the initiative. With the GI’s permission, the FDFA would also retain a Steering Committee position in order to maintain some involvement, which would also be to the GI’s advantage in terms of retaining a link with the FDFA and receiving strategic advice. The FDFA would also have communicated about their disengagement, meaning it would be clear they had not supported any future hypothetical actions which could be damaging. The likelihood of actions of this sort being taken is also considered to be very low. Legal advice on this aspect could be taken during the two-year withdrawal period.

A risk posed by a disengagement decision would be to the future viability of the GI. The FDFA is the only donor to provide core funding to both NGOs and so the loss of the funds would represent a significant challenge. However, the GI has diversified its donor base and FDFA funds now represent around 20-25% of overall funding for both organisations, a significant decrease since the beginning of the evaluation period. Nevertheless, over and above the actual amounts, an FDFA disengagement would send negative signals to other donors. Recognising this, and in respect to the long partnership and grantmaking best practices, the proposed exit strategy is responsible and fair. An immediate disengagement is not presented as a scenario because it does not represent a just solution in line with good practice. While the FDFA cannot be held responsible for the survival of the GI indefinitely, it should also manage its disengagement so that this withdrawal doesn’t necessarily result in the initiative being killed, as would more likely be the case in an immediate cessation of funding.

An advantage of the disengagement strategy is that it avoids delaying a final decision and so provides some certainty for the organisations to plan ahead, which has so far been lacking. The status-quo of a non-decision is no longer tenable for either party. The FDFA would commit to providing another two years’ of core funding at similar levels to today to allow the GI time to try to secure core funding from other sources. The FDFA and GI could use the withdrawal period to agree on communication strategies, including to other donors. This also represents a good moment for the FDFA to announce their exit in that they are not currently funding any unfinished projects. If a two-year plan is put in place, by the time the FDFA funding comes to an end in 2023, this will represent twenty years of continuous Swiss support to the initiative; a significant contribution to an initiative which was important to its regional strategy.

C. FDFA Engagement in Political Initiatives

The following recommendations are more generally for Swiss support of political initiatives. It should be noted that they are an extrapolation of lessons learned from this partnership alone, which only represents one among many for Switzerland.

- The creation of NGOs as part of a political initiative requires a consideration of the dependency this creates. Exit strategies which include supporting the NGO partner(s) with capacity building and fundraising should be in-built from the beginning.
- Although challenging considering the length and closeness of some partner relationships, a certain distance should be kept between the FDFA and its partners so that decision-making can be as objective and evidence-based as possible. Additional funding should not be provided if required improvements are not made, so that the message is clear to partners on

requirements. Providing funding is a strong sign of support and confidence which can overshadow other (less positive) feedback given.

- Feedback on projects and partners should be better documented and institutionalised and verbal feedback should be followed up with written comments. This creates a paper trail for any future assessments, assisting institutional memory, and also helps to ensure that feedback is understood and taken on board by partners.
- More robust M&E frameworks, with agreed ToCs, objectives and SMART indicators are necessary to objectively assess progress. The FDFA should consider providing support in M&E capacity building for partners who require this; both to increase the sustainability and effectiveness of the organisation and to ensure the FDFA is able to better see the results of its investments. Although M&E is especially challenging for advocacy and outreach initiatives, good monitoring is vital in these cases as results can be difficult to perceive otherwise. Follow up with participants should be systematised and take place over the longer term to track results at various stages post participation. Concrete behaviour should also be recorded as far as possible, rather than just stated changes in attitudes; the correlation between the two is often weak. The use of control groups (comparing changes in those who have and haven't participated in FDFA-funded activities) could also be useful in assessing attribution.
- The objectives of an initiative should be aligned with the realistic political spheres of control and influence of the involved organisations. The objectives should be updated if these change over time or the validity of the initiative reassessed.
- Evaluation should be built into M&E frameworks so data is collected throughout the partnership which supports the eventual evaluation of impact. Evaluations should be carried out more frequently and mid-term evaluations which can provide recommendations for ongoing work should be considered. They should also be participative, including partners, and ideally end beneficiaries, from the beginning so that learning can be directed, shared and owned by all stakeholders.
- Even when providing core funding (a relevant and appreciated approach), attention should still be paid to the overall objectives of the organisation to ensure they are measurable and achievable. The FDFA should consider putting in place specific organisational objectives for core funding in cases where they judge that improvements are required.
- Especially when providing core funding, it is good practice to coordinate with other donors of the initiative, to ensure Switzerland is contributing funds to wider objectives which align with their priorities. Coordination helps to create a common strategy for the organisation and avoid gaps and overlaps in funding. Lessons learned and best practices can also be shared in this way, providing funders with a fuller understanding of the partner's progress.
- Although single-year funding allows the FDFA additional flexibility in its grantmaking, it undermines partners' ability to plan ahead. Where possible, the FDFA should consider providing multi-year funding, especially where objectives are linked to longer term changes.

VI. LIST OF ANNEXES

- A. Bibliography
- B. CSO Survey Results
- C. List of Key Informant Interviews
- D. Reconstructed ToC for the Geneva Initiative