



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WEST BANK/GAZA

SUCCESS STORY

Engaging Youth through Soccer

6,000 fans watch the World Cup Final thanks to USAID efforts



Photo: Sky Advertising

Six-year-old Maja helps her mother draw the winning ticket for a USAID-Adidas soccer ball at the Hope and Life Association in Gaza City.

“With the youth’s reaction to the games, it felt more like a stadium here at the Club,” said one mother at a USAID World Cup outreach event.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Soccer is the favorite recreation among young Palestinians. Few fields have grass and few teams have special equipment. But all they need is a soccer ball and the desire to play. When the world’s top soccer stars take each other on every for years at the World Cup games, life grinds to a halt. Everyone tunes in to watch. In 2006, however, the festivities were dampened by the high fees charged to access the games on television. Many resigned themselves to missing the championship.

USAID responded with an innovative effort to combine World Cup viewing with soccer training for Palestinian youth. USAID Goodwill Ambassador and soccer legend Rifat Turk joined the effort and trained youth soccer teams. After teaching soccer techniques, Turk would tell the youth about winning strategies for their personal lives. A beloved soccer star who is the first Arab Israeli to serve as a deputy mayor in his country, Turk uses his fame to spread a message of tolerance and self-discipline.

“We are honored to have such a popular former player train us,” said Sa’id Fahed, a young striker. Goalkeeper Ala’ Roma added, “Inshallah, the guys will become better through this experience and raise their level to play with international teams.”

After the training, the youth soccer clubs would watch the World Cup games. Each night during the semi-finals, there was a drawing for a USAID Adidas “Teamgeist” soccer ball.

The program created a safe and entertaining environment to watch the games, and attendance grew over the five week period. At the Hope and Life Association in Gaza City, women watched two matches each afternoon. At night, an average of 150-200 youth crowded into the center, and 700 viewed the final game. In Rafah, the Rafah Youth Club moved the viewing equipment they received from USAID to a nearby park so that 6,000 residents could enjoy the final match.

The program was enthusiastically received by youth, coaches, and even the press: 14 newspaper articles were written, and the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation filmed the activities at one of the youth soccer clubs. USAID’s effort to reach out to Palestinian youth through soccer was hailed as a great success.