

Gaza Crisis January 2015 – Six Month Report Prepared for the States of Jersey Overseas Aid Commission

"I open my eyes every morning knowing that I will go out to work, instead of spending my time trying to look for organisations to help me feed my children. I just wish I had long-term opportunities for work. I don't want to have to depend on humanitarian aid again."

Kamel Qasem, participant in Oxfam's cash for work programme in Gaza

More than six months since the conflict began, and more than four months since the ceasefire, the situation in Gaza remains desperate. Around 100,000 people - more than half of them children - are still displaced as their homes have been destroyed. People's livelihoods have been devastated. Vital water and sanitation infrastructure, schools and health facilities urgently need rebuilding. Many families have been badly affected by flooding as winter has arrived and temperatures are falling.

Oxfam has helped more than a third of the population in Gaza, more than 660,000 people. At the peak of the crisis we delivered safe drinking water by truck, installed generators to pump water and repaired damaged water systems. We also provided cash and vouchers to families to help them buy food.

We are now moving from immediate emergency assistance to helping people with longer term recovery, supporting people to find ways to earn a living such as helping farmers rehabilitate their fields and plant new crops. We continue to call for an end to the blockade, which is a barrier to the reconstruction of damaged buildings, and severely limits Gaza's ability to rebuild its economy in the aftermath of the crisis.



Eleven-year-old Manar, centre, and her friends at their damaged school in Gaza. During the conflict Manar and her family fled their house, which was completely destroyed. "I lost everything I love in the house. My happiness went under the rubble. I hoped to find some of my happiness in my school, but on my first day back the damage shocked and scared me. The classes are overcrowded and the water leaks in when it rains. But I love my school. Having a proper house and school again might help me to forget all the bad days I've lived through since the war." *Photo: Iyad Al Baba/Oxfam*

Oxfam's response: water, sanitation and hygiene

At the height of the crisis, Gaza was on the brink of a major public health crisis due to damage to infrastructure and contamination of the water supply. The bombing destroyed dozens of wells, pipelines, and reservoirs; up to 15,000 tons of solid waste were left to rot on the streets; wastewater pumping stations ran out of fuel; and many neighbourhoods were without power for days. After bombing damaged the sanitation infrastructure, there were concerns that water supplies could be contaminated by raw sewage.

Oxfam responded by delivering tens of thousands of litres of water daily to families, many of whom had fled their damaged homes and were sheltering in schools and community buildings. We also supplied more than 26,000 people with essential hygiene equipment including soap, toothbrushes, shampoo, buckets and detergent.

As we move from emergency assistance to longer term recovery, Oxfam is phasing out water trucking and is supporting local traders who sell water. We are providing vouchers to families so that they can buy the water they need, and we are carrying out regular quality testing and treatment to ensure that the water is safe to drink.

We have also continued support for our health programme, working with partners to support mobile health clinics, health centres and Al Awda hospital with fuel, water and medical supplies.



During a 72-hour ceasefire, Oxfam worked with partner agency YEC to install four generators to get water pumps working again. "We're working in an environment with a completely destroyed water infrastructure that prevents people in Gaza from cooking, flushing toilets, or washing hands. The public health risk is massive," said Nishant Pandey, Head of Oxfam in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. *Photo: Iyad Al Baba/Oxfam*

A young girl drinks water from an Oxfam tap stand.

At the height of the crisis Oxfam was providing safe water to more than 250,000 people by driving tankers of drinking water to schools, communities and shelters; repairing damaged water systems; and installing generators and providing fuel to pump water.

Photo: Iyad Al Baba/Oxfam



Oxfam's response: access to food and earning a living



Abdelrahman and Naji Wahdan are two brothers who have been farmers all their lives. During the recent conflict, 250 of their beehives were destroyed and 100 of their sheep were killed. Their home was also bombed. Now their livelihood is gone. "This is the fifth time my land has been destroyed," says Abdelrahman. Oxfam is helping farmers to rehabilitate their land and access vital irrigation, seedlings and fertilisers.

Photo: Iyad Al Baba/Oxfam

The violence last summer increased the pressure on families who already find it difficult to make a living in Gaza. Many families rely on fishing or farming as their main source of income. These industries were badly affected by the conflict and the ongoing blockade.

Farmers had their crops and land destroyed by the bombing, or were unable to plant because it was too dangerous to travel to their fields. Fishermen had their boats destroyed, and are not permitted to go further than six miles out to sea, which is where the best fishing areas lie. Shopkeepers had their shops, goods and stores destroyed.

This means that thousands of people now lack the means to grow or buy food, and other essentials.

At the height of the crisis, Oxfam was supporting more than 50,000 families with vouchers so they could buy food and other household essentials. The vouchers were loaded onto debit cards that could be redeemed at more than 90 shops and markets across Gaza. This enabled families to buy what they needed, and also

helped the local economy by providing custom to shopkeepers whose businesses were affected by the war. Oxfam also ran cash for work programmes, providing work and a source of income.

"The Oxfam vouchers help us buy essential food. It helps us decrease our expenditure on food, so we can spend the little money we have on other expenses like clothes, cleaning products and transport for our children to get to school," says Ahmad Bihar, whose shop was destroyed in the bombing. "I just hope they can keep helping us until we are able to get back to our normal life."

Now we are looking towards longer term reconstruction, working with local partners such as the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, to help farmers rehabilitate their land and access vital irrigation, seedlings and fertilisers.



Kamel Qasem's house was destroyed by the bombing in 2014. Without a job or a home he is struggling to provide for his children. He joined Oxfam's 'cash for work' project, which pays people to clear storm water drains - providing them with a valuable income and helping to reduce the risk of further flooding. "Now I open my eyes every morning knowing that I will go out to work, instead of spending my time trying to look for organisations to help me feed my children," he says. "I just wish I had long-term opportunities for work. I don't want to have to depend on humanitarian aid again." *Photo: Iyad Al Baba/Oxfam*

Campaigning for change

"Recent history must warn everyone that the ceasefire will only be a short-term fix, rather than a foundation for lasting peace, as long as Palestinian civilians in Gaza are denied their basic rights."

Nishant Pandey, Head of Oxfam in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel

Oxfam believes that full recovery from the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza will be impossible unless Israel's blockade is lifted permanently.

Beyond basic humanitarian concerns, the blockade severely limits Gaza's ability to rebuild its economy. Gaza used to depend on exports of strawberries to UK supermarkets, flowers to the Netherlands, and an abundance of goods to Israel and the West Bank. Today, Israeli restrictions cut off trade to Israel and the West Bank, and exports are at just two per cent of pre-blockade levels. Without access to external markets, Gaza's once vibrant economy is condemned to a future of aid dependency.

The blockade is also a barrier to reconstruction. It is estimated that more than 700,000 truckloads of aggregates, steel bars and cement would be required to meet Gaza's housing needs alone. However in December, only 795 truckloads of construction materials entered Gaza.

In August 2014, Oxfam took the campaign to lift the blockade to Parliament Square to raise public awareness of the issue. We continue to lobby behind the scenes, working with Israeli and Palestinian partner organisations to raise awareness of the impacts of the blockade in London, Paris and Brussels.



In August 2014, Oxfam coordinated a stunt in Parliament Square where 150 men, women and children were squashed inside boxes to illustrate the conditions faced by the people in Gaza who are trapped by the blockade.

Photo: Mike Kemp/Oxfam



Iman and her daughter prepare a meal for their family. Their house was destroyed in the recent conflict. They now live in a caravan and rainwater leaks through the ceiling when it rains. *Photo: Iyad Al Baba/Oxfam*

After the Israeli blockade of Gaza was imposed in 2007, Iman's husband lost his job in a factory. The family struggled to pay for food and rent, and to pay the medical expenses for their 12-year-old daughter who was diagnosed with brain cancer. Iman also became sick and the family had to borrow money, pushing them deep into poverty.

"We have seen different types of suffering - the poverty, the sickness and the loss of our house," says Iman. "All of this is due to the blockade, and the war which made us homeless in one day. We couldn't afford the rent of a new place so we had no choice but to live in a caravan. It seems there is no hope for the house to be rebuilt as long as the situation in Gaza remains the same."

Thank you to the States of Jersey for supporting Oxfam's humanitarian work in Gaza

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