

Children as Risk Communicators- Building a resilient community

Community Resilience Project



Implemented By:

**World Vision Jerusalem- West
Bank & Gaza**

(North Gaza ADP)

Children as risk communicators- Building a resilient community

*“We are still young, but
We can make a **change**”*

*Ahmed, a 14 years old boy member of C&Y
committee*



Context

Conflict has been a part of Palestinian life since occupation, and there have been numerous difficulties that equate with disaster. The current context of conflict in Gaza is extremely complex with many factors and various players involved. Six decades of conflict, including four of Israeli occupation have played a major role in shaping the society and social dynamics of today.

The most recent conflict was in November 2012, when the the Israeli Air Force (IAF) launched an airstrike that targeted and killed the acting chief of Hamas’ armed wing and one of his associates. This incident marked the beginning of a large military offensive, called the Pillar of Defense. The latest offensive followed several weeks of intermittent escalations in violence between Palestinian armed groups and the Israeli military. IAF airstrikes and firing from Israeli naval vessels and tanks have resulted in rising civilian fatalities and injuries and damage to hundreds of homes across the Gaza Strip. The total death toll is 158¹, of which 33 are children, 13 women and 13 elderly. The total injured is 1,269, including 260 children, 140 women and 55 elderly.

The uninterrupted waves of airstrikes and indiscriminate rocket fire have also triggered widespread fear among the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, particularly among children, with dozens having to be treated for shock. Children, who make up 56% of the Gaza population, continue to bear the brunt of the violence and account for a significant proportion of the dead and severely maimed. Scared by the terrifying noises of war night and day, children in Gaza are displaying worrying signs of psycho-social distress. Such signs include bed-wetting, flashbacks, nightmares, fear of going out in public, fear of being alone and withdrawal².

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains precarious – pre-existing shortages of drugs and medical supplies may be compounded by any increased demand on health services

¹ OCHA, Escalation of Hostilities Gaza and Southern Israel ,Situation Report, November, 2012

² UNICEF, OPT at a Glance, November 20, 2012.

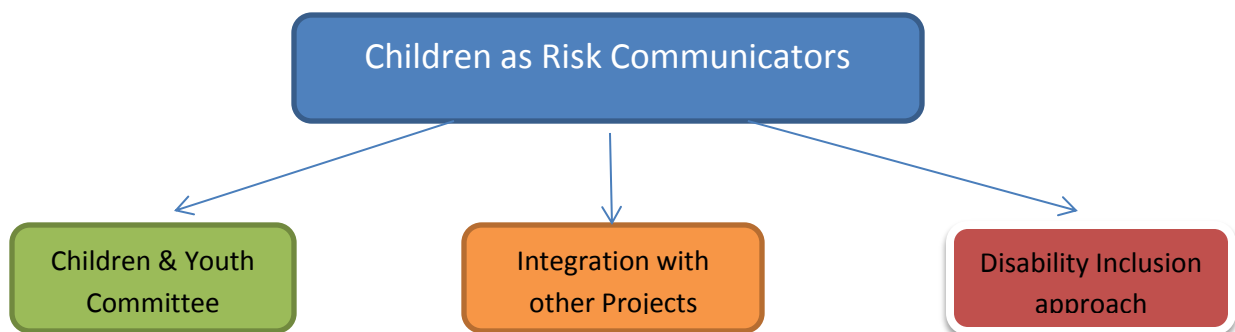
relating to the increase in violence. Currently, the only entry point for commodities (including humanitarian supplies) is closed.

Based on the previous paragraphs, one can imagine that the crisis in Gaza is characterized as being predominantly human-induced. However, since 2011, environmental threats (trans-boundary animal, plant pests, pollution and diseases) as well as natural hazards (water scarcity, wind/rain storms, etc.) have further demonstrated the protracted nature of the situation faced by Palestinians.

The statistics of mid 2013 showed that Gaza Strip has a high population density of 4,661 persons/km², and a total population of 1.7 millions; of which 31% are unemployed and 2.4% are with disabilities. Despite these figures, the data also revealed that the population of Palestine as general and Gaza strip in particular is a young population; where the percentage of individuals aged (0-14) are 43.4% of the total population.³ This shows the importance of focusing on the work with children to build a strong basis to support and empower the Gaza community.

OUR STRATEGY

The long-term conflict is a major factor affecting the health and quality of life of Palestinians. In October 2011, World Vision started the community resilience project in Gaza Strip with an aim to increase the capacities of children and their communities to reduce disaster risk and the impacts of climate change, and build resilient communities. The community resilience project also has a strong focus on children to be involved in the whole project process, which was strengthened through the approach the project adapted “Children as risk communicators” that ensured such rights and participation. To apply this approach, the project started working with a focus on a three pillar strategy; Children and Youth Committee (C&Y), Integration with other projects, and Disability Inclusion.



³ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statics (PCBS), On the Eve of the international population day 11/7/2013 report

PILLAR 1: CHILDREN & YOUTH COMMITTEE (C&Y)

As the project approach is “Children as risk communicators” the project had adapted using a tool that will allow children to be an effective part of their communities and in the same time direct implementers of the project. The C&Y committee was formed from 20 children and adolescents who are members of two partner CBOs of the project and were selected based on elections; where the children elected representatives to represent them in this committee. Each member of the C&Y committee is responsible for 10 children at each stage of the project, this allows the committee to reach 200 children/stage.



This committee was first trained in different subjects like psychological first aid, child protection, leadership skills, and communication to be able to carry out their responsibilities effectively.



The committee was part of every step of the project, starting with the CoVaca assessment where the children had a separate part to discuss the risks and their ideas of mitigation measures, then being involved in the preparations of the Community Disaster preparedness plan. Then the committee was involved in the design and implementation of the activities as based on the Covaca assessment; four risks were identified; conflict, electricity generators, drugs, and pollutions. The C&Y committee was divided into four groups (5 members/group) and each group was responsible for raising awareness and planning for activities that help children understand the dangers of these risks and learn how to protect themselves of such dangers.

The committee wrote songs, formed plays, conducted campaigns, and street drama events and part of the materials designed through the project came as ideas from the C&Y committee including a cartoon film and the ladder and snake game, all of this aimed to reach the largest number of children in their communities.

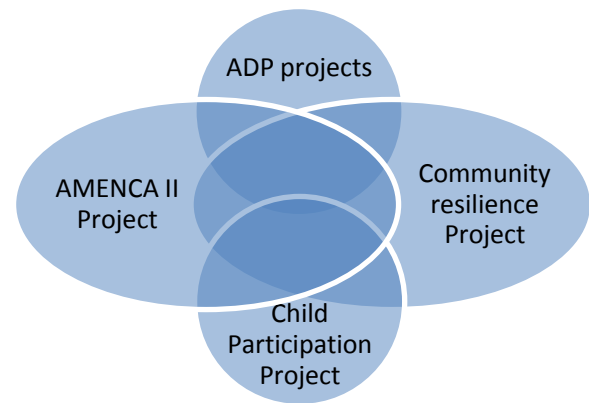


PILLAR 2: INTEGRATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS

Integration is a key for effective and efficient implementation of any project, as it allows you to see the bigger picture which will sure be missed if you worked without integrating with other projects especially when all the projects are serving a common objective.

The figure shows the different projects the ADP is implementing, which all serve a common objective of building resilient communities and improves the wellbeing of children in Gaza Strip.

Under the psychosocial component of the AMENCA project; IASC-MHPSS trainings, Psychosocial first Aid trainings, and Psych educational trainings were conducted. While for the Child Participation project, 4 initiatives out of 10 focus on disaster risk reduction measures, during the last year the initiatives conducted were:



- Clean environment (Children & parents cleaned the streets).
- Make your own safe light (To decrease generators use).
- One street drama event called “Children Rights in a safe world”.
- A one week camp “A safe Life” for the dangers of wars.

While lastly, through the ADP project, awareness raising was a key to integrate with the DRR. The awareness raising sessions focused on:

- Pollution and its effects on children and family health.
- Build the capacities of partner CBOs regarding issues related to environment and health.
- Child protection.
- Psychosocial activities including street drama events.

Benefits of integration is unlimited; it allows us to overcome the limited budget for certain activities in the DRR and also better use budgets in other projects, allows us to diversify the implementation and not only focus on one aspect but capture the fruits of more diversified DRR interventions, and ensures that the DRR will not finish the day the project ends will continue through other projects and learning's will always be there.

PILLAR 3: DISABILITY INCLUSION

In situations of conflict, like Gaza Strip, individuals with disabilities are often the least visible. The long-term conflict is a major factor affecting the health and quality of life of Palestinians, especially those who are disabled, as people with disabilities were largely neglected, despite that they represent 2.4% of the Gaza Strip population.⁴ Normally, people with disabilities face various challenges in their striving for basic human rights such as employment and education; but within the Gaza context a big factor is added which is Conflict as people in Gaza need to learn how to protect themselves and be more resilient to any future shocks.

Our experience in main streaming disability taught us that the secret for successful interventions is to listen and talk to the CwD, think and then plan together, and so 6 out of the 20 members of the C&Y committee were CWD mainly deaf and this was done with the support of one of the project partner CBOs “Al-Basma club for disabled”.

The six children with disabilities in the C&Y committee are the voice of other children with disabilities and represent a large number of children in North Gaza and allow other children to understand and consider the needs of CwD in the design and implementation of CwD in the project interventions.

On the other hand, partnering with a Disabled People Organizations (DPO) , has multi benefits as:

- Instrumental in empowering local society.
- DPO staff are community members, ongoing links with their communities especially disabled.
- They will always be there.
- Not just DPO support. Ultimately through CBOs you strengthen the capacity of local society.
- Empowerment.
- Sustainability.

*“In Gaza, being disabled is different, it is not only a matter of being a disabled and trying to be recognized in your community, it is a matter of being able to protect yourself and LIVE with all the invasions and wars that happens”
Tayma says, 15 years old deaf child*



⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)
On the Eve of the International Population Day | 11/07/2013

Results

Key Result 1: Communities are more organized and prepared for future shocks.

World vision has been working with communities to improve their resilience and build their capacities regarding disaster measures in Gaza for more than two years now. The successful results of this work did not come alone from the community resilience project but more from the comprehensive integrated strategy WV took to implement this project. One of the successes emerged was the preparedness of the communities to respond to any future shocks which was clearly reflected during the November 2012 military operation over Gaza where the communities



took the right measures to protect their families based on the community and the individuals guidance instructions that was distributed to more than 3000 community members. WV was also able for the first time to conduct Within one day of the truce declaration a rapid assessment with the help of 30 members of the local communities based on the HESPER tool, the trained enumerators collected an average of 10-15 questionnaires per day with a total of 400 questionnaires. The data was translated into English, and then entered onto a spreadsheet for analysis every day through working in parallel to the field data collection. Such work would never be done without having qualified local committees to undertake such a huge work in a limited time very effectively.

The North Gaza area now has its community representative group which is part of the WV local committees, and the one responsible for the update of the CDDP for North Gaza, this community group has a direct link with WV and is part of the Do No Harm (DNH) group which updates WV- DNH report as WV is using this approach to analysis the context and determine ways to better manage their programs on the ground every six months.

“Our power is very small compared with what we face, but we realized that this small power can have a BIG impact” Jamel, one of the local committee representatives

On the other hand, we should not forget to mention that till today 6500 community members had been involved in Psychological First Aid trainings (PFA) which is an approach to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. During observations, it was clearly noted that there was a 50% decrease in the time the children of North Gaza took to adapt and recover from the trauma they faced in the 2008-2009 war compared with the November 2012 military operation.

For North Gaza, such projects does not only mean being prepared or more aware but the successful results was much more than expected, as based on the filed visits and monitoring data, it was noted that children being poisoned and passed away by the pesticides (e.g, drinking from bottles or exhaling by mistake) has dropped by 80% with the past three years as parents now know what are the right procedures to store such materials and children also are aware of the danger of touching or coming near any dangerous or unknown materials. The second issue is the electricity generators, which is widely used due to the electricity shortage problem in all Gaza Strip , and due to the deaths of children that were noted during the last few years, WV through the CRP project has conducted huge campaigns to raise awareness about their dangers and the right procedures to use generators, and based on the last observations it was noted that within the last year there was an 60% decrease in the children deaths from electricity generators which is extremely large percent to reach when you only take actions by awareness raising.

Key Result 2: Communities are taking actions to upheld the rights of people and children with disabilities.

People and children with disabilities were from the most vulnerable in their communities especially in times of disasters. In North Gaza community members are starting to take actions to support people and children with disabilities, this included:

- Involving 120 CwD in disaster risk reduction activities through the work of the C&Y committee, those 120 children were involved in conducting plays, street drama events, songs, door to door campaigns. 95% of those children indicated that this is a completely new subject for them and that they now have a better understanding of protection measures.
- 200 parents were involved in sign language trainings to better communicate with their children, as people realized that the first step to a successful protection is having a clear communication channel.
- Inclusion approach has been used within additional 5 CBOs.
- Community representatives started taking actions regarding disabled facilities for emergencies, including installing lamps that light in cases of emergences for people with deaf disabilities. It is a very low cost way through which people and children with deaf disabilities can use to be alerted in cased on emergencies.

"This is why I joined this project, I want to help, I want children to be safe, and I want to make a CHANGE". Tayma, a member of the C&Y committee and a CwD

"We were not able to afford taking a sign language training despite we needed it a lot to communicate with our children, We appreciate a lot conducting such trainings, this training build a LIFE for us" fatma, a mother of a child with a deaf disability.

There is still much more to do for CwD, and all the success that we as WV staff feel being achieved in this project is not only due to our work, it is because those children has a lot of potentials waiting to be **U**nleashed.

Challenges

- Gaza lacks for sufficient resources for the risk reduction including awareness raising materials, equipped facilities, ..etc.
- The No contact Policy do not allow us to contact the civil defense or any other related ministries.
- Some community members would give more attention to actual visible work (e.g facilities) rather than awareness campaigns or trainings, so it should be clear and aware that both approaches are necessary and not only on the expense of the other.

Lessons Learned

- Partnering with a CBO or a DPO ensures strong involvement of community representatives, empowers the CBO or DPO, and supports ensuring sustainability.
- When available, using existing local resources and developing it is much easier and more friendly for the communities rather than using exported resources.
- Disaster risk reduction is not a one person process but a participatory process that should include different community members, CBO's, NGO's, INGO's staff all together in different stages.
- Establishing clear communication channels is critical in successful interventions.
- Despite children being very vulnerable to disasters, they are effective agents and communicators for risk awareness issues.
- Street drama events are a very effective tool to spread DRR messages.
- DRR project should not stand alone as it should be integrated with other ADP projects due to its importance and to ensure effective interventions and implementations.

