

THE CANAAN INSTITUTE OF NEW PEDAGOGY  
& CENTRE FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION



# A REPORT ON A PSYCHOSOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME 2019 GAZA STRIP, PALESTINE



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## Introduction

This is a report on activities delivered in year two of a three-year project (2018-2020) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, jointly managed by the Centre for Global Education (CGE), a development non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Belfast, and the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy, a Palestinian NGO based in Gaza City. The project was funded by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund and delivered from 1 December 2018 to 30 April 2019.



The project had three aims. The first was to provide psychosocial support to 400 children aged 7-12 years suffering from the acute effects of trauma caused by three wars in the Gaza Strip since 2008 and the grinding poverty created by a thirteen-year Israeli siege. The second aim was to supplement the children's education by providing community-based learning focused on core areas of the school curriculum such as literacy and numeracy. The third aim was to deliver workshops to the children's parents with a view to extending psychosocial care into the household. The project was delivered in four locations in Gaza: Culture Revival Society - Gaza City; Bud Flower Association for Affection and Hope - Maghazi refugee camp (central Gaza); Rural Family Development Association - Al-Mughragha Village (southern Gaza); and SOS Villages - Rafah (southern Gaza).

In addition to the activities delivered to children, a total of 32 family workshops on providing psychosocial care were delivered in the four community centres to 514 parents. The workshops advised parents on how to recognise and deal with behavioural changes in children suffering the effects of trauma. This represented a joined-up approach to psychosocial care that involved local schools, community centres and families. In the recruitment of children onto the programme, each community centre liaised with the local school and discussed how the activities could best meet the educational and psychosocial needs of young people. In the case of SOS Villages in Rafah, this organisation provides education and training services to children who have been orphaned in the three wars in Gaza since 2008. The organisation is situated about 15 km from Rafah in a village called Deir Sultan which has around 71,000 inhabitants, most of whom are refugees. The project take-up can be summarised as follows:



## Gaza Project 2019 by numbers

Activities	Number of Participants
Number of child participants	400
Number of workshops delivered to children	244
Number of facilitators per centre	3
Number of family workshops	32
Number of parents who attended workshops	514
Number of psychosocial sessions with children	496
Number of follow-up sessions with children and facilitators	30

## Background to project



Children playing in Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, home to 43,330 registered refugees.  
Photo: May 2014. Stephen McCloskey, all rights reserved.

## Israel's siege of Gaza

In 2012, the United Nations published an alarming **report** on the future of the Gaza Strip warning that by 2020, without urgently needed remedial action, the territory would no longer be a 'liveable place'. The report added: 'There will be virtually no reliable access to sources of safe drinking water, standards of healthcare and education will have continued to decline, and the vision of affordable and reliable electricity for all will have become a distant memory for most'. These dire forecasts of a creaking infrastructure unable to meet the needs of two million Gazans have been sadly realised. According to **Save the Children**, 90% of Gaza's drinking water is unfit for human consumption, electricity is available for just 2-4 hours per day, water-borne diseases are spiking, health and emergency services are breaking down and fresh food is unavailable because of a lack of refrigeration. With over 108 million litres of untreated sewage discharged daily into the Mediterranean Sea, over 60% of the sea is contaminated and the ground water increasingly compromised with pollutants. Gaza has truly become an unliveable place and, yet, two million Gazans are forced to live in what is famously described as the world's largest open air prison.

The primary cause of this 'unliveable' environment is a highly restrictive Israeli blockade, now in its 13th year, which has reduced Gaza to the point of '**systemic collapse**'. Ostensibly imposed on the basis of a security protocol following the election of a Hamas government in Palestinian elections in 2006, Amnesty International believes that Palestinians in Gaza are being '**collectively punished**'. Indeed, what distinguishes this crisis from the disasters and emergencies that normally push civilian populations to the edge of catastrophe is that it is not the result of a hurricane, flood, tsunami, drought or famine but the calculated policy of the Israeli government.

Harvard scholar Sara Roy, who has meticulously researched the impact of Israel's policy-making on Gaza **argues** that the territory has been subjected to 'de-development' meaning that it has been 'dispossessed of its capacity for rational and sustainable economic growth and development, coupled with a growing inability to effect social change'. So, what we are witnessing in Gaza today, she suggests, is the 'logical endpoint' of this policy; 'a Gaza that is functionally unviable'. This view is underscored by the fact that the unemployment **rate** in Gaza is the world's highest at 52% but that rises to nearly 70% for young people and 75% for women. Nearly **75%** of Gaza's population are registered refugees, of whom 900,000 receive emergency food assistance from the UN and 500,000 live 'below the abject poverty line'. Although it withdrew its settlers and troops from Gaza in 2005, Israel remains the occupying power in the territory as it controls the airspace, territorial waters and all but one of the border crossings. According to **Amnesty**, this means Israel 'is responsible for the welfare of the inhabitants in the strip under international humanitarian law'. The blockade is therefore illegal under the terms of the fourth Geneva Convention which **imposes** 'general responsibility on the occupying state for the safety and welfare of civilians living in the occupied territory'.

## The Great March of Return

On 30 March 2018, Palestinian civil society launched the Great March of Return, a weekly protest movement demanding an end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza and asserting the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the land of their ancestors. By the end of October 2019, the UN **estimated** Palestinian fatalities during the weekly protests along the perimeter fence with Israel at 326 with 35,962 injuries including multiple amputees. In noting her 'grave concern' at the use of live ammunition on civilian protestors, the International Criminal Court Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, **announced** on 20 December 2019 that 'there is a reasonable basis to proceed with an investigation into the situation in Palestine'. The protestors in Gaza are demanding the right to return to their ancestors' homes, from which they were expelled in 1948 when Zionist militias forcefully removed 750,000 Palestinians from their villages to clear the way for Israel's creation.



A United Nations Commission of Inquiry into the use of live ammunition by the Israeli military of protestors in Gaza in 2018 **found** “reasonable grounds to believe that during the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Some of those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, and must be immediately investigated by Israel”.



*Great March of Return, 2019. Canaan Institute. All rights reserved.*

### **Three wars since 2008**

The social problems created by Israel’s blockade of Gaza have been compounded by three wars since 2008: operations ‘Cast Lead’ (2008-09), ‘Pillar of Defense’ (2012) and ‘Protective Edge’ (2014). Operation ‘Protective Edge’ resulted in the highest number of Palestinian civilian casualties than in any year since 1967. **551** children were killed from a total of 1,462 civilian deaths and ‘nearly 68 percent of the children killed by Israeli forces were 12 years old or younger’.





*Zeitoun Preparatory Schools for Girls, an UNRWA school located in a southern district of Gaza City, opposite a government building destroyed in Operation 'Pillar of Defense', an eight-day bombardment of Gaza carried out in November 2012. Photo: March 2013. Stephen McCloskey, all rights reserved.*

According to Unicef, **370,000** children were left in need of 'psycho-social aid' and Euro Med Monitor for Human Rights has **found** that:

***"1 in 4 children needs psychosocial support because of trauma and losses experienced during violence, including physical injury, fear of bombing sounds and deaths of family members or friends".***

In the midst of the conflict in August 2014, Unicef's field officer, Pernilla Ironside, said:

***'There isn't a single family in Gaza who hasn't experienced personally death, injury, the loss of their home, extensive damage, displacement'. The Israeli casualties in the same conflict totalled 67 soldiers and six civilians.***

The infrastructural damage in Gaza caused by 'Protective Edge' included 18,000 housing units partially or completely destroyed and 73 medical facilities and several ambulances damaged. The United Nations (UN) reported that **7 schools** were completely destroyed and 252 schools damaged by the conflict which has exacerbated a crisis in education in Gaza. According to the UN, 250 additional schools are needed to address the present shortfall and accommodate a rising population predicted to increase to 2.1 million from the present 1.8 million by 2020. With the number of school buildings depleted further by 'Protective Edge', the education system is under unprecedented strain with 90 percent of schools in Gaza having to double shift; house two separate school populations in the same building every day.

The problems created by the creaking infrastructure of the education system are compounded by the psychological effects of war and poverty. In commenting on the multiple effects of war on Gaza's population, Pernilla Ironside *said*:

*"The impact has truly been vast, both at a very physical level, in terms of casualties, injuries, the infrastructure that's been damaged, but also importantly, emotionally and psychologically in terms of the destabilizing impact that not knowing, not truly feeling like there is anywhere safe to go in Gaza".*

This is particularly the case with children on whom the psychological effects of conflict manifest themselves in many ways including fear, tension, aggression, becoming withdrawn and silent, difficulties in concentrating in school, and increasing isolation from family and friends. These psychological problems are also related to the 'pressure cooker' environment of households under severe economic pressure as a result of Israel's siege.

The combination of three wars since 2008 and an eleven-year economic siege has created a highly stressful and physically dangerous environment for children in particular who are on the frontline of conflict and vulnerable to the effects of extreme poverty. They are also physically isolated because of the restrictions on travel in and out of Gaza caused by Israel's siege and Egypt's closure of the southern border with Gaza at Rafah. One young person described this as being part of a 'blindfolded generation' denied contact with the outside world and unable to take-up opportunities for work, study and travel beyond Gaza's borders. All of these factors contributed to the Centre for Global Education's decision to work with the Canaan Institute in delivering a project specifically for young children inside Gaza to both enhance their education opportunities and to provide psychosocial support to help address the effects of trauma and poverty.

## The Project

The Centre for Global Education / Canaan Institute project had four main aims:

- To enhance the knowledge and understanding of young people of key areas of the schools' curriculum such as literacy and numeracy, and strengthen their school performance.
- To help alleviate the trauma and stress of children enrolled in the programme through psychosocial care and family support.
- To create a safe and structured play environment for children in a community setting using interactive methodologies and activities.
- To enhance the capacity of the four host community organisations to deliver interactive, development education training activities.

### Project Objectives:

- To provide psychosocial support to 400 children aged 7 to 12 suffering acute effects of conflict-related trauma in the Gaza Strip;
- To supplement education provision to children with special learning needs to enable them to reach their full potential in school and to provide education services to children who have had to leave school early to work at home;
- To deliver training to the families of the children to enable them to provide psychosocial support to the young people at home;
- To co-ordinate project delivery in liaison with local schools and psychotherapists to ensure a 'joined-up' approach to child welfare.
- To deliver the project in partnership with the Canaan Institute and four grassroots community centres in the Gaza Strip;



- To provide training in facilitation to a total of 12 facilitators (3 per centre) in the four centres to enable them to deliver development education activities to children;
- To evaluate the programme and its impact on the facilitators and children.



## Project Activities

*The project had six stages of delivery that are described below:*

### STAGE 1: Training of Facilitators (December 2019)

Three members of staff from each of the four community centres received nine hours of training on 19 and 20 December 2018. The training was delivered using interactive, development education methodologies and activities designed to enhance the educational performance of children and provide psychosocial support. A significant project outcome has been the enhanced skills base of the four centres through the training delivered to their staff. The training was delivered by the staff of the Canaan Institute and included:

- Facilitation techniques used to lead children in games and play, arts and crafts, and expressive mediums such as theatre, dance and rap.
- Training in the use of teaching activities designed to support learning in Arabic, English, Health and Science, and Mathematics which are key areas of the school curriculum.
- Active learning concepts, aims and methodologies consistent with good practice in development education.
- Facilitation methods used to support discussion on mental health problems caused by trauma.
- Developing a teaching plan of activities and field work.
- Advice on liaison with schools during the project.
- Techniques to support the effective monitoring and evaluation of activities.

## STAGE 2: Recruitment of Children (December 2018)

The 400 children enrolled on to the project were selected by the four community centres in consultation with surrounding schools and visiting psychotherapists working with children in each school. The project enrolled children manifesting the most acute forms of trauma and anxiety who were identified by teachers and psychotherapists. A key component of the project was its 'joined-up' approach to the children's therapy by involving their families, schools and the local community. This ensured that the education activities targeted areas of the school curriculum in which the children needed support as well as providing psychosocial therapy to address the causes of stress. The four community organisations involved in project delivery were:

- Culture Revival Society - Gaza City;
- Bud Flower Association for Affection and Hope - Maghazi refugee camp (central Gaza);
- Rural Family Development Association - Al-Mughragha Village (southern Gaza);
- SOS Villages – Rafah (southern Gaza).



## STAGE 3: Training Delivery to Children (January - April 2020)

On 2 January 2020, the training began with 100 children enrolled in each centre facilitated by three staff members. The children in each centre were divided into groups of 25 along age lines. Two groups of 25 worked on Saturday, Monday and Wednesday and the other two groups on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. This meant that 50 children attended workshops every day in each centre except Friday. Facilitators worked with each group over two periods in the morning from 8.00am to 2.00pm in the afternoon.

The education activities used with the children aimed to strengthen their classroom performance in four core areas of the schools' curriculum:



- Arabic
- Mathematics
- English
- Health and Science

The sessions combined formal school learning with play which included games, role play, theatre, dance, cultural expression and art. The activities were implemented using active learning methodologies and the outcomes of the children's work included: wall designs, dramas and songs, puppet and contemporary dance, stories, and art and embroidery. The facilitators used dynamic, interactive methodologies including drama, art, stories, poetry, rap and *Dabka* (traditional Palestinian song and dance). The activities focused on strengthening knowledge, skills and confidence in the areas of literacy, numeracy, talking and listening. The formal sector work was delivered in liaison with teachers in local schools who advised on the key areas of the curriculum that needed to be addressed in the work with children. Teachers could advise on subject areas in which children were particularly weak and needed additional support. The activities were evaluated with the children through oral feedback and written questionnaires at the end of the programme. A total of 496 psychosocial sessions and 244 educational workshops were delivered to children over the four months of the project. A total of 32 workshops were delivered to the parents of the children across the four communities on psychosocial care with a total of 514 women attending.



*A facilitator leads children in a group activity.*

## Psychosocial Activities

The project prioritised psychosocial activities that enabled the children to share the difficult and troubling feelings and emotions caused by the constant threat of conflict in Gaza and the daily grind of poverty. This is often exacerbated by a difficult domestic life where one or both parents may be out of work and struggling to make ends meet. This can cause a 'pressure cooker' environment that creates anxiety, stress and tension for children and can manifest itself in the children's behaviour which can range from aggression and fear to becoming withdrawn and silent.





The psychosocial activities supported by the programme included:

- Games and structured play activities;
- Free expression activities and a psychological 'dump' exercise;
- Drawings and art work;
- Popular cultural tradition activities;
- Puppet theatre.



*A psychosocial support activity in SOS Villages, Rafah.*

Summary of Project Activities (December 2018 - April 2019)						
Total number of Activities	The total number of workshops in each community				Tasks Type of activities	Month
	Culture Revival Society (Gaza City)	Rural Family Development Association (Mughragha Village)	Bud Flower Association for Affection and Hope (Maghazi)	SOS Children's Villages (Rafah)		
112	32	24	24	32	Literacy, Numeracy, Cultural, English.	January
56	16	12	12	16	Science subjects	
8	2	2	2	2	Family workshops on psycho-social care	
120	32	24	32	32	Free art and drawing activities	February
60	16	12	16	16	Arabic classes	
8	2	2	2	2	Family workshops on psychosocial care	
132	32	32	32	36	Structured Play activities	March
64	16	16	16	16	Mathematics classes	
8	2	2	2	2	Family workshops on psychosocial care	
132	32	32	32	36	Theatrical and literary display activities	April
64	16	16	16	16	English language classes	
8	2	2	2	2	Family workshops on psychosocial care	

#### STAGE 4: Family Workshops (January to April 2020)

A key part of the project activities involved the delivery of workshops to families of the children enrolled on the programme. The facilitators across the four centres organised a total of 32 psychosocial support sessions that were delivered to 514 parents.

The workshops focused on:

- Continuing the psychosocial support of young people at home that built upon the training delivered by the facilitators in each centre;
- How to recognise the symptoms of trauma;
- How to manage young people in times of crisis and stress;
- How to use play and therapeutic learning in domestic life to alleviate stress.

The facilitators consulted with parents on a one-to-one basis to help them monitor the progress of their child and identify areas of learning in which they needed specific support. Many parents struggle to manage children subject to stress and trauma and so the assistance provided by the community centres and schools is invaluable.

The facilitators monitored the behaviour and progress of the children in responding to the psychosocial activities during the project and regularly met with parents to discuss the individual needs of each child.





*Parents attending a family workshop aimed at strengthening psychosocial support for children in the household.*

### **STAGE 5: Celebration Days (April 2020)**

Each of the four centres organised a Celebration Day in April 2020 to mark the end of the project and celebrate the students' achievements over the previous four months. The Celebration Days were organised jointly by the facilitators and the children and family members were invited to attend. The days involved children performing song, dance, poetry, rap and role plays. They often performed songs and dance in traditional dress with the help of their facilitators. The Celebration Days also allowed family members to see the work carried out by the children in Art & Design, Mathematics, Health & Science, English and Arabic reflecting the high quality activities delivered by the facilitators.



*Celebration Day in SOS Villages in Rafah, Gaza.*



The Celebration Days included:

- Exhibitions of wall murals, art, craftwork and drawings;
- Theatre performances written and performed by the children;
- Songs and Palestinian traditional dance (*Dakba*);
- Poetry written and performed by the children;
- Puppet shows;
- Clowns and dance shows.

The performances were attended by the children's families, local community members, the staff of Canaan Institute and the board of directors of each community association participating in the programme.



Children working on a wall mural during the project

## STAGE 6: Monitoring and Evaluation (January to April 2020)

Throughout the delivery of the project, the staff of Canaan organised a series of educational and administrative follow-up visits to the four partner organizations to assess delivery of the programme and reflect on its outcomes with the twelve facilitators. These visits dealt with monitoring and evaluation, administrative issues such as how to securely store data records on parents and children, providing advice on workplans and the delivery of activities.

The twelve facilitators also attended an end-of-project evaluation day organised by the staff of the Canaan Institute. This was a day of reflection on the project outcomes and the methodologies and materials used in the project activities. A major strength of the programme is the provision of lifelong learning skills to facilitators which will strengthen their professional development, particularly with the introduction of a new training diploma by the Canaan Institute.



*A facilitator leads a workshop with children enrolled on the 2019 project in Gaza.*

## Project Outcomes

The main outcomes of the project activities were as follows:

- ✓ 400 children have developed skills in talking, listening and discussion, and are more confident in expressing themselves.
- ✓ Children are more open about sharing issues related to stress and trauma as a result of the psychosocial activities delivered by the project.
- ✓ Children's relationships at school, at home and in the community have developed significantly and positively, as a result of psychosocial support.



- ✓ The project has resulted in a noticeable improvement in children's desire to understand and learn basic school subjects using active learning methods.
- ✓ The children's parents are now more confident and positive in extending psychosocial care at home as a result of the project's parental workshops.
- ✓ The 12 project facilitators have learned lifelong skills in delivering active learning methodologies and providing psychosocial support.



*Children engaged in a play activity*

### **Activity Outputs for the Project**

The main outputs for the project are as follows:

- The four host community organisations now have enhanced staff capacity for training and development as a result of their involvement in the project.
- The children produced a rich landscape of drawings, sketches, arts and crafts, and exhibitions.
- The children produced a collection of stories, poems and songs.
- The children wrote letters to their local communities.
- The project produced a range of learning tools in various educational subjects.
- The children performed impromptu sketches and folk performances.

### **Recommendations to Enhance Future Projects:**

- Implement community-based initiatives using activities that enable children and their parents to work together.
- Provide a large portable speaker with a microphone to carry out group activities.
- Organise an open day and a recreational trip for both parents and their children.
- To provide a school bag and stationery for each child on the programme.
- To organize a summer camp during the programme.
- To consider a raise in the facilitators' salaries



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Children drawing in an activity in SOS Villages, Rafah.

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The Centre equips individuals and organisations to understand the cultural, economic, social and political influences on our lives that result from our growing interdependence with other countries and societies. It also provides learners with the skills, values, knowledge and understanding necessary to facilitate action that will contribute to poverty eradication both locally and globally.

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