

THE CANAAN INSTITUTE OF NEW PEDAGOGY
& CENTRE FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION



SUPPORTING EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE GAZA STRIP



THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN FUNDED BY NIPSA'S DEVELOPING WORLD FUND



1. Introduction

This is a report on an education project in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, delivered by the Centre for Global Education (CGE), a development non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Belfast, in partnership with the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy, an NGO based in Gaza. The project was funded by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Developing World Fund and delivered from December 2012 to March 2013.

The project's aim was "to enhance education and psycho-social support services to marginalised young people in the Gaza Strip". It was delivered to 300 young people aged 7 to 10 in three locations in Gaza: Beit Lahia, Deir El Balah and Maghazi. These are areas with high concentrations of refugees where communities are subject to acute poverty levels and young people attend school for half a day. The Centre's project aimed to supplement education provision and provide a structured and safe play space for the young people enrolled on the project in the three delivery sites.

This is a narrative and visual report on the delivery of the project and its outcomes.

2. Background

This project is building on recent work supported by the Centre for Global Education in the Gaza Strip in partnership with the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy. Canaan Institute shares the Centre's educational values and approach to development and aims to address the educational needs of grassroots community organizations in Gaza. In July 2012, the Centre and Canaan jointly delivered a summer school to 1,000 children aged 8-12 years to provide opportunities for play and learning over the summer months. It was particularly valued in 2012 as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the main provider of health and education services in Gaza, had to cancel their summer scheme for young people owing to cuts in their budget. The CGE / Canaan summer school was a great success and provided a foundation for the delivery of the NIPSA project in 2013 which is described below.

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Jabalia Refugee Camp in Northern Gaza

Blockade of Gaza

The CGE decided to work in the Gaza Strip given the worsening humanitarian situation resulting from Israel's blockade of the territory which was intensified in 2007 and has exacerbated poverty levels that have particularly impacted on children. The Israeli siege has devastated the economy and reduced humanitarian aid entering the region to a trickle. Most of Gaza's 1.7m people are refugees and living in a small slither of land just 45km long and 5-12km wide. With the economy in freefall and unemployment at just under 30 percent, the levels of malnutrition in Gaza have accelerated with 60 percent described as 'food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity'. The UN has said that Gaza's economy which is heavily reliant on intensive trade, communication and the movement of people is "fundamentally unviable under present circumstances". It adds that "Gaza is currently kept alive through external funding and the illegal tunnel activity" between Gaza and Egypt.

Health and Education of Children

Children are on the frontline of Israel's blockade of Gaza as failing utilities like water and electricity combined with an inadequate diet have seen rampant rates of anaemia and diarrhoea. In 2012, Save the Children published a report which found that 58 percent of school children in Gaza suffer from anaemia which is caused by an iron deficiency in their diet. This is the result of their eating processed food smuggled through the tunnels rather than fresh meat and vegetables. The health problems of young people are compounded by a polluted water supply with 95 percent of Gaza's water supply unsafe for drinking without purification. This has resulted in a rise of sanitation-related diseases like typhoid fever and diarrhoea which combined with 'chronic malnutrition' is severely impacting on the health of Gaza's children.

In regard to education provision, Gaza is in a state of crisis with 44 percent of the territory's population under 14 years. Most of Gaza's children are educated in 247 schools run by the United Nations with 221,000 pupils attending them. 90 percent of these schools operate a double shift which means that pupils attend school for half-a-day to make way for more children using the same building in either the morning or afternoon. As a result, schools struggle to provide any kind of extra-curricular activities to pupils and the swelling size of the school population means that the 7,700 teachers employed in UN schools struggle to contend with overcrowded classrooms.

Children and Conflict

One of the aims of the Centre's project was to provide psycho-social counselling to children suffering residual trauma from Israel's bombardment of the territory in 2008-09 and more recently in November 2012. 344 children were killed during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in 2008-09 and many more left with the psychological scars of conflict which have an enduring impact on their mental health. Even in periods of relative calm, children are vulnerable to Israeli military activity particularly on Gaza's northern border. For example, 30 minors were shot by the Israeli military in the period between 26 March 2010 and 27 December 2011 while carrying out agricultural work near the border with Israel.

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from a total of 156 (103 civilians). The children were killed “due to Israeli shelling of civilian houses and property in the Gaza Strip”. During the bombardment, 88 schools and 19 health service facilities sustained severe damaged. In total 1,460 houses, public facilities, agricultural, industrial and naval properties were targeted in the Gaza Strip during ‘Operation Pillar of Cloud’.



Zeitoun Preparatory Girls School on the left was one of 88 schools that sustained severe damage during Israel's bombardment of Gaza in November 2012. The children attending this school had to be temporarily relocated to another school while \$100,000 of repairs were undertaken to Zeitoun. They re-occupied the school in March 2013.

As a result of living in a region under constant siege, many of the children in Gaza suffer from mental health problems manifested through fear, sleeplessness, hyper-tension and a lack of motivation. NIPSA's project was therefore regarded as a vital service in trying to counsel children through these psycho-social issues in the three areas of delivery.

3. About the Project

3.1 The Project aim was:

To enhance education and psycho-social support services to marginalised young people in the Gaza Strip.

3.2 Project Objectives were:

- To supplement education provision to 300 children aged between 7 and 10 years in the Gaza Strip;
- To provide psycho-social support to the young people on the programme suffering the effects of conflict-related trauma;
- To deliver the project in partnership with the Canaan Institute and three grassroots community centres in the Gaza Strip;
- To provide training in facilitation skills to a total of 9 staff in the three centres;
- To evaluate the programme and its impact on the facilitators and children.



Three facilitators in Deir El Balah: Jawher N. El Louh, Mona S. Abu Amra, Mohamed A. Khatab

3.2 Project Delivery

Phase 1 of the project (December 2012)

The Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy trained three facilitators in each of the three Centres that supported the work of the project based in Beit Lahia, Deir El Balah and Maghazi. These Centres already had strong working relations with the Canaan Institute and provide a range of community services to young people and adults in areas with a high population density and subject to extreme poverty. Three facilitators working in each Centre received training from the Canaan Institute in active learning methodologies and facilitation skills used to engage young people in education activities through play, drama and arts and crafts. One of the sustainable outcomes of the project has been the training received by the facilitators which will enhance their ongoing work with children in the three Centres.



- **A total of 300 children participated in the project in three locations: Beit Lahia, Deir El Balah and Maghazi.**
- **The children received supplementary education to strengthen their Arabic and numeracy.**
- **They also had classes in art, crafts, song, dance, poetry, drama and fun!**

The Canaan Institute provided ten days training to the facilitators in the first stage of the project using well established development education methodologies and resources. At the same time, the three Centres recruited 100 children from their localities to participate in the project. The project was promoted through local schools by speaking to the young people about the project activities. In all three Centres there was intense interest in the project and the quota of places was easily filled. With many more children than places available, the young people were enrolled using criteria based on educational and psychological needs ensuring that the places went to those particularly affected by conflict-related trauma and with special educational needs.

Phase 2 of the Project (January to March 2013)

The delivery of project activities started in January 2013. The 100 children in each centre were divided into four groups of 25. One group attended in the morning and one in the afternoon so 50 children attended each Centre per day. Two groups attended each Centre on Saturday, Monday and Wednesday and the other two groups on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. One of the aims of the project was to provide supplementary education classes to children so the young people came for activities in the Centres on the morning or afternoon when they weren't at school.

The education activities focused on literacy and numeracy including sessions on learning English as well as strengthening Arabic. The facilitators worked on creating a fun but structured learning environment that included sessions on arts and craft, drama, poetry, song and dance, as well as traditional cultural activities. The project provided a safe play environment in areas bereft of facilities for children and also took the young people on visits outside their localities including to the other Centres. Even in a region as small as Gaza, young people are often denied the opportunity to explore areas outside their neighbourhood given the lack of available transportation and continuous threat of conflict.

An important element of project delivery was the provision of psycho-social support to young people experiencing acute trauma related to the conflict in Gaza. The timing of the project was important in this respect starting just one month after Israel's Operation Pillar of Cloud, an eight day bombardment from 14-21 November 2012. There were casualties in all three areas where the project was delivered and the facilitators commented on the impact that the bombardment had on

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the mental health of the young people. The facilitators worked closely with the children most severely manifesting symptoms of trauma using skills and expertise derived from their training with the Canaan Institute and in their Centres. They worked closely with the children's parents to discuss how this support could be extended to the household and sustained beyond the duration of the project.



Phase 3 of the Project (March 2013)

In March 2013, the facilitators and children worked together to organise a Celebration Day to showcase the work completed over the previous three months. The celebration days were attended by the children's families and members of local community. The children performed traditional song and dance, their own compositions including poetry and rap, and dramas that reflected on family and community life in the midst of conflict.



Palestinian rap, Maghazi Centre



A young girl participates in the Celebration Day, Maghazi

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Phase 4 of the Project (March 2013)

The final phase of the project involved the Centre for Global Education's Director, Stephen McCloskey, visiting Gaza from 24 - 31 March to help evaluate the project outcomes. The visit included:

- Attending the Celebration Day in each Centre;
- Meeting the facilitators and getting feedback on project delivery;
- Meeting the Director of the three community centres;
- Meeting the Director of the Canaan Institute.

It was important to locate each Centre in the context of the local community and get a sense of the wider social and economic problems being experienced by families in the three areas. A recurring issue raised during this visit was the level of concern expressed by individuals and communities about the reduced level of non-governmental and United Nations funding coming into the region on the back of the global financial recession. Indeed, the UN mission in Gaza issued emergency appeals for funding in 2011 and 2012 to address a significant shortfall in funding needed to maintain essential humanitarian services. These services include cash aid, food, housing, health and education provision with 70 percent of Gaza's refugee population dependent on UN support for most basic needs.



Celebration Day, Beit Lahia with strong support from the local community.

At a local level, families in the three communities where the project was delivered find it increasingly difficult to secure essential day-to-day items like food and clothing while the lack of clean water and an interrupted electricity supply places an intolerable strain on adults and children alike. However, there was a very evident community bond in all three areas and a very high level of support for the project activities. The communities turned out in large numbers for the Celebration Days.

Evaluation of the project included meeting with the nine facilitators in the three Centres to assess the extent to which the project benefited them and the young people they worked with. The facilitators highly valued the development education training received from the Canaan Institute, particularly the lifelong facilitation skills, values and attitudes derived from the first stage of the project. They felt that this training strengthened their capacity as trainers that would endure beyond the project timeframe. As the facilitators work in the Centres where the project was delivered they are in a position to apply their skills to the young people on an ongoing basis.

The project enabled the facilitators to work in a range of learning areas – arts, crafts, drama, mathematics, Arabic and English - as well as enhance their counselling skills while working with young people experiencing trauma. They diversified their skills base and feel better equipped to strengthen the formal education of young people as well as leading them in more informal activities like games and art. On the debit side, all of the facilitators, the children and families commented that the programme was too short and needed a longer delivery period of at least a year. This would provide more time to address the needs of children on a one-to-one basis, particularly those manifesting symptoms of trauma.

From the perspective of the young people, the programme had several very positive outcomes. First, it provided them with supplementary education provision three half-days a week in which they strengthened their learning in mathematics, Arabic and English. Second, they enjoyed the informality of learning in a local community centre as opposed to the more formal environment of the school. This made the learning process more relaxed and enjoyable. Third, they were offered opportunities to play with their peers in a structured and safe play environment with skilled facilitators. Fourth, they had opportunities to visit other parts of the Gaza Strip as part of the programme and escape their local environment. And fifth, they received counselling that helped alleviate psychological problems arising from the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

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Children perform tradition song and dance at the Celebration Day in Deir El Balah

The children's families, too, valued the project as providing new learning and counselling opportunities as well as placing the young people in a safe environment when they weren't at school. The level of participation from the families of the children in the Celebration Days reflected how highly they regarded the project's activities. However, they too felt that the timeframe of the programme was too short.

The Directors of the three Centres were deeply appreciative of the support provided by NIPSA through the project. The meetings with the Directors provided useful background information on the problems created within their areas by the blockade and conflict. All of them commented on the tightening margins within which families had to operate as funding from the UN and other sources was being squeezed. This was most starkly evident in the community centre in Maghazi in central Gaza which stands opposite a refugee camp occupied by 23,000 people in an area of one square kilometre. With families living in difficult conditions in all of the communities that participated in the project, the project was very much valued by the Directors of the Centres who would welcome the opportunity to collaborate again with NIPSA, the CGE and Canaan.

3.2 Project Outcomes

In summary, the outcomes of the CGE / Canaan Institute project were:

- **300 young people received supplementary education provision in literacy and numeracy;**
- **The project facilitators learned new training and facilitation skills that they applied in their work with the children;**
- **The most acute trauma cases received counselling from the facilitators who also worked with parents on how to provide home support;**
- **All of the young people had opportunities to visit other parts of the Gaza Strip and the other Centres involved in the project;**
- **The project supported stronger links between CGE, the Canaan Institute and the three Centres involved in the project that we can build on in the future.**

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Maghazi Refugee Camp

- In Maghazi Refugee Camp, 23,000 people are living in an area of one square kilometre.
- The Maghazi Community Centre that participated in the project stood opposite the camp and many of the children that enrolled on the project were refugees.
- The Director of the Maghazi Centre very much valued the support provided by NIPSA to the project.

4. The next steps

The Director of the Canaan Institute, Issa Saba and Director of CGE, Stephen McCloskey, aim to build on the work supported by NIPSA in this project by collaborating on a longer-term initiative that will facilitate an exchange of learning and expertise between Gaza and the North of Ireland. To date our work has focused largely on project delivery within Gaza and could benefit from a comparative dimension examining how education can play a positive role in conflict scenarios drawing upon work carried out in Ireland and Palestine. The project could also support community learning partnerships between the North of Ireland and Palestine given the strong community links developed by Canaan and the Centre for Global Education as part of their work.



A CGE and Canaan Institute banner at the Celebration Day in Deir El Balah.

The need remains however for short-term initiatives too that address immediate needs in the areas of education and psycho-social support. The comparatively low operating costs in Gaza mean that small amounts of support go a long way toward addressing community needs, particularly those of children who are most vulnerable to the effects of Israel's blockade of Gaza and military interventions. Therefore, any future support available from NIPSA's Developing World Fund would make an immediate impact on the lives of Gaza's children.

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Far Right: Issa Saba, Director of the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy; Fourth from the left: Mohammed Abu Amara, Director of Al-Jamer'a Youth Society where the project was delivered in Deir el Balah; Fourth from the right: Stephen McCloskey, Director, Centre for Global Education with staff from the Centre in Deir El Balah.

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