

Gaza

Emergency Response

Mid-term evaluation



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Photos: Building demolished by the war, in Gaza. Silva Ferretti / ActionAid 2015



About the evaluation

Programme overview

As reported in the Participatory Review and Reflection Process document, ActionAid Palestine's Emergency Response Programme - Gaza has now completed nine months. ActionAid resumed its operation in Gaza beginning in July 2014. During the initial few months, AA – with partners – provided cash vouchers to 500 war affected families to purchase food items as emergency relief. Following the same cash voucher distribution system, AA supported a further 490 families for non-food items and later 500 families for a winterization programme – warm clothes, blankets and mattresses. From December 2014 onwards, ActionAid entered into a formal partnership with four local Palestinian Non-Government Organizations partners as a second phase from the immediate relief phase towards a longer term recovery and development phase. AA formally established an office in Gaza in September 2015 and started to function, supporting partners in the planning processes to integrate plans with the longer term change process based on the real time evaluation findings and in line with the Emergency Response and Resilience Building Plan.

Partners and programmes

Wefaq Society for Women and Child Care:	Psychosocial support for children (4 months December 2014 to March 2015) and Women's livelihood with integrated psychosocial support (8 months December 2014 to July 2015)
Agricultural Development Association (PARC):	Women's livelihood (8 months December 2014 to July 2015)
Fekra Arts Institute	Supporting Psychosocial Initiatives for Children Affected by War in Gaza (12 months December 2014 to November 2015)
Union of Health Care Committees (UHCC):	Free Medical Support to the war affected people in Gaza (4 months December 2014 to March 2015). Contribution of medicines worth value of USD 40,000.
Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO):	"Reconstruction in Gaza: Building Local Participation and Accountability" for 7 months (March to September 2015)
Agricultural Development Association (PARC):	"Recovery of agro-based women's livelihoods and strengthening agriculture sector in Gaza" March 2015 to August 2016.

An overview of the coverage, as generated by the ActionAid office

Activity	Beneficiaries
<i>Food items (for families living at schools/shelters (non UNRWA)</i>	Targeted 490 families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men 650 • Women 980 • Child 1800
<i>Non-food items (school uniform and kitchen utensils etc.)</i>	Targeted 500 families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men 1830 • Women 1825
<i>Winterization kits</i>	Targeted 500 families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male 1849 • Female 1703
<i>Livelihood projects total targeted 146 family</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PARC 56 women; 474 family members • WEFAQ 90 women; 666 family members
<i>Psychosocial support targeted</i>	1,172 individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women 174 (Wefaq) • Children 998 (Fekra & Wefaq)
<i>Emergency medical days & medicines</i>	600 individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women 350 • Men 250

Where is ActionAid heading to?

ActionAid had previously worked in Gaza, on an emergency response to “Operation Cast Lead” in 2009-2010. The organization had plans to stay in the long term, but contextual challenges led it to cease operations in 2010. The commitment to work in Gaza remained, and was stressed in the country strategy 2013-2017, committing ActionAid to establish a long-term presence in Gaza. The emergency response led to re-engagement. The organization has now formulated an ActionAid three year comprehensive response plan.

ActionAid’s three year comprehensive response plan objectives:

1. We will support women living in poverty in Gaza to access and manage resources needed for livelihoods.
2. We will support women and children in Gaza to reduce the impact of trauma, and enhance protection in the context of post-war recovery.
3. We will advocate for the application of international humanitarian law, and promote fair and effective development

From stated objectives versus a shared, strategic vision of change

The work done so far is still largely a service delivery type of response, and with a strong psychosocial component. This is understandable, since the needs in the months following the 51 day war in July-August 2014 were acute. This aspect – how the rights based approach links to the provision of tangible relief assistance – will be further looked at in a subsequent chapter (**Error! Reference source not found.**) Now ActionAid is developing its response in line with the strategic objectives of ActionAid as an international organization and in Palestine. The fieldwork revealed emerging possibilities and ideas: from ActionAid, from the Partners and from the beneficiaries themselves. As highlighted in the methodology, this evaluation became an opportunity to capture these ideas.

All the partners that are currently working with ActionAid have potential for long term engagement, and their vision is in line with ActionAid’s. They are keen to have a strategic engagement that goes beyond this response programme.

This evaluation intends to be also an opportunity to assess, within the current context:

- What is the vision of partners, and their capacities to realize it as the programme transitions from emergency response to longer term programming
- To bring in a framework that responds to the strategic mandate of ActionAid.

Methodology

Evaluation activities

The evaluation activities are captured on an online map, which outlines location and content.

	<p>The map is available at http://tinyurl.com/gazaeval</p>
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Evaluation activities included:

- Home visits to individual beneficiaries
- Small focus groups with beneficiaries (in the partners' offices as well as home visits, as appropriate)
- Participant observation of ongoing activities, in particular 1) animation and drama sessions with children 2) scheduled meetings held with old and new partners, focusing on accountability (which were a very good opportunity to see how discussion and work on this priority area for the future engagement of ActionAid unfolded)
- Feedback meetings with partners and with ActionAid, in ActionAid and partners offices in Gaza and in the ActionAid office in Hebron.

Who did we meet?

The evaluation met:

- **People** who benefitted from the work. It did so with individual interviews or small focus groups (three to five people). Interviews were long (up to two hours). They included a video taking session to capture insights.
- **Staff** of ActionAid and partners (also including partners that had just started their work together with ActionAid).
- Given the limited number of days in Gaza (further shortened by delays in granting the permit) there was no time left to visit **external agencies / coordination bodies**.

Criteria for selecting interviewees

The selection of who to interview was left to the partners, asking to prioritize:

- **People** who are representative of the "average" beneficiary of the projects.
- **People** who could provide insights on possible future developments of the project.
- **People** who could show interesting angles of the work, worth capturing.
- **People** who could help to gauge not only the results, but also the process.
- **Something** that can show challenges for the work. Important to appreciate that, in a context that is as complicated as Gaza.

The evaluation approach: forward-looking

Aspirational and appreciative

A mid-term evaluation is a good opportunity to stop and reflect, to look at “what it can be” and building on the ideas and on the experience so far. It is important that it can help to “build momentum”, so this evaluation was also designed to be appreciative in nature. It starts by valuing the work done – rather than trying to “pick issues”. It seeks to emphasize achievements and possibilities. An appreciative evaluation can still reveal issues, mistakes, challenges, but this is done:

- as a way to acknowledge the complexity of the context where action takes place. It is often easy to forget how difficult is to operate in a context such as Gaza, and an evaluation is a good opportunity to reassess and acknowledge the difficulties
- soliciting ideas on how to overcome them.

Learning oriented and promoting innovation

As it will be discussed later, the programme offers many opportunities for learning. The evaluation tried to capture some of it, as a way to help promote further sharing of practices and amongst partners. The evaluation itself is seen as an opportunity to promote innovation, and this has happened by:

- Demonstrating the relevance of a resilience framework, which was used to analyse change, but could also be used to form a shared theory of change (and partners and staff acknowledged the potential in the feedback meetings).
- Thinking together options for future actions and discussing them (for example thinking of how partners could work together). The purpose of this sharing was not to “redesign the programme” – which is of course not the purpose of the evaluation – but rather to generate concrete ideas of what “could be” and to probe capacities and interest around them. As ActionAid partners are very action and ideas oriented, forward looking and practical reflection was really useful to have deeper insights in the programme.
- Using video to capture people’s voices, to demonstrate how it is possible to document change beyond reporting.
- Sharing information as open data on online platforms. The activity mapping showed in practice how to use free online tools to geo-reference activities (and further demonstrations of the use of geo-referenced data were presented in feedback sessions with staff). The sharing of the video is also a way to share evidence, and it is hoped that access to these sound bytes promotes ideas and reflections beyond what is captured in this report.

Listening

The evaluation used in depth and open interviews with individuals and groups. There was no checklist. Interviews started with broad questions about the change experienced by people (what difference did the project make for you?), and then probed into the answers, asking for tangible examples, and for further insights (What else? Can you tell me more? Why this? What would you suggest?). Of course if a key feature of the project was missed in conversation or forgotten by people they were brought into the interview, but always trying to make the conversation flow, rather than “interrogating people”. Experience shows that it is only after some time that issues beyond the obvious outcomes start to emerge. And these issues help to make more tangible the “soft” aspects of an intervention, (the power within, the power with, the power over).

An opportunity to look “through the same lenses”

This evaluation worked with different organizations using the same resilience framework. Fieldwork and reporting are therefore also an opportunity not only to generate and share “findings” but also:

- To contextualize the framework and check the relevance for the context in Gaza: the framework was discussed with partners and ActionAid staff
- To share the framework, as an output of the evaluation. Different organizations can then acquire a new “set of common lenses” – coherent with the approach of ActionAid – that can be used to strengthen their collaboration on resilience.

Multimedia

In addition to producing a conventional report, this evaluation captured evidence through video. Using video allows to:

- **Check if the understanding of key points was correct.** When we ask at the end of the interview to repeat some key issues, it is also a way to check that we understood them correctly. In some occasions it helped to rectify some points.
- **Give people a voice.** We feel that the evaluation is an opportunity for people to be heard, and to share their concerns. Quoting their voices in a report is of course already an acknowledgement, but it is a bit aseptic. A video can show much more beyond the words. The personality, the passion, the humanity of the people saying them
- **Empowering people.** We feel that capturing videos is a form of acknowledgement for people, that what they said matters. And this appreciation can be empowering, as the short story below demonstrates

I am proud of myself

One of the videos captures the story of a woman who was punished by her husband after she appeared in a Facebook page about the programme. She was beaten. She was forced to wear the Niqab. Before filming the video we asked if she was still fine to be on video and we also proposed some alternative options for it (e.g. filming only her body, doing some post production to blur her face). She said that - as far as the video was used for the evaluation and not for broad publicity - she was fine. At the end we showed to the video to her. She beamed and she said "I like so much how I look in the video. I feel so strong and proud. And now I do not care if my husband beats me when I do a video."

An important note on video confidentiality:

These videos were filmed as part of the evaluation, not for broad communication. We explained to people that the purpose was to share learning with the evaluation stakeholders. So it is important that they are used with this understanding. As it is clear from the story above, some videos could be sensitive and should not be shared lightly. If ActionAid and partners wish to use some of the videos for other purposes, they should first seek consent from the people featured.

The videos are removed from this public version of the report.

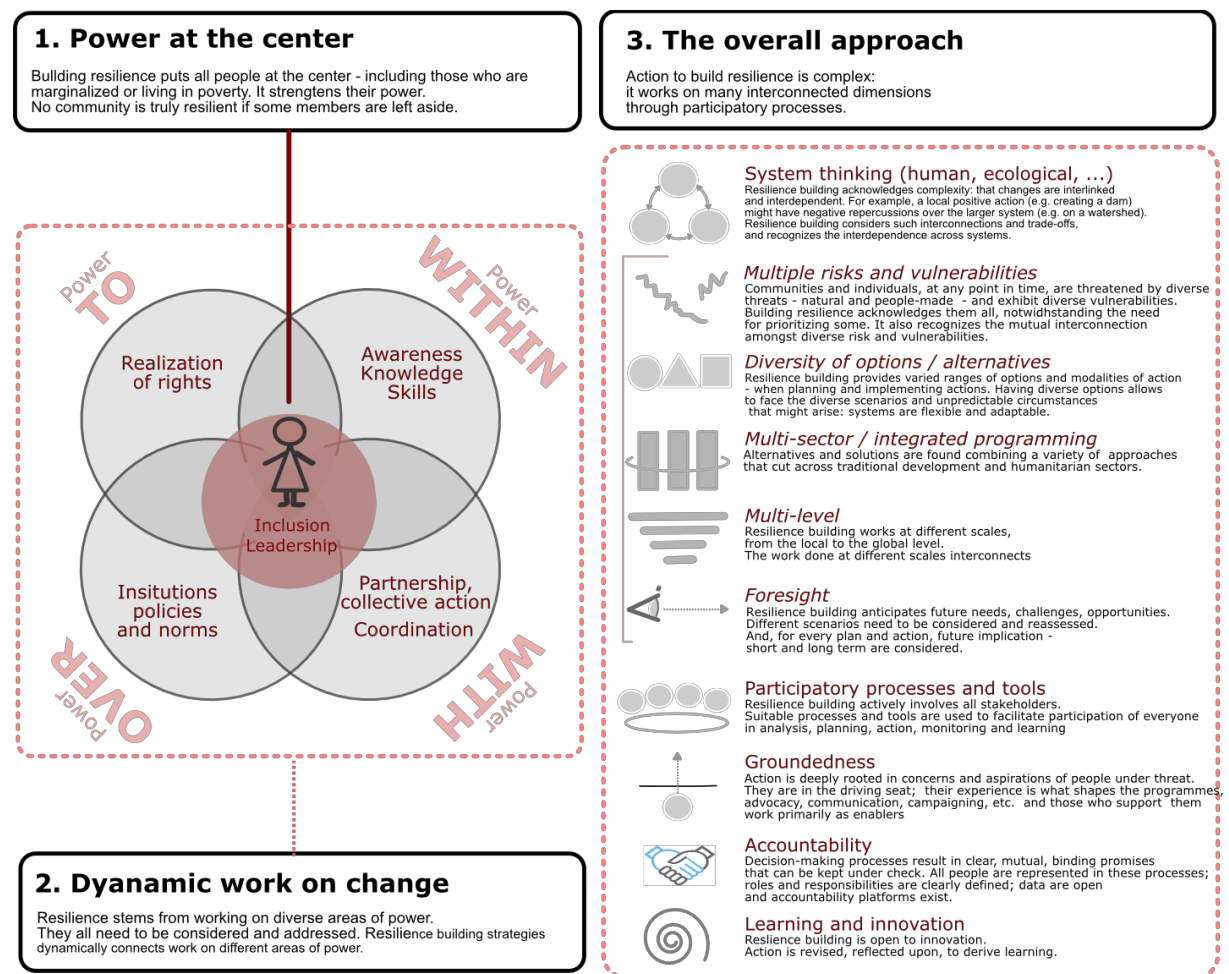
Framework: Resilience building

What understanding of resilience?

The response in Gaza cannot stop by satisfying essential needs, but should help to “build resilience.” The understanding of resilience of this evaluation is a dynamic one. It emphasizes the changing nature of shocks and the need to contextualize and continuously revise action. It sees resilience not simple as “bouncing back”, but also to as the need to transform people and context. Resilience is seen as **power to withstand future shocks**, but also to **reduce them** and to **positively transform reality**.

The evaluation therefore looked at the programme through resilience lenses, using a resilience framework recently tested in a response evaluation in Kenya (with ActionAid). The components of the framework and the lines of questioning that they imply are listed below.

The framework also captures information that would fit within the OEDC/DEC criteria, as well as information about the organizational set up. But it organizes this information to talk about the “system” that builds resilience, and not through a “linear log-frame” logic. Looking at the system requires questioning: what is the theory of change of the programme, its strategic approach. It requires asking “are we achieving meaningful changes” rather than simply checking “are we achieving the planned changes?” The framework also demands to see changes through the eyes of the beneficiaries. Rather than checking adherence with planned interventions only, we tried to capture the beneficiaries’ perspective of change.



The framework prompts three main areas of enquiry, as detailed below:

1. Power at the centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did the programme put “power at the centre”?</i> Was resilience-building understood as the need for empowerment in the face of threats? • <i>Whose power?</i> Who was at the centre? Did the programme recognize that a community is resilient only when all members are resilient, and therefore targeted the most excluded ones?
2. Dynamic work on change	<p>The framework identifies four areas of change in power (TO, WITHIN, WITH, OVER). It recognizes that they are all important, and that any achievement in any of these areas is likely to create improvements in the life of people. It also recognizes that resilience building requires that change is interconnected and flows. Empowerment means that: 1) all four expressions of power are addressed, and actions lead to shifts in the power of people and 2) changes in the four areas of power are linked. Change in one area should be linked to (or initiate) change in other ones, until they are all tackled</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What changes happened around the four areas of power?</i> Did the actions taken so far have an impact on the power of people, in any of the four areas? Looking for change in different areas of powers means to investigate <i>outcomes</i> of the programme. • <i>How did change happen?</i> How did change interlink? How is change in one area of power part of a “chain of change” eventually leading (even if in the long term) to build resilience? Looking at how “power flows” leads to identify the strategies and the processes of change. • <i>What is the power of the organization?</i> Side by side with changes in the power of the people affected by the crisis, it is important to check the “power of the organization.” What is the power of ActionAid (e.g. in terms of resources, skills, attitudes, linkages, institutional relations)? And how did the organization use it?
3. The overall approach	<p>How is change generated? Whatever the approach what matters is to check that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the approach recognizing complexity?</i> Resilience building is not linear (meaning that the same action will always correspond to the same result), but <i>complex</i>. It requires operating across many different, interconnected actors and levels. The relevance of “complexity” to understand change is increasingly recognized also within the humanitarian system. This framework highlights elements that help to navigate such complexity, with a practical focus. • <i>Is the approach participatory, grounded, accountable, and oriented to learning?</i> An understanding of resilience as power requires approaches that are participatory in nature, where decision-making power is shared and grounded in the reality of the most marginalized people. And which is open to learning and reflection.

This framework was shared with AA staff and partners to check if it responded to their vision and aspiration, during the evaluation and the final workshop. Staff and partners responded positively to it.



Findings

Overall the response of ActionAid was provided to the satisfaction of the beneficiary needs, and in line with what was stipulated in proposals and plans. The evaluation started with a review of the documentation and reporting provided. In the field work no significant challenge emerged or was pointed out that was not captured in the reporting, with regard to the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. Partners demonstrated openness in sharing the challenges and bottlenecks they encountered when working on their own programmes – or in their relations with ActionAid.

This evaluation focused mostly in checking the fledging impact of the evaluation, looking in particular at the adherence of the response with the mandate of ActionAid. ActionAid seeks to apply a human rights based approach also within the humanitarian response, and to ensure that it can ultimately lead to the empowerment of beneficiaries.

This is why the evaluation took a higher ground and used “resilience lenses” to check the approach. It focused in particular on the aspects that were not yet captured in depth in the monitoring / reporting systems. It also focused on “learning and innovation” and on the adaptation of the response to the challenges in Gaza, over strict compliance. The core aspects of the programme below were looked at through those lenses:

- immediate response for food, NFI and winterisation with cash vouchers
- women’s livelihoods
- psychosocial support and protection (for women and children)
- advocacy in relation to accountability



Recommendations

The evaluation happened at a key time to inform future strategic engagement. It was decided not only to “capture the state of the art”, but to be more ambitious. The evaluation sought to emphasize the “forward looking, strategic aspects” rather than focus mainly on capturing results. And it even engaged with partners to discuss future trajectories for work.

1. *Strategize together (and foster sharing learning and cooperation).*

ActionAid has stated objectives for the future work in Gaza, but it is important to link them to a shared vision of change. Working together on an operational strategy, and sharing ideas about “how change will happen” will be a powerful way to strengthen the organization’s partnerships. Sharing learning should be part of the process: to help partners to exchange ideas and practices, and to identify novel ways to work together.

2. *Frame emergency interventions as resilience building.*

ActionAid managed to identify partners who have a strong drive to work on rights. This clearly emerged in looking at the early response and in engaging with the staff. ActionAid can build on this by framing response and rehabilitation work to “build back better” – as “resilience building”. Resilience - as in the framework proposed by this evaluation - is a dynamic concept, which will allow tackling both the “external” as well as the “internal”.

3. *Advocate for psycho-social as resilience building, not as a palliative.*

ActionAid’s work on response – in this one and the previous one - had always been oriented to support psychosocial work. It is important that ActionAid continue to work on psycho-social work but also capture and demonstrate what makes psycho-social work an avenue for “resilience building” and empowerment and not a palliative, in a context where much aid is earmarked for such interventions.

4. *Strengthen the focus on inclusion.*

ActionAid and partners had so far strived to identify beneficiaries in marginalized areas (with the exception of Fekra, who had so far mostly worked in central Gaza with affected children). They focused on women and children rights, and tried to identify at risk categories within them. The efforts on inclusion and the capacity to identify the “most excluded” are an important asset and should be further strengthened. Capacity to pinpoint exclusion will be an important aspect not only to perfect criteria of selection, but also to ground the advocacy work.

5. *Promote tools and methodologies for participation.*

ActionAid has strong expertise on participation and participatory methodologies, which would be an asset for its partners. Currently they engage in consultations with people and committees mainly through meetings and interviews. As participatory tools are introduced, it would be worthwhile to also link them to social media / communication platforms, to experiment with the potential of “participation 2.0”.

6. *Go beyond “bureaucratic accountability.”*

In the relief phase ActionAid and partners had been accountable to their beneficiaries by establishing criteria for selection – with limited consultation with population – and setting up feedback mechanisms. These mechanisms are in line with international standards, but ActionAid - as an organization that has made accountability one of its main areas of work - should try to raise the bar and move from “bureaucratic accountability” towards building a culture of accountability which is transformative: a vision of accountability deeply linked with participation, citizenship and governance which ultimately can trickle down to influence other institutions. It looks that ActionAid Palestine has indeed this vision. However the capacity of the international organization to accompany it seems to be limited. It is recommended to ActionAid International to reignite its capacity to be a trendsetter in accountability, rather than simply promoting compliance with mainstream standards.

7. *Strengthen the work on communication with/by affected population.*

The importance of “communicating with affected communities” is more and more recognized in humanitarian response. It features prominently in the core humanitarian standard. This communication is at its core, about accountability and empowerment, and can also strengthen advocacy. It is a “new” niche of humanitarian work that would play to the strength of ActionAid and allow the organization to support advances in the sector. It is also a much needed area of intervention, which would help to overcome the communication deficit that is evident in Gaza (e.g. lack of transparent information on aid). In addition to promoting communication, ActionAid could

also strengthen it by linking to the sharing of evidence as **open data** generated and owned by local actors (as discussed, in the course of the evaluation, with local partners).

8. *Link local and global action.*

Resilience in Gaza needs to be linked to international action, but grounded in local work. The organization is working on this, and the linkages amongst ActionAid International and ActionAid oPt are now stronger than what they used to be a few years back. ActionAid in Gaza has a stronger ground to explore avenues for work on resilience with the support of the broader organization.