

## **Background**

Of the 4.4 million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, 1.7 million live in the Gaza Strip. Half is under 15 years of age. Over 76 percent of the population in Gaza are registered refugees, 43 percent of which live in 8 refugee camps.

The military operation 'Protective Edge', launched by Israel in July and August 2014, resulted in widespread destruction in the Gaza Strip. The hostilities resulted in the largest displacement recorded in Gaza since 1967. Thousands of people were displaced or were left homeless. Especially children were badly affected by the conflict. Psychosocial distress levels, already high among the population of Gaza, worsened significantly as a result of the conflict. The estimated number of children needing some level of direct and specialized psychosocial support was near 500.000.

## **War Child's response**

To improve the situation for children in Gaza, War Child started the project 'Recovering from war through child protection and psychosocial support in Gaza Strip', late 2014. The objective of the project is to give psychosocial support to children between 8-14 years old and to their caregivers/parents, to improve their coping capacity and self-esteem. The project is implemented by community based organisations, such as BASMA<sup>1</sup>. The areas most affected by the war have been selected to implement activities, such as Beit Hanou, Beit Lahia, Khanyounis.



The budget for the 12-month project was initially 389.000 Euro and has been amended to 300.000 Euro. It has been covered by various funding sources: DEC (UK Distasters Emergency Committee), War Child and Stichting Wereldwijd voor Kinderen. The project will continue until December 2015. The entire Gaza emergency and recovery intervention is planned to be evaluated at the end of 2015.

## **Progress and achievements**

This report gives an update on activities and achievements until mid-2015.

### *Context*

In the first few months of 2015, there was a significant increase in the number of demonstrations. Protests focused on poor living standards and the delays over the reconstruction of Gaza. Partner organisations have witnessed people becoming more frustrated and angry. The delay in reconstruction also has great impact on the lives of the people in the Gaza Strip and on children in particular.

Also, an increase in community and family violence including domestic violence and abuse against children has been observed. For instance corporal punishment, which was a pre-existing issue both in schools and communities, increased during the hostilities. This

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<sup>1</sup> BASMA Society for Culture and Arts was established in 1994 as a non-profit community based organisation. The organisation enables Palestinian people to access cultural and artistic activities.

indicates that families are experiencing high levels of distress and using negative coping strategies which adversely impact children.

### *Achievements*

A number of activities have taken place in the reporting period, contributing to the result of improved psychosocial well-being of children. This progress report highlights a few:

- Three Child Friendly Spaces were rehabilitated, including toilets, fence, drinking water basins, and equipped with items including books, puzzles and toys as well as outdoor games equipment. These Child Friendly Spaces offer a safe and protective environment where children come together for activities.
- Facilitators from community based organisations such as BASMA received trainings on psychosocial methodologies including DEALs<sup>2</sup>.
- 31 DEALs cycles (20 sessions per cycle, 1.5 hour per session, 25 children per session) were completed, reaching 775 children, while additional recreational activities reached a further 1060 children.
- 143 children received in-depth psychosocial support, resulting in 320 individual sessions for 80 children and 180 individual and group therapy sessions to 63 children.

Also activities took place to improve the well-being of the caregivers and their capacity to support and understand their children; their reactions and behaviour. Besides sessions for parents to learn how to create a safe protective environment for their children, joint meetings between mothers and their children were facilitated. This was meant to improve communication with each other. Also over 1000 fathers were involved in 4-day workshops, to help them to better understand the impact of the conflict on their children. Fathers learned about stress management, how to support children after traumatizing events and practical sessions on how to explore feelings. These workshops were very successful; many partner organisations received requests from men to be able to join future workshops.

### **What did it bring so far?**

Before participating in the activities, most of the children suffered from major stress, fear, loss of control, aggressiveness, low level of trust etc. Participation resulted so far in that children developed skills to return to their normal rhythm of life. Feedback received from facilitators, care givers and children themselves showed that they are better capable to deal with the impact of the crisis; children have less fear to express their feelings and emotions and have improved relationships with their families. Positive behaviour change was noted in the children, including concentration, increase in self-confidence and reduced levels of violence amongst children.

*'I was suffering of high level of anger and I couldn't control myself but after my participation in I DEAL, I have become more confident, and the level of anger has reduced.'* Girl, 13 years

Parents reported significant improvement in their ability to care for the protection and well-being of their children. Feedback received marked significant improvements within the household, such as better relationships with their children and between wives and husbands.

*'I have seen my child becoming much more supportive and less aggressive, he is now motivated to go to school.'* Mother of a 13-year old boy

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<sup>2</sup> I DEAL is a methodology, designed by War Child. It includes all kind of activities to help children to better 'deal' with the violence and challenges they (have) face(d). I DEAL combines creative activities and games with group discussions.