Rebuilding Gaza
An Overview of Humanitarian & Reconstruction Needs
INTRODUCTION

One year after the last war in Gaza there are few signs of rebuilding. The combined effects of more than eight years of blockade and three wars in seven years are making Gaza unlivable for the Palestinians who call it home.

Bombs destroyed entire districts. Thousands of farmers, fishermen and factory workers lost their jobs, swelling the ranks of the poor and unemployed. Many families can’t earn enough to put food on the table. The only Gaza power plant is not running at full capacity, in part because of damage sustained in the war. Gaza is without electricity between 12 and 18 hours a day.

This report gives an overview of the current, pressing humanitarian and reconstruction needs in Gaza. ANERA’s ongoing programs there are helping to address some of the immediate and long-term needs of the population. The residents of Gaza cannot rebuild on their own. This is where the international community must help.

OPERATION PROTECTIVE EDGE

For 51 days in the summer of 2014, Gaza experienced what is described as the worst destruction, devastation, and displacement since the start of the Israeli occupation in 1967. The operation killed more than 2,100 Palestinians, most of them civilians. 11,231 people were injured, with 10% of these victims suffering severe injuries resulting in permanent disabilities. At the height of hostilities, the number of people sheltered in United Nations (UNRWA) buildings or with host families reached 500,000, about 28% of Gaza’s population. At least 142 Palestinian families lost three or more members in the bombings, and as many as 1,500 children were orphaned.

The war devastated homes, roads, farms, factories, water and sanitation systems and communication networks. More than 450 businesses, mosques, schools, health clinics, and other civilian structures were damaged or destroyed. The Gaza-based economist Omar Shaban estimates that the war’s economic damage is three times that of the 2008-9 conflict.

Military incursions and bombs destroyed entire neighborhoods near the separation wall in the far north and south as well as Gaza City, flattening some high-rise residential buildings in the process. An estimated 18,000 housing units were either destroyed or severely damaged.

Many families were sheltered in UNRWA schools in the nine months following the ceasefire. On June 17, 2015 UNRWA finally closed the two remaining school shelters, after ensuring displaced families could find alternate housing solutions with the help of rental subsidies or repairs of damaged properties.

The war’s economic damage is 3 times that of the 2008-2009 conflict.
Education in Gaza after Operation Protective Edge

Half of the 520 universities, schools and preschools in Gaza were damaged in Operation Protective Edge. The Palestinian Ministry of Education reported that 26 schools were completely destroyed and cannot reopen. The ministry estimates the total cost of destruction in the education sector is $33.5 million.

Prior to this last crisis, schools in Gaza were chronically plagued by overcrowding with an average of 37 students per class. Now, schools are even more crowded and some cannot be used until they are cleared of war rubble and remnants. Nine out of ten schools are running a double shift, reducing each student’s education to only four hours a day.

Health in Gaza after Operation Protective Edge

Operation Protective Edge damaged or destroyed 18 health facilities. Patients who can no longer access their local health facilities are turning to other hospitals and clinics that are already overburdened with patients. Given the high number of casualties during the war, many patients had to be discharged prematurely or received no care for their condition, increasing the caseload of institutions specializing in complex injuries, complications and disabilities.

There were nearly 2,000 referrals issued to the West Bank, Israel, Jerusalem, Egypt and Jordan in May for specialized treatment unavailable in Gaza – the second highest month for referrals recorded by WHO.

In addition, the eight-year-old blockade has severely limited the health system’s ability to deliver continuous, high-quality services due to chronic shortages in medicines, medical supplies and equipment. Stocks of critical medicines are at an all-time low. The Ministry of Health’s (MoH) Central Drugstore reports having in stock an average of 26% of essential medicines; 47% of disposable medical supplies are at or near zero stock for MoH facilities.

With funding from the Kuwait government, ANERA purchased local materials and rebuilt Amjad Preschool in Beit Hanoun after it was destroyed by bombs.

“We woke up to realize that our limited stock of medicine had burned. There was nothing left and yet the number of patients had soared. After October 2014, we got an additional 576 cases over and above the 8,000 patients we previously saw each year.”

Dr. Sameer Abu Jayaab in front of the rubble of the outpatient pharmacy at the Society for the Physically Handicapped

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Agriculture in Gaza after Operation Protective Edge

Operation Protective Edge severely damaged Gaza’s farmland. The Ministry of Agriculture estimates losses at $550 million.18 As in other sectors, the damage is worst close to the wall separating Gaza from Israel, especially the northern Gaza, Gaza City and the Khan Younis areas. The war decimated 42,000 acres of farmland, as well as greenhouses, irrigation systems, livestock, fodder stocks and fishing boats, affecting the livelihoods of some 40,000 people.19

Water for irrigation currently is unavailable or inaccessible in two-thirds of Gaza because of the destruction of wells, collection ponds and pipes, or as a result of electricity outages. In nine municipalities, agricultural inputs such as pesticides and fertilizer are not available on the market because of restrictions on imports into Gaza.20

Gaza suffers today from a shortage of fresh produce. The agricultural sector cannot meet local demand for staple fresh vegetables such as tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, cucumbers and eggplants for the first time in more than 20 years.19 According to farmers and farmer organizations in Gaza, the supply of locally produced fruits and vegetables is not likely to improve next harvest, as restoration of destroyed farms is in process and crops take time to mature. This means prices for healthy fruits and vegetables are inflated and impoverished families increasingly turn to cheaper, unhealthier options.21

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The Economy of Gaza after Operation Protective Edge

In addition to eight years of blockade of Gaza imports and exports, war damage to the manufacturing and construction sectors has resulted in a rising unemployment rate, pushing Gaza closer to economic collapse. The building sector, a major source of jobs, is virtually at a standstill. Over 350 factories were destroyed during the fighting, including cement and sponge factories and dairies.23 Gaza’s only large bakery, along with other medium-sized businesses which were destroyed, had provided employment to thousands of individuals. Today, most of Gaza’s entrepreneurial class and the people they employed have been reduced to poverty and forced into dependency on charity.24

According to a recent World Bank Report, in the last quarter of 2014, Gaza’s unemployment rate stood at 43%, higher than any other economy in the world.25

For the past several years most consumer products, cement and other dry goods came through tunnels dug along the border from Egypt. Those tunnels have been destroyed by both Egyptian and Israeli authorities.

Operation Protective Edge and the closure of the tunnels resulted in a loss of $460 million in Gaza’s economy, lowering the territory’s GDP by 15%.26

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Water and sanitation in Gaza after Operation Protective Edge

Most of Gaza’s water is unfit for human consumption – 97% does not meet WHO standards – due to the high levels of chloride and nitrate. Seawater has seeped into the groundwater because of over-extraction from the aquifers, leaving water unfit for drinking, cooking or agricultural use. The situation has been exacerbated by war damage. An initial damage assessment from the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility reported that 12% of Gaza’s wells were destroyed or damaged in Operation Protective Edge, particularly in the Gaza City, Beit Hanoun, and Deir Al Balah areas. The assessment also found that more than 33,000 meters of water and wastewater networks were damaged in Khan Younis and 6,300 meters of networks were damaged in Gaza City. Raw sewage flows into open pools, farmland and the Mediterranean Sea. Residents in Rafah and Gaza City have expressed fear of sewage entering damaged water lines. Fishermen are also affected since many fish have died or fled the sewage-contaminated waters. The power needed to run the sewage and water treatment facilities is severely limited both because of fuel shortages and because Gaza’s only power plant was bombed and knocked out of commission in July 2014. Despite repairs to the electrical grid, most areas of Gaza get less than twelve hours of electricity a day.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO OPERATION PROTECTIVE EDGE

Widespread reconstruction work on Gaza’s physical infrastructure, including large buildings and civilian homes, is only just starting. Millions of tons of rubble are still being cleared from all over Gaza, an essential first step in restoring Palestinians’ access to basic services, such as water and sanitation infrastructure. However, major reconstruction efforts are minimal. The pace of rebuilding is slowed by a lack of funding coupled with import restrictions and other political obstacles. The amount of construction material that has entered Gaza since August 2014 is only one-tenth of what Gaza needs to reconstruct homes and businesses. In the housing sector, the priority has been on cash assistance for displaced people to rent homes or make repairs to partially damaged dwellings.

UNRWA is the primary provider of shelter assistance in Gaza. However, UNRWA suffers a $101 million deficit to its operating budget, due to the lack of fulfillment of donor pledges. This severely hampers its ability to serve the Palestinian refugee families left homeless by the war. Outside of the housing sector, ANERA is rebuilding schools, repairing damage to water and sanitation systems and restoring agricultural land destroyed during the fighting. This work is ongoing and expanding.
### ANERA IN GAZA

ANERA's Gaza office is made up of 16 education, health, infrastructure and development professionals.

### Water & Sanitation

For decades, water access and sewage management have been at the heart of ANERA's programs across Gaza. Since the end of the fighting, ANERA completed 23 water and sewage system repair projects, providing 89,000 people with access to healthier, hygienic living environments and water for cooking, cleaning and drinking.

### Restoring Farm Land

ANERA's Gaza land restoration project is reviving the agriculture sector while helping farming families secure an income. The project is assisting 120 families by grading and plowing 350 acres of fields, installing and repairing irrigation systems, and distributing seeds and olive tree saplings.

### Rebuilding & Renovating Schools

Since September 2014, ANERA has rehabilitated five Gaza preschools under the early childhood development program. ANERA also completely rebuilt Amjad Preschool in Beit Hanoun, which was destroyed by bombs. In the aftermath of the fighting, ANERA provided psychosocial support to preschoolers in the hardest hit areas of Gaza.

### Distributing Medicines & Health Supplies

In times of peace and war, from its warehouse, ANERA distributes millions of dollars worth of donated medicines and supplies to hospitals and clinics. In fiscal year 2015 alone, ANERA delivered 22 in-kind shipments worth over $13 million.

### Delivering Emergency Relief

Immediately and after the war, ANERA delivered throughout Gaza nearly $20 million in urgent humanitarian relief, including bottled and tankered water, fuel for desalination plants, hygiene kits, medicines and food.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Eight years of blockade and three wars in seven years have taken a toll on Gaza’s population. Families who are unable to earn a decent living are forced to rely on handouts from aid organizations, something that had been considered shameful in the past. Despair pervades everyday life, as people are unable to recover from the traumas of war and deprivation.

Relief and development organizations, like ANERA, continue to deliver critical aid and infrastructure programs, but significantly more needs to be done and at a much faster pace. A serious, concerted reconstruction effort, supplied with a steady flow of materials and funding, is critical to rebuilding homes, reconnecting water and power networks, restoring farmland, creating jobs and jumpstarting the economy.

Reconstruction work and emergency relief are not enough though. A political solution is ultimately needed to end the suffering that is felt in almost all aspects of life in Gaza.
ABOUT ANERA's ON-THE-GROUND SERIES
The ANERA on-the-ground series is designed to add a humanitarian voice to the story of life in the Middle East. With data from ANERA’s professional staff, people who live and work in the communities they serve, and with over 40 years of experience in the region, ANERA has a unique opportunity to build a fuller understanding of what life is like for families struggling to survive within an atmosphere of severe political strife and daily turmoil.