



The Gaza Resilience Programme: ICRC's urban approach in practice

Samir Hafiz

CASE STUDY

 ALNAP

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks are owed to everyone at the International Committee of the Red Cross who contributed their time and support to the development of this case study. The author would like to thank Michael Talhami, Tammo Van Gastel and Federico Sittaro in particular. Thanks also to all interviewees, including partners of the Gaza Resilience Programme.

From within the ALNAP Secretariat, the author has appreciated the support of a number of colleagues. Leah Campbell provided research project guidance, Alice Obrecht and Juliet Parker reviewed drafts and Danny Liu and Maria Gili gave communications support.

Suggested citation

Hafiz, S. (2022) *The Gaza Resilience Programme: ICRC's urban approach in practice*. ALNAP Case Study. London: ODI/ALNAP.

ISBN: 978-1-913526-26-9

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Design by Soapbox
www.soapbox.co.uk

Communications management by Maria Gili and Danny Liu.

Copyediting by Hannah Caddick.

Typesetting by Anil Shamdasani.

Cover image credit: ICRC



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acronyms | 4 |
| ALNAP research on working in urban complexity | 5 |
| About this case study | 6 |
| 2 Understanding the Gaza Strip context | 8 |
| 2.1 Space and settlements | 8 |
| 2.2 Politics and governance | 12 |
| 2.3 Economy and livelihoods | 13 |
| 2.4 Services and infrastructure | 15 |
| 2.5 Social and cultural issues | 17 |
| 3 Introduction to the Gaza Resilience Programme | 18 |
| 3.1 Components of the Gaza Resilience Programme | 18 |
| 3.2 Urban resilience approach | 23 |
| Figure 3: The ICRC's urban resilience approach | 24 |
| 4 How has the Gaza Resilience Programme tried to navigate urban complexity? | 26 |
| 4.1 Understanding interconnected services | 26 |
| 4.2 Working across sectors and scales | 27 |
| 4.3 Supporting infrastructure development and stakeholder coordination | 29 |
| 4.4 Taking a long-term view through resilience-building | 30 |
| 5 Obstacles and challenges | 33 |
| 6 Enabling and supporting factors | 38 |
| 7 Questions for further study | 42 |
| 8 Key takeaways | 43 |
| References | 47 |

Acronyms

| | |
|------------|---|
| ALNAP | Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action |
| CMWU | Coastal Municipality Water Utilities |
| CSO | civil society organisation |
| GAUC | Global Alliance for Urban Crises |
| GEDCo | Gaza Electricity Distribution Company |
| GIS | geographic information service |
| GRP | Gaza Resilience Programme |
| IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| ILOT | Israel and the Occupied Territories |
| MoG | Municipality of Gaza |
| NGO | non-governmental organisation |
| OCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| oPT | occupied Palestinian Territory |
| PCBS | Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics |
| PV | photovoltaic |
| PWA | Palestinian Water Authority |
| UN DESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UN-Habitat | United Nations Human Settlement Programme |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| WASH | water, sanitation and hygiene |

ALNAP research on working in urban complexity

In recent decades, there has been a vast increase in humanitarian action in urban areas. Humanitarians have found themselves operating more frequently in cities and towns – responding to earthquakes in Pakistan and Haiti; the Ebola Outbreak in West Africa; the uniquely urban catastrophe in Beirut, Lebanon, as a result of mismanagement of hazardous substances; and the displacement of people to cities across the Middle East and Europe as a result of the protracted conflict in Syria.

There is growing recognition that traditional approaches to humanitarian response, designed for rural and camp environments, fall short in navigating the complexity of urban contexts. Effective response in urban areas requires humanitarians to go beyond simply adapting rural approaches, and to actively seek to understand and address the complexity of cities appropriately. Over the past several years, new ways of working have been piloted and documented, such as methods for needs assessments and urban-specific water, sanitation and hygiene and food security interventions. Many of these new practices were documented in a Good Practice Review (Sanderson, 2019) published by ALNAP and the Humanitarian Practice Network.

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises has put forward recommendations, which include the need for humanitarians to better understand urban contexts, to ‘work with the systems that shape cities’ and to engage local stakeholders (GAUC, 2016). These recommendations indicate a shift in how humanitarians are approaching urban crises and reflect recent calls to think differently about urban areas (Campbell, 2016). However, despite growing interest, there is a lack of clarity around what it means to truly understand, address and work within the complexity of an urban context.

To help fill gaps in understanding, in 2016 ALNAP produced *Stepping back: understanding cities and their systems* (Campbell, 2016), a paper that explored issues around defining urban contexts and why understanding these was important. This proposed changes regarding how humanitarians understand cities, including a typology of urban systems and several principles as to how humanitarians can understand urban contexts through a systems lens. The research focused on the importance of changing our understanding of urban contexts as a first step to improving response. However, while it answered some initial questions, it left several outstanding. For example, it did not address how humanitarians could, in practice, change their ways of working to operate more appropriately within the complexity of urban environments.

As part of ALNAP’s research on context-appropriate humanitarian action in urban environments, ALNAP has developed six potential characteristics of projects that perform well in complex urban settings (Campbell, 2016). This paper represents one of three case studies that aim to better understand these characteristics and how they are supported, by highlighting examples of how humanitarians have adjusted ways of working to deliver context-appropriate programming in neighbourhoods and cities.

To find out more, visit <https://www.alnap.org/our-topics/urban-response>

About this case study

Case study selection

At the close of 2020, ALNAP contacted all operational ALNAP Members, looking for projects that met as many of the following criteria as possible:

1. projects that deliberately sought out and used information about the underlying context, such as politics and power, culture, and land issues (either formally through analysis or informally through local staff or long-term local presence)
2. projects that did not focus exclusively on short-term needs and goals
3. projects that considered the complex relationships and power dynamics between stakeholders in the urban context
4. projects that could be flexible or adapt when either the urban context or situation changed or new information about the context or situation became available
5. projects that actively engaged or partnered with local authorities and/or municipal government
6. projects that, overall, took account of the complexity and interconnectedness of the urban context.

Submissions were received on a total of 12 projects. The International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) Gaza Resilience Programme (GRP) was selected for the case study. This programme met a number of the six criteria and fit well within the profile for the wider case study series regarding geographic setting, crisis type and organisation type.

Case study method

This case study is based on a review of literature on the Gaza context, a review of internal documentation on the GRP and 17 key informant interviews.

This research was conducted between February and May 2021. During the period, in April–May 2021, hostilities between Palestine and Israel escalated to a level not seen since the 2014 Gaza War. This prevented some of the stakeholders external to ICRC from engaging with the research, including key partners, other humanitarian response organisations, and local authorities and civil society organisations. As such, it has not been possible to triangulate all the information shared for this case study. The author conducted interviews with ICRC and partner staff, and with those with recent experience of working in Gaza.



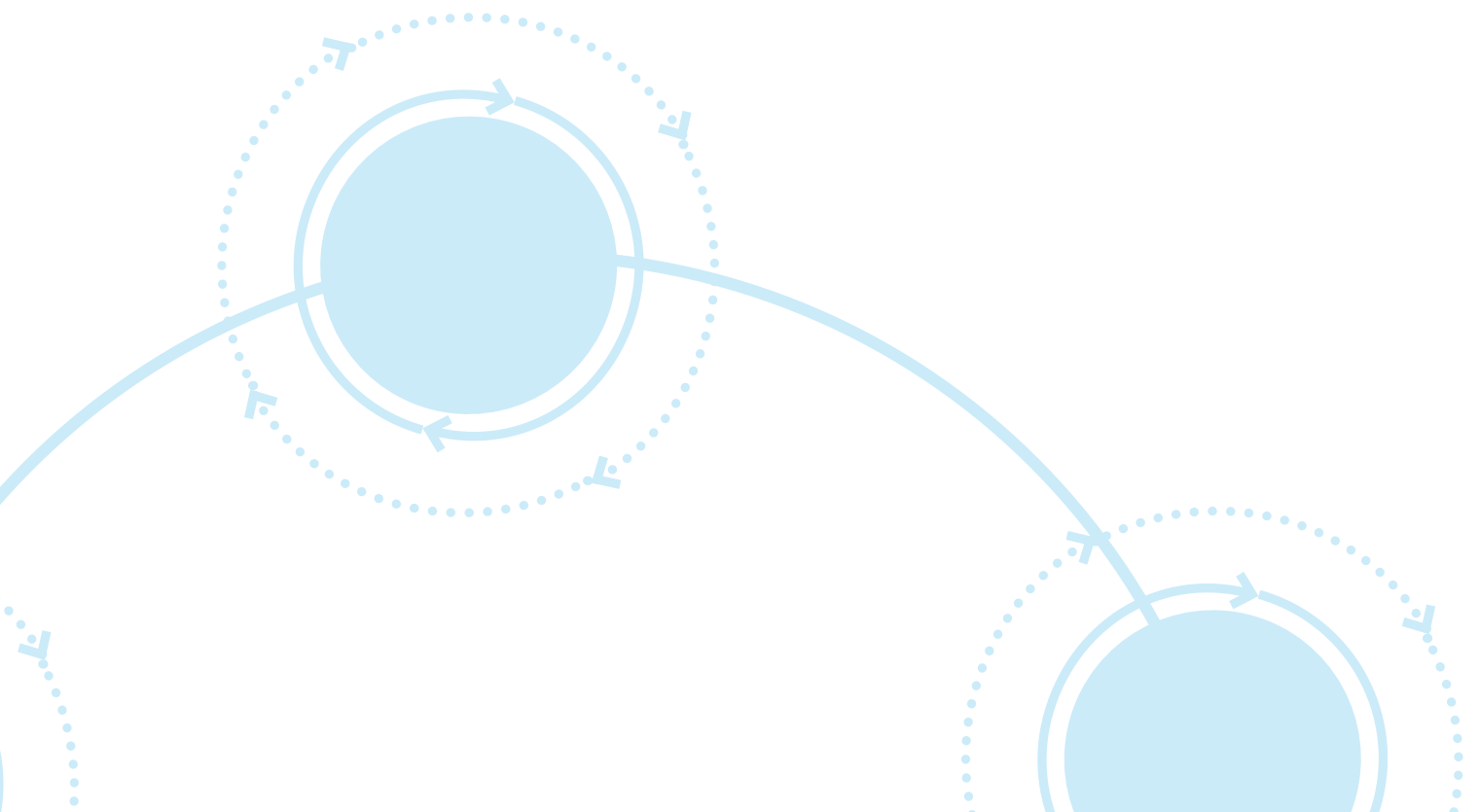
The GRP is a multi-year programme with a rolling portfolio of projects and interventions. This case study focuses primarily on the component of the GRP that seeks to strengthen operational resilience of essential services; there is less information and learning on other aspects of the programme.

Given travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic, all interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. They were recorded, transcribed and coded using MaxQDA to identify relevant themes.

The case study used an appreciative inquiry approach to interviews, and sought to answer the following questions:

- Has the project used a context-appropriate response in the Gaza context? If so, how?
- What barriers or enablers has the project faced in implementing context-appropriate ways of working?

This case study focuses on those aspects of the programme related to delivering a context-appropriate humanitarian response in urban environments. It does not provide a comprehensive overview of all elements of the GRP, nor does it represent an evaluation that explores the overall impact or outcomes of the programme. The analysis explores the extent to which this programme meets the criteria of delivering a context-appropriate humanitarian response and provides examples as to how this has been done successfully. It also explores the limitations and barriers, and instances of criteria not having been met or having been met only partially at the time the research was conducted.



1 Introduction

Decades of Israeli–Palestinian hostilities, an occupation and internal political divisions have fuelled a complex protracted crisis in the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT). With challenges in access to essential services (health care, education, energy and water supply, sanitation), employment opportunities, free movement and trade, almost half of the 5.2 million people living in oPT are in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2020; European Commission, 2021). While half of the world’s population now lives in urban environments (UN DESA, 2019), in Palestine this figure rises to 76% (World Bank, 2021). This firmly grounds the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people in an urban context.

The case study explores the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Gaza Resilience Programme (GRP), an initiative that aims to build the resilience of systems and communities in Gaza. It highlights how the project has applied context-appropriate approaches to the Gaza context and identifies the enabling factors and challenges in these approaches. Section 8 presents key takeaways from the case study.

2 Understanding the Gaza Strip context

The Gaza Strip (Gaza) comprises five southern Palestinian governates and covers an area of 365 km² (Asfour, 2017). It is one of the most densely populated areas in the world (Asfour, 2017; Elkahlout, 2018), with as many as 100,000 people per km² living in some of its settlements (Elkahlout, 2018, Nassar and Alsadi, 2018; OCHA, 2020). A total of 73% of the 2.05 million people living in Gaza need humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2020; PCBS, 2020). Decades of hostilities with neighbouring Israel, a military occupation and a blockade have restricted the free movement of goods and people, and devastated services, infrastructure, the economy and civilian wellbeing (Weinthal and Sowers, 2019).

This section explores the context of Gaza, including its settlements, politics, sociocultural dynamics, economy and infrastructure.

2.1 Space and settlements

The Gaza Strip runs along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, covering a total area of 360 km², with 72 km of borders with Israel and Egypt (UN-Habitat, 2014). Within a population of 2.05 million, 1.4 million Gazans have refugee status (Figure 1a) (OCHA, 2020). The high population growth rate (3.48%) (Asfour, 2017) is increasing the number of Gazans living in urban areas each year.

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This case study identifies challenges and enablers of context-appropriate approaches implemented by the ICRC in their Gaza Resilience Programme.”

Restrictions imposed by Israel and Egypt on the free movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza have effectively locked Gazans within the borders of the Strip. As a result, the demand for land (for both housing and agriculture) greatly exceeds availability (Koek, 2015). One case study interviewee highlighted the pressure of having to locally 'produce everything that is needed by the population living there' as a result of the blockade. Israel prevents the import of 'dual-use goods' into Gaza, including building materials such as cement, to limit these goods from serving a military purpose. However, this also impedes development and the expansion of Gaza's civilian infrastructure, as well the ability to rebuild and repair homes damaged by hostilities with the Israeli military (UN-Habitat, 2014; Shaban, 2017; Weinthal and Sowers, 2019).

High demand for and pricing of land for housing have resulted in the urbanisation of some agricultural land; a lack of planning policies means the limited number of available green spaces are also under threat from urban expansion (UNEP, 2020). The quality of the natural environment in which urban areas are situated is also deteriorating, owing to inadequate wastewater treatment and disposal, destruction of agricultural land and debris from decimated buildings (World Bank, 2018; UNEP, 2020). Gaza is at risk of climate-related hazards such as heatwaves, dust storms and floods. The latter represents a significant seasonal threat to low-lying areas and areas around Gaza's only significant body of open water, Wadi Gaza, as a result of high rainfall and overflow of wastewater from lagoons at treatment facilities and stormwater reservoirs, as well as the failure of pumping stations to evacuate wastewater from the built-up area (OCHA, 2019; UNEP, 2020).

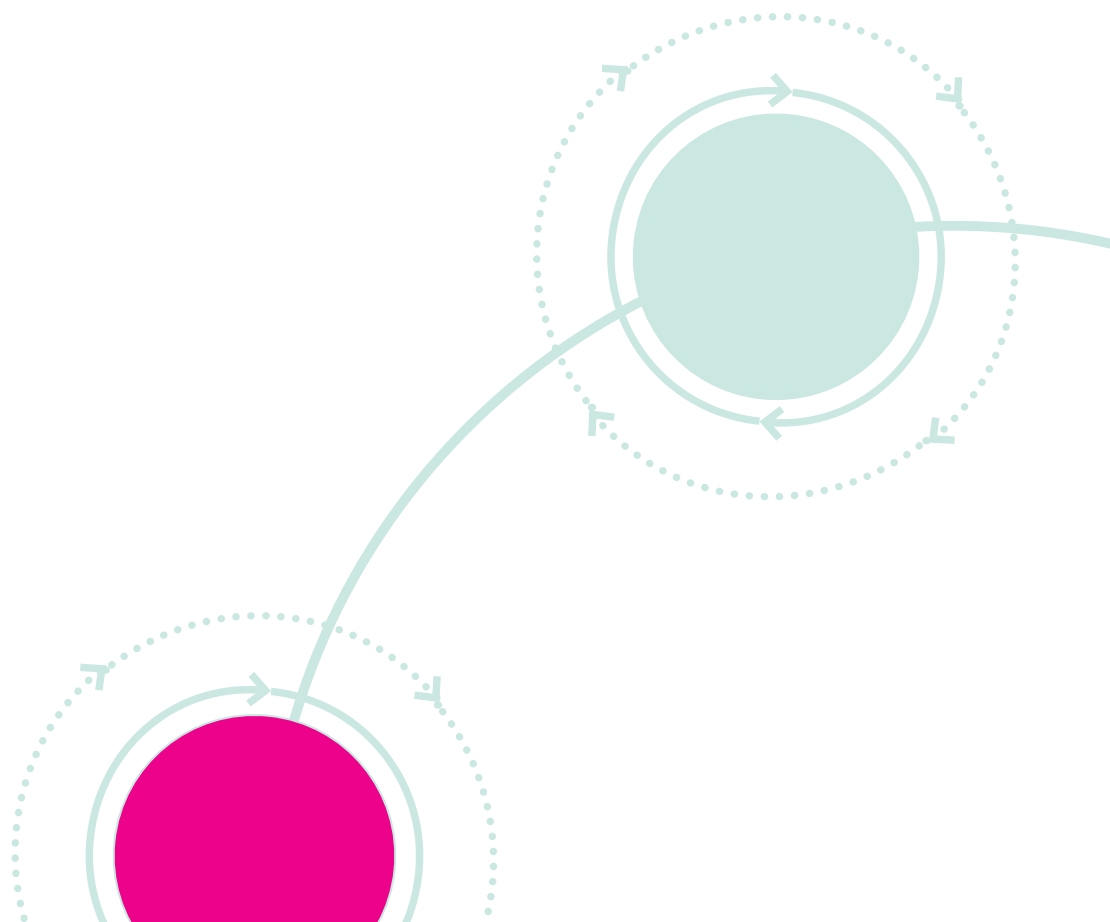
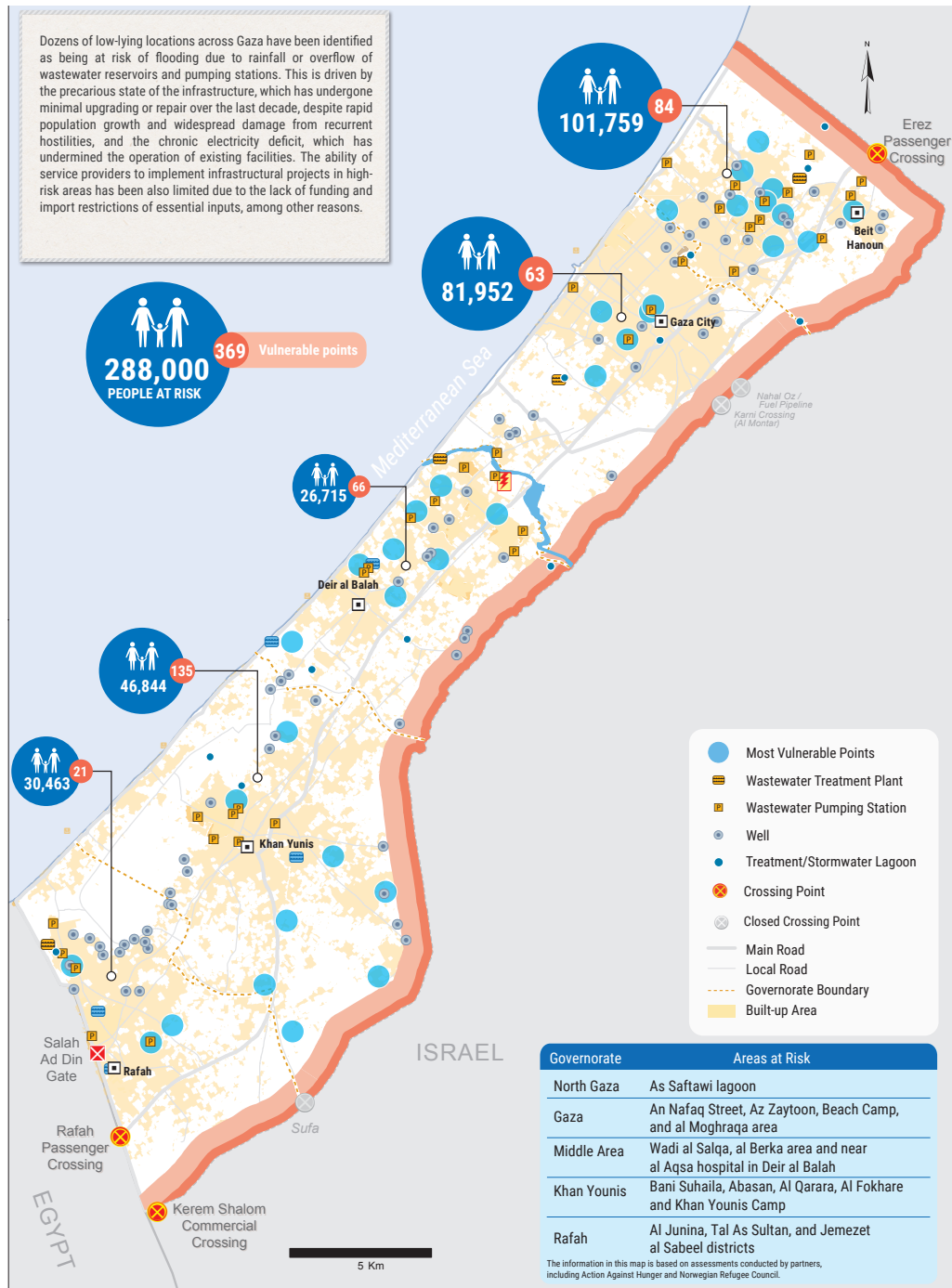


Figure 1a: Gaza refugee population by governorate



Source: OCHA (2019).

Figure 1b: Areas at risk of flooding in Gaza



Source: OCHA (2019).

2.2 Politics and governance

Israel has occupied Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem, since 1967. The prolonged occupation has seen the expansion of Israeli military presence, infrastructure and settlements on Palestinian territory. Several non-violent and violent demonstrations have centred on resistance to the occupation (Shafir, 2017; Weinthal and Sowers, 2019). In May 2021, for example, conflict between Israeli military forces and Hamas escalated severely, resulting in 11 days of hostilities (Box 1).

In addition to the occupation, Israel and Egypt's blockade on the Gaza Strip, put in place in 2007 following Hamas' election victory over the ruling Palestinian Authority, has effectively shut Gaza off from the rest of the world through restrictions on travel, trade and infrastructure (UN-Habitat, 2014; Devi, 2021; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021).

Meanwhile, in the past decade, intra-Palestinian political disputes between the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority (the official ruling party for the state of Palestine that governs the West Bank) and the governing administration in Gaza, led by Hamas, have resulted in internal Palestinian divisions.

Governance of the Gaza Strip is split across 25 municipalities, which have a mandate to meet the needs of the people, including all services and regulatory functions (UN-Habitat, 2014; OCHA, 2016). Some municipalities have greater resources and capacity than others, and thus take on a greater governance role within Gaza than falls within the scope of their mandate. There are growing socioeconomic differences between Gaza and the West Bank, with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority introducing parallel policies and laws that are creating legal divisions and cementing Hamas' position as an alternative government (Berti and Kurz, 2018).

Donor governments have funding restrictions in place in connection with engaging with Hamas in Gaza: there are strict funding conditions for humanitarian and development projects in Gaza and 'no contact' policies with Hamas. This creates a challenging operating environment for most civil society organisations (CSOs) and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (OCHA, 2017). Humanitarian and development actors must consider Hamas' authority in Gaza (Berti and Kurz, 2018), and many take on a non-partisan or mediation role to overcome the intra-Palestinian political split to deliver their programmes (Shaban, 2017).



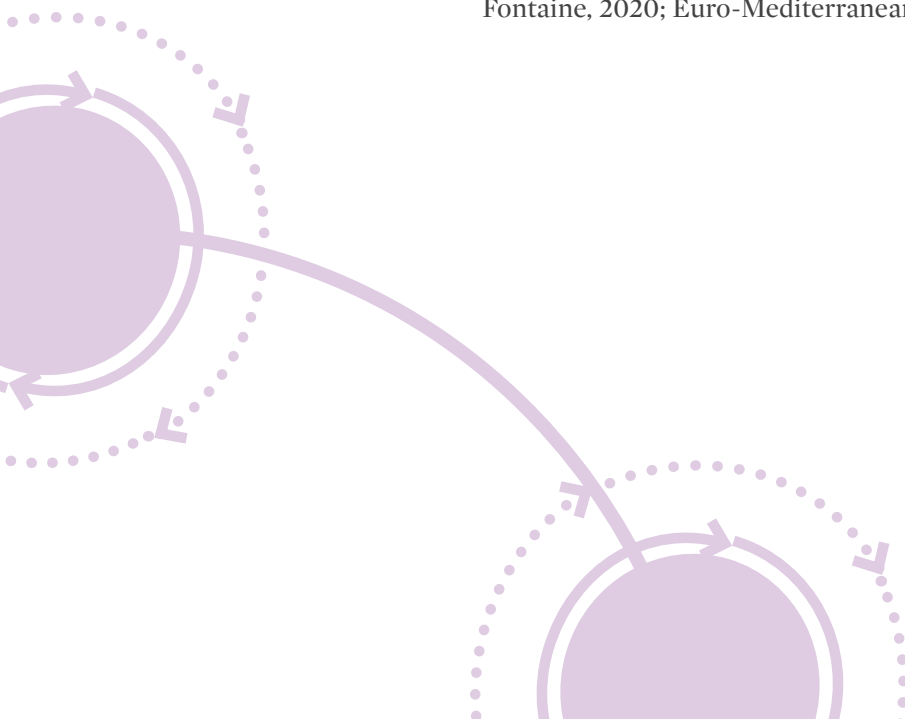
Box 1: Escalation of the Israel–Palestine conflict in May 2021

The research and write-up of this case study coincided with the severest escalation in Israel–Palestine hostilities since 2014, with 11 days of air strikes between 10 and 21 May leading to 129 Palestinian fatalities, the internal displacement of 72,000 people in Gaza and the destruction of 1,148 housing and commercial units (UNICEF, 2021; OCHA, 2021).

Overall, 40% of water supplies were affected (PWA, 2021), 800,000 people were left without regular access to safe piped water and individual access to electricity reduced to an average of five hours per day in Gaza (OCHA, 2021). The main powerline from Israel to Rafah, which powers 65% of Rafah's water and sanitation facilities, was damaged, with utility operators unable to perform repairs amid the hostilities (UNICEF, 2021) and humanitarian actors struggling to support affected communities in Gaza as a result of the air strikes (ICRC, 2021a). The cumulative damage from repeated cycles of hostilities and the impact of restrictions have threatened the progress made by the Palestinian government and international partners, and significant investment and reconstruction efforts will be required to respond to this situation (PWA, 2021).

2.3 Economy and livelihoods

The internal political divide and closure imposed by Israel and Egypt has had a significant impact on Gaza's economy and livelihoods (Elkahlout, 2018; Abusaada and Fontaine, 2020). Out of the six border crossings in and out of Gaza, three are permanently shut; the remaining three allow for limited movement of goods and people, and can close without notice (Abusaada and Fontaine, 2020; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021).



Israel's restrictions have created a shortage of electricity supply in Gaza, with an at times outright ban on the entry of fuel (Martin, 2018; Nassar and Alsadi, 2019). This has had impacts on all economic activity. Gaza contributes just 18% towards the wider Palestinian economy (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021), and the blockade has also resulted in its isolation from the global market (Masaud, 2017). The ban on import of 'dual-use goods' into Gaza also affects Gaza's trading, business infrastructure development and economy (Shaban, 2017; Weinthal and Sowers, 2019). The blockade and other economic restrictions from the occupations have given rise to an underground economy in the past decade, with the authorities in Egypt tightening security to eliminate a system of tunnels controlled by Hamas under the Egypt–Gaza border used to smuggle goods in and out of Gaza (Shaban, 2017; Berti and Kurz, 2018).

Agriculture plays a critical role in Gaza's economy. However, restrictions on farmers' access to arable land and wells near the border with Israel (Weinthal and Sowers, 2019) reduce the already limited amount of land available for farming. With a coastline of over 40 km, fishing is also a key part of the Gaza Strip economy (Abusaada and Fontaine, 2020). Israel's blockade includes varying restrictions on the fishing zone, with access sometimes limited to as little as 3 nautical miles during times of heightened Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Martin, 2018; Weinthal and Sowers, 2019; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021).

With a lack of external investment, most businesses in Gaza are family-owned (Abusaada and Fontaine, 2020). Limited economic opportunities have resulted in a reliance on remittances from the Palestinian diaspora outside of Gaza and a dependency on humanitarian assistance (Shaban, 2017; Abusaada and Fontaine, 2020). Meanwhile, approximately 80% of Gaza's population is receiving some form of aid or social assistance (Elkahlout, 2018).

The Israeli government maintains a corridor into Gaza and an administrative coordination office for government- or foreign-led activities such as humanitarian assistance in the Palestinian territories (IMFA, 2021). Aid is closely monitored in order to prevent diversion to and strengthening of Hamas, and the recently elected Israeli government has signalled an appetite for humanitarian response to move towards more voucher-based assistance to support this (Al Jazeera, 2021).

The COVID-19 global pandemic has slowed Gaza's local economy and increased unemployment rates to among the highest in the world (World Bank, 2020a), reaching 49% at the end of 2020 (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021). Prior to the pandemic, 53% of people in Gaza lived below the poverty line; early estimates indicate that the pandemic will push this figure to 64% (World Bank, 2020b).

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2.4 Services and infrastructure

Infrastructure has been seriously damaged during hostilities over the course of the past two decades (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021; World Bank et al., 2021). The repair, reconstruction, operation and development of infrastructure, such as a major desalinisation plant in Gaza City, is hampered by the blockade on 'dual-use' building materials (Martin, 2018; Weinthal and Sowers, 2019; Signorelli, 2020).

A shortage of power supply is a key issue. This impedes the delivery of essential services and increases the domestic burden on women and girls (OCHA, 2020). Just half of the population's energy demand is being met, and there are rolling blackouts, with eight hours of electricity followed by eight hours without (World Bank, 2017; Abescat, 2019). Most electricity is unaffordable for Gazans, as it is imported from Israel (Nassar and Alsadi, 2019). Domestically generated energy from the Gaza Power Plant and household solar panels meet just a fraction of demand, with limited infrastructure and grid capacity to generate and distribute more substantive quantities (World Bank, 2017). Energy demand is projected to rise by 3.5% in the coming years, meaning that the crisis will worsen unless supply is increased and diversified (World Bank, 2017; Nassar and Alsadi, 2019).

Water availability, quality and management issues have made water an expensive and limited commodity in Gaza. People in Gaza receive just 53% of the amount of water for domestic use recommended by the World Health Organization, and an average family spends a third of their income on water (Abescat, 2019). An overreliance on the coastal aquifer, Gaza's primary source of domestic water supply, has led to depletion and salination of groundwater reserves. A lack of critical waste management infrastructure has contributed to contamination of drinking water (UNEP, 2020; World Bank et al., 2021). Around 25% of diseases in Gaza are estimated to be related to water quality (UNEP, 2020). Water facilities operate at only 15% of total capacity because of the energy crisis (Abescat, 2019). Political differences between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas further strain the water supply service, with both operating parallel water governance structures in Gaza (UNEP, 2020).

Medical facilities and supplies are stretched thin, and reliant on humanitarian assistance (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021). The struggling health care system has faced added pressure as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic (Box 2).

The impact of internal political divisions, the Israeli restrictions and the blockade by Egypt and Egypt are felt in other services and infrastructure too. The parallel political system has made it difficult to employ teachers: a shortage of personnel and classrooms means that two-thirds of schools are operating a two-shift system to accommodate the rising number of pupils (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021).

Box 2: The COVID-19 Pandemic in Gaza

As is the case in many parts of the world, strict measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 were introduced in Gaza in March 2020, with a full lockdown following soon after (World Bank, 2020a). Israel has tightened border crossing restrictions, allowing only the most severe medical cases to exit Gaza and at times halting the processing of exit permits (OCHA, 2020). During this time, the United Nations Inter-Agency Access Coordination Unit has facilitated movement of humanitarian personnel on behalf of the cluster system (ibid.).

Medical facilities have been stretched thin. At the onset of the pandemic, there was a severe shortage of ventilators, with only four available for every 100,000 people (Hamad et al., 2020). At the time of writing, only 3% of Gazans had received a first dose of a vaccine, compared with 53% of Israelis (Devi, 2021). Doctors have struggled to cope with the increasing demand for health care, a problem that is compounded by the high population density of Gaza and the way in which COVID-19 is transmitted between individuals (Sen, 2020). Access to safe water and sanitation as a preventative measure with regard to COVID-19 has been a challenge, with the pandemic aggravating existing vulnerabilities in water supply and sanitation (Barhoum, 2021).

The sharp decline in economic activity and unemployment rates in Gaza as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic follows three years of low economic growth (World Bank, 2020b). The lockdown has had particularly severe impacts on small businesses, some of which have had to close permanently (Hamad et al., 2020).

Humanitarian organisations have ramped up emergency assistance during the pandemic, although interviewees noted that a lack of foresight as to when restrictions would be lifted, as well as stakeholder preferences for face-to-face contact, had impeded the planning of specific emergency interventions

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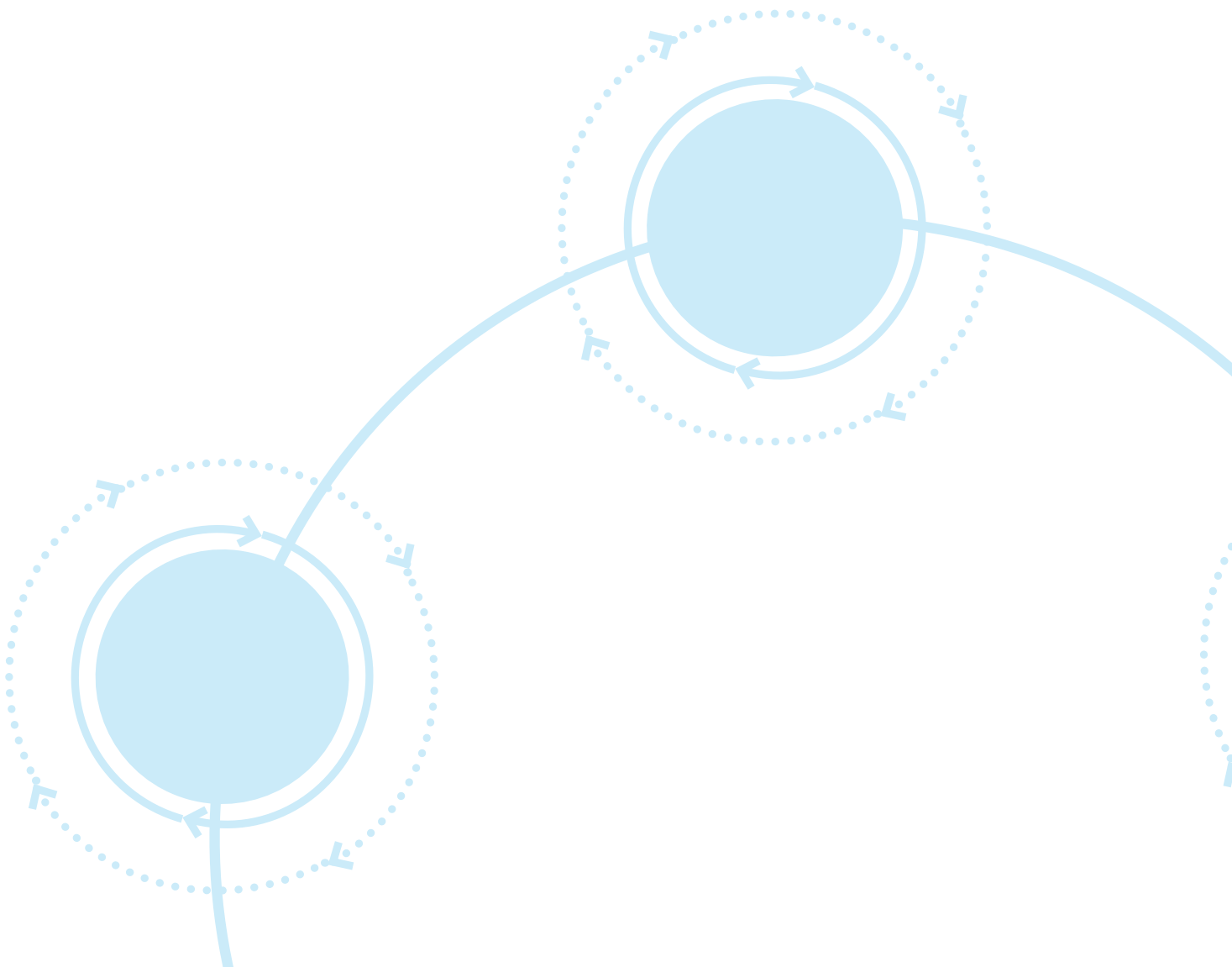
Access to safe water and sanitation as a preventative measure with regard to COVID-19 has been a challenge.

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2.5 Social and cultural issues

Gaza's isolation from the rest of Palestine has led to socioeconomic divisions between Gaza and the West Bank (Shaban, 2017) and the separation of families (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2021). Interviewees highlighted the impact of poor living conditions, difficult economic prospects and hostilities on the overall mental health of the Gaza population. Many have used migration as a coping mechanism in recent years, enduring difficult journeys in a rush to pursue asylum in southern Europe (Elkahlout, 2018).

The high population density has led to overcrowding, with interviewees noting that multigenerational and crowded homes were commonplace in Gaza. The population pyramid is heavily skewed towards the young, with 72% of Gazans under the age of 30 (Elkahlout, 2017; Shaban, 2017). A lack of employment, social opportunities, political representation and contact with the 'outside world' for the growing young population has led to increasing frustration, mental health issues and radicalisation among this group (Shaban, 2017).



3 Introduction to the Gaza Resilience Programme

The ICRC has worked in Israel and oPT since the 1967 Arab–Israeli War. In the past decade, it has supported livelihoods and access to essential services in Gaza. The ICRC has also developed its global approach to humanitarian response in urban environments in recent years, sharing lessons, technical notes and recommendations with the wider humanitarian and development sector.

Within the context outlined in Section 2, the ICRC is implementing a multiyear response, the Gaza Resilience Programme (GRP), which supports affected communities and local service providers by strengthening their resilience to shocks and stressors.

Specifically, the GRP aims to ensure a minimum level of essential service delivery during a crisis; mitigate to the extent possible the impact of longstanding Israel–Palestine hostilities on public health; and contribute to creating a resilient socio-economy that can better recover from shock events. To do this, the ICRC is partnering and working closely with local authorities and essential service providers, including the Coastal Municipality Water Utilities (CMWU), the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), the Municipality of Gaza (MoG) Water and Wastewater Department, Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCo) and the Ministry of Health.

The programme runs from 2020 to 2024, and is organised into four thematic and operational tracks (see Section 3.1). At the time of publication, the GRP was commencing Year 2, with many activities in the planning and tendering stage; the component of the programme that will focus on community resilience is still being developed. This case study primarily explores the activities in track 1 and, to a lesser extent, tracks 2, 3 and 4.

3.1 Components of the Gaza Resilience Programme

The GRP is organised into four tracks, which help focus efforts towards the resilience and restoration of livelihoods and essential services. These are outlined below. Figure 2 provides a timeline overview of the programme.

Track 1 | Public facilities

Projects and activities under this track are informed by lessons learnt from previous hostilities, and aim to strengthen the resilience of essential services while factoring in the interconnectedness and dependencies between these. A significant component of the GRP focuses on improvements in the generation and distribution of electricity, as well as increasing efficiency to reduce fuel usage. Working in partnership with local service providers, these projects build on existing service systems and infrastructure.

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Improvements in remote technology will enable service providers to manage the power supply at distance during hostilities.

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- **Improving the reliability of the power supply.** The ICRC has supported the provision of a second power line to critical water supply, wastewater and health care facilities to improve their capacity to supply electricity to key infrastructural nodes. This power line acts as a backup or redundancy measure during hostilities, making the power supply more resilient. The GRP also includes the installation of auto-reclosers, which increase network management efficiency in terms of the time and resources required to partition and distribute supply. These also eliminate the need for multiple cables and can be managed remotely by service providers. This is another characteristic of resilience that is adapted to hostilities, as enabling remote management spares the service provider personnel from having to risk their lives to operate and maintain these systems.
- **Managing and diversifying power sources.** The ICRC has supported CMWU by installing solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, a second dedicated powerline to the facility and a net metering system at the Canada Well. This has resulted in a 36% increase in water production, redirection of enough surplus solar energy into the grid to meet the needs of up to 52 households and cost savings for both the service provider and customers as a result of less reliance on a generator. A similar project is planned for Year 2 for a wastewater pumping station in the Sheikh Radwan district. In 2020, ICRC piloted a smart metering project with GEDCo in the Al Senaa neighbourhood, installing pre-programmed smart meters to optimise and manage power supply from multiple sources. This allowed households to receive more hours of electricity each day with rotating power thresholds.
- **Developing essential service automation and technology.** The ICRC is upgrading, automating and installing remote functionality to 118 water well operating systems. This will enable them to switch their source of electricity automatically, from grid to generator, depending on availability. Improvements in remote technology will enable service providers to manage the power supply at distance during hostilities. A similar project is planned for Year 2 for a water desalination plant.
- **Water quality and wastewater treatment.** The ICRC is developing the potential to manage storm water, both as a water resource and to mitigate the impacts of flooding, including the effects on public health. Furthermore, the ICRC is planning two separate studies, to (i) assess the impact of desalination plant brine discharge on water salinity and (ii) explore the feasibility of reusing treated wastewater for agriculture. These projects are still in development.

Track 2 | Communities

Projects and activities under this track aim to strengthen community resilience to the onset of crisis and to develop community or local informal services and capacity.

- **Community-level energy security.** Under the GRP, the ICRC is leading a project to develop hybrid grids whereby communities benefit from and access locally generated power supply such as PV installations or private generators during times of hostility.

Further activities under this track, such as the installation of 2,000 smart meters in Al Senaa households, are in development, and will focus on the linkages between community resilience, the local economy, service provision and public health.

Track 3 | Authoritative data

This track focuses on improving access to quality data to support evidence-based decision-making and better inform operational response and action, by both the ICRC and local actors.

- **Improving access to data and geographic information service (GIS) capacity for decision-makers.** The ICRC is working to aggregate data from service providers and other stakeholders to enable them and the ICRC to make informed planning and resourcing decisions for strengthening the operational resilience of essential services. This is in addition to providing support to different actors on GIS functionality. These parts of the GRP are still ongoing.
- **Health impact assessment.** The ICRC has initiated a comprehensive assessment to progressively identify actionable health interventions in Gaza, for the purpose of informing infrastructure planning and service delivery. This part of the GRP is currently ongoing.

Track 4 | Advocacy

Projects and activities under this track relate to advocating for resilience to other actors, be these local organisations, other humanitarian actors or international development agencies, in order to mobilise them to be able to respond to the crisis in Gaza at scale.

- **Utilising the evidence base and knowledge.** The ICRC will use evidence and knowledge gathered from track 3, alongside completed projects/interventions under tracks 1 and 2, that demonstrate a track record in resilience, to advocate and influence other actors – particularly development organisations – to help take resilience programming to scale across the Gaza Strip. This part of the GRP is still ongoing.

Figure 2: Timeline of GRP design and implementation



Source: ALNAP.

Much of the inception of the programme can be credited to a comprehensive resilience study led by an external consultant in 2017. This highlighted key risks and vulnerabilities in essential services, multipliers of impact and the scale of the crisis in Gaza, as well as recommendations for prioritised action. Specifically, the study concluded that:

- a greater emphasis was needed to tackle the power crisis bottleneck, which has impacts on all other services
- existing emergency work on water supply and wastewater treatment needed further development
- establishing a common geospatial database for stakeholders and improving data and improving knowledge and data-sharing between different authorities was required for a holistic understanding of the essential services context
- additional resource capacity for the Gaza delegation by way of a headquarter-based support team was necessary, in order to ensure the response was adequate and effective.

In addition to the resilience study, the GRP has implemented a series of resilience-building interventions in Gaza, which to date have included:

- 20 dedicated and second power supply lines to ensure a more reliable supply of electricity for critical water and wastewater installations
- two solar power installations equipped with net metering for critical water installations
- approximately 250 groundwater boreholes being equipped with remote automation
- synchronisation of generators supporting three hospitals
- installation of more than 50 auto-reclosers to enable continuous operation of water and wastewater installations.

Together, these projects have increased the electricity supply and operation hours of essential power, water and wastewater services, reduced the risk to the operational management of essential services and improved public health as a result of more reliable access to essential services. The GRP is strategically building on this series of interventions, drawing on the ICRC's expertise and learning on resilience-building in Gaza to ensure continued impact.

3.2 Urban resilience approach

The ICRC has a mandate under international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of victims of armed conflict and violence without interference or obstruction (ICRC, 2021c). Much of its work is around protracted crises, with the average number of years spent in its 10 largest operations being 42 years (ICRC, 2019). These protracted crises are increasingly set in urban contexts (ibid.). In recent years, the ICRC has developed its global approach to humanitarian response in urban environments, documenting lessons and recommendations for other humanitarian and development actors.

In contrast with other interpretations of the complexity of urban contexts, which emphasise diversity and vulnerability within communities (Brown et al., 2015) and a holistic view of the complex urban context (Campbell, 2016), the ICRC's interpretation of complex urban contexts focuses more on infrastructure systems and governance of essential services. The ICRC defines urban contexts as:

'... the area within which civilians vulnerable to disruptions in essential services reside and the network of components supporting those services' (ICRC, 2015a).

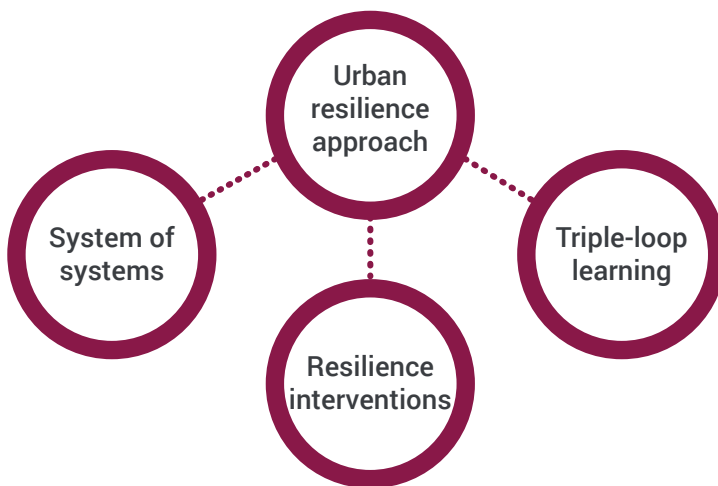
Given the interconnectedness of essential services and their impact on public health and livelihoods, these are a fundamental focus of the ICRC's humanitarian response approach in urban settings. A 2016 report on urban services by the ICRC illustrated this with the following example and explanation of why humanitarians need to adapt their approach:

'Damage to an electrical transformer can immediately shut down the water supply to an entire neighbourhood or hospital, which will in turn negatively impact public health. The set of skills and planning capabilities required to best address such interconnectivity is often beyond the scope of humanitarian operations. This needs to change if humanitarian actors are to be able to provide more effective assistance aimed at mitigating the consequences, be it on public health, livelihoods and/or displacement.'



The ICRC has adopted an ‘urban resilience approach’ (Figure 3) in the design, implementation and adaptation of the GRP, whereby the ability of services, infrastructure and communities to withstand and bounce back from shocks and stressors is strengthened.

Figure 3: The ICRC’s urban resilience approach

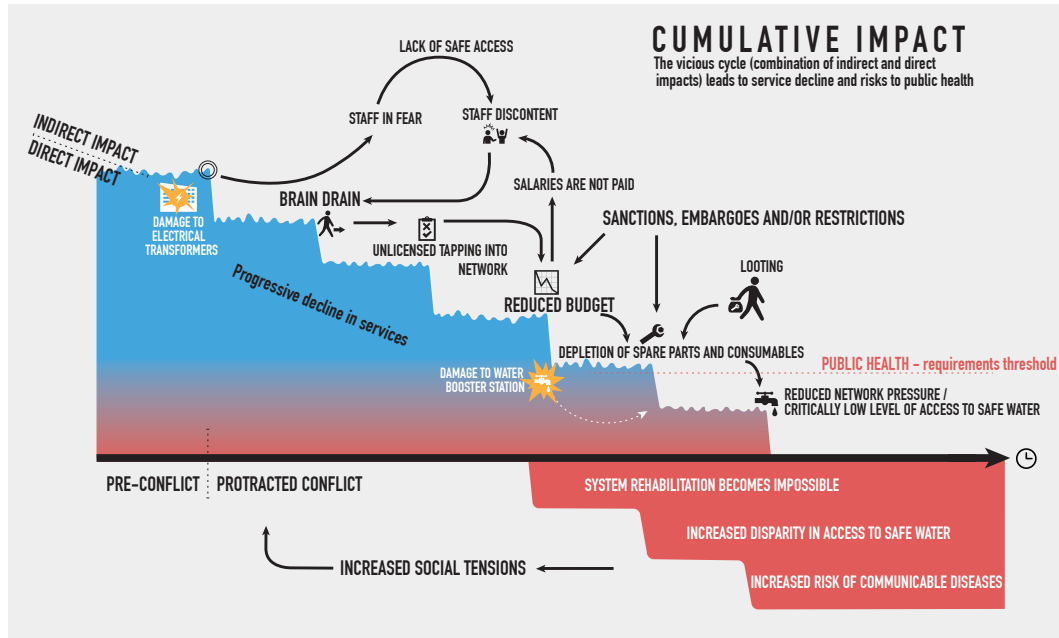


Source: ALNAP

The ICRC aims to use flexible and evidence-based programming with continuous cycles of planning, learning and adaptation to put its urban resilience approach into practice. This builds on the resilience-building interventions that have already been carried out to date (examples listed in Section 3.1). Three pillars underpin this approach, outlined below.

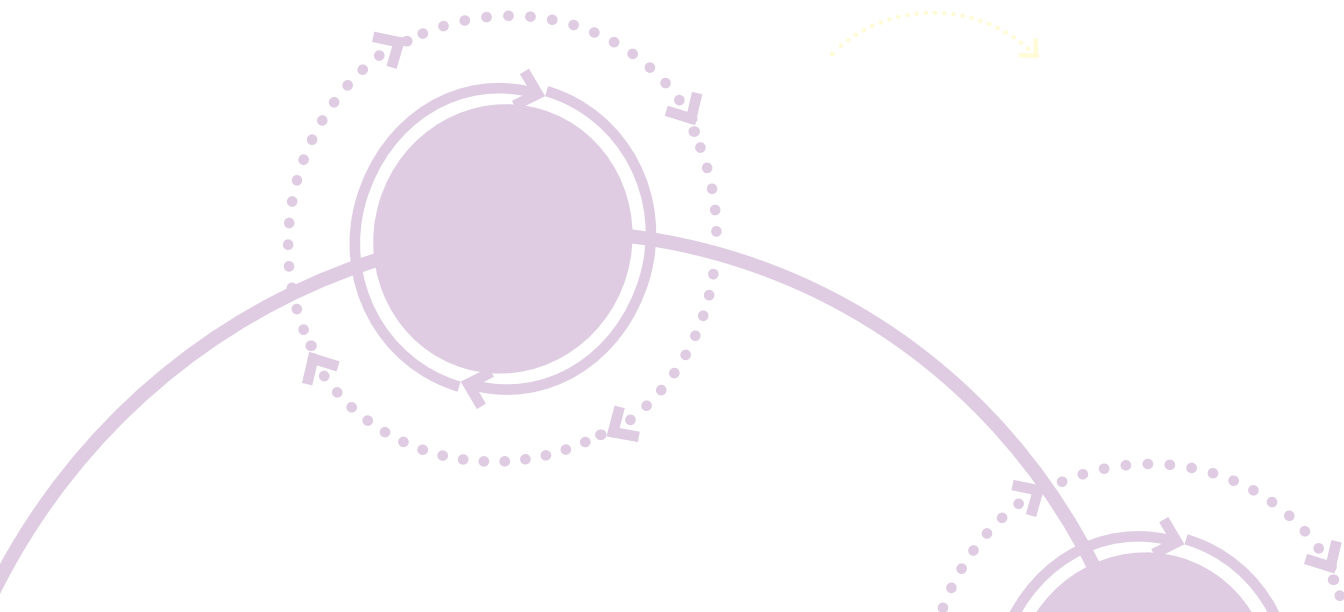
1. Understand the urban context as a complex **system of systems** – that is, ‘the way in which complex networks of hardware, activities performed by people, and provisions of items, operate together’ (ICRC, 2021d). Under the system of systems pillar of the urban resilience approach, the GRP explores the interconnectedness and complexity of services (water, wastewater, electricity supply and health care), infrastructure and stakeholder relationships in Gaza, including causal links, dependencies and bottlenecks. Examples of how the GRP has achieved this baseline knowledge-building include the completion of a resilience study of essential services and infrastructure in 2017, followed by a system mapping exercise during the design of the programme (Section 4.1).
2. Design interventions with **resilience** in mind, thus targeting direct, indirect and cumulative impacts (Figure 4), and aim to build in flexibility and redundancies. The ICRC focuses specifically on operational resilience (as opposed to community or household resilience), which it takes to mean ‘the ability of an operation to respond to and absorb the effects of shocks and stresses, and to recover as rapidly as possible within the normal capacity and efficiency’ (Hay, 2016).

Figure 4: Cumulative impact on infrastructure during hostilities over prolonged periods leading to service decline over time



Source: ICRC (2016).

3. Use of a **triple-loop institutional learning approach**, which encourages reflection on contextual assumptions and decision-making and evaluation of an examination of an intervention’s success, decision-making and contextual assumptions. Triple-loop learning goes beyond fixing a problem (single-loop) and seeking to understand or address its causality (double-loop); it challenges assumptions and processes, looking to ascertain how and why decisions are being made, including those of the learner (Tamarack Institute, 2021).



4 How has the Gaza Resilience Programme tried to navigate urban complexity?

Many of the current individual and institutional practices across the humanitarian sector fail to anticipate the depth and scale of underlying issues (ICRC, 2015a; World Bank et al., 2021), and therefore to design and implement a context-appropriate response (Campbell, 2016). Commonly arising challenges include working in sector silos, creating duplicative structures and only focusing on individual households (ibid.).

The contextual background in Section 2 highlights the dynamic political landscape and interconnected essential services and wellbeing issues in the Gaza Strip. Energy supply is linked to water security and quality, which is linked to agriculture and health care, all under a unique internal political stalemate and decades of Israeli–Palestinian hostilities.

This section explores new ways of working employed by the ICRC and partners to address the issues in Gaza with the aim of delivering a humanitarian response programme that is relevant and appropriate to the Gaza Strip context.

4.1 Understanding interconnected services

Urban environments are highly interconnected (Campbell, 2016), and disruptions in urban essential services can have incremental direct and indirect effects, leading to a cumulative impact on the interconnected system that is difficult to address (ICRC, 2015a) and, potentially, widespread humanitarian consequences. Enabled by a systems mapping exercise, the GRP has sought to overcome silos and work across multiple essential services to address the challenges faced in the Gaza Strip when seeking to ensure continuity in the delivery of such services.

The ICRC conducted analysis on the essential service systems related to the programme. A comprehensive resilience assessment (see Section 4.3) instigated deeper understanding of the capacities and dependencies of essential services in Gaza. An analysis of how service providers and communities were managing the power crisis was documented as a ‘catalogue of coping mechanisms’, which shed light on creative and practical approaches already being used throughout Gaza that warranted upscaling. A geospatial analysis of services and infrastructure and a Gaza market and economy analysis for a project outside of the GRP were also reviewed.

A systems mapping revealed interconnections between essential services.

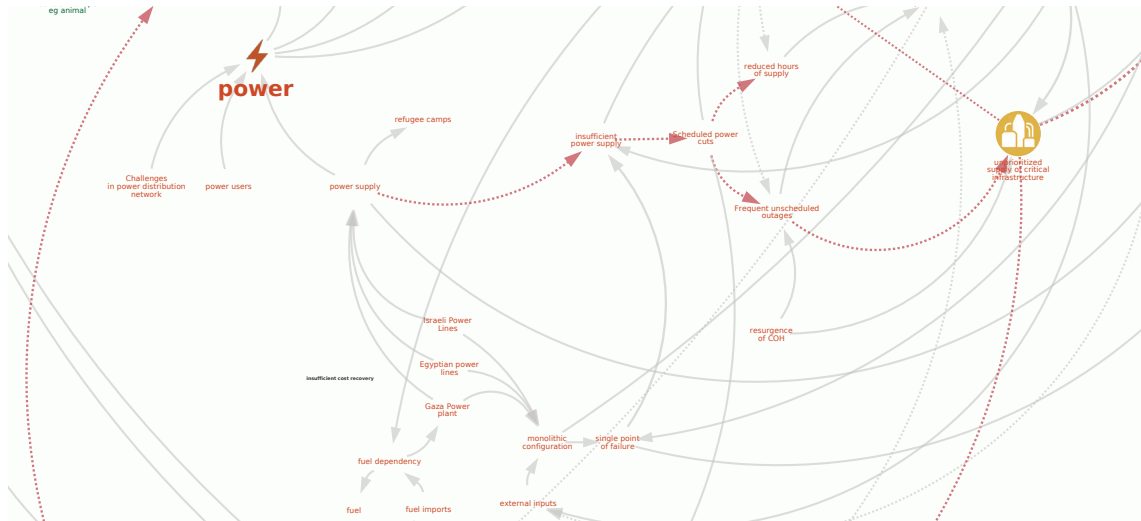
The ICRC has developed a series of systems maps that provide a ‘better understanding of how all essential services work and how they are linked to each other and to different stakeholders’, as one interviewee explained. Different thematic teams within the ICRC individually mapped their related sectors using institutional and partner knowledge and supporting data, such as

“

Commonly arising challenges that hinder a context-appropriate response include working in sector silos, creating duplicative structures and only focusing on individual households.

”

Figure 5: An example of an output of a mapping exercise on power supply in Gaza



Source: ICRC (2021d).

the ‘catalogue of coping mechanisms’, with interconnections mapped visually at a wider level using Kumu software. The mapping allowed for a ‘failure propagation analysis’, to determine what the impacts of failure in any one particular area would be on other parts of the system, and thus identification of root causes of issues and critical nodes of intervention. The complexity of the cascading effects of individual services on other parts of the system has helped substantiate the ‘system of systems’ term. However, this analysis was for the most part restricted to essential service systems and not the wider context – see Section 5 for further discussion.

4.2 Working across sectors and scales

Three departments contribute to the GRP. The ICRC Assistance Division in Israel and the Occupied Territories (ILOT), which serves the Gaza operations, is split into three thematic programming departments: Water and Habitat, Health, and Economic Security. All three collaborated on the GRP, and, although each has separate sub-projects within the GRP, they come together to tackle the interconnected issues in Gaza. One interviewee highlighted that, without this approach, the response would ‘not be enough to capture all dynamics... there will still be limitations’. Some examples of cross-sector activities in the GRP include:

- Linkages between power supply and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. In Gaza, essential WASH facilities, like water supply pumping stations and wastewater treatment plants, operate at reduced capacity because of a shortage of power supply. The GRP addresses this dependency

directly, installing solar PV to augment electricity supply to water supply facilities, and providing a second and dedicated power line to essential service facilities to build in redundancy and augment electricity supply for these.

- Linkages between economy, water infrastructure and/or food security. A market analysis led by the Economic Security unit assesses the affordability of essential services and alternative options. The Economic Security unit has also engaged in designing a systems map for sustainable food production.

To date, the GRP has focused primarily on resilience of power supply for WASH services and hospitals. WASH-related activities have evolved organically and form a key part of the programme, whereas health and livelihood initiatives are being incorporated for Years 2–5 of the programme. Although the GRP works across these three sectors, its scope does not address the wider range of challenges explored in Section 2 (see Section 5).

The GRP works across neighbourhoods and scales. Gaza is split into five governates and 25 municipalities (UN-Habitat, 2014); the ICRC works across all of them. Issues are addressed at the individual level up to the national level under the GRP.

- An example of work at the national level is the upgrading and automating of water wells across the Gaza Strip to improve the management and efficiency of water supply, especially during periods of hostility, when operators and technicians may not have safe access to operate these systems.
- Examples of building resilience at the community level include the synchronisation of generators for reliable power supply and the installation of solar panels for an alternative source of energy. These are mostly targeted towards communities and areas where services are dispersed and there is greater vulnerability as supply fails to meet demand, alongside the development of central service infrastructure. The ICRC is also conducting a feasibility study for a hybrid grid, which would enable storage and control over the power supply while remaining connected to the grid during an emergency.



4.3 Supporting infrastructure development and stakeholder coordination

Humanitarians must recognise and support the wealth of resources, skills and capacities among local stakeholders in urban environments (Campbell, 2016). The GRP has a specific focus on strengthening the resilience of existing infrastructure and services and working with local stakeholders and service providers to do so. The ICRC has used a number of approaches to try to support stakeholder coordination and infrastructure development. These are outlined below.

Developing existing essential service infrastructure. The ICRC is supporting local essential service providers such as CMWU to strengthen the resilience of existing infrastructure to shocks and stressors by means such as diversifying the power supply source if the electricity grid connection fails during hostilities. New initiatives and innovations, such as the installation of smart meters, also fall within the scope of improving efficiency of existing infrastructure and ensuring more reliable delivery of essential services. One partner involved in the GRP noted that the ICRC was ‘keeping existing systems alive by protecting them, to serve the people, preventing an otherwise collapse’ in services. Another highlighted its role in ‘initiating’ long-term change by supporting local capacity. The opportunity for partners to co-design projects has increased their sense of ownership (Zeitoun, 2021). As the ICRC supports and works with local actors to increase capacity, there is scope to build on this by strengthening the technical capacity of local actors too.

Building the GIS capacity of partners. The ICRC has a GIS specialist who is providing practical and strategic advice to support utility providers in mapping their service networks. This is helping highlight emerging needs and areas where service providers and the ICRC should prioritise resources over time, and is creating clearer linkages and enabling the identification of cascading effects between essential services, public health and economy. Track 3 of the GRP entails compiling data and strengthening the GIS capacity of local stakeholders, so as to provide them with a management tool that improves their understanding of the context and that supports their planning and operations and maintenance processes. This part of the programme is ongoing.

Convening key stakeholders for collective action. Using data, the GRP team is demonstrating areas of overlap and the need for collective action, thus mitigating some of the negative impacts of the sensitive political context by convening key actors for the purpose of building resilience. One interviewee likened the ICRC's role to a ‘bridge’. During the scoping phase, the ICRC helped put in place an emergency preparedness plan based on learning from previous rounds of hostilities and how these lead to vulnerabilities the service provision. This was agreed upon by all local water and sanitation

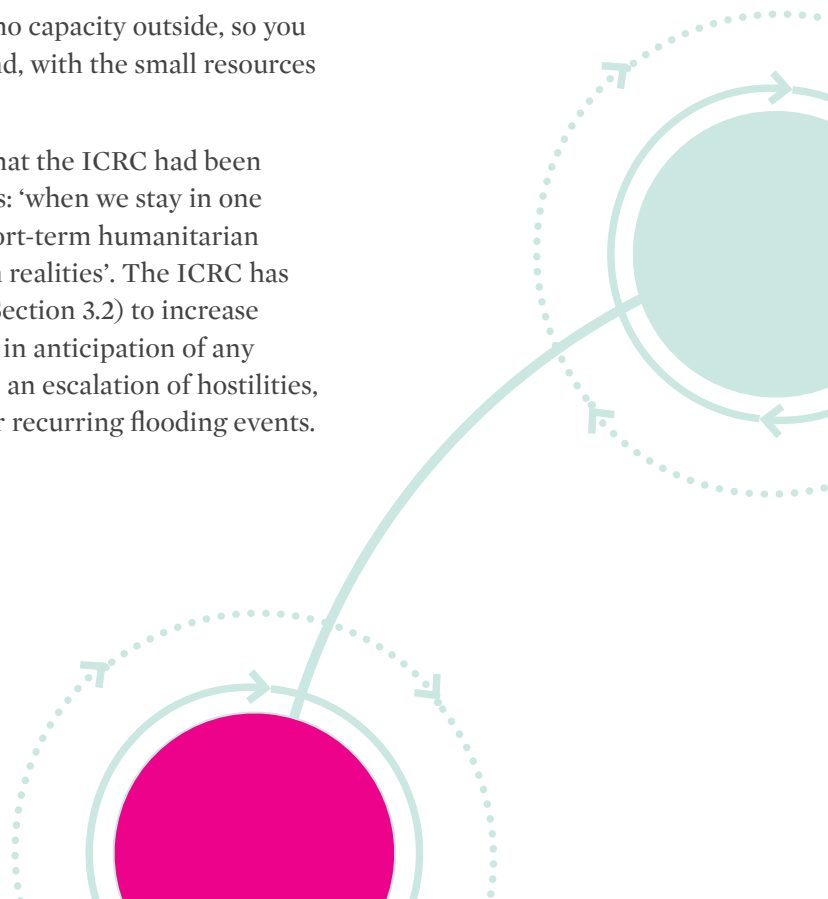
authorities in Gaza despite overwhelming political differences. The process initiated joint lesson-learning exercises and generated a collective agreement on the need to move beyond emergency response and the development of the initial resilience-building measures. Another example of bringing together stakeholders in the GRP relates to a sub-project to synchronise generators to improve energy supply at the Al Nasser Hospital Complex. This required the ICRC to coordinate between hospital directors and electricity providers, as well as with Israeli authorities to permit the entry of specialty materials into Gaza.

4.4 Taking a long-term view through resilience-building

Protracted crises, such as in the Gaza Strip, require a rethinking of conventional short-term humanitarian responses by developing resilience measures to anticipate the range of emerging challenges (World Bank et al., 2021). In recent years, there has been an increasing shift from purely needs-based humanitarian action to a resilience-based humanitarian approach that is preventative in nature, which considers and strengthens the capacity of communities, economy, services, institutions and infrastructure to bounce back from shocks and stressors (Hilhorst, 2018). Although this issue is not restricted to urban environments, their interconnected systems and stakeholders, large vulnerable populations and increased level of economic risk make them particularly challenging and complex environments for humanitarian response. With the isolated nature of the Gaza Strip, there is further pressure to be self-reliant and prepared for the prospect of a deterioration in living conditions. One interviewee explained that Gaza ‘is a closed environment where the population depends on its own resilience – there is no capacity outside, so you have to work on the inside, on this small piece of land, with the small resources available’.

Another interview reflected on the average length that the ICRC had been present in its 10 largest operations, which is 42 years: ‘when we stay in one context for so long, it can’t just be an immediate, short-term humanitarian intervention; we need to interact with the long-term realities’. The ICRC has adopted an urban resilience approach in Gaza (see Section 3.2) to increase the resilience of communities and essential services in anticipation of any exacerbation of the already difficult context, such as an escalation of hostilities, a severe reduction in electricity supply in the grid or recurring flooding events. The GRP has considered long-term issues by:

“
With the isolated nature of the Gaza Strip, there is further pressure to be self-reliant and prepared for the prospect of a deterioration in living conditions.
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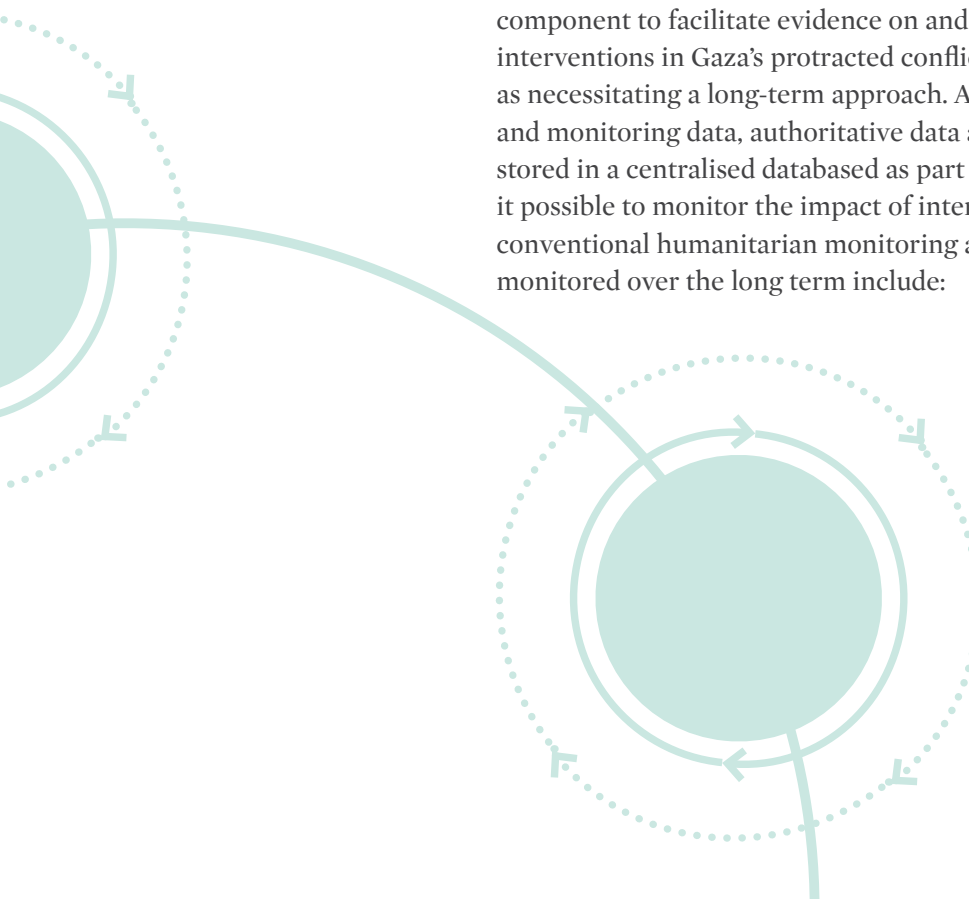
“
The COVID-19
Pandemic and the
2021 escalation
in the Israel-
Palestinian
hostilities have
exacerbated
existing issues and
needs.
”

Addressing immediate issues and long-term resilience in parallel.

Interventions within the GRP have been designed to address some of the immediate needs of the civilian population as well as to improve resilience in relation to long-term issues. With regard to immediate needs outside of the scope of the GRP, the ICRC also delivers other humanitarian response projects in Gaza that have a more conventional emergency needs-based approach. The ICRC facilitates family visits for detained individuals, provides physical rehabilitation services and offers emergency assistance such as trauma care and medical assistance, as well as supporting operations, maintenance and repairs to infrastructure and services. The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2021 escalation in the Israel–Palestine hostilities have exacerbated existing issues and needs, requiring the ICRC to increase its emergency response efforts in Gaza. The ICRC has invested in an internal governance structure for the GRP to ensure that the GRP activities remain on track while the ICRC fulfils its emergency assistance goals that are not covered in the GRP.

Planning and strategy alignment. The ICRC is ensuring that all plans within the GRP align with the master plans and long-term strategies of partners such as the PWA and essential service providers, something that the partners that have been involved in the GRP verified (Zeitoun, 2021). Despite not being involved in devising partner plans, the ICRC works to advocate the incorporation of more durable and hence long-term solutions. Although synergy of strategies is evident from a historical perspective, limitations in our data collection (outlined at the beginning of this case study) meant it was not possible to verify how local stakeholders interpret this alignment of planning and strategy.

Monitoring long-term impact. The GRP has a long-term monitoring component to facilitate evidence on and analysis of the impact of resilience interventions in Gaza's protracted conflict setting, which the ICRC recognises as necessitating a long-term approach. As well as baseline measurements and monitoring data, authoritative data and evidence is being collected and stored in a centralised database as part of track 3 of the GRP. This is making it possible to monitor the impact of interventions over a longer period than in conventional humanitarian monitoring approaches. Examples of what is being monitored over the long term include:



- increases in the diversity of energy sources and in the electricity supply, and the reliability of access to electricity supply for critical water, wastewater and health installations
- the amount of water supply in targeted facilities
- reductions in operational and maintenance costs for targeted facilities
- the number and consequences of cascading failures as a result of power supply issues for the delivery of other essential services (water, wastewater, health)
- further to project-level monitoring, progress on sectoral interventions, through ongoing sectoral monitoring.



Local community workers installing components for the remote operation of Water Well.

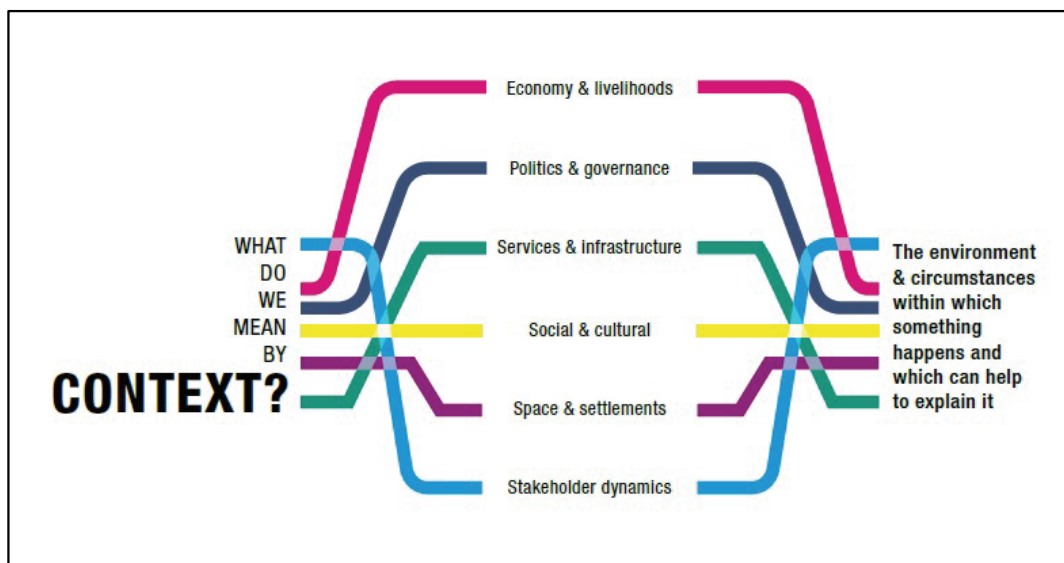
Photo credit: ICRC

5 Obstacles and challenges

While the GRP illustrates many examples of innovative working in an urban context, it also highlights several obstacles and challenges to conducting operations in a context-appropriate way. Some of the context-appropriate ways of working identified in previous ALNAP research (Campbell, 2016) are utilised to a lesser extent. The programme addresses many of the broader public health challenges determined by water, wastewater, energy and agricultural or fishing practices, but some contextual challenges, such as those related to economic opportunities, do not fall within its scope. Although, overall, local capacity to address challenges is increased, the programme has not yet focused on strengthening technical capacities, except through GIS capacity-building. This section explores some of these gaps and considers what obstacles and challenges may have contributed to them.

A wider context analysis that goes beyond the GRP's priority sectors has not been conducted. Previous ALNAP research on understanding urban contexts (Campbell, 2018) has highlighted different elements of contexts that humanitarians need to understand if they are to be able to design and deliver a truly relevant response (Figure 6), and examples of different context analysis tools. These tools have included a market and political economy analysis example by the ICRC and a city-wide risk assessment to build community resilience by the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, both of which the GRP has not yet utilised as of yet. It is key to note that, as the programme progresses, such tools may be used to inform the community focus of track 2.

Figure 6: What is context? Different elements that humanitarians should understand in order to design and deliver a context-appropriate response



Source: Campbell (2018).

The GRP is skewed towards specific sectors, which limits its ability to work holistically. The GRP focuses on building the resilience of essential service infrastructure, thus does not prioritise some of the other challenges facing the people of Gaza outlined in Section 2, such as financial security and housing. This scope of the GRP can be attributed to its development process. Development of the GRP was led by the ICRC's Water and Habitat department, which helps explain why the programme focuses on resilience of energy, water, wastewater and hospital essential services.

However, it can also be argued that this same leadership by one technical department has helped champion collaborative working. The Economic Security and Health departments have been invited to collaborate on the design of the programme for a multisectoral approach further along the process. As such, some of the activities with a greater food and agriculture focus, such as creating organic fertiliser for improved crop production and resilience against the impact of fertiliser import restrictions, or a health focus, such as the health impact assessment, are still in development or ongoing at the time of writing of this case study.

As these other components are still in the very early stages, there is a question around how multisectoral and holistic the programme will be once all parts are being implemented. Silos within the ICRC (between the three departments within the Assistance Division) and wider sector silos (lack of engagement between different types of service providers) mean that a greater effort to collaborate is required, and there is a steep learning curve on transgressing sector boundaries to achieve a holistic resilience programme.

Community engagement is not integrated into all thematic components.

An emphasis has been placed on building the resilience of infrastructure and services under track 1 of the programme. This is to ensure that the broadest part of the population has access to essential services without having to resort to negative coping mechanisms. Track 2, which focuses on community resilience, is under development at the time of writing. A lack of community engagement activities in Year 1 of the programme can be attributed to the inexperience of the engineering team in this area, which has thus far led the bulk of activities. The Health and Economic Security departments, which have a greater role to play in upcoming activities, have greater experience of working at the community level. However, for the GRP to be truly holistic, all sectoral components need to be targeted at both the national and the community level. This requires some teams within the ICRC to target different groups of stakeholders to those they have previously targeted.

Although the community-level interventions of the GRP are still ongoing, it should be noted that a study conducted in 2019 mapped local technical and social management solutions on coping with energy scarcity, bringing to light an informal sector on production and distribution of energy. Some of the portfolio of solutions outlined in the catalogue of coping mechanisms are being scaled up and replicated in the GRP – for example net metering to reduce monthly energy bills.

The GRP has struggled to embed true flexibility or adaptiveness. Like many humanitarian organisations (Obrecht, 2019), the ICRC has struggled to implement its aims of being an adaptive programme. Many of the examples of flexibility and change cited during interviews are reactive rather than truly adaptive. Although learning, iterative planning and adaptive management are said to be embedded within the GRP's approach, at the time of writing there had not yet been a significant change in context to trigger the GRP to adapt planning and implementation. This can be attributed to the programme still being in its early stages: it is important to note that this is likely to be addressed in the authoritative data focus of track 3 as the GRP progresses.

The GRP is building the resilience of systems and infrastructure alongside partners; nevertheless, there is room to incorporate more of a focus on strengthening local technical capacities. Some interviewees noted that the GRP had incorporated little training or capacity-building to improve the skillsets of local service providers. GRP staff acknowledged that, should local partners take over the planning and delivery of resilience-building, the ICRC would likely provide technical capacity-strengthening, assistance and resourcing. For now, the programme is still too early in its implementation. Track 2 of the GRP will focus on engaging more at the individual level.



Canada Well, Rafah, Gaza. The ICRC has installed Solar PV, a net metering system, and a dedicated power line to support the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in improving the operational resilience of the public water supply facility. Photo credit: ICRC

Complex stakeholder dynamics have required a multi-level engagement strategy. The longstanding occupation and the absence of a clear singular governance structure mean that it is necessary to engage several stakeholders in the effort to achieve interventions at the national level and at scale. The occupation has introduced significant complexity into stakeholder relationships, for example with regard to restrictions on the entry of materials. Meanwhile, there are two main reasons for the lack of clear governance structures: (i) the parallel authority situation within the Gaza Strip (i.e. the de facto Hamas government and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah); and (ii) the differing capacities of service providers, which has meant that those with greater capacity have taken on a broader role that goes beyond their jurisdiction – for example, the CMWU has taken on a prominent role in the water sector, going beyond its remit of providing water for the coastal municipalities. With so many stakeholders and blurred or parallel lines of responsibility, buy-in and commitment from multiple stakeholders is required for work to progress.

There are ingrained assumptions about who should do resilience-building. When speaking with some development actors and donors as part of their efforts to advocate for resilience building interventions in humanitarian and development programming, the ICRC came up against many stakeholders who felt that resilience-building and the strengthening of essential services should fall in the development sphere rather than humanitarian action. However, one interviewee explained why humanitarian actors such as the ICRC were well equipped to build resilience of essential services in the Gaza Strip:

‘After three rounds of hostilities in Gaza, the development work that was done to reconstruct the infrastructure that was damaged built that infrastructure back as was rather than strengthening its resilience. The organisations that understand how these systems break down during hostilities are typically those that are on the ground; first and foremost, the service providers, but also, in this case, in Gaza, the ICRC.’

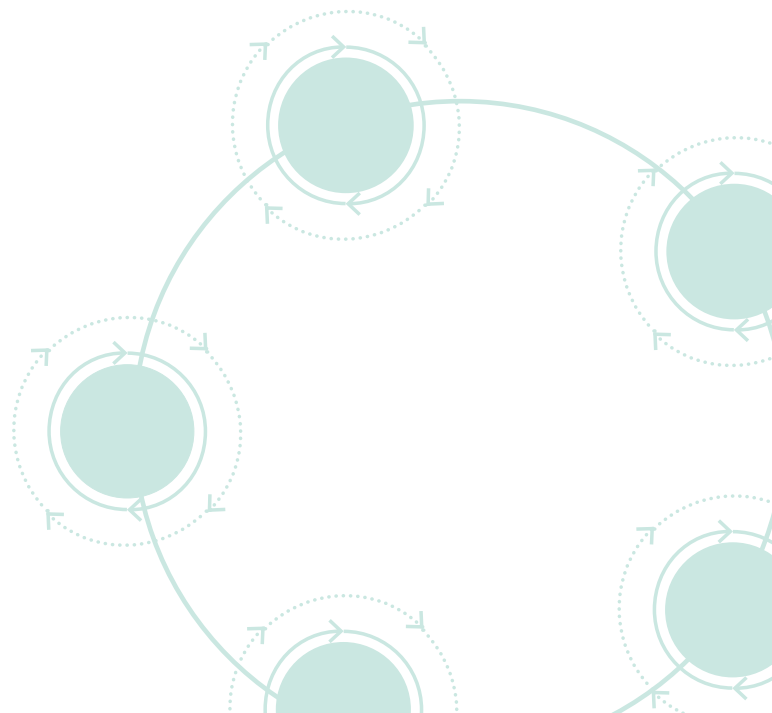
The recipients of the GRP infrastructure upgrade support are local service providers. As such, on completion of the works, the responsibility for and ownership of the infrastructure, and its operations and maintenance, are passed onto the service providers. Many humanitarian and development actors have heavily entrenched understandings of what constitutes humanitarian or development programming, which are somewhat linked to funding criteria. Discussions around the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus are stimulating collaboration; as one interviewee put it, the barriers between humanitarian and development solutions are ‘slowly starting to break down’. In their joint publication, the World Bank, the ICRC and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) demonstrate the importance of effective humanitarian–development collaboration for more durable solutions to strengthen the resilience of water supply and sanitation services (World Bank et al., 2021). The ICRC is advocating for development actors to incorporate resilience-building into their programming, recognising their important contribution to scaling up some of the methods introduced in the GRP.

Annual planning cycles reinforce short-term thinking. Annual planning cycles are the norm for most humanitarian organisations, given the fast-changing nature of the needs, the contexts and the responses required. The ICRC's internal institutional setup is formed around an annual budget and plan, which makes it less easy to move out of the short-term humanitarian mind-set and look at multiyear or long-term programming. One interviewee noted that, as a humanitarian organisation, the ICRC has been set up 'with most systems, tools and processes all being geared towards facilitating emergency response, and so they are short term by design, such as the annual plans'. Even though the GRP is a five-year programme, the team is working within the constraints of this financial and planning system. An internal cultural shift has been required for those involved in the GRP to adapt to thinking longer term as opposed to focusing on one-year cycle projects. In line with their Grand Bargain commitments, donors should also continue to provide more adaptive multi-year financing to support this.

Short-term ICRC missions can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge. The ICRC's rotation system for expatriate staff means that most such staff have a placement tenure of just one to two years. One interviewee explained that this short tenure could act as a barrier for new staff who need time to familiarise themselves with the context:

'Gaza is very complex and takes time to understand what is going on, and once you do, you're almost at the point of leaving.'

Despite strong documentation of learning and evidence, there is an inevitable loss of knowledge and relationships at the individual level as a result of the high staff turnover. That said, to a certain extent, resident staff retain historic memory and knowledge, as the next section mentions. More effective use of authoritative data and programmatic evidence is also helpful in mitigating some of the loss of knowledge.



6 Enabling and supporting factors

Several factors have enabled the ICRC to work differently in this programme. These are outlined below.

New leadership and management structures support a multidisciplinary approach. A new programme manager role has been introduced to ensure smooth and efficient operations and collaboration and coordination across the multidisciplinary components of the programme (Water and Habitat, Health, and Economic Security). Interviewees noted the importance of the GRP manager role in providing holistic oversight across different ICRC thematic units and helping break departmental silos. A Steering Committee has been set up at the headquarters level to enable buy-in and linkages at an organisational level, to provide technical guidance and to sign off on key project decisions.

National Gazan staff have enabled a better understanding of the interconnected essential services systems. For example, the Water and Habitat unit has national staff who have been working with the ICRC for several years, who bring both a deeper understanding of the environment and strong institutional knowledge to share with rotating expatriate delegate staff. This was particularly important in the systems mapping exercise. One interviewee commended the contribution of the Gazan national staff:

‘Most of them have been working with the ICRC for so many years and have such rich knowledge of the context. They are the ones that have these long-term relationships with different stakeholders and have a very strong understanding.’

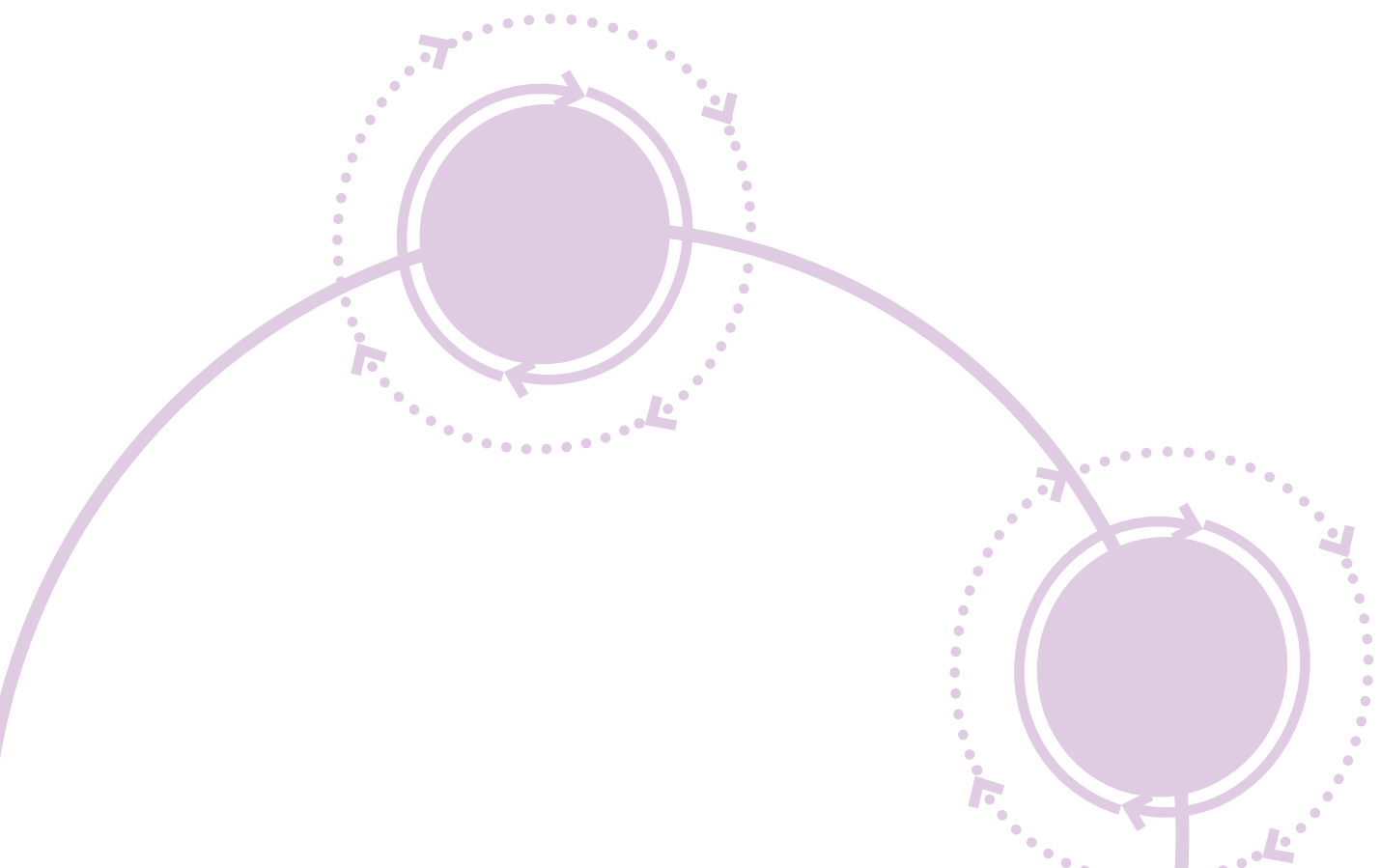
Outside of a small share of expatriate humanitarian staff, most humanitarians in Gaza are Gazan nationals working for a number of different international organisations. They have strong technical skills and a unique perspective on the protracted crisis, having lived through it first hand.

Humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality have been critical to help navigate the complex political context in Gaza. The ICRC’s unique role as a neutral, independent and impartial actor in the humanitarian ecosystem, and its positive reputation based on previous emergency response interventions in Gaza, has leveraged trust and enabled engagement with Palestinian and Israeli government authorities, service providers, communities and non-state armed groups in Gaza.

The multiyear funding commitment has enabled the ICRC to plan a long-term programme. Even though some protracted crises, such as that in Gaza, run for decades, funding for humanitarian action has remained annualised and short term (Levine et al., 2019). Multiyear donor commitment to the five-year resilience programme has allowed the ICRC to forego its traditional single-year short-term approach to humanitarian assistance and develop long-term and iterative resilience interventions such as in waste management. It has allowed

for flexibility in planning interventions across a longer period of time, more control for project managers in terms of deciding when to introduce new project components over the course of the five years and greater investment into monitoring, evaluation and learning processes. However, it should be noted that there is some limitation on the flexibility of funding: funds cannot be carried forward or used upfront between years, which would be key for urban response programmes to work at scale and pace.

ALNAP research has highlighted that annual planning and funding cycles limit the ability of humanitarian actors to achieve significant transformative change, as they have just a 12-month window to do this within (Campbell, 2020). Although it is one of the Grand Bargain commitments (IASC, 2016), multiyear humanitarian funding is unfamiliar territory for both donors and implementing humanitarian organisations, and thus there has been a learning curve for those involved in the GRP. One interviewee noted that fundamental to the funding agreement is the ICRC's commitment to 'demonstrate and carry out multiyear programming, not just do business as usual and continue on an annual basis'. The multiyear donor reporting commitment is another reason why the GRP has invested in longer-term monitoring and evaluation when compared with other ICRC humanitarian projects. One interviewee noted that there was an expectation for the ICRC to demonstrate the impact of the multiyear programme through enhanced monitoring frameworks and reporting, although there is a fair degree of donor flexibility to enable the ICRC to adapt the programme quickly to changes in context.



The ICRC has developed a common understanding of resilience. The ICRC has articulated its definition of resilience-building to all GRP staff, modifying theoretical language to make the practical application of resilience-building easier to understand. This has enabled the ICRC to better communicate the concept of resilience externally. Communications have been adapted when sharing key messages relating to resilience-building and long-term approaches, moving away from messaging on conventional emergency needs-based humanitarian response. Capturing the essence or successes relating to resilience in photographs and social media can be challenging, as the narrative is more complex than ‘pictures of buckets of water and taps being repaired’, as one interviewee suggested.

The ICRC has been willing to challenge the *status quo* and explore new ways of working. The ICRC had more of a conventional needs-based emergency assistance focus in Gaza before 2015, when staff were encouraged to apply their fresh perspective to the protracted crisis. One ICRC staff member acted as a champion for the resilience-building approach in Gaza, and was deemed a key enabler by colleagues in helping change ways of working and applying institutional experience and expertise of working in urban environments in the Gaza context. The GRP team has welcomed the shift towards multiyear programming and long-term thinking, investing more time in monitoring, evaluation and learning processes, and cross-departmental working across the different thematic units (Water and Habitat, Health, and Economic Security) and with the Geneva-based support team. Leadership has supported staff to explore the resilience concept and provided constructive input. Common interests among stakeholders have ensured that the GRP has had the right level of support. This has included government authorities, service providers and communities. One interviewee highlighted that ‘everyone is supporting and trying to facilitate the mission of the ICRC, even at the level of the *de facto* government’.



The ICRC has leveraged its long-established relationships and understanding of the context. The ICRC has a track record of programming in the oPT since 1967. Following the funding restrictions imposed by the international community upon Hamas' electoral victory in 2006, the ICRC was one of the few humanitarian organisations to continue to provide assistance in Gaza, thanks to its mandate and the availability of general funds to finance the aid. For the GRP, the ICRC has leveraged strong existing relationships with authorities and essential service providers that have been in place for decades, rather than having to build new ones. As one interviewee noted, the ICRC has 'good relationships with partners, which are key to fairly direct communication'. This has been particularly important with regard to assessing the capacities and dependencies of the essential services systems in order to improve their resilience. The ICRC has been able to work effectively with different municipalities and service providers to support ongoing operations and maintenance and to strengthen emergency preparedness for the onset of hostilities or other destabilising events (e.g. flooding). The ICRC's depth of knowledge of the context, given its historic presence in the area, has helped inform appropriate action under the GRP. Meanwhile, opportunities for partners to input into the design of interventions and the alignment of the GRP with their own plans have increased their sense of ownership.

The programme is fostering a culture of learning and evidence-based decision-making. Collection of evidence and learning is a key component of the GRP, both as part of specific activities under track 3 of the programme and more widely, regarding how mechanisms of learning have been embedded into the programme cycle. Individual projects within the programme are being designed iteratively as per the availability of data to inform action. For example, the health impact assessment is key in analysing the longer-term impact of previous ICRC water and health interventions and challenging internal assumptions of what is working well, something that standard ICRC monitoring forms and procedures would not have captured (Zeitoun, 2021). The findings of the health impact assessment will also inform the identification, selection and prioritisation of future resilience-building measures to deal with the onset of hostilities, severe reductions in the electricity supply in the grid and flooding. Evidence gathered also serves to advocate for the value of resilience-building to partners, donors and the wider international development and humanitarian community, through lesson-sharing, such as through the recent joint report on water and sanitation in protracted crises (World Bank et al., 2021). This effort aims to take these resilience-building measures to scale across Gaza. The emphasis on long-term monitoring allows project managers to 'develop much deeper lessons learned, iterations to projects, and an understanding of which assumptions were correct or not', as one interviewee explained.

7 Questions for further study

This descriptive case study has documented the GRP as an example of how humanitarian actors are trying to respond more appropriately within an interconnected, dynamic urban environment by working differently. In highlighting what the programme has achieved so far, it also raises a few questions worth further consideration:

1. How can holistic programmes be designed and implemented, when so many organisations are structured in technical siloes?
2. Can mapping of interconnected essential services be a starting point for a true systems mapping/context analysis of a city?
3. Is strengthening the technical and resource capacity of government and essential service providers as important to resilience-building as strengthening infrastructure and putting in place emergency preparedness plans?
4. How can organisations encourage their technical staff to adopt a more holistic mindset and engage in a wider range of issues and with a broader set of stakeholders?
5. To what extent can multiyear funding act as a catalyst for other organisations to adopt a long-term ‘resilience’ approach to their humanitarian response, particularly in an urban protracted crisis?
6. How can organisations turn their ideals of adaptive management and flexibility into practice?



8 Key takeaways

The GRP was designed to build the resilience of interconnected essential services and communities in Gaza to shocks and stressors such as increasing hostilities. The ICRC has used new ways of working in its humanitarian response to try and address the complex urban protracted crisis context. The GRP has successfully used new ways of working that support an interconnected view and long-term vision. A review of the programme also highlights some of the challenges organisations face trying to be truly context-appropriate.

Table 1: How working differently helped address the common challenges of working in complex urban settings

| Common challenge of working in complex urban areas | How this was mitigated or avoided | How the GRP could have taken this further |
|--|--|--|
| Focusing on individuals or individual households | Deliberately seeking to improve infrastructure and service delivery for community- and national-level impact | By working at a service provider level, the GRP has arguably had far less of a focus on the household level. This could have been improved by including community participation in the design of the programme and more community-level interventions, although this is planned for track 2. It can also be argued that that focusing on the service provider level provides greater benefit to the civilian population. |
| Working in sector silos | Including multiple sectors within one programme | The GRP could have aimed for a truly holistic programme that considers the various other needs of the population of Gaza, such as livelihoods and housing. Although multidisciplinary humanitarian action is a core objective of the GRP, this is still a work in progress. |

| Common challenge of working in complex urban areas | How this was mitigated or avoided | How the GRP could have taken this further |
|--|--|---|
| Creating new, duplicative structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning planning and strategies with local authorities and service providers • Strengthening the resilience of existing essential services infrastructure and systems • Improving access to available data for stakeholders to make informed decisions and reducing duplicate data collection • Convening stakeholders for collective action | The GRP could have included more technical capacity-building of local service providers from the outset, to equip them to lead on and take over from the ICRC on resilience-building initiatives. |
| Thinking short term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a multiyear programme with flexible funding to develop programming iteratively • Building the resilience of infrastructure and services so that these can withstand shocks and stressors in the long term • Addressing both short- and long-term needs in separate parallel programming | The ICRC could have expanded its definition of resilience to include resilience at the individual and community level, thus addressing long-term needs in other areas beyond essential services infrastructure. However, this is planned for track 2. |

The GRP has encountered several challenges to these new ways of working. These have included the following:

- A wider context analysis that goes beyond the GRP's priority sectors has not been conducted (this can be attributed to the programme still being in its early stages at the time of writing).
- There has been slow uptake in working across technical departments and sectors, as a result of the new way of working and the steep learning curve; this has slowed the GRP's ability to work more holistically.

- Community engagement is not integrated into all thematic components (this can be attributed to track 2 of the GRP being in its early stages at the time of writing).
- As there has not yet been a significant change in context to trigger adaptiveness, the GRP has not had a chance to demonstrate whether the embedded programme flexibility or adaptiveness mechanisms will be successful. As the GRP is still in its early stages, planned learning exercises will inform future interventions.
- Complex stakeholder dynamics have meant that engagement has been complicated. Although the ICRC is tackling this strategically, it remains an ongoing obstacle that requires careful consideration.
- There are ingrained assumptions as to who should carry out resilience-building.
- Annual planning cycles reinforce short-term thinking.
- The short-term nature of many ICRC missions can lead to a heavy loss of institutional knowledge.
- Multiyear financing that does not allow for the balance to be carried over impedes the pace at which activities can be carried out.

However, there have also been a number of enabling factors that have supported the GRP:

- New leadership and management structures support a multidisciplinary approach.
- National Gazan staff have enabled a better understanding of the interconnected essential services systems.
- Humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality have been critical to help navigate the complex political context in Gaza.
- The multiyear funding commitment has enabled the ICRC to plan a long-term programme.
- The ICRC has developed a common understanding of resilience.
- The ICRC has been willing to challenge the *status quo* and explore new ways of working.
- The ICRC has leveraged its long-established relationships and understanding of the context.
- The programme has fostered a culture of learning and evidence-based decision-making.

Lastly, it is crucial to reflect on the applicability of learning from the GRP in other humanitarian projects. This case study raises a number of questions worth further consideration, such as:

- How can holistic programmes be designed and implemented, when so many organisations are structured in technical siloes?
- Can mapping of interconnected services be a starting point for a true systems mapping/context analysis of a city?
- Is strengthening the technical and resource capacity of government and essential service providers as important to resilience-building as strengthening infrastructure and putting in place emergency preparedness plans?
- How can organisations encourage their technical staff to adopt a more holistic mindset and engage in a wider range of issues and with a broader set of stakeholders?
- To what extent can multiyear funding act as a catalyst for other organisations to adopt a long-term ‘resilience’ approach to their humanitarian response, particularly in an urban protracted crisis?
- Should large humanitarian organisations such as the ICRC continue to balance a dual role of direct delivery as part of an acute emergency response and strengthening local service providers and delivery, or is there a case for a greater emphasis on the latter? If so, how could this be achieved? How can organisations turn their ideals of adaptive management and flexibility into practice?



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