



Gaza conflict: CARE responds

Abid Katib/CARE

Three months have passed since the conflict began in Gaza Dec. 27, 2008, leaving nearly 1,500 people dead and 5,400 injured, and destroying homes, infrastructure and families. During the 22-day conflict, militants in Gaza fired homemade rockets at bordering Israeli villages and towns, killing three civilians and wounding hundreds more.

CARE responded within hours after the conflict started, distributing urgently needed food, medicine, blankets, heaters, hygiene kits and other emergency supplies to families, hospitals and orphanages, helping more than 211,894 people. Today, CARE is committed to working with the people of Gaza in the long term to rebuild their livelihoods, repair damaged infrastructure, and provide ongoing support to some of the 1.5 million people affected by the conflict. CARE's recovery work is focused on food security, agriculture and livelihoods, health care, psychosocial support, water and sanitation, and shelter.

But the way forward is not clear; both sides continue to violate the Jan. 18, 2009 ceasefire, and the ongoing blockade of all but the most basic of humanitarian goods into Gaza is starving the people of the supplies needed to rebuild. CARE and its partners continue to advocate for a lasting peace between Israel and Gaza, and for access in and out of the Gaza Strip to be restored in order for full recovery to begin.

Food security

Even before the recent conflict, the people of Gaza had already been suffering under an 18-month blockade that limited the amount of food and supplies that could be transported in and out of Gaza. The conflict compounded this problem, and today, 88 percent of the population – 1.2 million people – are dependent on some form of food assistance. CARE's Fresh Food Project, funded by ECHO, provides a weekly supply of fresh vegetables to a total of 60,000 people in Gaza, including 1,802 elderly people, orphans, and people with chronic disabilities through support for hospitals, orphanages, long-term care centres, and homes for the elderly.

Agriculture and livelihoods

Farmers, who make up 27 percent of Gaza's workforce, were hit hard by the conflict. Livestock were killed and farmland destroyed in the bombings, and many greenhouses, wells, irrigation systems, and farming equipment were damaged beyond repair. Many farmers lost an entire season's harvest, leaving them with no money to purchase seeds for the next planting season and stripping them of the ability to provide for their families.

CARE immediately provided seeds to more than 280 farmers to replant crops that were destroyed during the conflict. These farmers will produce enough food to provide more than 40,000 people with low-priced, locally produced vegetables. CARE's Fresh Food Project also provides critical income to 1,400 small shareholder farmers in Gaza who supply the vegetables for distribution, helping to support the local economy and promote recovery. In addition, CARE will provide more than 800 farmers, breeders and rural households with the basic tools and materials they need to restart food production activities destroyed by the ongoing conflict.



Kate Brooks/CARE



Juliette Seibold/CARE



Juliette Seibold/CARE

Health care and psychosocial support

The conflict brought Gaza's health care system to the brink of collapse. Hospitals and health clinics were destroyed or damaged, and severe shortages of critical medicines and equipment made it nearly impossible to treat patients. To help bridge the gap, CARE distributed pharmaceuticals and hospital equipment to 13 hospitals and health clinics.

In a CARE survey during the conflict, 95 percent of families reported that their children suffered a high level of fear, with more than half of all children suffering from bed-wetting, nervousness, increase aggressiveness, nightmares and sleeplessness. Psychosocial support to help children and families recover from the trauma of the attacks will be crucial to helping the people of Gaza recover. Through CARE's ongoing projects, CARE is helping mothers find the counselling and support they need to help themselves and their children. In partnership with Dubai Cares, CARE provided 1,517 school bags and personal hygiene kits to children affected by the conflict, to help them regain a sense of normalcy as they return to their damaged schools.

Water and sanitation

The daily bombardments of Gaza destroyed many of the sewage lines, spewing raw sewage into farmers' fields and streets. Three months after the conflict began, nearly 50,000 people still do not have access to piped water, and another 100,000 only receive water every five or six days. A recent assessment showed that 14 percent of all potable water tested was contaminated, posing a risk of water-borne diseases and diarrhea. CARE is distributing drinking water and water for domestic use for more than 20,000 people without regular access to water, and is working with communities to repair damaged infrastructure and water lines.

Shelter

More than 14,000 houses and apartments were destroyed in the bombings, but no repairs are being undertaken, as construction materials such as cement and glass are not allowed into Gaza under the restrictions of the 20-month Israeli blockade. CARE provided families with emergency shelter repair kits to temporarily repair broken windows, and is advocating with the Israeli government to loosen the restrictions and allow construction materials into Gaza so families can rebuild their homes.

The challenges of stitching Gaza back together are not insurmountable. Donors and governments around the world have responded generously, pledging \$4.5 billion USD to the reconstruction of Gaza, and CARE welcomes the continued support of the international community to help create a lasting peace in the region. CARE will continue to work together with the people of Gaza to rebuild their homes and livelihoods, and restore a sense of security and dignity for those who suffered through the conflict.

About CARE: CARE is one of the world's largest humanitarian aid agencies, providing emergency assistance and implementing long-term development projects in nearly 70 countries. CARE has been working in Israel, West Bank and Gaza since 1948 (with a short break from 1984-1994), initially implementing programs to help refugees after the Holocaust. Today, CARE implements programs in food security, health and water, support for civil society groups, and distributions of fresh food. CARE International is non-political, non-religious organization based in Geneva, Switzerland.

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