



STILL TREADING WATER

Reviewing six years of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and the dire water situation in the Gaza Strip

Six years after the establishment of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), people in Gaza continue to live on the brink of disaster as a result of a 13 year blockade imposed by Israel. The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector remains significantly damaged, with Gaza facing a stark deterioration of available WASH services at the community and household level. The reconstruction process is ongoing, but it is slow, costly, and hampers the humanitarian response.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely aggravated existing vulnerabilities, including access to water and sanitation. This strongly impacts the daily lives of over 2 million people living in the coastal enclave, of whom 1.5 million – or 75% – have been identified as being in need of humanitarian assistance.¹

Oxfam has recently reviewed the challenges associated with the GRM and its impact on the WASH sector in Gaza. Its findings reveal that these challenges are an obstacle to the reconstruction of WASH infrastructure (including operation and maintenance), hindering efforts to address the increased needs of people in Gaza.

Donors and UN agencies should consider the needs of people in Gaza today. Rather than continuing with the GRM, they should explore how they can improve their engagement to be able to challenge the Israeli access restrictions, work towards economic development, ensure accountability within access mechanisms, and facilitate inclusive Palestinian participation to access mechanisms and the reconstruction of Gaza.

© Oxfam International March 2021

This paper was written by Laila Barhoum. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Catherine de Bock in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. Email policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78748-741-3 in March 2021.
DOI: 10.21201/2021/7413

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

Cover photo: Eyad El Baba/Oxfam

1 INTRODUCTION

Over six years ago, conflict between Israel and armed groups left Gaza in rubble. The escalation in violence caused the deaths of more than 2,131 Palestinians, including 1,473 civilians, and 71 Israelis, including four civilians.² In addition, it led to large-scale displacement, power and water shortages, the disruption of essential services, and an almost total economic shutdown. The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector was significantly affected, with water and wastewater facilities in the coastal enclave suffering substantial damage, estimated at \$34m³.^[OBJ] Gaza's only power plant was destroyed, leaving water and wastewater pumps as well as treatment plants inoperative. Approximately half a million people were directly affected by the damage to water facilities, and around one million people were affected due to damage.⁴

In the aftermath of the 2014 escalation in violence, the **Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM)** was established as a temporary agreement between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Government of Israel (GoI), brokered by the UN. The mechanism aimed to temporarily facilitate, monitor and regulate the flow of goods into the Gaza Strip, primarily to advance reconstruction and recovery following the conflict.⁵ **Over the last six years, the GRM facilitated the entry of 3.7m tons of construction materials for almost 600 large-scale projects, including WASH projects, and provided access to materials to repair, reconstruct, and build new houses for nearly 140,000 people.**⁶

Yet, today, the reality in Gaza remains dire, as 13 years of blockade by Israel have prevented Gaza from developing a viable economy. The ongoing protracted crisis has left the economy on the verge of complete collapse, with over two-thirds of the 2.1 million people in Gaza in need of humanitarian assistance.⁷

The COVID-19 outbreak in Gaza has exacerbated existing challenges caused by the land, air and sea blockade by Israel, resulting into immediate humanitarian consequences, including the erosion of essential services, including water and sanitation, protection, shelter and education. Ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a main concern in relation to increased movement and access restrictions associated with COVID-19.

Due to rapid population growth, the aquifer in Gaza has been pumped beyond its capacity. As a result, the water level has fallen below sea level, causing sea water intrusion and rendering more than 97% of the available water undrinkable.⁸

The Gaza Strip also faces a stark deterioration of WASH services at the community and household level, with the whole population negatively affected by increased shortfalls in the WASH sector. Gaza's five wastewater treatment plants are affected by a number of factors, such as electricity shortages, import restrictions on materials and decreased

donor funding. This resulted in a lack of available spare parts, minimal infrastructure maintenance, reduced operationality, and regular interruptions in access to water and sanitation. Consequently, partially treated as well as untreated sewage flows daily into the Mediterranean Sea, causing serious public health risks for people in Gaza.⁹

2 REVIEWING THE GRM

The situation has worsened over the past two decades and affected every aspect of Gaza's daily life. Several factors have contributed to the overall deterioration in the Gaza Strip: the ongoing Israeli blockade, the reduction in humanitarian funding, and punitive measures¹⁰ imposed by the PA in 2017.¹¹ Each time, the population in Gaza has paid the price.

Meanwhile, although almost all reconstruction following the 2014 escalation in violence has been completed, the GRM, designed as a temporary mechanism, is still operational. Research by Oxfam in 2017 found that the GRM remained fundamentally and unavoidably constrained by the Gol's ultimate control over the 'dual-use' list, and failed to operate at the pace or scale necessary to meet the levels of need in Gaza.¹²

According to a 2019 Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) report,¹³ a **joint review of the GRM was concluded in December 2018 and recommendations were implemented in January 2019** with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness, functionality, transparency and predictability of the GRM. Among other measures, the Israeli authorities committed to processing all dual-use items within 45 working days, in addition to providing better links between the GRM and other mechanisms for Israeli approval of requests. **These efforts clearly indicate that parties to the GRM acknowledged the impact of challenges associated with it, especially the delays in delivery and restrictions of the dual-use list.** Today, over a year after this review, delays and financial implications caused by the GRM remain important obstacles for actors in the private sector and international agencies.

Although the GRM was a response to facilitate access after the 2014 hostilities, it is important to note that the environment was already critical and grim prior to the hostilities, and the economy was failing because of ongoing access restrictions. This paper examines the GRM impact on the WASH sector, underlining that the GRM is also used for a variety of other sectors, including housing, agriculture, roads, health, public facilities, education, energy and others.

3 THE GRM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WASH SECTOR

In December 2019, Oxfam convened two consultation workshops with actors from the private sector, public institutions and Palestinian civil society, to discuss the GRM and its challenges. Following these consultations and building on Oxfam's research paper 'Treading Water: the worsening water crisis and the GRM' (2017),¹⁴ Oxfam commissioned research to explore new challenges associated with the GRM. Specific attention was given to the difficulties faced by service providers, the private sector, and humanitarian actors in the WASH sector.

The study was conducted between April and July 2020 and involved data collection, desk reviews and key informant interviews. Data were collected on the GRM process and the implications of the implementation of (mainly WASH) projects under the mechanism. Research papers and reports by international organizations, the GRM report website, and information shared by the WASH cluster were consulted to build a holistic understanding of the system. Furthermore, 25 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including representatives of international and local NGOs, the Palestinian private sector, public institutions, and UN agencies, who either play an essential role in the GRM or are affected by the GRM process.

When the GRM was established in 2014, it included four requirements¹⁵: enable the PA to lead the reconstruction effort; enable the private sector in Gaza; assure donors that their investments in construction in Gaza would be implemented without delay; and address Israeli security concerns related to the use of construction and other dual-use materials. Six years later, the situation has not improved, and none of the four requirements are being met. It is, however, important to note that the current reality is the result not only of the failed mechanism, but also the result of many different factors, including ongoing Israeli access restrictions, a decline in donor funding, strengthened Palestinian political divisions and a regular incidence of armed hostilities. The combination of these factors has caused an increase in needs over recent years, which cannot be addressed via a system such as the GRM.

THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO LEAD THE RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT

Materials for WASH projects must go through four stages of approval in the GRM process. During each stage, information must be submitted to the Palestinian Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) and then to the Israeli authorities for authorization. So while the PA were supposed to be able to lead in the reconstruction of Gaza, the final decision always remains with the Israeli authorities. It is worth noting that representatives from different Palestinian actors in Gaza were not included in the creation of the GRM, but only consulted after the mechanism was established. They are still not included in the GRM, which severely limits the possibility of having a Palestinian steer to the mechanism.

Furthermore, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) is the official focal point for all WASH projects implemented in Gaza and thus should be the main actor in the reconstruction of WASH infrastructure. Yet, according to a recent interview with the PWA, it does not use the GRM to coordinate the entry of dual-use materials or ABC items (e.g. aggregate, steel bars and cement) for small-scale WASH projects into the Gaza Strip. Instead, it coordinates directly with the Coordination and Liaison Authorities (CLA) of the GoI as this has proven to be less time-consuming.¹⁶ According to the PWA, the CLA is used for small-scale projects, with a limit of up to 65 items per project, unlike the GRM that has no limit on the numbers of items and is considered for small- and large-scale projects.

Finally, due to this long, costly and uncertain process, many local Palestinian NGOs often try to avoid implementing WASH projects large enough to qualify for GRM facilitation in order to circumvent the GRM process. When they have no other choice but to go through the GRM, they often depend on the assistance of international organizations and public actors, such as the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) and PWA, to facilitate the coordination, cover the costs and deal with the challenges of the GRM.

THE GRM HAS HINDERED RATHER THAN ENABLED THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN GAZA

The GRM website states that the mechanism 'allows anybody equitable access to submit a project and receive materials', placing the private sector at the center of the post-2014 reconstruction.¹⁷ The study clearly revealed that the GRM did not enable the private sector in Gaza and instead, the GRM is one of many factors that have complicated the situation for the private sector. Private contractors and vendors in Gaza

stressed that the GRM has negative financial implications, hindering their ability to function in Gaza's already weakened economy.

It should be noted that Israeli access restrictions, which were present before the establishment of the GRM, are the main cause of the difficulties that the Palestinian private sector in Gaza face. However, the GRM has been unable to ease these restrictions in a way that it meets the increased needs in Gaza. Together with the costs associated with the GRM, this has instead contributed to the deterioration of the economy. The GRM is perceived by those interviewed in the study as a financial burden due to the requirements associated with the GRM process.

Private vendors described the application for GRM approval as a long and costly process which requires a **large amount of paperwork**. They also stated that some implementing agencies' requests for proposal/quotation tender documents require that the contractor bear all the risks and costs of delays resulting from the GRM processes, for instance storage costs at the Israeli port if the entry of materials is delayed.

The GRM also requires **extensive and continuous follow up** on the Gaza Reconstruction Material Monitoring System (GRMMS). This is an extra workload, with implementing agencies as well as contractors stating that they employed dedicated personnel – on an average monthly salary of \$800 – to follow up on the system and coordinate with vendors and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) teams.

In addition, **running costs** add up as vendors must guarantee continuous monitoring of surplus materials, which must remain in storage areas under 24-hour CCTV surveillance. The construction of temporary and permanent storage facilities ranged in cost from \$30,000 to \$100,000 depending on size, facilities, equipment and location, in addition to multiple handling and transportation fees. When vendors fail to fulfil these conditions, even in cases of temporary interruptions to CCTV systems due to power cuts or other technical problems, vendors risk being temporary or permanently suspended. Such **suspensions have considerable financial consequences** as they hinder the contractor's ability to implement projects, affecting ongoing projects as well as potential future opportunities.

Other significant financial implications were the result of **unjustified delays** in actually importing items, even after the project and its items had been approved by the Government of Israel. The duration of these delays varies but, regardless of the delay, all project units are required to keep functioning until all project items are delivered. These extra running costs are an added burden on contractors. People in Gaza also pay the price of these delays as the provision of WASH services to large parts of the population is hampered.

In other instances, especially with smaller-scale projects, implementing agencies implicitly instructed contractors to supply and deliver the requested materials without going through the GRM process. Stakeholders from the private sector also indicated that for WASH

projects the GRM is no longer the main coordination mechanism for materials as an increased number of private sector actors import directly via the CLA. However, interviewees also mentioned the existence of a black market both for ABC and dual-use materials, given the scarcity of imported materials in the local market. As a result, prices increase rapidly and so the total cost of reconstruction activities, such as WASH projects, have significantly increased both for those using the GRM system as well as those avoiding it.

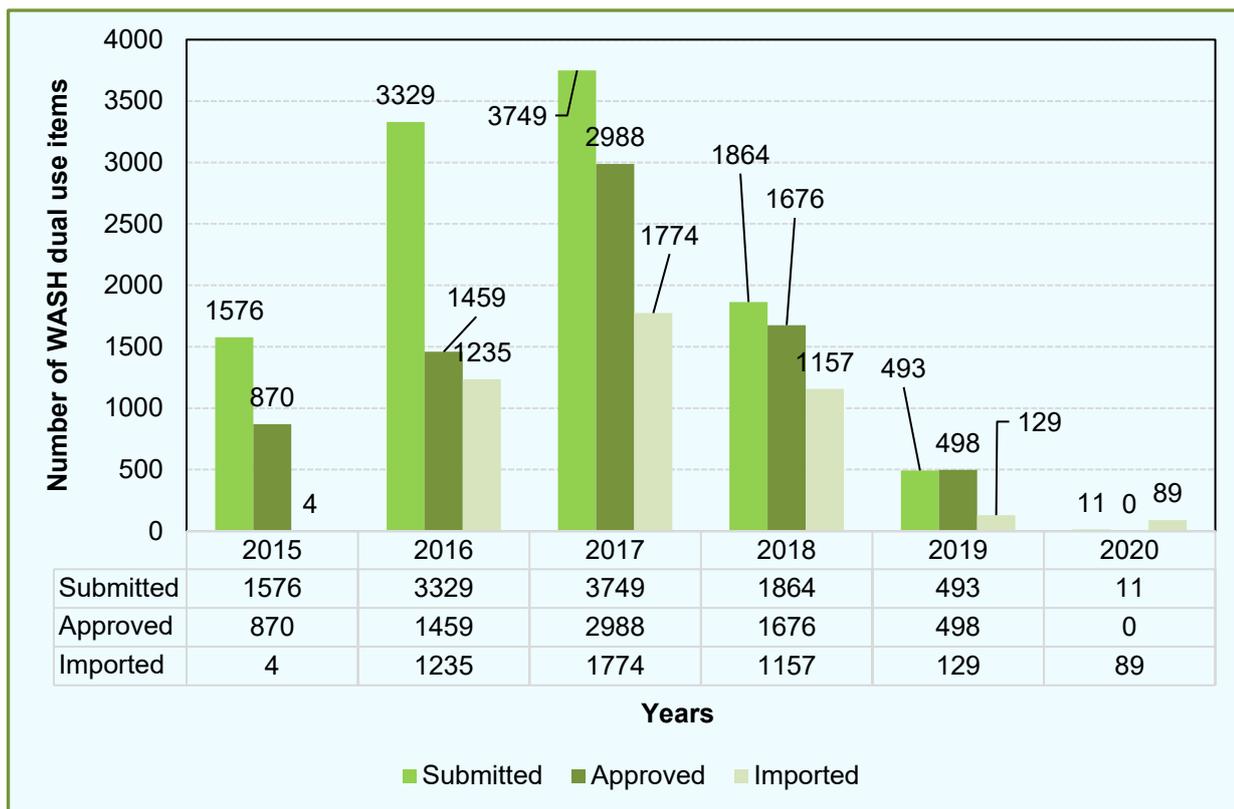
CONTINUED DELAYS TO IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSTRUCTION WORK HAVE NOT REASSURED DONORS

The lengthy and complicated GRM approval and monitoring processes, as well as delays in related paperwork and administrative processes, caused significant postponements to project implementation. These resulted in subsequent delays, in some cases up to 24 months, for the final project implementation.

Damage to the water and sanitation sector are estimated at approximately \$33 million. As of March 2021, the GRM website reported that over the last six years, the entry of 15,449¹⁸ items had been requested through the mechanism as dual-use items, of which 6,433 items were for the WASH sector¹⁹. A total of 183 WASH projects were applied for through the GRM, of which 79% were completed or approved.²⁰ WASH is the third biggest sector after housing and roads, accounting for 13% of all applications.²¹ Israel has an absolute veto power over the permitted materials based on 'legitimate security concerns', as it must approve all vendors of construction materials nominated by the PA and inspected by the UN.²² Following this case-by-case approval, it should be noted that the approval of submitted items or projects by the Government of Israel, does not mean that projects were physically implemented. Approvals of dual-use materials are only valid for one year, after which they are revoked. Stakeholders said that, on many occasions, approved materials were imported to Israel but then held at Israeli ports for an indefinite period before finally either entering or being denied entry to Gaza.

The constant gap between 'dual use' items submitted for approval, and finally being imported hampers the implementation of water and sanitation projects. Figure 1 shows an exceptional stark reduction of submitted, approved, and imported dual use WASH items in the year 2020. This can be attributed to reduction of donor funding to the WASH sector, availability of materials in the market, and decreased preference of the private sector to use the GRM who have been gradually shifting to increased CLA coordination.

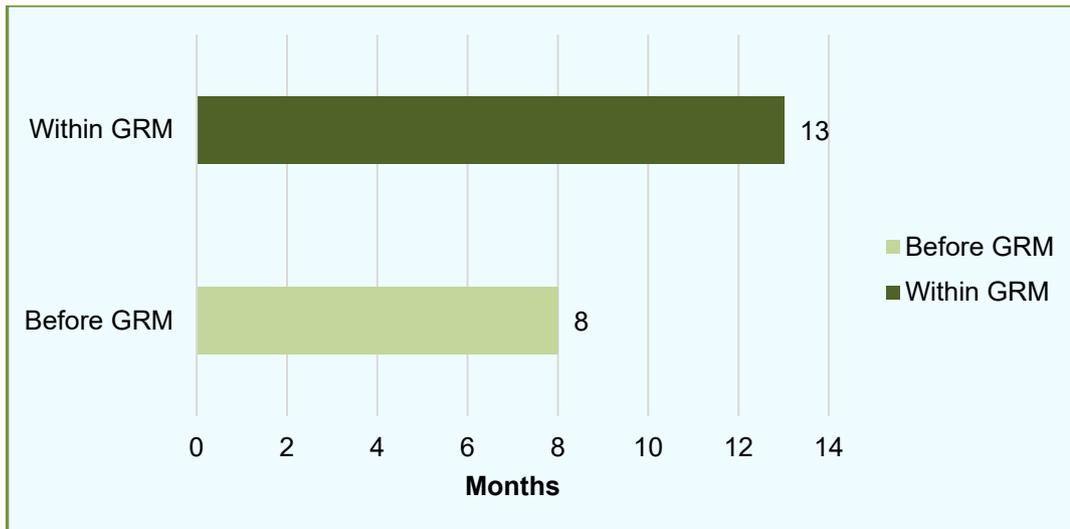
Figure 1: Dual use WASH items facilitated through the GRM (Submitted, approved and imported)²³



In 2019 more dual-use items were approved than the number of submitted applications, because some applications submitted in 2018 were not approved until 2019. The same applies to the year 2020, where a higher amount of items have been imported than applications submitted.

The interviews and data also show that most WASH projects continued beyond the planned project end date due to unjustified and unnecessary delays. Surveyed stakeholders²⁴ reported an average time delay of 40–50% caused by the GRM. One clear example (Figure 2) shows the delay in the construction of a 3000m³ water reservoir. For this project, going through the GRM required 62% more time than a similar project at the same location before the GRM was established. While this example might not represent a trend, it indicates that the GRM is not guaranteed to be quicker and can in reality hinder progress.

Figure 2: Implementation time of the construction of 3000m³ water reservoir



IT HAS NOT ADDRESSED ISRAELI SECURITY CONCERNS RELATED TO THE USE OF CONSTRUCTION AND OTHER ‘DUAL-USE’ MATERIALS

The GoI retains full control over what goes in and out of Gaza. It imposes its dual-use regulations on the GRM, stating that this is needed to address its security concerns. The GRM does not contest this dual-use list, which remains vague and changes regularly, resulting in unpredictable challenges for actors using the GRM.

Inconsistent and unpredictable decisions by the Israeli authorities reinforce the difficulties inherent to the GRM. For example, one of the contracting companies stated that a sewage and wastewater treatment project was given approval and priority²⁵ over a desalination project which had been submitted much earlier. Despite the early approval of the ABC materials for the desalination project,²⁶ approval of other dual-use materials was delayed for more than 12 months and led to the project’s main activities being suspended. The sewage and wastewater treatment project is of particular interest for Israel, as it prevents untreated wastewater reaching Israeli coasts. Interviewed stakeholders believe Israel’s own interests to be a main reason for the decision to give priority to this particular project. This would strongly contradict its obligation as the occupying power to provide for the needs of people in Gaza.

Since the end of 2017, it appears that the GRM is no longer the main, nor preferred, coordination mechanism for the entry of materials. All interviewees mentioned that the use of the GRM has significantly reduced in 2020. This can be attributed to many factors, including the

reduction of donor funds for WASH projects and the availability of some materials in local markets. The existence, recent emergence and/or re-activation of alternative access and coordination mechanisms, such as CLA and other bilateral coordination mechanisms, question the added value of the GRM. Finally, the complex nature and difficulties resulting from the GRM processes reinforced the creation of a black market for the ABC materials, where prices significantly increased and consequently had a negative impact on the local economy.

4 CONCLUSION

Six years after the establishment of the GRM, people in Gaza continue to live on the brink of disaster as a result of 13 years of the Israeli blockade. The WASH sector in Gaza currently faces a stark deterioration of WASH services at the community and household level. The process of reconstruction is still ongoing: it is slow, costly and hampers the humanitarian response. A lack of funding for the humanitarian needs in Gaza and procrastination by the GoI to allow the entry of construction materials, technical experts, essential equipment and spare parts are major factors contributing to the delays encountered by service providers and subsequently the overall humanitarian response.

The research shows that the GRM should also be considered as a major obstacle to the reconstruction of damaged WASH infrastructure (including operation and maintenance) in Gaza as it hinders, rather than supports, efforts to address the increased needs of people in Gaza and the disastrous environmental impact of the crippled WASH infrastructure. Although the GRM was created as a temporary mechanism, it is still in place and no exit strategy exists. Given the difficulties and costs of the GRM, as well as the fact that the GRM no longer appears to be the main access mechanism for ABC materials and dual-use items to enter Gaza, its existence should be questioned.

In terms of the future of the GRM, designed to be a temporary solution, donors and UN agencies should consider the needs of people in Gaza today, which have only increased since 2014. Rather than blindly continuing the GRM, donors and the UN should investigate how they can improve their engagement to be able to challenge Israeli access restrictions, work towards economic development in Gaza, assure accountability within access mechanisms, and facilitate inclusive Palestinian participation to access mechanisms and the reconstruction of Gaza.

CHALLENGE THE DUAL-USE LIST

All interviewees suggested that the issue of dual-use material disapproval and rejection was the most significant challenge. Israeli

authorities state that opening the crossings into Gaza would significantly undermine Israel's security,²⁷ and this reasoning underpins the Gol decision to impose a strict list of dual-use items. However, as extensively addressed in the previous Oxfam paper,²⁸ several Israeli security and political figures have argued that allowing the entry of construction materials is important to prevent or at least delay insecurity and further escalation of conflict.²⁹ Preventing the entry of these materials would therefore in fact be detrimental to Israel's security.

Israel's current security situation has not seen significant improvement. Rounds of armed hostilities have continued to take place since 2014 and some cases may have resulted in full-scale conflict if it wasn't for the efforts of mediators, including those from the UN, Egypt and Qatar. This indicates that instability in the region continues to affect Israel's security. It also questions the assumption that the GRM would ensure Israel's security.

While Israel has legitimate security concerns – including indiscriminate rocket fire from armed groups within Gaza, which constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law – it should be noted that the Gol, as the occupying power, also has a primary obligation under international law to provide for the humanitarian needs of Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). The security concerns of the occupying power cannot compromise its obligation under international humanitarian law, and should at no point hinder the provision and facilitation of humanitarian relief to people in Gaza.³⁰

While dual-use lists are internationally acceptable between countries, the list for Gaza is very strict and unpredictable, as it changes regularly. In the context of Gaza, it is mainly used as a tool to impose restrictions which hamper the entrance of materials necessary to meet the population's needs. This poses a number of serious concerns under international humanitarian and human rights law, including the right of civilians to receive adequate humanitarian assistance.³¹

Following a long legal battle and advocacy efforts led by the Israeli human rights organization Gisha, Israel's dual-use list was published in 2017 on the COGAT³² website. However, new items are often added, delaying the approval process. Although states may decide not to publish their dual-use lists publicly, the lack of transparency and predictability in the Israeli dual-use policy is problematic.

Although the ongoing Israeli blockade, rather than the GRM, is the main reason for the ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza, the research findings show that the GRM absorbs and institutionalizes elements of this blockade as it continues to give the Gol full control over the entry of materials needed to provide humanitarian assistance.

Therefore, when discussing the future of access mechanisms to Gaza, **donors and the UN should continuously monitor and demand that the Gol remove vital items for essential and lifesaving sectors, including the WASH sector. They should work towards access mechanisms that are not discriminatory, are less complicated and**

time consuming, and which provide clarity on the items allowed into the Gaza Strip.

FACILITATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Following the establishment of the GRM, **the economic situation in Gaza continued to deteriorate**. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, unemployment in Gaza reached 49% in the second quarter of 2020,³³ an increase of more than 6% since 2017³⁴ and almost 14% since Israel imposed the blockade on the Gaza Strip in 2007.³⁵

Notably, increasingly even those who are employed in Gaza don't earn enough to make a living. The average daily wage in Gaza during the first quarter of 2020 was only 60 ILS (about \$17.50 per day), with the average daily wage in the private sector only 32.7 ILS (less than \$10 per day).³⁶ Additionally, 82% of private sector employees in Gaza earn less than the minimum wage (1,450 ILS per month), with the monthly minimum wage in Gaza standing at 647 ILS compared with 1,146 ILS in the West Bank.³⁷

Instead of enabling the private sector, the research findings clearly show that the **GRM added a very costly layer** to the already complicated reality of private vendors and contractors. Furthermore, the fact that local Palestinian organizations and agencies had insufficient means to preserve through the different GRM stages and delays made them even **more dependent on larger international agencies**. This adds to the problem of rapidly increasing aid dependence in Gaza and hinders the development of the Palestinian economy.

It is **crucial that the development of an independent Palestinian economy in Gaza is prioritized by the international community**. Rather than supporting mechanisms that increase aid dependency, **donors and the UN should look at how they can support efforts to enable the private sector in Gaza**.

PRIORITIZE PALESTINIAN OWNERSHIP AND GUARANTEE ACCOUNTABILITY

For years, the Gol has implemented a **separation policy** which has resulted in the political, social and economic fragmentation of the OPT, by isolating Gaza from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Through a so-called no-contact policy with the de facto authorities in Gaza, this separation policy has been supported internationally over the last 13 years.

As argued in the previous Oxfam paper,³⁸ the internal divide and lack of cooperation between the PA and the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip has exacerbated the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the GRM.³⁹ While the PWA in Ramallah is responsible for managing all international projects in Gaza and coordination with donors, the PWA in Gaza is responsible for licensing private water wells and private brackish water desalination plants. There is reportedly little or no coordination between the two.

The GRM was set up as a temporary agreement between the PA and the Gol, brokered by the UN, but it is incorrect to equate the position of the PA with that of the Gol. **The Gol has the final say on which items are approved or rejected**, and it is therefore the Gol, not the PA, that is currently in the driver's seat of (re)construction efforts in the Gaza Strip.

Although the Ramallah-based PA has been involved in the GRM, they do not prioritise the challenges involved with the mechanism, especially for the private sector. The **lack of representation of different Palestinian actors in Gaza** is striking, given they are best placed to reflect on the real impact of the GRM, and especially in light of the separation between Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.⁴⁰

Finally, the GRM lacks **transparency** and accountability mechanisms and is not user-friendly. The current GRM website provides detailed data at the project level, but only limited information regarding the process itself. This leads to a high degree of uncertainty and misinformation among users and the public. Detailed information is either restricted to project managers or not available in the GRM report. The GRM website provides detailed information on projects using the mechanism, however information on processes is limited. Stakeholders interviewed also pointed towards a lack of **accountability** due to ineffective complaint mechanisms. In cases of unjustified delays, unclear decisions or rejections, applicants were often sent back-and-forth between UNSCO, who told them to address the PA, and the PA, which is based in Ramallah, and therefore not accessible for some actors from Gaza.

Therefore, **donors and the UN should guarantee that access mechanisms have effective complaint mechanisms. They should also pursue access mechanisms that are inclusive and owned by Palestinians. Palestinian organizations and private sector actors who carry the burden of the access restrictions should be included in the creation and regular evaluation of access mechanisms.**

ACCOUNTABILITY IS NEEDED TO MOVE FORWARD TO EFFECTIVE MECHANISMS

The GRM was created to ease some of the access restrictions imposed by the GoI. While it helped to implement projects that might not have been possible otherwise, it is important to understand why the GRM was established and why it still exists after six years when it was established as a temporary mechanism. It is also important to consider the future, not just of the GRM, but also the ongoing restrictions by the GoI.

When addressing Gaza's needs, we should consider the root causes of the deteriorated situation and, most importantly, the impact of continued access restrictions. This needs to acknowledge the importance of accountability and the obligations of relevant actors, including the GoI, which are stated clearly under international humanitarian and human rights law.

Two specific principles are crucial when reflecting on the current context in which national and international actors carry out humanitarian and development efforts in the Gaza Strip.

First, there is an urgent need to look further than fulfilling the minimal needs of the affected population in Gaza and work towards an approach that provides a dignified way of living. While today, Palestinians in Gaza are forced to move from one aid basket to another, there should be more efforts to establish adequate infrastructure in order to end aid dependency and invest in the high level of skills and potential of Palestinian people in Gaza.

Second, the imposed policies, restrictions and challenges created by the ongoing Israeli blockade and internal Palestinian division create an environment that hinders the sustainability and effectiveness of humanitarian and development efforts. It is in this same environment that the GRM and other mechanisms function. Without challenging this environment or addressing the need for improvements, future access mechanisms will meet the same dead end as the current GRM and other international interventions. Addressing the challenges created by the GRM is also a call to address the environment in which the GRM functions.

Any mechanism, especially if brokered by the international community, should aim to achieve full access and completely lift the Israeli blockade. While there are needs that should be addressed now, it is important to remember that, without changing the political landscape, the root causes of these needs will not be eliminated. The GRM shows us that in the context of Gaza, there is no such thing as a temporary mechanism: instead, 'temporary is the new permanent'. This is also reflected in the ongoing lack of accountability and political will to change the context in the Gaza Strip.

Concerns about the GRM should lead to a recognition of the need for a clear future for the GRM and the importance of an exit strategy which addresses needs in the short term, while laying the foundations to improve the economy, create jobs, achieve internal reconciliation, and end the blockade in the longer term. Such a strategy is essential in order to provide stability and security for all parties. It would pave the way for Palestinians in Gaza to be less dependent on aid and instead reach their potential in a healthy and functioning economy.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

UN agencies and donors supporting the GRM should:

- Continue to demand that the GoI remove vital items for essential and lifesaving sectors, including the WASH sector, from the dual-use list;
- In addition to ongoing meetings, including AHLC, hold regular meetings with the PA and GoI to specifically discuss the need to ease and remove restrictions on the entry of materials into Gaza;
- Avoid stipulating in their tender documents that abiding by the GRM is a necessary or mandatory precondition for the entry of materials via the GRM. There should be a prerequisites clause in the tender documents to allocate a contingency percentage to the project budget to cover delays in the entry of materials caused by Israeli restrictions;
- Effectively monitor the two main parties to the GRM (GoI and PA) to ensure the transparent and accountable implementation of the mechanism. Monitoring (including cost-benefit analysis) should be completed regularly and the findings published.

The international community should;

- Pressure the GoI to immediately lift the blockade and open all crossings in and out of Gaza, allowing for the unimpeded entry and exit of goods and people, as a prerequisite to meeting its obligations under international law and to respond to the humanitarian needs;
- Advocate for a broad stakeholder discussion on the future of the GRM, as it was set up as a temporary measure and should not become a permanent mechanism across all sectors;
- Advocate for a less intrusive material monitoring system that asks for reasonable monitoring requirements within an acceptable cost framework;
- Advocate for more transparency, accountability and access to publicly available information on the GRM website;
- Pressure the GOI to jointly agree on an official updated and transparent list of items classified as dual-use items.

The Government of Israel should:

- Lift the blockade and open all crossings into and out of Gaza, allowing for the unimpeded entry and exit of goods and people, with the exception of armaments, as a necessary prerequisite to meet humanitarian needs and to ensure sustainable economic recovery and development. As an urgent step towards ending the blockade, immediately remove building materials and other items that are necessary for humanitarian and development projects from the dual-use list.
- Urgently authorize and support the entry of much-needed materials for the construction, operation and maintenance of water and sanitation projects, particularly the Gaza (medium-scale) Seawater Desalination Plant, the Khan Younis Wastewater Treatment Plant, the North Gaza Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Gaza Central Waste Water Treatment Plant (Gaza and middle area).
- Refrain from targeting civilian infrastructure and essential facilities during any future hostilities.

The Palestinian Authority should:

- End the internal Palestinian division and work on improving the Palestinian economy in the overall OPT;
- Support public services in the OPT, especially in the WASH, health, and electricity sectors;
- Request a full and transparent review of the GRM and pursue access mechanisms that guarantee full Palestinian participation. Donors and relevant UN agencies should also support this claim.

NOTES

- 1 Oxfam. (2020). *Responsiveness of the Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme to Shifting Vulnerabilities in the Gaza Strip*. Retrieved 1 March 2021, from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/responsiveness-of-the-palestinian-national-cash-programme-to-shifting-vulnerabi-620989/>
- 2 OCHA. (2014). *Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 4 September 2014, 08:00 hrs)*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from https://web.archive.org/web/20140913014525/http://www.ochaopt.org/document/s/ocha_opt_sitrep_04_09_2014.pdf
- 3 UN. (2016). *Gaza: two years after*. Retrieved 14 January 2021, from <https://unispal.un.org/dpa/dpr/unispal.nsf/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/be3e65b01d2a4ce78525801b004a550b?OpenDocument>
- 4 United Nations. (2014). *Gaza Initial Rapid Assessment – OCHA Report*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-204696>
- 5 UNSCO. (2014). *Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism: Fact Sheet*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7EDDC3B30421D3F985257D74004DBFE1>
- 6 OCHA. (2019). *Monthly Bulletin* Retrieved 14 January 2021, from https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hummonitor_december_2018.pdf
<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-operations-undermined-delegitimization-access-restrictions-and-administrative>
- 7 UNOCHA. (2020). *Humanitarian Needs Overview: OPT*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2020-final.pdf;
- UNOCHA. (2019). *OPT Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2018*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/OPT%20HF%20Annual%20Report%202018.pdf>
- 8 United Nations. (2020, 10 February). *World Bank and Partners Invest US\$117 Million in Water for Palestinians in Gaza*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/world-bank-and-partners-invest-us117-million-in-water-for-palestinians-in-gaza-press-release>
- 9 UNOCHA. (2020). *Humanitarian Needs Overview: OPT*.
- 10 In 2017, the PA imposed measures in response to Hamas' decision to establish parallel institutions to run local ministries in Gaza. These included reducing the salaries of PA employees in Gaza by 30–50%, the forced retirement of around 58,000 employees, and delaying cash assistance for vulnerable households.
- 11 Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, and Première Urgence Internationale. (2018). *Israel Tightens Gaza Blockage, Civilians Bear the Brunt*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620527/mb-gaza-israel-blockade-civilians-270818-en.pdf>
- 12 Oxfam. (2017). *Treading Water: The Worsening Water Crisis and the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/treading-water-the-worsening-water-crisis-and-the-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-620218>
- 13 UNSCO. (2019). *Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco_ahlc_report_april_2019.pdf

f

14 Oxfam. (2017). *Treading Water: The Worsening Water Crisis and the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/treading-water-the-worsening-water-crisis-and-the-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-620218>

15 UNSCO. (2021). Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. Factsheet. Retrieved 18 March 2021 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-209766/>

16 PWA. (2020). Consultation with Oxfam, 19 May.

17 GRM website accessed in July 2020 through: <https://grm.report/#/DualUse/List>

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 Ibid

21 Ibid

22 Oxfam. (2017). *Treading Water: The Worsening Water Crisis and the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/treading-water-the-worsening-water-crisis-and-the-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-620218>

23 GRM website, accessed on March 2021, through: <https://www.grm.report/#/Sectors/Detail/Water>

24 These were mainly interviewed contractors and implementing agencies such as NGOs and INGOs. Other stakeholders confirmed the delayed process but did not provide an estimate of the length of the delay in implementation due to a lack of data.

25 As untreated wastewater carries significant contamination and disease risks for Israel, whether through disposal into the sea or infiltration into groundwater and the aquifer.

26 GRM.Report. Retrieved from <https://grm.report>

27 See, for example, Physicians for Human Rights. (2016). *Denied 2: Harassment of Palestinian Patients Applying for Exit Permits*. Retrieved on 12 January 2021, from http://cdn4.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2-Refused2_digital_Eng.pdf On pp. 37-38, the reply to Physicians for Human Rights from the Gaza District Coordination and Liaison Public Inquiries Unit, 27 January 2016, states '... in light of the armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian terrorist organizations, foremost among them Hamas, the Israeli policy in effect with regard to the movement of people is that entry of Gaza residents into Israel is not allowed except in humanitarian cases only, and subject to security screening of persons applying for entry into Israel's territory or through its territory, including those seeking entry for medical treatment. In this context ... unfortunately, the terrorist organizations stop at nothing and have, on more than one occasion, taken advantage of the humanitarian avenue, abusing entry permits granted for medical treatment in order to advance their wrongdoing.'

28 Oxfam. (2017). *Treading Water*. p.14.

29 Gisha. (2016). *Quotes by Israeli Security and Political Figures about the Connection Between Reconstruction in Gaza and Israel's Interests*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from

http://gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/Gaza_reconstruction_quotes.pdf

30 Oxfam. (2017). *Treading Water: The Worsening Water Crisis and the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/treading-water-the-worsening-water-crisis-and-the-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-620218>

31 Idem

32 COGAT: The Unit for the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories

- 33 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2020). *Press Release on the Results of the Labour Force Survey Second Quarter (April – June, 2020) Round*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3809>
- 34 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2018). *The Labour Force Survey Results Fourth Quarter (October – December, 2017) Round: Main Results*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3050>
- 35 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2008). *Palestine in Figures 2007*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1432.pdf
- 36 Gisha. (2020). *Updates, 10 June 2020*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://gisha.org/updates/11275>
- 37 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2020). *Press Release on the Results of the Labour Force Survey Second Quarter (April – June, 2020) Round*.
- 38 Oxfam. (2017). *Treading Water: The Worsening Water Crisis and the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism*. Retrieved 12 January 2021, from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/treading-water-the-worsening-water-crisis-and-the-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-620218>
- 39 Ibid.



OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 20 organizations networked together in 67 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org

Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)

Oxfam Australia (www.oxfam.org.au)

Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)

Oxfam Brasil (www.oxfam.org.br)

Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)

Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)

Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)

Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)

Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)

Oxfam IBIS (Denmark) (www.oxfamibis.dk)

Oxfam India (www.oxfamindia.org)

Oxfam Intermón (Spain) (www.oxfamintermon.org)

Oxfam Ireland (www.oxfamireland.org)

Oxfam Italy (www.oxfamitalia.org)

Oxfam Mexico (www.oxfammexico.org)

Oxfam New Zealand (www.oxfam.org.nz)

Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) (www.oxfamnovib.nl)

Oxfam Québec (www.oxfam.qc.ca)

Oxfam South Africa (www.oxfam.org.za)

KEDV (www.kedv.org.tr/)

www.oxfam.org



OXFAM