

# Post-War Reconstruction and Development

Research-Informed Ethical Guidelines for Global Engagement in Rebuilding  
Gaza's Vital Sectors

*(January 2026)*



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# Post-War Reconstruction and Development:

## Research-Informed Ethical Guidelines for Global Engagement in Rebuilding Gaza's Vital Sectors

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Dr Mona Jebril (January 2026)

### Summary

Post-war reconstruction in Gaza requires a research-informed approach to prevent repeating past mistakes that increased Palestinians' dependency on foreign aid, and therefore deepened Gaza's development. At the time of writing, Gaza's political horizon remains uncertain. Nonetheless, planning for reconstruction is an urgent policy priority that must begin immediately and continue into the day after the war. To support coordinated and sustainable recovery and reverse the process of de-development, this policy report puts forward ethical principles for rebuilding within and across vital sectors in Gaza including higher education, and health, with a focus on principles that can guide ethical global engagement.

While numerous individuals and regional and international initiatives are proposing solutions or debating how to support Gaza's reconstruction, their sporadic nature, combined with limited expertise in the cultural and structural complexities on the ground and the absence of fully functioning coordinating bodies in the Gaza Strip, risks benefiting only select institutions and individuals rather than strengthening these vital sectors and the Palestinian community in Gaza as a whole. Without research-informed planning, reconstruction and development efforts may prioritize short-term interests, perpetuating fragmentation and inequalities while neglecting the future of Palestinians and support for minoritized individuals and institutions.

Gaza should not be treated as a market where competition and donor-driven interests dictate reconstruction priorities, nor should higher education, health, and other vital services in Gaza be reduced to commodities, with better-connected local institutions competing for resources at the expense of sector-wide development, or where individuals and international organizations use advocacy and solidarity as a pretext to strengthen their own institutional profiles through funding grants and public attention. While such dynamics may arise in the early reconstruction phase, it is essential to raise awareness and facilitate a transition toward ethical practices that prioritize sustainability and inclusivity and contribute to Palestinian national aspirations for an independent state.

Drawing on extensive studies of higher education and the political economy of health, conducted through my PhD research at the Faculty of Education, and through the R4HC-MENA project at the Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge— together with 22 years of lived experience in Gaza and professional work in its public schools, and later, as a lecturer at two of its universities, this policy report integrates local perspectives with international research to identify ethical principles for global engagement in Gaza's reconstruction and development. These principles aim to guide efforts within, and across vital sectors in Gaza, and may also be useful in supporting reconstruction and development in other conflict-affected contexts. Reconstruction will be most impactful when grounded in Palestinian experiences and guided by these principles, fostering meaningful partnerships that advance Gaza's future in the right direction.

## Introduction

Post-war reconstruction in Gaza should neither begin from scratch, disregarding previous development experiences and repeating past mistakes, nor be limited to narrow technical toolkits and romanticizing perspectives, in some cases offered by international and local actors in goodwill and intention to help, yet lacking critical understanding of the Gaza context. A research-informed, in-depth approach that builds on both current and historical knowledge of the Gaza Strip is essential to ensure sustainability and inclusivity in reconstruction efforts, aligning with Palestinians' national development goals of self-determination, and reversing a process of "de-development" (Roy, 1995, p. 110).

In economic terms, "de-development is defined as a process which undermines or weakens the ability of an economy to grow and expand by preventing it from accessing and utilizing critical inputs needed to promote internal growth beyond a specific structural level, [...] transforming that economy into an auxiliary of the state of Israel" (Roy, 1987, p. 56). In my research on higher education (Jebril, 2018), and on the political economy of health (Jebril, 2021), I explored how this process of de-development extends to, and manifest in, other vital sectors in Gaza, for example, through a "simultaneous process of construction and destruction, that is internal and external" to institutions and their actors in Gaza (Jebril, 2018, p.273). Since Israel's war on the Gaza Strip, post October 2023, de-development in the coastal enclave has deepened dramatically. The war, unprecedented in its scale of destruction and brutality, has been ruled by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024, as at least, plausibly a genocide (International Court of Justice, 2024).

That said, the dilemmas for Gaza's post-war reconstruction and development are profound. First, studies on Gaza's social life and institutions are scarce, outdated, predominantly quantitative, and largely produced by technical bodies and humanitarian agencies. This gap stems from decades of Israeli occupation and siege, which have severely restricted access. Second, the Israeli war on Gaza since October 2023, combined with years of Israeli imposed separation between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the Palestinian political schism after 2007, has fragmented and weakened Palestinian local governance and sharing of developmental knowledge and information. Practically, Israel's ongoing war on Gaza has imposed severe constraints on the ability of local actors in vital sectors to operate effectively. Resources have been depleted or destroyed, and structural challenges, including the widespread destruction of infrastructure, homes, loss of expertise and essential facilities, and restrictions on humanitarian aid, construction material, essential supplies and equipment, disrupted the functioning of Palestinian institutions and severely limited their capacity to execute, collaborate and coordinate reconstruction efforts.

Addressing these challenges requires time and collective research efforts, yet reconstruction is an urgent priority that cannot wait. Recognizing this, the policy report at hand offers research-informed insights, laying out ethical guidelines for Gaza's global engagement, which can act as a guide to inform the design and implementation of reconstruction strategies, within and across multiple vital sectors.

In this policy report, I draw on my large-scale studies on vital sectors in Gaza, including higher education and health, which were conducted from a developmental lens (see methodology note below). Furthermore, I have explored themes of development in Gaza through various

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contributions to global think tanks, newspapers, and frequent media engagements which outlined valuable insights in developmental challenges and opportunities in Gaza. Across all these works, I integrate first-hand experience of living and working in Gaza with rigorous research, bridging practitioner, professional and scholarly perspectives, and combining both local and international viewpoints.

Reconstructing Gaza's vital sectors and institutions will be more effective and sustainable if grounded in Palestinian experience. Research-informed principles are vital to support Gaza's future, ensuring sustainable, inclusive development and fostering true resilience of the Palestinian community under occupation.

### *Note on methodology:*

The insights presented in this and the following sections are primarily drawn from my R4HC-MENA study on the political economy of health in Gaza (Jebrell, 2021), which involved 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with senior policymakers and health officials from international health organizations, public health institutions in Gaza, UNRWA, and the Gaza private health sector, as well as relevant academic experts and caregivers of patients. Each interview lasted between 90-135 minutes. These insights are further informed by my PhD research on higher education in Gaza, which included 36 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students and academic staff from the Faculties of Education at two of Gaza's universities, each lasting between 90-300 minutes. All interviews for both studies were conducted by me, via phone or Skype from the University of Cambridge. Both studies were inductive and were supported by comprehensive, specialized and interdisciplinary literature reviews. These reviews informed the development of interview questions, supported the interpretation or analysis of findings, and in some cases, were used retrospectively to consolidate the research findings.

## Historical Context

Two historical moments are particularly relevant to zoom in on for post-war reconstruction and development in Gaza, as they resonate strongly with the current situation: (1) the influx of financial and developmental assistance following the 1993 Peace Process Oslo Accords, and (2) the Israeli unilateral disengagement plan of 2005, which led to the evacuation of Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip.



First, the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 marked the end of the First Intifada (Palestinian uprising which started in 1987), and the start of the peace process which carried a promise of establishing an independent and viable Palestinian state. At that time, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation returned from its exile in Tunisia, forming the Palestinian National Authority. With this, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), including Gaza, became a hub for foreign investment. The newly formed government, and the nongovernmental sector received substantial financial assistance from international donors, including the European Union, to support state-building and the development of Palestinian institutions. (see: Jebril, 2018). Transitioning from decades of occupation to statehood, this influx of aid and reform initiatives, all presented under the banner of peace and development, was overwhelming, and yet appeared to signal a serious intention of supporting a Palestinian state.

In reality, however, such initiatives were so often underpinned by competing political agendas, that weakened opportunities for Palestinian independence, increasing their subordination on the Israeli occupation and on donor funds. (see: Le More, 2008, Jebril 2018, Jebril 2021). Furthermore, even after the establishment of the PNA, Israel remained deeply involved as a third-party regulator of financial assistance processes including donor funds (Le More, 2008). It also continued to control Palestinian land and vital resources through various restrictions on borders and exports and imports. This lack of autonomy made rebuilding post Oslo, challenging for both Palestinians and international donors alike. Being under successive

occupations for decades, Palestinians conversely lacked national vision, systems and alternative financial resources, therefore ending up being heavily dependent on donor aid as well as the Israeli occupation. Consequently, as Wallner & Prauhart, 2012 noted, the flow of donor funds have in fact made Palestinians became “one of the richest oppressed people” (p. 739). Furthermore, the overall outcomes of post-Oslo assistance projects were described by Le More (2008) as “arbitrariness, further separation, replication, and contention” (see: Jebril, 2018, p. 2).

Second, the current ceasefire discussions evoke memories of the 2005 Israeli unilateral disengagement plan, which resulted in the evacuation of 21 illegal Israeli settlements from Gaza. At the time, this withdrawal appeared to be a positive move from Israel, despite being done without direct negotiations with the PNA. In a way, it promoted the perception that Israel was granting Palestinians the autonomy that was lacking, thus providing them with an independent mini-state in Gaza, that they should assume responsibility for, in terms of institution-building, democracy, and prosperity (Roy, 2005, p. 65).

However, this apparent relinquishing of land in Gaza, was followed by periodic bombardments, expanded illegal settlements in the West Bank, and tightened Israeli restrictions. For example, “within two years of its disengagement, Israel had imposed a blockade on Gaza that remains to this day. It controls the passage of all people and goods, reducing Gaza to ‘the largest open-air prison in the world’, according to many rights groups, including Amnesty International” (Cordall, 2025, p. no pagination). In retrospect, the withdrawal aimed to outmanoeuvre the peace process, and serve other political and diplomatic goals, ultimately strengthening the occupation while “avoiding renewed negotiations over a two-state solution”. Thus, it gave “the appearance of taking one step back to take two [or several] forward” in hindering prospects of peace and development for the Palestinian community (Cordall, 2025, p. no pagination).

While optimism is essential, lessons from these two historical moments highlight critical anticipations for current reconstruction efforts:

- The double-edged nature of donor and supporter initiatives in Gaza’s reconstruction.
- The conditions of occupation in the OPT complicates work for development in Gaza, whether by Palestinians or/and their international donor and global partners.
- The absence of a unified Palestinian vision to lead post-war reconstruction and coordinate external interventions.
- The fragility of ceasefires in Gaza
- The systematic attempts by the occupation to jeopardise development in Gaza, even after hostilities end, and despite any peace agreements that are signed internationally.

These factors are deeply intertwined. They are both part of, as well as contributing to an inherited structure of de-development in the Gaza Strip, making the reconstruction of Gaza’s vital sectors particularly challenging, and yet more important than ever for supporting the Palestinian community amid de-development.

### III. Key Insights from Research

My research has identified several broad features that characterize past donor/funder engagement with Palestinians in the OPT, including the Gaza Strip. These patterns encompass both challenges related to donor and funder practices and others internal to the Palestinian context.



#### *III.A. Challenges related to donors/funders' engagement in the OPT*

##### **III.A.1 Hierarchical Top-Down Relationship Between Foreign Donors/Funders and Local Partners in Gaza.**

This hierarchical relationship is manifested in designing, approving and implementing initiatives. A senior policy maker (Interviewee 5, NG1) from a health NGO in Gaza explained that this top-down approach is usually not imposed as an obligation but occurs indirectly, for example, by defining the scopes for the funding calls in advance while keeping participation voluntary. Since any application must comply with the funder's criteria, applicants in Gaza face pressure to adapt, thereby fitting within the predetermined scope set by funders. He added, "Recently, all funding has become limited to certain objectives." (Senior policy maker, interviewee 5, NG1 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 72). While this might be commonly the case elsewhere, in the OPT context it carries significant risks, particularly due to the area's sensitivities and its historical and political complexities. This hierarchical influence extends beyond the design and approval stages to implementation, where local actors often have limited flexibility in assessment and

evaluation tools, and in making adjustment to accommodate cultural contexts or respond to emerging circumstances.

### III.A.2 Mixed Approach Between Short-Term and Long-Term- Interventions

For decades, international efforts at reform and reconstruction efforts in Gaza, largely driven by foreign donors, appear to be locked into a mixing approach (Jebril, 2021, p. 105; Jebril & Deakin, 2022, p. 3). Most initiatives focus either on short term humanitarian relief or long-term advocacy for peace and development, with minimum integration or commitment to sustainable engagement and sustainable impact. This deepening dependency is often instrumentalized for political purposes, such as subsidizing the occupation and projecting international humanitarianism concern, rather than addressing root causes like ending the illegal occupation and siege. As one senior policy maker, interviewee 4, G1, noted: "The global community's policy towards Gaza is to keep it alive [...]. They certainly do not want an explosion of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, since this may affect the entire region" (Jebril, 2021, p. 73).

Overall, donor/funder mixed approaches in Gaza have increased the dependency of the Palestinian community on foreign aid. As Le More (2005) observes: "Serious doubts have arisen as to the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of donor interventions beyond dramatically increasing the aid dependence of Palestinian households. Moreover, the short-term impact of relief is equally not that encouraging. (Le More, 2005 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 106) Similarly, Giacaman et al. (2003) describe an "illusion of reform," as structural and equality challenges remain unresolved (p.2). Despite this, the prolonged siege, recurrent wars, and widespread poverty continue to entrench overreliance on external funding, even when it undermines sustainable development.

### III.A.3 Prioritizing Large-Scale "Grand Projects" Over Immediate Local Needs

Although large-scale initiatives such as empowerment and civil society programmes are significant, they tend to appear abstract and somewhat disconnected from Gaza's lived realities. That said, clearly disempowerment in this context stems from the various entrenched structural constraints and accumulated injustices, compounded by urgent challenges such as poverty, economic decline, mobility restrictions, limited healthcare access, and chronic shortages of essential resources like water, fuel, and electricity.

Effective empowerment therefore requires addressing these root causes and removing constraints on people's agency, rather than investing substantial resources within a structure of continued frustrations and destructions. This is not to suggest such initiatives are unnecessary or without value; however, in a context of competing priorities, and struggles over existential needs, they may be perceived as hypocritical and unattainable. Consequently, stakeholders may hesitate to endorse their implementation authentically and meaningfully, particularly when such efforts conflict with traditional constructs held by those responsible for carrying them out. These dynamics often reinforce the perception of a developmental 'bubble,' shaped by Western frameworks that appear disconnected from local realities.

Local organizations, including NGOs, frequently feel compelled to adapt to donor-driven agendas to secure funding, and possibly even initiate such projects, to 'ride the wave' of

Western funding trends (see: Jebril, 2021, p. 68). Contesting donor priorities can seem futile and may jeopardize critical survival opportunities, ultimately making these organizations complicit in sidelining pressing local needs. Thus, “the competition over donor assistance has prompted some large NGOs to shift to using ‘buzzwords promoted by the majority of Western donors’, and to working on ‘grand projects’ related to empowerment and civil society rather than focusing on serving the needs of the local population” (Challand, 2008 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 72).

A balance is required; one that maintains opportunities to support immediate local priorities, while simultaneously creating windows for change and development, that might otherwise, remain unnoticed or unaddressed in the Gaza context.

### III.A.4 Preference for “Soft Investment” Over Physical Infrastructure

Given the repeated attacks on the Gaza Strip, many donors have become reluctant to invest in physical infrastructure, or even equipment, since these could be destroyed and “their money turned to rubble” (Thirkell, 2012 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 87). Consequently, projects tend to prioritize soft investment, such as human capacity building and training, rather than supporting physical spaces essential for fostering community and creating productive environments for work and learning, such as universities, schools, factories, and libraries.

While this logic is understandable, particularly amid repeated wars in Gaza, and given global shifts towards digital spaces and hybrid work modes, in the Palestinian context, especially Gaza, where opportunities for physical interaction and travel are severely restricted, reducing physical spaces to digital-only may impose additional constraints on academic and other forms of mobility. Moreover, digital solutions are not fully viable due to chronic power outages, disrupted connectivity, and frequently damaged infrastructure. Relying solely on online platforms also threatens equity, as many lack access to devices or power generators.

In Gaza, physical spaces such as universities (prior to October 2023) also carry symbolic meaning: they represent cultural heritage, a history of resistance to occupation, and provide a sense of stability and a focal point for innovation, offering hope for the future. Moreover, it is psychologically important for Palestinians to see tangible change on the ground in a context where they have long endured empty assurances and vague promises, such as peace, while daily life reflects a starkly different reality. That said, soft investment remains crucial, particularly under siege conditions, where Gaza’s human resources constitute the primary reservoir of talent and expertise on which society depends.

### III.A.5 Burdensome Reporting Requirements:

In Jebril (2021) one research conversation, a participant who worked as a professional in an NGO in Gaza, Interviewee 8, expressed frustration with unrealistic and routine reporting requirements for international projects, which he felt constrained his ability to exercise practical judgment. Despite raising concerns with his supervisor about the cultural sensitivities of the mandated criteria and approaches and suggesting alternative strategies that he believed would enhance productivity and outcomes, his supervisor explained that such changes were impossible due to strict funder reporting instructions and guidelines.

This dynamic reflects a broader issue: international or global engagement partners often rely on standardized technical procedures, likely adapted from templates used elsewhere, either due to a lack of trust in local partners or in pursuit of uniform mechanisms for assessing quality and implementation. Consequently, local partners, anxious to maintain funder confidence and demonstrate their capacity, tend to prioritize compliance over contextual and cultural knowledge. When such knowledge is overlooked, project objectives risk being undermined, and interactions may become performative rather than substantive. Furthermore, these requirements can exhaust local partners, who frequently struggle with complex forms due to linguistic barriers or differing professional experiences. In some cases, frustration leads to superficial or exaggerated compliance, rather than meaningful engagement.

### III. A. 6 Lack of Knowledge and Disconnected Privileged Experience Among International Actors in Gaza

In Jebril (2018), a Gaza university student (pseudonym: Tamara) recalled how, during the 2014 war on Gaza, bombs could be heard as she and other colleagues attended the final day of an AMIDEAST workshop led by a foreign teacher. Tamara explained that the teacher panicked but was quickly taken by car to a safe destination, possibly inside or outside Gaza, while the students had to leave on their own despite the danger. Although both experienced the same situation, their differing privileges meant the experience was far from equal (Jebril, 2018, p. 175).

Similarly, in Jebril (2021), a professional from an international health organization highlighted the hierarchy between local and international staff, even within Gaza, where internationals enjoy better access, greater trust, and are perceived as more capable than locals, regardless of qualifications. For example, a health official from an international organization (Interviewee 9, IO4) stated:

In Gaza, being an international staff member is advantageous [...]. International colleagues have better chances of reach, so their voices are louder than ours [...]. There is lots of discrimination [...]. As a local employee, if I want to travel [through Beit Hanoun/ Erez crossing<sup>1</sup>], I am not allowed to take my laptop or even my phone charger [...], but international colleagues can travel with their cars, back and forth [...]. Whether we like it or not, the local person needs the international person. If the international colleague is traveling to Jerusalem, I will ask him/her to take my laptop. This creates a power relationship between us [...]. When there is a point of argument at work, I will remember that he has done me a favour. This should not be a favour, but [compared to us], the international staff have protection, impunity, [...] rights and privileges; otherwise, they would not have chosen to come and work here.

- (Health official, interviewee 9, IO4 in: Jebril, 2021).

<sup>1</sup> A border crossing situated between the northern end of the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Such gaps between the local and the international can undermine trust and global engagement, while shaping frameworks of understanding, conceptualization, and implementation of international projects in Gaza. Although part of a broader so-called North-South divide in academia and development, in Gaza this dynamic is more pronounced and may intensify feelings of inequality and resentment among local partners, despite efforts by both international and local actors to mitigate these challenges.

The issue of discrimination, combined with limited access for international researchers and insufficient research on Gaza's society and institutions, creates a visible gap also in knowledge. As Watson (1994) noted:

The problem is that so often outsiders/consultants spend brief periods in a country, believe they know the answers, write their reports on the basis of semi-preconceived ideas and then depart. [...] These reports] lack [...] 'internal' understanding [...] which can only come from local personnel trained in the art of critical analysis.

- (Watson (1994) in: Jebril, 2018, pp. 272)

This policy report will return to the debate around 'local' and its meaning in the context of Gaza reconstruction shortly, but the above discussion highlights the often-unspoken dynamics underlying negotiations about equity. Acknowledging and addressing these dynamics, for example, through pre-emptive arrangements that minimize the interplay of these privileges within the team, is important for trust building and equitable practice.

### *III. B Challenges Internal to the Palestinian Context in the Gaza Strip*

#### **III.B.1 Historical Legacy of Decision-Taking and Remaining on the Receiving End of Donor/Funder Agendas**

Palestinians have historically occupied a position on the 'receiving' end of donor and funder priorities. The first Palestinian ministries were established only after the creation of the PNA in 1994 following the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993; before then, the community lacked a unified governing body capable of representing its interests in the face of external interventions. Yet, decades later, ministries in Gaza and Ramallah continue to appear constrained by donor-driven agendas, following rather than directing priorities. As one senior policymaker from an international health organization observed: "For historical and political reasons, ministries of health [in Gaza and Ramallah] are often led by bilateral donors. Therefore, the Palestinian health ministry(ies) is not the dragging feet." (Senior policy maker, interviewee 1, OI1 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 36). Consequently, this lack of control resulted in fragmentation.

That said, it is essential to distinguish between fragmentation and decentralization. Decentralization is an intentional governance model designed to function as a coherent system, whereas fragmentation reflects a counterproductive process that fosters development. In the years immediately following the Oslo Accords and the formation of the

PNA, the PNA's centralization efforts sought to bring NGOs under the PNA's political agenda, thereby limiting their autonomy. For example, "the PNA attempted to absorb 'or at least regulate the NGO sector operating under its authority'. Among other things, this attempt was to contain their political role which 'was not [always] in harmony with the PNA's agenda'" (Abuiyada & Abdulkarim (2016) in: Jebril, 2021, p. 33). This approach negatively affected Palestinian freedoms and investment. What is needed now is a balanced governance model, one that ensures effective oversight by ministries or relevant authorities over foreign funders, while enabling a system that supports productive decentralization.

### III.B.2 Lack of a Unified Palestinian Vision

Although donor interventions should ideally be anchored in a locally defined vision, in practice, developing a unified Palestinian sectoral and multisectoral vision at the national level remains a persistent challenge. This difficulty is rooted in prolonged occupation and conflict, which foster fragmentation and daily uncertainty, making long-term planning extremely difficult, if not impossible. The political schism following Hamas's 2006 electoral victory further deepened this fragmentation and introduced practices that undermine development. For example, collaboration among local actors and health and education providers is weak, despite occasional solidarity during crises such as the Great March of Return or Israeli military offensives on Gaza. A senior health policy maker commented: "There were and still are attempts to make this health cluster take a larger role in the sector. As Palestinian NGOs, we refuse this body to overshadow the government, and as NGOs, we will stand against this firmly. The health cluster works to achieve coordination, but it does not have a strategy to achieve this coordination or the power to impose it on us" -(Senior policy maker, interviewee 5, NGO1 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 99). Also, it remains that "no systematic national process for ensuring that health system development is tailored to the goals articulated in the national health plan or other relevant planning documents."(Schoenbaum et al., 2005, p. 29).

### III.B.3 Absence of the Palestinian Legislative Council's Role Since the 2007 Schism

Following the Palestinian schism in 2007, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), which was established in effect of the Oslo accords 1993-4, ceased to function, although "Hamas held PLC meetings in Gaza". Later the Palestinian "Constitutional Court decided on December 2018 to dissolve the PLC and to call for legislative elections", partly because, "the PLC has lost its status as a legislative authority, and thus its status as the Legislative Council" (Alsarghali, 2021, p. no pagination). Eventually, "the Court's decision to dissolve the PLC and to begin the election process has not, however, solved Palestine's constitutional crisis nor helped in reviving democratization. Despite election proceedings being 'earmarked' to be held six months after the PLC's dissolution, they have failed to materialize, perpetuating the absence of a functioning PLC." (Alsarghali, 2021, p. no pagination).

The absence of the PLC created a policy vacuum with repercussions for Gaza's vital sectors including the health sector. Existing legislation is often outdated and substitute decisions taken in its absence may not reflect the full Palestinian spectrum (see: Jebril, 2021, pp. 94; 95). A senior policy maker commented: "Until now, the health sector is governed by the law issued by the Legislative Council in 2002. [...] The laws need revisions and additions" (Senior policy

maker, interviewee 5, NGO1 in: Jebril, 2021: p. 95). The absence of the PLC also resulted in “minimal enforcement of the standards that do exist” (Schoenbaum et al., 2005, p. 29).

Furthermore, the legislative and policy vacuum weakens institutional accountability and transparency. For example, a carer of a patient stated: “There is a need to put into effect a law of accountability towards medical errors. There are big medical errors that take place (interviewee 12, CP1 in: Jebril, 2021, p. 99). Conversely, a senior policy maker, interviewee 5, NGO1, commented: “Until today, there is no law or legislation that addresses medical errors. Unfortunately, the courts have imposed high fines on people who work in the health sector [...], although it is difficult to prove if a person died out of a medical error or something else [...]. This had a negative psychological impact on the employees; it affected their motivation to work”.

From another perspective, the “absence of a legal framework to govern and regulate the NGO sector has made it more difficult for these NGOs to operate and plan” (Hammami, 2000, p. 39). This absence combined with deteriorating socio-economic context in Gaza, a lack of modern information system and data sharing, and the existing gaps between donor-driven grand projects and local needs, has also undermined transparency in implementation (Jebril, 2021). A senior policy maker from a private institution explained that in some cases, “if the project is awarded for an institution on the basis of buying drugs, it could use the money to pay employees’ salaries instead, because it cannot afford paying them otherwise, so they misuse the project’s fund [...]. There is escape from taxes. But these instances do not amount to the stage of corruption. They are mainly a result of the bad [political and economic] situation in Gaza” (interviewee 7, IP, in Jebril 2021, p. 65).

### **III.B.4 Structural and Operational Constraints Undermining Governance and Service Delivery**

There are several constraints that could hinder effective global engagement and sustainable partnership in the Gaza Strip. *Inter alia*, these include severe mobility restrictions, and isolations; chronic instability and resource shortages; persistent political fragmentation that complicates governance and donor coordination, and entrenched administrative bureaucracy coupled with informal practices, which obstructs efficiency and equity in operations.

First, over seventeen years of siege have severely restricted the mobility of academic, medical professionals, and the general population, as well as limiting access of international researchers and experts. This isolation has curtailed opportunities for knowledge exchange and partnership building, leaving Gaza’s society and institutions disconnected from global networks and creating significant gaps in perspectives and experiences.

Second, the siege and chronic instability and the frequent power outrages undermine institutional capacity for project planning, time management, and service delivery. Even high-level Palestinian institutions, such as the Ministry of Health (MoH) struggle to cope with these disruptions. As one senior policy maker, explained:

The Ministry of Health in Gaza invites us regularly for meetings [...] but we feel our ideas are put on the shelf. A few years ago, we produced a five-year strategic plan for health in Gaza; the Ministry could only take 20 or 30% forward for implementation [...]. This is because there is no stability in Gaza. Financial issues also have an impact [...], which resulted in the Ministry of Health currently suffering from mind migration.

- (Senior policy maker, interviewee 7, PI, Jebril, 2021, p. 93)

Third, political fragmentation, particularly the Palestinian schism since 2007, complicates donor engagement. Funders must navigate competing governance structure with caution. Despite attempts at reconciliation, challenges persist. A senior policy maker noted:

After the unity government, funders became embarrassed about how to deal with MoH in Gaza. Some funders such as UNICEF and UNDP may hold agreements with Ramallah, which include Gaza, and then implement projects in Gaza. Other funders avoid Ramallah altogether. To prevent political embarrassment, they prefer to strike deals at lower management levels, such as with hospital administrations rather than Gaza MoH itself.

— (Senior policy maker, interviewee 4, G1, in Jebril, 2021, p. 68).

Fourth, fragmentation has also increased bureaucratic complexity. A health official working with an international organisation described:

“When I prepare for a workshop [...] and I invite both the West Bank MoH, and Gaza MoH to participate, I am faced by conflict on who is going to deliver the opening remarks [...]. We try to balance our preparations between the two parties, but these technical issues exhaust our time and energy [...]. Palestinian schism has affected our work on daily basis”.

(Health Official, Interviewee 9, IO4, in: Jebril 2021: 101).

But bureaucracy is also a major challenge for Palestinian local institutions, both before and after the Palestinian schism:

We face administrative complications [...]. If I want to ask for something from another department, my request should go to my first boss, then to my second boss, and then to my third boss. This takes time [...]. If I want to borrow a printer [...], I will have to seek permission from my manager, who will then write to both his manager, and to the administrative manager. The administrative manager will also write to the medical manager, and to the manager of all hospitals/clinics, who would then send the request to the Undersecretary, and so on.

— (Health Official, Interviewee 10, G2, in Jebril, 2021, p. 101)

Political fragmentation, combined with traditional constructs such as kinship, also fosters negative informal practices, such as *wasta* (favouritism/ nepotism), and clientelism. These undermine equity, trust, and integrity in the workplace, affecting governance of projects and service quality (for more details, see Jebril, 2021).

In summary, successful international projects and partnerships in Gaza require meaningful dialogue between donors, global partners and local actors to address issues arising from donor engagement patterns, and the specific constraints of Gaza's context under occupation and blockade. While fully resolving these issues may be unrealistic under current conditions, ignoring them risks superficial reconstruction efforts, repeating past mistakes and undermining prospects for recovery and sustainable development.

## IV. Principles for Ethical Reconstruction

This section, drawing on some of the key research insights mentioned above, uses Tables 1 and 2 to outline concerns identified in my studies, and other research on the OPT. It highlights a selection of issues stemming from previous international and global engagement in the region, as well as internal challenges within Palestinian practices that may have contributed to these outcomes. It then introduces desired changes and proposes principles for global engagement (Table 1) and pathways for Palestinian practices (Table 2) to guide future improvement. Unlike Table 1, which sets out principles, Table 2 frames its recommendations as pathways, acknowledging the complexities faced on the Palestinian side.

Together, these tables aim to ensure that future engagement contributes ethically and productively to the reconstruction of vital sectors in Gaza, both in the aftermath of October 2023 and in the long term. They are intended as indicative rather than exhaustive, encouraging greater awareness and action informed by contextual challenges, limitations, and potential risks, while highlighting the need for ongoing research to inform policy on this critical topic.

**Table-1:** Diagnosing Concerns Related to Global Engagement and Principles for Improvement

No	Diagnosing Issues	Desired Change	Principles
1.	<b>Hierachal top-down approach</b> Palestinians are usually approached by funders for certain projects or apply to available calls for funding, which often include predetermined areas of interest.	<b>Collaboration</b> Palestinians should design projects that reflect their societal needs and suit the specificity of their environment.	<b>Principle (#1) of Collaboration</b> Global engagement should be grounded in equitable collaboration and shared leadership in defining priorities for funding.
2.	<b>Fragmentation and duplication</b> Projects by several funders/donors have resulted in fragmented and duplicate efforts.	<b>Coordination</b> There is a need for coordinating international funder/donor/local initiatives.	<b>Principle (#2) of Coordination</b> Efforts must be coordinated to prevent fragmentation and duplication of resources.
3.	<b>Mixing approach</b> Reform and development efforts often focus either on short-term relief or long-term advocacy for liberation. This mixed approach, though necessary, does not serve Gaza's development well.	<b>Avoid deadlock</b> Short-term efforts should not undermine long-term initiatives for advocacy and independence. Reform should move beyond being confined to either short-term or long-term goals and instead build momentum and trust through sustained, continuous engagement.	<b>Principle (#3) of Continuity</b> Development should ensure sustained engagement by linking short-term interventions to mid- and long-term goals. When projects conclude, they should foster connections with similar initiatives and share lessons learned with the community in Gaza/OPT to promote continuing impact.

4.	<b>Competitive political agendas</b>	<b>Local agenda with critical input</b>	<b>Principle (#4) of Fairness</b>
	International funders may have political motivations that do not serve Palestinians' future and, in some cases, indirectly subsidize the illegal occupation. Conversely, local agendas can also be shaped by kinship ties or factional interests.	Funding should be based on a home-grown local agenda that serves all Palestinians fairly, while benefiting from regional and international expertise.	<b>Local agendas should be inclusive and complemented by critical, professional input and drawing on diaspora expertise.</b>
5.	<b>Focus on grand projects</b>	<b>Multi-level intervention</b>	<b>Principle (#5) of Multi-Level Support</b>
	Funding often focuses on large projects like empowerment, neglecting smaller but vital needs.	Interventions should improve Palestinian lives and future prospects at multiple levels.	<b>Interventions should address needs at multiple levels, not just grand projects.</b>
6.	<b>Prioritizing human capacity building to infra-structure</b>	<b>Combined investment</b>	<b>Principle (#6) of Combined Investment</b>
	Due to repeated destruction, funders avoid investing in physical infrastructure, preferring soft investments like training. Yet physical structures are essential for development.	Investments should include both physical infrastructure and human capacity building.	<b>Development demands combined investment in physical infrastructure and human capacity.</b>
7.	<b>Exhaustive and bureaucratic reporting mechanism</b>	<b>Flexible Mechanisms</b>	<b>Principle (#7) of Common Sense</b>
	Rigid reporting and measurement procedures can limit project impact, particularly in Gaza and other conflict-affected zones.	Reporting mechanisms should allow flexibility and incorporate common sense.	<b>Reporting and evaluation mechanisms should be flexible and adaptable to Gaza and other conflict contexts.</b>
8.	<b>Increased dependency</b>	<b>Building agency</b>	<b>Principle (#8) of Agency</b>
	Decades of occupation and siege in Gaza have created reliance on external funds.	Interventions should prioritize building Palestinian agency.	<b>Building Palestinian agency must be central to all reconstruction and development efforts.</b>

**Table-2** Diagnosing Contextual Factors Within Palestinian Practices Influencing Global Engagement Outcomes, and Pathways for Improvement

No	Diagnosing Issues	Desired Change	Pathways
1.	<b>Lack of unified vision</b>  The absence of a unified vision for development in the OPT, including Gaza, is a historical legacy that persists. Occupation, factionalism, and over-reliance on donor funding are key factors.	<b>Professional mediation for unified vision</b>  Develop a unified vision, if not nationally, then at least at the sector or area level. Professional mediators should facilitate this for time-specific or intervention-specific initiatives.	<b>Pathway #1</b>  <b>Work to draft a time-specific or intervention-specific vision, especially during emergencies, with assistance from trusted partners.</b>
2.	<b>Accountability</b>  The absence of a legislative council undermines accountability mechanisms. In times of instability, legal institutions struggle to function effectively. However, global engagement, the enforcement of international contracts, and the protection of rights and service quality all depend on robust systems of accountability.	<b>Establish an existing or alternative legal framework</b>  Institutions in Gaza need to provide a legal framework—formal or commonly binding, that governs internal work. International bodies should adapt to conflict-related limitations, especially at times of war.	<b>Pathway #2</b>  <b>Establish a suitably binding legal framework that ensures accountability and is effective in the Gaza context.</b>
3.	<b>Collaboration</b>  In some cases, competitive Palestinian political and institutional agendas undermine opportunities for cooperation.	<b>Avoid unfounded 'exclusion' of other actors</b>  Funders should ensure projects are not restricted to specific institutions or political entities. All parties should adhere to professional guidelines and accountability standards.	<b>Pathway #3</b>  <b>Extend benefits to other institutions and beneficiaries lacking engagement opportunities. Clarify professional rules of engagement from the start, including accountability.</b>
4.	<b>Transparency</b>  Strict donor guidelines detached from local realities, combined with socio-economic hardship and resource scarcity, may reduce transparency.	<b>Develop realistic projects and meaningful guidelines</b>  Collaborate on all aspects of projects, including guidelines and assessment.	<b>Pathway #4</b>  <b>Donor guidelines should address societal and local partner needs. Local partners should ensure these guidelines are both meaningful and feasible.</b>
5.	<b>Traditional constructs</b>  Gaza society is shaped inter alia by some traditional constructions such as neopatriarchy, gender assumptions, kinship, factionalism, and authoritarianism, which affect fairness and professionalism.	<b>Centre human rights and fair distribution</b>  Address these constructs by embedding equity principles in project design.	<b>Pathway #5</b>  <b>Prioritize human rights and social justice, ensuring fair distribution of opportunities.</b>

<b>6.</b>	<b>Isolation and limited international experience</b>	<b>Support is needed to build the partnership and international experience</b>	<b>Pathway #6</b>
	Restricted mobility isolates Gaza, limiting institutional experience and growth opportunities.	Provide international support and training to enhance delivery standards.	<b>Strengthen local implementation through international training.</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Bureaucratic routine</b>	<b>Develop mechanisms to navigate bureaucracy</b>	<b>Pathway #8</b>
	Exhaustive institutional procedures slow progress and cause frustration.	Discuss with local partners and integrate solutions during project design.	<b>Account for bureaucratic delays in project timelines or create fast-track options where possible.</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Political bargaining</b>	<b>Prior discussion and navigation strategies</b>	<b>Pathway #9</b>
	The Palestinian schism complicates donor work and fosters factional bargaining, undermining development projects.	Explore obstacles early and clarify strategies for navigating them. Encourage practices that unify rather than divide.	<b>Promote unity and collaboration while anticipating challenges.</b>

## V. Questions for Ethical Global-Local Partnerships in Gaza: Design and Implementation Guide

Below are indicative questions to consider when designing initiatives or interventions with local partners in the Gaza Strip. These questions aim to address the main considerations outlined in Tables 1 and 2 above.

- For ready-to-use checklists, please refer to Appendices I of this report.

### V.A Strategic Questions for Global Partners to Consider When Bringing Initiatives/ Projects to Gaza, and Negotiating Partnership Agreements

#### V.A.1 Alignment and Design

- Does this project originate from the societal needs of Gaza/OPT?
- Is the project designed collaboratively? (Are Palestinians included on an equitable basis?)
- Does this project duplicate any existing project in Gaza, partially or completely? If so, is there scope for collaboration?
- Does this project serve Gaza's future, and how? Does it address short-, medium-, or long-term goals? Does it promote sustainable engagement? How does it contribute to development in the OPT?
- Is this initiative focused on broad or narrow areas of development? What outcomes are expected, and when? How does it address Gaza's immediate societal needs?
- Does this project combine soft and hard investments, for example, balancing physical infrastructure and human capacity building? If physical investment is not currently possible, will it be included later? What proportion of resources is allocated to each aspect?
- What specific local considerations should inform project design to make it flexible and adaptable, given instability and unpredictability?

#### V.A.2 Governance and Partnership Terms

- If there is no clear or unified vision, can a time-specific or intervention-specific vision be formulated?
- In the absence of a legislative council and possibly legal institutions during crises and war, what alternative legal framework (formal or informal) can govern this collaboration?
- Have local partners been involved in designing implementation and assessment activities? How flexible and adaptable are these methods to realities on the ground? Have reporting mechanisms been established in consultation with local partners? To what extent is the relationship based on trust, enabling transparent communication about challenges?

- What mechanisms can ensure that the benefits of this project extend to other institutions or individuals in Gaza not represented in this collaboration? What steps have been taken to uphold professional standards?
- What steps have local partners taken to protect human rights and ensure fair distribution of benefits?
- What support do local partners need to strengthen their role in this collaboration?
- Does this initiative promote unity or division among institutions, groups, or individuals? How can inclusion and unity be ensured?

### V.A.3 Risk and Sustainability

- To what extent is this project influenced by political agendas? If a political agenda cannot be avoided, what are its implications for the community in the OPT? What measures have been taken to find common ground with local priorities?
- Does this initiative, directly or indirectly, increase Palestinian dependency? How can the project be designed to build agency within the Palestinian community?
- To what extent are project guidelines and conditions realistic in the Gaza context? What changes are needed to adapt and maximize impact?
- What delays might be expected, and how much time should be allocated?

Similar questions can guide Gaza-based institutions in their collaboration with international supporters, as we shall see shortly. However, the severe damage caused by Israel's war on Gaza has placed these institutions in survival mode, limiting their capacity for robust scrutiny. At this critical time, the greatest responsibility lies with international supporters to provide just and equitable partnerships that do not undermine Palestinian resilience and development.

## V.B Strategic Questions for Gazan/ Palestinian Partners to Consider When Approached by Global Partners, and Negotiating Partnership Agreements

### V.B.1 Alignment & Design

- Does this initiative align with Gaza's societal needs and long-term vision?  
*(If not, how can we ensure it reflects local priorities and future goals?)*
- Were we involved in shaping this project from the start?  
*(If not, what steps can we take to ensure equitable participation in design and decision-making?)*
- Does this initiative duplicate existing local efforts?  
*(If yes, can we negotiate collaboration or integration to avoid redundancy and maximize impact?)*
- Is the project scope realistic for Gaza's context?  
*(Does it address short-, medium-, or long-term goals? Are expected outcomes achievable?)*

- Does the initiative balance physical infrastructure and human capacity building?  
*(If not, can we advocate for a more balanced approach?)*
- Are we involved in designing implementation and assessment methods?  
*(Are these methods flexible enough for Gaza's realities? Are reporting mechanisms co-created and based on trust?)*
- Which specific local realities should inform project design to ensure adaptability amid instability?

### V.B.2 Governance & Partnership Terms

- Given the unpredictability of Gaza's political context, what time-bound or intervention-specific vision can we agree on?
- In the absence of formal legal structures, what alternative governance frameworks, formal or informal, can we propose for this collaboration?
- Are the project guidelines and conditions proposed by global partners practical for Gaza's context?  
*(What adaptations are needed to maximize impact?)*
- What support do we require from the global partner to strengthen our role and capacity in this collaboration?

### V.B.3 Risk & Sustainability

- How can we ensure that the benefits of this initiative extend beyond our institution to other Gazan actors?  
*(What mechanisms can uphold professional standards and fairness?)*
- What measures can we implement to protect human rights and guarantee fair distribution of benefits locally?  
*(How can we ensure these measures work in practice?)*
- Could this initiative increase dependency or create divisions among local actors?  
*(How can we advocate for inclusion, unity, and local agency instead?)*
- What delays are likely, and how can we negotiate realistic timelines with global partners?

## VI. Critical Reflections on Reconstruction and Representation: Balancing Local and Global Roles

There is growing awareness of the consequences of external interventions in Palestinian reconstruction and the enduring impact of successive colonial rule on Palestinian lives. While this awareness is positive, it can sometimes lead to the exclusion of diversity and productive dialogue, both essential given Gaza's severe loss of expertise and immense destruction. Addressing this issue requires sensitivity, as misinterpretation could justify unethical practices. My positionality as an 'insider-outsider' of Gaza enables me to attempt this clarification.



### IV.A Who Counts as "Local"? Expanding Definition and Responsibilities

Palestinians must lead reconstruction efforts in Gaza—or at the very least, be equal partners—but this leadership requires support from the diaspora and international expertise. The Israeli war post October 2023 created new 'insider-outsiders' as many Gazans were evacuated abroad, raising questions about what counts as 'local.' Historically, Palestinians have been dispersed across the OPT, neighbouring countries, and a global diaspora shaped by decades of displacement. This complexity, compounded by recent evacuations and humanitarian transfers, makes the diaspora a critical resource for rebuilding.

Importantly, some Palestinians who studied or settled abroad have acquired dual or multiple nationalities, and in some cases, they themselves have become Western citizens, with no Palestinian passport. Yet nationality does not erase their deep engagement with Gaza's realities. Many remain profoundly affected through family ties, businesses, and enduring attachments to their communities, rooted in meaningful participation, memories and heritage.

These connections shape their perspectives and motivate their involvement in reconstruction, academic research, and political advocacy. This reality challenges simplistic notions of 'local' and underscores the need for inclusive definitions that reflect demographic and political complexity. Diaspora Palestinians often maintain strong identity bonds and can contribute expertise and networks essential for reconstruction, even if their legal status or lived experience differs from those inside Gaza.

This raises a further question: Do we define 'local' solely by geography and heritage or by demonstrated commitment? There are international scholars with no Palestinian heritage who have contributed to Palestinian communities with sincerity and dedication, often more consistently than some individuals physically present in Gaza. Conversely, there are locals whose attitudes and practices undermine Palestinian self-determination or even involve collaboration with Israeli intelligence. Should "local" be expanded to include those with a proven record of standing with and contributing to Palestinian society?

That said, this expanded definition, however, must not equate those whose lives have been shaped by the Gaza context, and who hold deep, embodied local knowledge, with diaspora Palestinians or international allies who support from relatively safe and often unfamiliar spaces. These actors, no matter how committed, do not share the same exposure to suffering, precarity, and systemic violence. Expanding 'local' is not about flattening differences; it's about creating an ethical, inclusive framework that values commitment and accountability alongside proximity.

#### **IV.B Representation in Reconstruction: Why Context and Critical Research Matter**

Over the past two years of Israeli war in Gaza, attention to the Palestinian voice has grown. However, as noted earlier, this representation has increasingly narrowed to those physically located within Gaza, often in ways that place the burden of organization and leadership squarely on their shoulders. Including voices from Gaza is crucial, but several observations warrant examination in order to make this engagement more effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

On one hand, driven by what might be described as 'colonial guilt' or an eagerness for inclusion, many international actors who support Palestinians have voluntarily stepped back, adopting a passive, recipient-like stance. They wait for Palestinians in Gaza to choose, decide, organize, and lead, at a time when Gaza's systems have been largely destroyed and its people are overwhelmed with struggles over basic survival needs and protecting their families.

At the same time, the inclusion of voices from Gaza has become something of a 'trend', a fashionable approach adopted by international actors and institutions to signal responsiveness to local context. In some cases, these voices are instrumentalized as legitimizing tools, to secure project funding, attract public attention, and enable external involvement to appear 'decolonial' at a moment when doing otherwise risks being criticized as 'colonial.'

Overall, while this inclusion has been vital for conveying Palestinian suffering and fostering solidarity, it has also placed individuals, willingly or unwillingly, on a performative stage. They are perceived internationally as representatives of their institutions or communities and

expected to justify their worthiness of support: first by acknowledging its impact on their lives, and second by projecting idealized narratives that align with external expectations of them as flawless heroes.

Palestinians are certainly heroic for enduring these challenges while continuing their responsibilities such as journalism, education, and care for their communities. Yet, like any society, they are not perfect, nor were they perfect before October 2023. This imperfection does not diminish them; it humanizes them.

However, humanization alone is insufficient if it obscures the structural realities shaping these experiences. Contextualizing Palestinian life within the root causes that have constrained their work and capacity for development is essential. Projecting Palestinians as perfect by discarding any critical perspectives, is not only unrealistic, but also an act of denial, and, ultimately, erasure. Palestinian suffering and resilience have been shaped by decades of Israeli occupation, with profound consequences for individuals, institutions, and social life, compounded by internal Palestinian divisions. Ignoring these forces is unjust to those who have endured multiple layers of oppression.

Celebrating resilience without acknowledging these constraints, and their impact on everyday life, social interactions, and institutional culture, constitutes a form of erasure. Such erasure is harmful and cruel, adding symbolic violence to the physical destruction brought by occupation. Conversely this dynamic seems also to grant significant control to only a select group of actors in Gaza, as well as representatives of certain Gaza based institutions currently abroad, who are deemed eligible to speak for the Palestinian community. These actors appear to gain the authority to prioritize and deprioritize agendas of global engagement. While this may seem natural under the current circumstances, as in any society, it carries risks for democratic practice and has implications for fairness, diversity, and inclusion, so it is important to remain attentive to these patterns, particularly in the context of post-war reconstruction.

For instance, the majority of those recognized as legitimate leaders and representatives—both historically within Gaza's institutions before October 2023, and consequently, within international panels and decision-making circles concerned with Gaza after October 2023—are men who hold formal titles or occupy positions of power. By contrast, the voices of women, persons with disabilities, other marginalized groups and newer or less powerful institutions—despite their extensive knowledge, expertise and contributions—remain significantly underrepresented due to systematic inequalities and deep-rooted structural and cultural biases under occupation. Thus, between self-exclusion driven by 'colonial guilt' and the concentration of representational authority within a limited group, a tension emerges that shapes who gets to speak, who is heard, and whose experiences are sidelined.

The efforts of all Gaza actors and their international supporters are commendable, and it is understandable that the situation is complex and difficult. The contributions of both have been fundamental to keeping vital sectors in Gaza afloat amid war as much as possible. This critique does not aim to undermine these efforts; rather, it emphasizes the importance of grounding global engagement not only in Palestinian voices, inside and outside Gaza, but also in rigorous and critical research and the valuable insights from credible actors with long-standing commitments to the future of the region.

Critical research does not undermine the Palestinian cause; it strengthens it by identifying both obstacles and opportunities for reconstruction. When grounded in historical and political realities, critical research becomes an act of love, supporting a future of independence and institutional accountability. Like self-love, it involves recognizing strengths and weaknesses and striving for growth. An act of love does not deny these challenges; it contextualizes them, not to undermine Palestinians, but to enable constructive engagement. Gaza's complexity is distinct because its challenges have been compounded by decades of occupation and siege. Critical research enables informed strategies, ensuring that reconstruction efforts are not driven by romanticized narratives but by evidence and in-depth knowledge of the context. It empowers reconstruction, aligned with Palestinian realities, that can be sustainable and effective.

## **VII. In conclusion**

Despite numerous efforts to propose solutions for post-war reconstruction in the Gaza Strip, current approaches appear either politically motivated in support of the continuation of illegal occupation or largely guided by narrow technical analyses and romanticizing perspectives that lack depth and critical engagement. While these viewpoints can facilitate practical support on the ground, there is a need for a deeper, more holistic approach to reconstruction that is based on a critical understanding of the Gaza context. Such an approach should integrate both immediate and long-term strategies while prioritizing the overarching goal of reversing the entrenched structure of de-development in Gaza. This requires learning from past mistakes to improve international interventions during times of war and crisis. History demonstrates that sporadic initiatives, although helpful for short-term relief, often prove counterproductive, or at best neutral, to Gaza's future. For reconstruction to be effective, it must be research-informed and grounded in the lived Palestinian experience.

This policy report aims to contribute to this understanding by highlighting key features of the historical context, presenting insights from research, offering critical reflections on reconstruction and representation, diagnosing issues related to previous global engagement in Gaza to support future design and implementation, and promoting ethical commitments to avoid repeating past mistakes through strategic questions for both global partners and Palestinians on navigating global engagement more productively.

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## Appendix I

### Checklist for Ethical Global-Local Partnerships in Gaza: Design and Implementation Guide

#### I.A Strategic Questions for Global Partners When Bringing Initiatives/Projects to Gaza and Negotiating Partnership Agreements

##### I.A.1 Alignment and Design

- Does this project originate from the societal needs of Gaza/OPT?
- Is the project designed collaboratively? (Are Palestinians included on an equitable basis?)
- Does this project duplicate any existing project in Gaza, partially or completely? If so, is there scope for collaboration?
- Does this project serve Gaza's future, and how? Does it address short-, medium-, or long-term goals? Does it promote sustainable engagement? How does it contribute to development in the OPT?
- Is this initiative focused on broad or narrow areas of development? What outcomes are expected, and when? How does it address Gaza's immediate societal needs?
- Does this project combine soft and hard investments, for example, balancing physical infrastructure and human capacity building? If physical investment is not currently possible, will it be included later? What proportion of resources is allocated to each aspect?
- What specific local considerations should inform project design to make it flexible and adaptable, given instability and unpredictability?

##### I.A.2 Governance and Partnership Terms

- If there is no clear or unified vision, can a time-specific or intervention-specific vision be formulated?
- In the absence of a legislative council and possibly legal institutions during crises and war, what alternative legal framework (formal or informal) can govern this collaboration?
- Have local partners been involved in designing implementation and assessment activities? How flexible and adaptable are these methods to realities on the ground? Have reporting mechanisms been established in consultation with local partners? To what extent is the relationship based on trust, enabling transparent communication about challenges?
- What mechanisms can ensure that the benefits of this project extend to other institutions or individuals in Gaza not represented in this collaboration? What steps have been taken to uphold professional standards?
- What steps have local partners taken to protect human rights and ensure fair distribution of benefits?
- What support do local partners need to strengthen their role in this collaboration?
- Does this initiative promote unity or division among institutions, groups, or individuals? How can inclusion and unity be ensured?

### **I.A.3 Risk and Sustainability**

- To what extent is this project influenced by political agendas? If a political agenda cannot be avoided, what are its implications for the community in the OPT? What measures have been taken to find common ground with local priorities?
- Does this initiative, directly or indirectly, increase Palestinian dependency? How can the project be designed to build agency within the Palestinian community?
- To what extent are project guidelines and conditions realistic in the Gaza context? What changes are needed to adapt and maximize impact?
- What delays might be expected, and how much time should be allocated?

## I.B Strategic Questions for Gazan/Palestinian Partners When Approached by Global Partners

### I.B.1 Alignment & Design

- Does this initiative align with Gaza's societal needs and long-term vision? (If not, how can we ensure it reflects local priorities and future goals?)
- Were we involved in shaping this project from the start? (If not, what steps can we take to ensure equitable participation in design and decision-making?)
- Does this initiative duplicate existing local efforts? (If yes, can we negotiate collaboration or integration to avoid redundancy and maximize impact?)
- Is the project scope realistic for Gaza's context? (Does it address short-, medium-, or long-term goals? Are expected outcomes achievable?)
- Does the initiative balance physical infrastructure and human capacity building? (If not, can we advocate for a more balanced approach?)
- Are we involved in designing implementation and assessment methods? (Are these methods flexible enough for Gaza's realities? Are reporting mechanisms co-created and based on trust?)
- Which specific local realities should inform project design to ensure adaptability amid instability?

### I.B.2 Governance & Partnership Terms

- Given the unpredictability of Gaza's political context, what time-bound or intervention-specific vision can we agree on?
- In the absence of formal legal structures, what alternative governance frameworks—formal or informal—can we propose for this collaboration?
- Are the project guidelines and conditions proposed by global partners practical for Gaza's context? (What adaptations are needed to maximize impact?)
- What support do we require from the global partner to strengthen our role and capacity in this collaboration?

### I.B.3 Risk & Sustainability

- How can we ensure that the benefits of this initiative extend beyond our institution to other Gazan actors? (What mechanisms can uphold professional standards and fairness?)
- What measures can we implement to protect human rights and guarantee fair distribution of benefits locally? (How can we ensure these measures work in practice?)
- Could this initiative increase dependency or create divisions among local actors? (How can we advocate for inclusion, unity, and local agency instead?)
- What delays are likely, and how can we negotiate realistic timelines with global partners?

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