



FINAL REPORT

Supporting UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme in the Gaza Strip

Project Code: PR730

1. Executive summary

UNRWA received from Zanfha a total of GBP 12,000 towards supporting UNRWA's Community Mental Health Program in the Gaza Strip. The first amount of GBP 10,000¹ (equivalent to USD 16,584) was received on 24 November 2009. On 8 April 2010, UNRWA received additional GBP 2,000² (equivalent to USD 3,021) towards the same project.

The funds from Zanfha were used to support UNRWA's Community Mental Health Program (CMHP) through covering the cost of hiring 7 psychological counsellors for 90 working days.

The project started immediately the same day in which funds were received. The Field Administration Department, Personnel division and CMHP were responsible for implementing the project. UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme used the allotted budget to support the employment of 7 CMH counsellors for a period of 90 working days. These counsellors provided critically needed psychological support to children in 7 schools across the Gaza strip. Counsellors screened school children to determine who were in the most urgent need for mental health support. Counsellors also formulated group counselling sessions, where students who had had similar experiences were able to interact with the counsellor and each other in an environment conducive to sharing and learning new coping strategies.

2. Background

2.1. Problem statement and justification

On 27 December 2008, Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) launched an intensive military operation in the Gaza Strip code named (*Operation Cast Lead*). By the time Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire on 18 January 2009, large numbers of civilians were killed and injured. Palestine Ministry of Health estimated that 1,417 Palestinians were killed including 313 children and 116 women and other 5,303 were injured including 1,606 children and 828 women³.

IDF *Operation Cast Lead* has wrought unprecedented devastation and hardship on an already impoverished population, compounding the effects of an 18-month border closure and tight regime of closures and restrictions on movement that date back to the early 1990s.

Children, who comprise nearly 48.3⁴ percent of Gaza's population of approximately 1.5 million, are among the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the conflict. Children frequently suffer from extreme levels of physical and psychological stress caused by continual exposure to traumatic events, including the witnessing of destruction and death, loss of family members, high levels of insecurity and mass displacement.

¹ UNRWA exchange rate for GBP / USD for November 2009 is 0.603.

² UNRWA exchange rate for GBP / USD for April 2010 is 0.662

³ The breakdown of fatalities and casualties is provided by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights: <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/PressR/English/2008/36-2009.html>

⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007 Census

Successive studies have highlighted the short-term and long-term negative effects of the ongoing conflict on Palestinian children and youth. These include fear, episodes of bedwetting, difficulty in concentrating, eating and sleeping disorders, irritability, and increased anti-social behaviour during adolescence and neurotic problems during adulthood.

In Gaza, persistent psychological distress and feelings of uncertainty over the future have sharply altered the lives of the population. The mental health needs of the population have increased dramatically in recent years, exceeding the capacity of teachers to meet the special needs of their students, and doctors to treat their patients.

According to surveys carried out by UNRWA's mental health programme, among those displaced during *Operation Cast Lead*, more than 30% of children, and 20% of the caregivers suffer from various psychological symptoms that interfere with their daily lives. In an attempt to screen UNRWA schools for students exposed to direct violent events during the last war, the CMHP counsellors conducted a survey at UNRWA schools in Gaza Strip. The findings of the survey were as follows:

- 320 students lost their fathers
- 62 students lost their mothers
- 661 students lost their brothers or sisters
- 2881 students had their homes demolished completely
- 9712 students had their homes demolished partially

In response to the findings, the CMHP programme launched a school based mental health interventions campaign where the 189 counsellors working at UNRWA schools were provided with training to orient the teachers on healthy practices after the war. In addition, the program is planning to hire additional counsellors to assist a much higher number of refugee families.

2.2. UNRWA's response

The Community Mental Health Programme is part of the UNRWA's Emergency Appeal for 2009 and 2010. The Agency currently employs 189 CMHP counsellors to work in its schools, health and social service centres. On a monthly basis, CMHP counsellors conduct more than 4,000 individual counselling sessions and 2,000 group sessions, involving nearly 8,000 children.

UNRWA's CMHP school counsellors use three basic intervention approaches: individual counselling, group counselling and group guidance sessions (mental health education classes). Typically, counsellors conduct group counselling sessions for children who share similar mental health problems or who were exposed to similarly distressing events. The children share their experiences and learn from the counsellors and from each other how to cope and recover. Those children with sensitive problems, which are difficult to share, are given more privacy through individual counselling.

CMHP counsellors also conduct mental health education classes that increase the pupils' awareness of mental health and foster their resilience. Children in these sessions learn how to deal with stress, how to engage in effective communication with each other, how to respect each other's opinion, and how to understand and address the emotions shown by themselves and their peers. Various tools, such as drama, art, games, and puppets are used to help the children grasp these concepts.

2.3. Strategic Framework

The Agency has four human development goals: 1) A long and healthy life, 2) Acquired knowledge and skills, 3) A decent standard of living, and 4) Human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent possible.

2.4. Donor contribution

UNRWA received from Zanfha a total of GBP 12,000 towards supporting UNRWA's Community Mental Health Program in the Gaza Strip. The first amount of GBP 10,000 (equivalent to USD 16,584) was received on 24 November 2009. On 8 April 2010, UNRWA received additional GBP 2,000 (equivalent to USD 3,021) towards the same project.

3. Project Description

3.1. Aims

The goal of UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) in Gaza is to help mitigate the psychological impact of violence and economic hardship on the refugee population. Through varied interventions of its professional counselling staff, CMHP helps children, youth and families to develop and implement positive coping strategies to address their circumstances, achieve mental-wellness, and contribute to the development of their communities.

3.2. Objective

The specific objective of this project is to alleviate the psychological impact of the recent traumatic events by supporting the employment of 7 counsellors for 90 working days in the Gaza Strip.

3.3. Project implementation and activities carried out:

UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme used the allocated budget to support the employment of 7 CMH counsellors for 90 working days. These counsellors provided critically needed psychological support to children in 7 schools across the Gaza strip. Counsellors screened school children to determine which children were in the most urgent need for mental health support. Counsellors also formulated group counselling sessions; where students who had had similar experiences were able to interact with the counsellor and each other in an environment conducive to sharing and learning new coping strategies.

The aim of CMHP is to normalize the lives of those students, restore their pre-war level of function, and provide healing for them. CMHP counsellors used a variety of techniques including free drawing, expressive writing, drama, and storytelling to assist the students gain a sense of safety, security, and trust. Some of these students needed individual sessions, especially when they failed to benefit from group sessions.

CMHP counselors also supported teaching staff through group discussions designed to provide teachers with the tools necessary to deal with traumatized children. The counselors conducted home visits for those students who were not reporting to schools and to those whose parents were unable to attend meetings at the schools.

All project activities were carried out under the supervision of UNRWA mental health supervisors who were available to treat students who needed higher level interventions.

3.4. Results / Impact on Beneficiaries

UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme helped in mitigating the immediate and longer term effects of the recent conflict on the refugee population in Gaza. UNRWA's CMHP counsellors through carrying out several activities under the generous contribution of Zanfha including but not limited to the following:

- 1) Counselors provided counseling for at least 155 students delivering a total of 65 group counseling sessions.
- 2) Counselors provided mental health education and support classes for at least 727 students, through at least 15 classes.
- 3) Counselors provided orientation sessions and training for at least 40 teaching staff, who in-turn reached almost 1455 students at UNRWA schools.
- 4) Counselors provided individual counseling and home visits for 44 traumatized students and their families through 97 home visits and individual counseling sessions.

Students who underwent the counselling programme (total 155 students) for alleviating violent behaviours showed moderate improvement toward the end of the school year 2009-2010. The approach taken with these students was comprehensive covering them and their families. Results indicate that slightly more than half (54 %) of students show overall improvements particularly with regard to violent behaviour.

3.5. External Linkages

UNRWA GFO maintains close coordination with the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Welfare, the Palestinian Water Authority and the CMWU, both at Gaza level and in Ramallah, to ensure that the delivery of essential services to Palestine refugees and non-refugees are achieved with minimum overlap.

Coordination with other UN agencies in Gaza is ongoing and fine-tuning of service delivery ensured. UNRWA and WFP work closely together to ensure no overlap in their respective emergency food programmes. Other examples include close cooperation between UNICEF/MoH and UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP).

Regular contact takes place with key NGOs and the ICRC within the Gaza Strip, for both programmatic and protection related issues.

3.6. Visibility

The international as well as the local community was made aware of the contribution, with reference to the donor, through public information materials produced by the Agency.

3.7. Sustainability

UNRWA funds its regular programmes from its regular budget, which is based on voluntary contributions from its major donor countries, following the approval of the United Nations General Assembly. Projects, emergency activities and special initiatives are funded through special contributions from the donors. Given the extraordinary situation in Gaza, additional resources for CMHP are also secured through Emergency Appeals.

UNRWA has been providing essential humanitarian assistance (both development and emergency related) to Palestine refugees since 1950, and is mandated to provide this assistance through UN resolutions. Until a long term political solution is found for the conflict in the oPt, UNRWA will remain the main service provider for Palestine refugees.

4. Project Management

4.1. Internal management

UNRWA's Community Health Programme was responsible for the management and implementation of the project. CMHP was supported by the Field Administration, Personnel Division and the Projects Office. Recruitment of the 7 counsellors was carried out according to UNRWA procedures on a competitive basis.

4.2. Monitoring / Reporting

Counsellors report directly to their supervisors on weekly basis. The supervisors in turn report to the Manager of Community Mental Health Programme.

5. Budget

Please refer to the attached final financial statement which reflects the full utilisation of all funds received. The financial statement shows total income of USD 19,605, expenditure of USD 19,605 and a nil fund balance.