Country Notes

Palestine:
Lessons from UNESCO's crisis–disaster risk reduction programme in Gaza

Bilal Al Hamaydah, Jo Kelcey, and Ferran J. Lloveras

PALESTINE

Education Sector Planning

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Acknowledgements

I am afraid to come to school whenever I hear loud noises. My parents force me to come to school, but I can't wait to go home because of all the noise that I hear around the school.

Whenever there is an airstrike we hide under the stairwell. One boy was accidentally injured by some shrapnel that was still lying around. It hurt his eye. This was during school time. The teachers came and took him to the hospital and they told his parents.

There is lots of shrapnel, and rockets and missiles that are fired around the school that I see. I stay away from them, but there are many kids that come close to them and hold them, and start playing and even throwing them at each other.

Mahmoud, 12 years old, Grade 7, Al-Qastina Boys School (interview conducted August 2011).[1]

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1. One week after this interview was conducted, Mahmoud was killed by a rocket launched by a Palestinian armed group during the course of heightened hostilities between the Israeli military and Palestinian militants in Gaza. The rocket fell short of the border with Israel and hit the boy's home, killing him immediately. Another four members of his immediate family were injured in the same incident, which also resulted in the destruction of his house, as well as damage to his school nearby. In addition to being hit by the Palestinian-launched rocket in August 2011, the school was heavily damaged during the Cast Lead military offensive in 2009, and was again damaged in March 2011 during Israeli airstrikes targeting nearby locations (OCHA oPt, 2011: 3).

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Abbreviations

ARA	access restricted areas
c-DRR	crisis–disaster risk reduction
CAAC	children and armed conflict
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
MIRA	multi-cluster/agency initial rapid assessment
MoEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Palestine
MRM-CAAC	monitoring and reporting mechanism for children affected by armed conflict
MS	INEE Minimum Standards
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
oPt	occupied Palestinian territory
SHPA	Safety and Health Protection Association
SMS	short message service
UCAS	University College of Applied Sciences
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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Foreword

As a result of the *Operation Cast Lead* crisis (December 2008/January 2009), also known as the Gaza War between Israel and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, UNESCO and other international organizations immediately developed responses to support the recovery of educational and other services in Gaza. UNESCO activities focused on gaps at secondary and higher education levels and the promotion of quality standards in emergency education, which included Palestine's first training sessions on applying the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

UNESCO's Programme of Emergency Support to the education system in Gaza was funded by the Office of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned of Qatar and started in late 2009. It was developed in response to identified sector priorities and gaps with initiatives to improve the preparedness of the education system in Gaza for future emergencies – whether related to conflict or to natural disasters – in order to minimize the physical and psychosocial effects and the disruptions to education that occur as a result of such emergencies. Based on the experience of the innovative crisis–disaster risk reduction (c-DRR)[2] component of this programme, the UNESCO team prepared a booklet in 2012 to compile the lessons learned from the UNESCO emergency education response in Gaza.

The publication of this booklet is timely as it occurs at another challenging moment for Palestine. The scale of destruction and devastation after 51 days of conflict which ended on 26 August 2014 is unprecedented in Gaza; the education infrastructure has suffered massive destruction. According to the multi-cluster/agency initial rapid assessment (MIRA) findings, 26 schools have been completely destroyed and 122 damaged during the conflict, 75 of which are UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools. It is worth noting that prior to the last conflict the education system in Gaza was already suffering from a shortage of at least 200 schools, which led to a large number of classes running in double shifts, and negatively impacted on the quality of education. Early childhood development has also been highly affected. Among a total of 407 kindergartens in Gaza, 133 were damaged and 11 totally destroyed.[3] According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, over 11,100 Palestinians, including 3,374 children, 2,088 women and 410 elderly, were injured. It is estimated that at least 1,000 of the children injured will be permanently disabled.

These figures highlight again the critical importance of protecting education systems from attack and mitigating the impact of crisis to ensure that all children benefit from the right to quality education, even during conflict and crisis situations.

This publication on lessons learned from UNESCO's emergency response and particularly from the c-DRR programme was compiled in 2012; it is extremely timely. In such volatile contexts, the strengthening of institutional and individual capacity to ensure the safety of schools should be an ongoing priority of government and non-government stakeholders alike. UNESCO's approach to education in emergencies offers a sustainable framework to implement inclusive c-DRR programmes in conflict or post-conflict environments. It also tries to bridge gaps between humanitarian and developmental interventions, keeping in mind that prevention and mitigation of crisis require not only emergency support to the education system, but medium and long-term support as well. Only then is it possible to ensure the availability of adequate capacities for both preparedness and response.

UNESCO has been promoting the exchange of experiences and lessons learned between the West Bank and Gaza. For instance, through the UNESCO c-DRR programme, an

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2. The programme initially used the terminology 'conflict-DRR'; eventually this changed to 'crisis-DRR' which is wider and includes all types of emergency situations.
3. According to a recent assessment by Save the Children in coordination with the Humanitarian Education Cluster and the MoEHE (see UNESCO and EENET, n.d.).

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) community of practice has been established and trained in Gaza over the past few years; in May, 2015 master trainers from Gaza have expanded this training to the relevant Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) Departments in Ramallah. Besides its support to the consolidation of the INEE network, UNESCO also assisted in the conceptualization process of the INEE Minimum Standards for Palestine in 2013 (INEE and oPt Education Cluster, 2013). Ownership by local institutions and partners is a key component of UNESCO's approach.

After the completion of the specific c-DRR programme in 2012, interventions proved to be sustainable, with continued close collaboration between Ministry and schools. For instance, follow-up was done with MoEHE and schools to update the list of most vulnerable schools according to specific criteria (e.g. schools directly bombed; schools located in 'buffer zones' along border areas; schools difficult to access; schools near the sites of security or military training centres) or to ensure that monitoring systems continued to be operational in the targeted schools such as the SMS alert system for emergencies. In addition, support to partners continued through exchange of information and technical guidance on c-DRR and education in emergencies.

The impact of the c-DRR on institutions, schools and communities has definitely proved sustainable. For instance, many of the members of the schools safety committees (including the teachers) who attended the first aid training courses are able now to deal with many urgent cases arising during the school day without having to wait for an ambulance (as they were doing before the programme). Most of the schools are still using the SMS alert system in case of emergencies to inform the parents about what is happening at the schools. Another example of sustainable practice is that many of the teachers who received Right to Play training are still using the 'Red Ball Child Play methodology' in order to reduce violence among the children, and also use the 'Team Up methodology' to provide education through play. Some of the schools are also using the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) to report on violations of the right to education, which is the added value of this c-DRR programme and approach compared with traditional DRR interventions.

It is critical to continue c-DRR interventions, to reactivate others, and to continue strengthening the monitoring and reporting of violations. UNESCO has been working closely with the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), notably to share lessons learned about monitoring attacks on education; more recently, UNESCO also participated in the launch of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* (GCPEA, 2014).

In this challenging context and based on lessons learned from years of experience in emergency education response, UNESCO aims to strengthen c-DRR programmes in the Gaza Strip. Focus will continue to be on the most vulnerable schools such as those located in the access restricted areas (ARA)/buffer zone. Higher education institutions would also warrant attention as they lack knowledge about education in emergencies in general and c-DRR in particular.

It is very clear – when looking at the level of the preparedness, response and recovery in the ongoing crisis – that the c-DRR approach is critical: to providing a safe learning environment for students and staff; to developing and designing emergency plans in order to be ready to face different kinds of crisis; to promoting the principle of inclusive education through facilitating access to quality education for all children, including children with special education needs (e.g. children with disabilities, psychosocial needs or learning difficulties), which is even more important in time of crisis; and to using the MRM-CAAC mechanism to report violations of the right to education. Good preparedness is a key to boosting the education sector's capacity to mitigate negative impact and speed up recovery after crisis.

Lodovico Folin-Calabi, Head of Office, a.i., UNESCO Ramallah

1. Background

The crisis–disaster risk reduction programme (c-DRR) is part of UNESCO's Gaza emergency education programme that supported schools at high risk of attack in the Gaza Strip during 2011. It was a pilot project that sought to make vulnerable schools safer by adopting an integrated protection and education approach. Specifically, it adapted the principles and good practices of disaster risk reduction to a conflict setting and the particular context of Gaza. The programme comprised six main activities, which were implemented in two phases (see *Tables 1 and 2*, and *Figure 1* for details).

Phase I

During Phase I of the project, which began in January 2011, the 12 public schools located in Gaza's access restricted areas (ARA) were provided with training and associated support on:

1. First aid (partner organization: Palestinian Red Crescent).

2. Good safety practices, including school evacuation and preventing and putting out fires (partner organization: the Safety and Health Protection Association, SHPA).

3. Training on human rights monitoring and reporting, with a specific focus on reporting for the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict (MRM-CAAC) (partner organization: Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights).

4. Psychosocial activities focused on the use of learner centred methodologies and approaches (partner organization: Right to Play).

Phase II

During Phase II of the project, which began in April 2011, activities were expanded to respond to 10 more vulnerable schools (part of a list of 80 identified through the MRM-CAAC database). Basic safety equipment (first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and generators) were also provided to all 22 schools, and in response to feedback received during Phase I, a further two activities were initiated:

1. Training sessions on the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards (MS) (2010) in all of the schools, with a specific view to developing school-based contingency plans to increase preparedness and quality of local responses in emergencies (partner organization: University College for Applied Sciences).

2. The creation of a short message service (SMS) alert system that will allow school stakeholders (schools, MoEHE, students and staff) to send and receive timely information regarding attacks and incidents in the vicinity of the school. The system became operational at the beginning of the 2011/2012 academic year (partner organization: SoukTel).

Subsequently, a 'Phase II plus' was implemented in the second semester of 2011, covering a further seven schools, and bringing the total number of beneficiary schools to 29.

Table 1.   Schools covered by the crisis–disaster risk reduction (c-DRR) programme, 2011

Directorate	No	School Name	School Type	Classrooms	Students	Teachers	Males	Females
Northern Gaza	1	Hamza Ben Abdul Mutaleb Basic School for Boys	Primary	8	252	17	252	
	2	Hamza Ben Abdul Mutaleb Secondary School for Girls	Secondary	13	405	27		405
	3	Martyr Hani Na'im Secondary Agricultural School for Boys	Secondary	8	160	46	160	
	4	That Al Sawari Basic School for Girls	Primary	9	252	20		252
	5	Alqastena Basic School for Boys	Primary	7	183	21	183	
	6	Othman Ben Afan Secondary School for Boys	Secondary	21	777	47	777	
	7	That Al Sawari Secondary School for Girls	Secondary	17	522	37		522
	8	Alqastena Secondary School for Boys	Secondary	10	280	28	280	
Eastern Gaza	9	Ash Shuja'iyeh Martyrs Secondary School for Boys	Secondary	15	583	32	583	
	10	Tones Basic School for Boys	Primary	12	390	22	390	
	11	Besan Basic School 'A' for Girls	Primary	10	333	17		333
	12	Besan Basic School 'B' for Girls	Primary	9	275	15		275
	13	Tones Secondary School for Boys	Secondary	14	438	35	438	
	14	Sobhe Abu Karsh Basic School For Girls	Primary	18	617	33		617
	15	Sobhe Abu Karsh Basic School Co-Ed	Primary	19	698	32	298	400
Middle Gaza	16	Bilal Ben Rabah Basic School for Girls	Primary	18	463	39		463
	17	Bilal Ben Rabah Basic School for Boys	Primary	16	422	35	422	
	18	Qesaria Secondary School for Girls	Secondary	15	391	32	113	278
Khan Younis	19	El-Ma'ari Basic School Co-Ed	Primary	10	330	19	168	162
	20	El-Ma'ari Basic School for Boys	Primary	9	269	25	269	
	21	El-Ma'ari Basic School for Girls	Primary	11	308	25		308
	22	Kamel Alagha Basic School for Boys	Primary	9	287	21	287	
	23	Abasan El Jadeeda Basic School for Boys	Primary	10	304	25	304	
	24	Abasan El Jadeeda Basic School for Girls	Primary	13	393	30		393
	25	Khuza'a Martyrs Secondary School for Boys	Secondary	10	303	29	303	
	26	Khuza'a Martyrs Secondary School for Girls	Secondary	11	345	30		345
Rafah	27	Raba'a Al Adaweha Basic School Co-Ed	Primary	22	732	35	164	568
	28	Raba'a Al Adaweha Secondary School for Girls	Secondary	21	813	47		813
	29	Al Shouka Secondary Girls School	Secondary	8	265	23		265
Total				**373**	**11,790**	**844**	**5,391**	**6,399**

The target schools in Phase I, January-April 2011

The target schools in Phase II, June-October 2011

The target schools in Phase II, October-November 2011

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Figure 1. Map of school locations
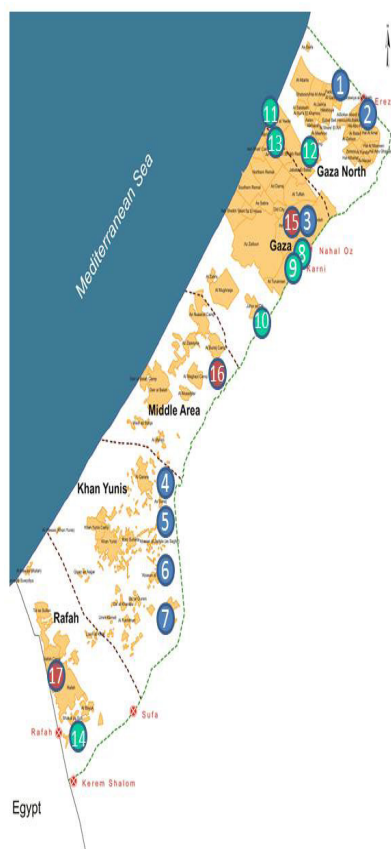
Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

**Table 2. Schools covered by Phases I, II, and II plus**

	Phase I, school buildings and number of schools
1	Hamza Ben Abdul Mutaleb Basic School for Boys & Secondary School for Girls, 2 schools
2	Martyr Hani Na'im Secondary Agricultural School for Boys, 1 school
3	Ash Shuja'iyeh Martyrs Secondary School for Boys, 1 school
4	El-Ma'ari Basic Schools (boys, girls, co-ed), 3 schools
5	Kamel Alagha Basic School for Boys, 1 school
6	Abasan El Jadeeda Basic School (girls & boys), 2 schools
7	Khuza'a Martyrs Secondary School (girls & boys), 2 schools
	Phase II, school buildings and number of schools
8	Besan Basic School for Girls, 2 schools, One of these 2 schools was targeted in Phase II plus
9	Tones Basic & Secondary Schools for Boys, 2 schools
10	Qesaria Secondary School for Girls, 1 school
11	Alqastena Basic & Secondary School for Boys, 2 schools
12	Othman Ben Afan Secondary School for Boys, 1 school
13	That Al Sawari Basic & Secondary for Girls, 2 schools
14	Al Shouka Secondary Girls School, 1 school
	Phase II plus, school buildings and number of schools
15	Sobhe Abu Karsh Basic School (girls, co-ed), 2 schools
16	Bilal Ben Rabah Basic School (girls & boys), 2 schools
17	Raba'a Al Adaweha Basic School (Girls, co-ed), 2 schools

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

The c-DRR project incorporated recommendations from the UNESCO-commissioned *Psychosocial Assessment of Education in Gaza and Recommendations for Response* (UNESCO Ramallah, 2010) and also addressed the full range of the *INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery* (INEE, 2010). *Figure 2* illustrates the relevance and applicability of each of the elements of the c-DRR project in the context of the INEE MS. It seeks to protect children and teachers and increase their capacity to respond effectively in the event of a crisis. The project encompasses the three phases of preparedness, response, and recovery. The preparedness phase includes the development of contingency plans, and investments in school safety equipment. The response phase includes first aid training, an SMS alert system, and training on extinguishing fires and evacuation drills. The recovery phase includes psychosocial support and using the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) on human rights violations. Finally, the project included an important advocacy component. This was intended to raise awareness of the situation in Gaza and contribute to the prevention of future attacks. The project was conceptualized by UNESCO staff in close cooperation with MoEHE and in line with the priority needs as expressed by communities in Gaza.

Figure 2. Relationship between the INEE Minimum Standards and the c-DRR project
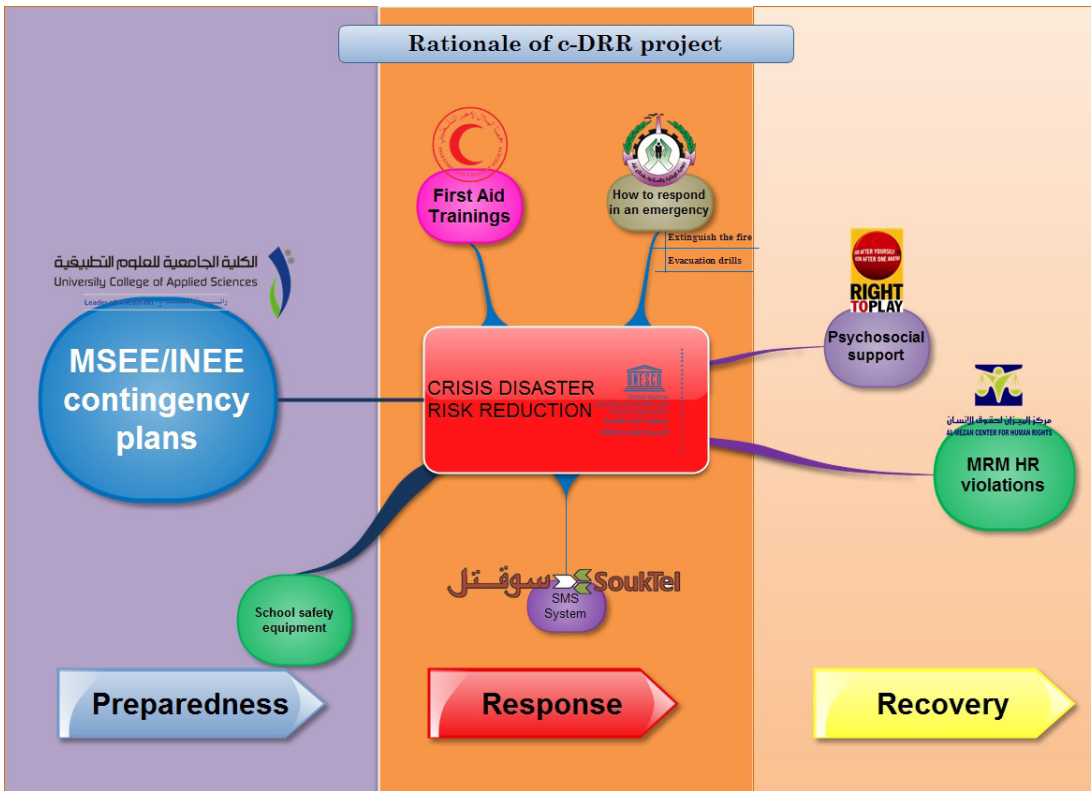
Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

2. Situation analysis

Gaza is no stranger to conflict. The occupation manifests itself through high levels of military and militant violence, while the high density of population results in this violence often impacting civilians and civilian structures – including students, teachers, and schools. Impacts are particularly serious during intense escalation phases of the crisis, such as during *Operation Cast Lead*, which took place from December 2008 to January 2009, and *Operation Protective Edge*, in July–August 2014.

In addition to these periods of great violence, general levels of instability have prevailed since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, and the tight blockade that followed means that much of the damage remains unrepaired. Some of the most vulnerable areas are those located near the Israeli border. This is where the UNESCO c-DRR programme was initiated, benefitting the most vulnerable schools according to the human rights MRM database.

During the planning and monitoring stages of this programme, UNESCO sought to collect information regarding the nature of attacks on education and the risks and vulnerabilities as they were perceived and experienced by the communities themselves. Interviews and structured discussions were conducted with education staff, students, and parents at the schools included in the programme. The data collected speaks to the situation in Gaza, helps to clarify why the project was designed as it was, and in some cases provides initial reflections on the c-DRR response. To help readers understand the particular context in Gaza, illustrative extracts from these interviews are included in the text. Also, together with the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, UNESCO conducted a psychosocial assessment of education in Gaza that included recommendations for response, which was used for the inception of this project. This assessment also became an important source of valuable information for the entire education cluster in Palestine.

Some of the main points that come out of the collected information include:

- Several years later, the impacts of the 2008–2009 war remained very present in terms of psychosocial impact and impact on learning. This appears to be compounded in cases where school buildings remain damaged, as children and teachers must carry on despite constant reminders of how their school was destroyed and that their schools were unable to protect them. The situation is particularly dire in Gaza owing to the continuing blockade which largely prevents adequate repair and reconstruction.
- While a few children are experiencing severe trauma from the war and the ongoing military activities, many more have seen their psychosocial well-being compromised which in turn impacts on their learning capacities. Common manifestations included fear of loud noises, non-school attendance after air strikes, cases of children wetting themselves, lack of concentration and restlessness in class.
- Schools located near to government sites are particularly at risk of recurrent attack, which results in an almost permanent state of damage, destruction, and overall fear within the education community.
- In addition to the threats to safety at school, there are the dangers faced en route to and from school, and lack of access owing to very poor road infrastructures in some communities located in rural areas. Dirt roads, flooding, and lack of transportation (or high cost of transportation) all serve to keep children out of school during the winter months, while excessive heat in the summer also exacts a toll.
- The general economic depression of Gaza affects access to education. Schools have reported cases of drop-out as a result of the associated costs of schooling or the need for children to work to support their parents.

The situation described by one school counsellor offers insights into the compounded risks experienced by students in many of the communities the c-DRR worked with. It speaks to the importance of holistic response strategies that take into account the different vulnerabilities that affect children's physical and emotional well-being, as well as the impact that this has on their learning:

> The school is near a border area. We went through many difficulties and the students have a lot of psychological problems and traumas. They went through airstrikes and other forms of Israeli attacks on the school. Most of the students exhibit depression, fear, and nervousness. These conditions require a huge capacity to allow them to vent and to treat them properly. We have 500 students and it is extremely difficult for one person alone to treat 500 students! Also it is hard for the teachers to help the students since they must focus on teaching. I am the only counsellor in the school but there are a lot of cases that need attention. … Most of the students are living in poverty – they can't buy a notebook, they can't even buy a pencil because of the unemployment rate. Ninety per cent of the students' fathers don't work. This affects the students' education. We need some programmes for the students to make them feel like they are children. We need organizations to help out with programmes to allow them to experience their childhoods: we need games to help them play normally.

3. Programme design and implementation

To better ensure validity of response, the UNESCO team used the key rights-based principle of community participation to guide the design and implementation of activities. This required strategies to ensure that community members were actively engaged in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of emergency education and protective responses. It also requires that existing resources, be they human skills or material resources, are identified and where appropriate built upon. UNESCO took these steps as recommended by the INEE *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies* (2010), in terms of the Foundational Standards concerning *Community Participation*: Participation and Resources; *Coordination and Analysis Standards*: Assessment, Response Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation. This was achieved through a variety of mechanisms (see Section 1–5).

1. The establishment of school-based safety committees

The main way in which the c-DRR project seeks to ensure meaningful community participation is through the establishment of school-based safety committees. The safety committees are at the core of the project, and each school was supported in developing a committee to be comprised of staff from the school as well as local community members including parents and people of influence. The committees then identified the priorities, acted as a focal point for the coordination of activities in the school, and supported the partner organizations to ensure that these activities were in line with their specific needs and priorities and would build on locally developed coping mechanisms. They also played a key role in helping to identify existing resources in the community. Last but not least, they were instrumental in the preparation of the school-based contingency plans.

Overall, community participation experiences have varied among schools: while some communities were very responsive in terms of engaging in training and planning, in others there was much less participation. Nevertheless, several cross-cutting lessons were identified. These included the need to raise awareness of the goals of the programme within the community and the need to ensure that implementation allowed for a wide variety of community members to participate in the process (including but not limited to religious leaders, parents, teachers, and other educational staff) (see *Box 1* for an example).

Box 1. Success story: Community participation at Abassan School

In the beginning, Abassan School was having problems finding enough support for the establishment of a safety committee. The school decided to utilize existing community structures to raise awareness about the importance of the project. The head teacher approached the local Imam and explained the activities that were to take place and the need for the community to be engaged. The next day, during Friday prayers, the Imam discussed the project with the community and asked for their support and participation in the forthcoming training sessions (first aid, and safety and evacuation training).

The outreach helped ensure the commitment of the Imam and the wider community. This led to more participation among community members. The school has seen much higher levels of participation, including more proactive participation whereby parents approach the school if there is an issue they want to raise.

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Lessons learned

The safety committees need to be flexible and adaptable to the community. It was found that they should not be limited to teachers and parents of pupils. In recognizing the key role that a school plays in any community, many safety committees included important community leaders and figures such as the local Sheikh or Imam. Adaptability was also reflected in the number of members. These varied but averaged around 15–20. In one school there were 18 members of the safety committee, of whom 7 were school staff and the other 11 were other community members.

Safety committees can be a driver for community participation and activity even beyond the anticipated limits of the c-DRR project. One school used the project as an opportunity to identify and build upon existing capacities in the community. The initial members of the safety committee identified which members of the community already had skills and training in key protection areas and asked them to join the safety committees in order that they pass on this knowledge. As such, the safety committee acted as an identified pool of resources through which information and knowledge could be passed on, thus further expanding its impact and providing members with opportunities for personal development through the implementation.

In some cases, teachers live quite far from the school, thus limiting their participation in extra-curricular activities and presenting an extra challenge. *Schools where this is likely to be a problem should be identified and alternative mechanisms developed* (by holding meetings during lunch breaks instead of after school for example).

A number of head teachers advised that it was crucial to consult with, brief, and include parents on the safety committees. Even if parents initially appeared uninterested in participating, it was felt that keeping an open dialogue was essential so that parents felt comfortable and reassured about the nature of the activities and would allow their children to participate.

By *developing sub-groups within the safety committees*, different roles and responsibilities could be identified for everyone thereby helping to avoid possible negative manifestations of competition.

2. Supporting locally developed coping mechanisms and recognizing existing responses

Related to the need to identify, mobilize, and use community resources in emergency education response (see INEE foundational standard on community participation, Standard 2 on Resources [INEE, 2010]), the planning of the c-DRR programme took into account the *need to recognize existing skills and materials*, and to learn from approaches and mechanisms that were already being employed in vulnerable communities. Indeed, during the research and data collection stage it was found that schools and communities had already been using a variety of self-preservation and protection approaches with regard to ensuring the continuation of educational services. In one school, for example, a teacher recounted how staff had already been managing crises albeit with little training on good practice for such scenarios:

> We don't have a safe evacuation plan, but after the last incident we came up with an escape plan. To calm the students down, during the airstrike we get them to hide under the desks. Evacuations will take place from the wing farthest from the attack down to the first floor, and then the students will be taken out from the farthest exit with the help of parents.

Not all of these coping mechanisms were optimal, yet the team felt that there was much to be learned from existing approaches. In addition, *by building on existing approaches the likelihood of their acceptance within the community is maximized.*

> **Box 2. Local education protection strategies**
>
> Locally developed strategies for protecting schools and children included the following:
>
> - parents calling teachers in the morning to check that the route to school is safe;
> - children only taking pre-agreed routes to and from school, even if this means they travel much greater distances;
> - the MoEHE limiting the number of older students studying in the area because older children are more likely to be shot at or to react to the Israeli presence in the area;
> - not using the highly vulnerable buffer zone schools for the end of year examinations;
> - preventing children from engaging in any activities that draw particular attention to the area (including recreational activities) outside the school.
>
> *Source*: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Overall, the project was designed in such a way as to make the most of existing community resources and to harness the community's ability to protect itself by investing in human resources and development. *By conducting training on practical and tangible ways for saving and sustaining lives during a crisis*, the project supported response and met a clear need in the communities. Another example of the ways in which the programme sought to strengthen the existing response was the inclusion of the text message (SMS) alert system. The team decided on this strategy after learning from a number of schools that during a crisis, the staff would call parents to establish whether the journey could be made to school or not. Communications were often unclear, however, and worried parents would frequently turn up at schools during and following military activity to check that their children were not injured or distressed. Effective communications were also impeded since many of the schools in the programme were difficult to reach, located on dirt roads in out-of-the-way border areas. As one school principal described the situation in their community:

> Access is also a huge problem and we don't have adequate resources to cope. There is only one road to the school and it is a very dangerous road – not only is it a dirt road that gets really muddy during the winter, but it is also right next to the military zone so it is dangerous for students to walk along it. Also, outside help is hard to get because of the location to the school. Waste piles up right in front of school because it is hard for the waste truck to reach us. It is also hard for the ambulances to come to the school – it takes a lot of time and the location is difficult to reach or even describe to people. The location of the school is unknown except to the students and when we want to give directions it is hard because the roads are dirt tracks. During the 2009 attacks, three students were killed during daytime. We have an evacuation plan however, and the parents themselves do not allow kids to come to school when they know there are attacks going on or hear planes. We don't have fire extinguishers. We don't have any emergency exit stairs. Communication with the outside is very hard since this is a rural location. We also have a problem with electricity. We have students from the al Shegaia area and some from the Zaytoon neighbourhood. The students are often late for school because of the roads and lack of adequate access routes. On average, for 15 days of the winter semester we have around 30 per cent of the students absent. During times of heightened threat from the Israelis we have zero attendance.

Thus in spite of their efforts to stay in touch with the school staff, existing physical access issues served to exacerbate the confusion felt by community members after attacks. This was a chief impetus for the inclusion of the text message SMS alert system: to provide timely, accurate information shared between all relevant education stakeholders

(the school staff, the safety committee, students, their parents, MoEHE). Through a partnership with Souktel, the c-DRR therefore included an Arabic interface messaging system to facilitate communications between parents and the school.

In another example of how the activities sought to ensure that the communities and schools were able to strengthen their existing coping strategies, *the safety committees played an important role in defining the material needs that were needed to complement c-DRR efforts*. In addition to alarms, first aid kits, and fire extinguishers, the safety committees alerted UNESCO to the fact that they needed generators to allow schools to continue to operate under the difficult conditions of power cuts and shortages that often occur in Gaza.

3.   Working through, and supporting, existing structures and coordination mechanisms

A number of coordination mechanisms relating to education and humanitarian interventions are in place in Palestine, and this project sought to ensure complementarity with such efforts and in some cases to directly support them. In addition to MoEHE, which played an essential role in the implementation and follow-up for this project, activities were also coordinated with the cluster system and associated cluster working groups as described further on.

Regular meetings between UNESCO and MoEHE staff were held to ensure that everyone had the latest information regarding c-DRR activity implementation. Good cooperation and communications with MoEHE at all levels were essential as the project comprises six separate activities and is thus logistically challenging to organize. UNESCO therefore ensured contact not only with central MoEHE staff but also with the school head teachers. In addition, meetings between school principals, MoEHE staff, and partner organizations were organized which provided the opportunity for all stakeholders to voice concerns and share pertinent information. This has been a valuable experience for many of the schools, which were able to share concerns and raise questions with policy and planning staff. Moreover, regular contact between MoEHE and UNESCO has also allowed for discussion regarding how the philosophy of the c-DRR programme may be better represented at the policy level, thereby supporting the longer-term sustainability of the programme.

Education cluster system

UNESCO works closely with other partners in the education cluster.[4] Information collected through the programme has been shared with the cluster in order to support other activity planning and advocacy.

The c-DRR project also sought to provide more direct support to the Working Group on Grave Violations against Children. Since October 2009, UNESCO has been a regular member of the Palestine working group for the MRM-CAAC. UNESCO has sought to better integrate the MRM into its programmatic responses. During the c-DRR project planning, the need for advocacy and preventive response was underlined and the working group was identified as one of the best sources for systematic data collection and effective advocacy in Palestine. UNESCO was keen to build upon and strengthen this work through the c-DRR project, especially since the issue of increasing awareness of attacks on education has

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4. The education cluster is an open formal forum for coordination and collaboration on education in emergencies. The education cluster brings together NGOs, UN agencies, academics, and other partners under the shared goal of ensuring predictable, well-coordinated, and equitable provision of education for populations affected by humanitarian crises (Global Education Cluster, 2015*a*). Education clusters at the country level are crucial networks that coordinate work on education in emergencies, bringing partners together to ensure priority needs are identified and met. Clusters at the country level are essential for information sharing and knowledge management, advocacy and resource mobilization, and provide technical support to organizations implementing education programmes in extremely challenging contexts (Global Education Cluster, 2015*b*).

been discussed with some prominence at the global level ever since the 2009 Protecting Education from Attack conference in Paris.

The MRM work was therefore integrated into the c-DRR response through the provision of support to training for vulnerable schools in how to report directly into the MRM database. In Palestine this is an effective strategy given the prevailing situation of a protracted crisis which ebbs and flows. While following up on the schools, their reporting showed that:

- During a period of heightened tension and frequent airstrikes in the border areas, all the schools in the restricted access areas completed reports detailing the impact that these conditions had on education. The reports itemized damage caused, the number of hours of lost schooling, and other impacts.
- In addition to the direct support these training sessions have provided to the MRM data collection, feedback from the schools involved thus far demonstrates a much greater understanding of the MRM and human rights mechanisms and processes for individuals who are directly affected.
- The creation of such feedback loops and community participation mechanisms through these awareness-raising activities and the opening of dialogue with individuals who are directly affected by violations should help to enhance the accountability of global human rights monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Lastly, MRM data were the principal data used to inform the selection of schools for Phase II of the c-DRR project.

Other actors

Finally, the project also sought to make linkages with global education structures and networks, including INEE. At all stages of the project, and as reflected in the findings of this report, INEE MS have been used to ensure that global good practice is adhered to. INEE has also been included more directly through the addition of INEE training to strengthen school preparedness and planning, not only through knowledge but also through the practical elaboration of contingency plans at the school level. In addition, cooperation was established with the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) and experiences and lessons learned shared on different components of the c-DRR programme and approach in Palestine, such as on human rights monitoring mechanisms.

Lessons learned

MoEHE support was crucial in ensuring and promoting participation at the school level: once MoEHE was on board participation was prioritized and institutionalized by teachers and head teachers. This validates UNESCO's mandate-driven approach of working on the development of government capacities at the local level.

The ongoing and nascent *work regarding protecting education from attack at the global level provides an additional possibility to present the lessons learned from Gaza* and presents an opportunity to both influence discussions at this level and raise the awareness of (and hopefully accountability for) attacks that are happening in Gaza.

4.   Programmatic flexibility

Operational flexibility has been sought throughout the planning and implementation stages of the c-DRR project. Thus while it was essential to ensure agreed-upon and coordinated training schedules between the four partner organizations that were implementing the Phase I activities, it was equally important to *ensure that organizations were able to respond to unexpected changes as well as to urgent new needs as they arose*. Indeed, a number of such situations have already occurred; some delays were reported as

a result of nearby military activities and electricity cuts which affected the implementation of training, and bad weather also hampered implementation in some cases.

Overall, the c-DRR package has been developed as an integrated protection-education programme that remains flexible enough to adapt not only to different contexts but also to the changing daily circumstances that characterize conflicts and disasters. This approach was also developed in order to promote an inclusive philosophy; notably *by allowing each school community to adapt and apply the standard elements of the programme in a way that best fits its particular needs and context.*

5. The importance of a more holistic understanding of attacks on education

During the planning phase, the team quickly realized that the protection issues facing the education system needed to be understood within the wider community context. This highlighted the relevance of understanding community infrastructure as well as transportation issues for children, both of which tended to exacerbate the risk and impact of attacks. For example, one parent explained the particular risks faced in their children's school owing to the close proximity of the school to a site used by Palestinian militants:

> The school is very close to our house. But there is a militant site right next to the school, so the school is always getting bombed. We don't want a militant site right next to the school: this is very dangerous for the students.
>
> During winter time my child suffers from asthma, so he gets really sick and can't breathe. The roads are dirt roads. We need asphalt streets. The books, clothes … everything gets muddy. I come to the school asking for more books. His father is unemployed, the school provides pencils and school supplies for the children as we can't afford it.
>
> Every time we hear planes, tanks, or bullets, we parents run to the school to pick up our children.
>
> The most important thing is to remove the militant site near the school and to provide adequate roads.

Feedback such as this made it clear that attacks on education needed to consider not only the dangers that were present in the immediate physical infrastructure of schools, but also the wider community context. Accordingly, a chief concern for this community was to use the monitoring of incidents to pressure Palestinian factions to relocate away from the vicinity of the school.

4. Activity-specific feedback

1.   INEE Minimum Standards trainings

Prior to the launch of the c-DRR project and as part of its *Emergency Support to the Education System in Gaza,* UNESCO held 29 INEE MS workshops with 525 participants, and established an INEE advisory committee in Gaza. UNESCO continues to work closely with this committee, including through the technical review of its work, as well as using it to support the practical application of the MS in the schools participating in the c-DRR project. This work also had a regional dimension, in that it supported the development of the INEE Arabic language community through translations and technical edits. UNESCO co-hosted the regional launch of the revised MS in Amman in mid-May 2012, where our activities in Gaza took pride of place.

Training on the INEE MS became an integral part of c-DRR project activities. All the project schools benefited from it and were also requested to develop their own contingency plans afterwards. The University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS) based in Gaza City has designed training manuals and a workbook, which have been instrumental, *inter alia,* for the preparation of the school-based contingency plans. UCAS trainers also made follow-up visits to the project schools in order to help them develop their school contingency plans. *Table 3* below shows the number of INEE MS training sessions that took place in 2011 and the number and type of participants. Education personnel from throughout the system – MoEHE staff, head teachers, teachers, university professors, and university students – took part in the training sessions.

Table 3.   INEE Minimum Standards training sessions

Dates	Implementing partner	No. of courses	Number of Participants					
			MoEHE	Public schools	UNRWA	Universities	NGOs	Total
May–September 2011	University College of Applied Sciences	29	52	446	25	1	1	525

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Lessons learned

School-based contingency plans are a good idea that needs to be followed up on both at the community and at higher levels. UNESCO, MoEHE, and UCAS (or another partner) should regularly review the school-level contingency plans that have been produced to date to determine whether modifications to the format are needed and to help schools improve their plans and make sure that the plans are shared and tested within the school community (including school staff and local community members as needed). Participation in the planning process and sharing the final plans are needed so that all school staff members know their responsibilities in the event of an emergency. In addition, the school safety committees should also be involved in the school-level contingency planning process and in the conduct of regular evacuation drills as a means of further increasing the preparedness and response capabilities of the schools.

Furthermore, UNESCO may be able to support MoEHE in developing a system for monitoring the planning process, since the plans need to be updated on an annual basis

and evacuation drills need to be conducted regularly. This ensures that school staff and children know exactly what to do in an emergency situation.

Efforts to promote the use of the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Palestine need to be continued. In the future, the experiences and lessons learned from INEE MS training in Gaza could be used to inform similar efforts in the West Bank. If Master Trainers from Gaza are granted permission to travel to the West Bank, they could be used to conduct training in the West Bank and share their experiences of the MS training within the education system in Gaza. If additional MS training sessions are conducted with school teachers, it would be useful to review the training content and adapt it to focus more specifically on areas that are the most relevant and practical for them.

2.   Psychosocial support

The intense and protracted nature of the crisis has taken its toll on children's mental well-being. Teachers and parents both recounted the negative impacts this has had and pointed to the importance of activities to address this. For example, one school principal provided the following illustrative anecdote:

> A boy in the 5th grade who is 12 years old has a heart problem. After the war, the counsellor started to pay more attention to him. He had very bad reactions to any sound in the classroom that would result in him crying and panicking during class. He would jump at any given moment, even at the sound of cups touching each other. Even if a balloon would pop he would think it's an airstrike. He was in a constant depression. It took the counsellor two years to help him to overcome his depression. The school didn't have any sports or time for kids to play. We didn't have any first aid kits at all; no bandages, alcohol, and cotton or gauze. We didn't even have the most basic stuff. We did not have any training on how to act during emergencies and where to go during airstrikes, how to escape and information like that.

In response to this, psychosocial approaches were built into the programme design. In developing this component of the c-DRR, the UNESCO team drew upon the research findings and recommendations presented in the assessment of psychosocial impacts of the war and blockade on the education system in Gaza that it commissioned in 2009–2010. This research highlighted how the day-to-day psychosocial distress resulting from the prevailing situation affected learning and teaching capacities. Specifically, the report recommended:

1.   The adoption and better integration of learner-centred methodologies that allow children greater room for expression and promote life skills.

2.   Peer support for teachers and counsellors – to help them implement learner-guided activities.

Activities were implemented through Right to Play's sport and play programmes that seek to improve health, build life skills, and foster peace for children and communities affected by war, poverty, and disease. The appropriateness of this approach has been underscored by the feedback thus far. Head teachers for instance told UNESCO of the value of addressing the day-to-day realities and strains experienced. They also pointed to the relevance of future programme interventions that provide psychosocial support for teachers. They said that it was appropriate that the teachers were considered in such responses, as they were best placed to support students in this regard.

Table 4.   Summary of Right to Play activities

Phase	Red Ball component		Youth As Leader component		Team Up component		Play Days component	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Phase I	8	8	8	6	10	6	2,184	1,025
Phase II	11	6	6	6	14	6	401	152
Phase II plus	0	12	0	0	4	12	0	0
Total	**19**	**26**	**14**	**12**	**28**	**24**	**2,585**	**1,177**

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Lessons learned

Discussions occurred throughout the implementation of this project about whether or not activities should have been separated for boys and girls/men and women. While some stakeholders were supportive of a mixed set-up, others argued that participants would feel more comfortable in a segregated setting. The particular situation of girls in secondary school was brought up in terms of their need for culturally appropriate distractions.

The approach adopted – i.e. learner-centred approaches – encouraged inclusiveness. Specifically, the strong emphasis on teamwork that is promoted by Right to Play activities helped to ensure that all children were able to participate in a comfortable and productive way with the support of their peers.

While the content of the training sessions was appreciated, a key concern remained for a number of head teachers – namely, the lack of safe and sheltered spaces within the community itself where such activities could take place.

One suggestion on appropriate follow-up to these activities was to increase the number of field trips for the schools to help reinforce the training with additional opportunities to practise skills and techniques learned during training.

Box 3.   Success story: School-initiated psychosocial support activities

In late March 2011, the border areas of Gaza were heavily bombed. A number of the schools participating in Phase I of the c-DRR project were affected. As the Right to Play training had been undertaken by this time, a number of the schools were able to immediately mobilize their trained teachers and offer some immediate support for the children.

Two days after the bombings had ended, Kamel Agha School in Khan Younis took the children in Grades 1–9 out of the school for a few hours to provide them with some relief through the games they had learned during the Right to Play training. Feedback from these events was very positive.

Elsewhere, at Khuza'a School, the teachers used Right to Play activities during periods of heightened tensions in order to help calm the children and provide them with alternative activities while they were under stress.

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

3.   Safety and evacuation training

In the aftermath of the 2008–2009 war, it was clear that schools lacked basic safety resources. One first-grade teacher remembered the situation thus:

> During the 2009 war we were inside the school when the attacks occurred, we didn't know where to run to since the entire school was surrounded. We have neither basic medical kits nor fire extinguishers and we don't even have a water supply!

It was imperative therefore to improve school safety equipment, and to ensure school staff knew how to use this equipment. The c-DRR initiated school-based safety trainings for each of the school safety committees. The trainings were designed by the SHPA, which gathered the following information from field visits to affected schools:

- geographical mapping of the areas near the school, to help design appropriate emergency response;
- existing safety and prevention equipment available in schools;
- levels of likely community cooperation;
- previous emergency and disaster experience of schools, and how it was used to inform response;
- means of communication available to the schools and access to emergency services.

Based on this they designed training to cover:

- emergency situations, and how to address them;
- suspicious objects, and how to deal with them;
- fires, and how to fight them;
- the dangers of gas, and ways to avoid and manage a gas leak;
- electricity and its dangers, and how to deal with electrical hazards;
- distribution of the rules for emergency committees and the formation of subcommittees;
- a civil defence plan for the schools.

The need to develop a preventive culture regarding emergencies was stressed throughout the training. This was complemented by a final day of practical exercises on using fire extinguishers and alarm systems and conducting evacuation drills with the students.

In Phase II, the following safety equipment was delivered to the schools: generators, different types of fire extinguishers (gas and powder) depending on the particular school context, manual microphones for use in the event of power outages, an alarm system to alert the school to activate response in the case of danger, and personal kits for trainees containing training material, notepads to record information, pen, brochure to explain the functions of the emergency committee, and phosphorescent uniforms for the emergency committee members.

Reflecting the impact of these trainings on the confidence of education actors to manage the crisis, MoEHE subsequently decided to decentralize the decision on whether to evacuate a school. Whereas the previous decision-making process involved contacting central authorities to gain approval on whether or not to evacuate, which resulted in inefficient and often unsafe delays, the head teachers now make the decision based on their informed assessment of the risks.

Table 5.   Number of people trained in the school safety component

Phase	School personnel	Community members	Male	Female	Total trained	Average number trained/school
Phase I	135	39	122	52	174	14
Phase II	166	21	116	71	187	19
Phase II plus	85	16	36	65	101	14
Total	**386**	**76**	**274**	**188**	**462**	

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Lessons learned

For some of the schools participating in Phase I of the project, *these training sessions were among their highest priorities*. Khuza'a School, for example, said that they had even decided to prioritize these sessions over teaching time as the messages conveyed were of such a fundamental and life-saving nature. In feedback to UNESCO staff, their head teacher stated that if the children did not know how to react in a safe way, then all the other teaching processes were undermined. Indeed, this school has already had to conduct one real evacuation since receiving training when an F-16 of the Israeli Air Force flew low overhead.

A persistent and unresolved issue however is that for some other schools, *evacuation is not necessarily the safest option*. The lack of any guaranteed safe space within the school and wider community means that while training has helped schools to conduct evacuations in a safe and timely manner, the question of where it is safe to evacuate to remains. As one teacher noted:

> We do have evacuation plans, but it's not very helpful as we are surrounded on both sides – on the west, by the resistance, on the east, by Israel – so the only option we have is to stay in the school. So really there is no evacuation plan because the location of the school itself does not allow for a safe evacuation plan. The school must and should have a shelter.

At the same time, in the case of Gaza several incidents suggest that the presence of *a designated refuge area such as a bunker or safe room could negatively draw attention to the school and make it a target*.

The need for safety equipment that is locally procured was paramount in the design of the project. Locally procurable supplies were important for the sustainability and ease of replacement especially given the blockade which means that local market supplies are heavily restricted. Accordingly, UNESCO discussed the importance of institutionalizing minimum school safety requirements with MoEHE, taking into account the feasibility of procuring and replacing goods on the local market.

Based on the initial feedback received from parents and teachers, two additional initiatives were undertaken. SHPA conducted a study to identify safe spaces to evacuate to in the vicinity of the schools, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Gaza mapped all of the schools in this programme. This was intended to allow for a better understanding of schools' vulnerability based on criteria including: the number and condition of access routes to and from school, the proximity of the school to health centres or safe evacuation areas, or proximity to possible military targets. Moreover, in cases where participating schools have been attacked, SHPA has mobilized to take on an assessment role, providing MoEHE and other agencies with key information upon which

to base their response.[5] One important area that SHPA sought to strengthen in Phase II of the c-DRR project was the participation of women in their training activities, which had been male-dominated until then.

4.   First aid training

Physical health and safety are paramount concerns in Gaza. These training sessions were designed to provide participants with core knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to respond to first aid needs of students (and adults) in emergency situations. It was also intended however that the training would support students with pre-existing medical conditions whose access had been compromised. One teacher for example told us:

> We have two girls that suffer from seizures and the ambulances are often late arriving. The girls who are 12 and 14 may be lying there for one hour before the ambulance gets here. The 14-year-old was taken out of school by her parents two months ago because of her seizures and the inability of ambulances to reach her.

The training programme focused on how to perform initial assessments and how to intervene in life-threatening situations until trained health care providers are able to arrive on the scene. The course covered 20 hours of training and there was also a one-hour exam to test the knowledge gained at the end of the course. In Phase II of the c-DRR, this work was extended to the 17 additional schools and first aid kits were distributed to all 29 schools.

Overall feedback from the first aid trainings was very positive. The Red Crescent reported strong interest from participants (evident in high participation rates and retention – 83 per cent of participants attended all five days of the training). Engagement was especially high when it came to doing the practical exercises. The fact that the activities were so hands-on not only meant that members of the school community learned essential life-saving skills, but also left them feeling able to deal with crisis situations. However, a number of practical considerations were highlighted that may need to be taken into account for future implementation.

Table 6.   Teachers trained in basic first aid

Phase	Male	Female	Total	% passing final examination
Phase I	93	27	120	97%
Phase II	50	33	83	95%
Phase II plus	11	37	48	95%
Total	**154**	**97**	**251**	

Lessons learned

Some head teachers suggested it was important to consider a selection process for teachers participating in first-aid training. Schools should be choosing the most competent and receptive teachers to pass on the skills. They also need to be individuals who are able to keep calm and in control of the situation. One school noted that they preferred to focus on training younger teachers as they felt it resulted in more sustainable knowledge sharing and practice.

In the future, it will be necessary to have both male and female trainers, or at least female assistants, to allow female participants to feel more at ease (although it was noted that the sex of the trainer was not to be understood in terms of the quality of training but rather the ease with which participants felt they could actively participate).

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5.   For example in mid-August 2011, Qastina School was damaged during the course of hostilities. Within two days, SHPA had provided child protection and education agencies with a report of the damages and recommendations for response.

Vehicle access to some of the border communities is difficult and it can take a long time for ambulances to reach people. A number of the teachers stressed that while the basic first aid course was very useful they would also appreciate receiving more advanced training to deal with such delays and the inability to access health facilities.

An indication of positive impact of the training was that some of the schools found it so useful that they have already decided to pass on to students the first aid skills learned by the safety committees.

The training also had a positive impact in terms of better information sharing. Specifically, through the training and coordination meetings the Red Crescent – the primary health service provider – was able to visit and discuss with some of the most vulnerable communities in Gaza. During the second stakeholder meeting Red Crescent representatives stressed to the teachers that they were not only responsible for field visits but that these visits were free of charge. Community representatives should therefore be in touch with them in about organizing the visits and discussing specific community needs.

Red Crescent trainers have highlighted the importance of ensuring follow-up mechanisms. In particular, members of the safety committee should be charged with managing the content of the first aid kits in the long term to ensure that they are regularly replenished.

5. Monitoring, documentation, and advocacy

One of the key differences between the c-DRR project and regular disaster risk reduction packages is the inclusion of a human rights reporting and advocacy component. This activity sought to strengthen monitoring and reporting of violations of the right to education in an effort to ensure more effective advocacy to protect education and prevent attacks from happening. As already mentioned, the MRM-CAAC working group have played an important role for this component of the c-DRR project.

In 2005 UN Security Council Resolution 1612 was passed. It requested that the UN Secretary-General establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism to be managed by country-based task forces in order to provide timely and reliable information on six grave children's rights violations:

1. killing or maiming of children,
2. recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups,
3. attacks on schools or hospitals,
4. rape or other sexual violence against children,
5. abduction of children,
6. denial of humanitarian access to children.

The UN Secretary-General is required to list the names of armed forces and armed groups that commit these violations in annual reports on children in armed conflict that are sent to the Security Council. Parties involved are then required to develop and implement action plans within a given period of time to halt these grave violations. At the country level, task forces are established by UNICEF (the co-chair of this mechanism) along with its partners. These task forces collect information on the grave violations and share it with the UN Security Council which then develops appropriate responses.

Although not currently mandated by the Security Council, since 2007 such a group has been operating in Palestine, voluntarily monitoring and reporting on these grave violations as they affect children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Through the c-DRR UNESCO sought to support these data collection efforts by providing timely and verified data from some of the most vulnerable schools in Gaza. Teachers were trained on good reporting standards and practice by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights. Incidents reported were then fed into the mechanism and verified through its triangulation process.

In addition to supporting the MRM-CAAC, this component was intended to provide community members with a better understanding of the international mechanisms that related to their situation and empower them to contribute towards these. This is captured in the reflections of a school principal and a third-grade mathematics teacher who were interviewed during the initial stages of the project's implementation:

> We had no knowledge of … our rights as teachers and the rights of our students, and our role in how to demand those rights. …
> I really thought that we didn't have any rights at all but now I know more about our human rights and international rights and how I can use these tools.

Table 7. Number of teachers and community members trained on the UNSC Resolution 1612 monitoring and reporting mechanism

Phase	# of trainings conducted	Number of teachers and community members trained		
		Male	Female	Total
Phase I	6	75	29	104
Phase II	5	68	25	93
Phase II plus	2	18	29	47
Total	**13**	**161**	**83**	**244**

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

Lessons learned

During the high-intensity bombings in March 2011, all schools were able to submit reports to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (and by association the MRM database had much more comprehensive data). In this instance case training sessions were ongoing which gave field workers the opportunity for a practical exercise through which participants could see the results of their work.

Box 4. Success story: Use of monitoring and reporting training to improve school environment (Shegaia School, East Gaza)

In Shegaia School in the East of Gaza, the reporting techniques that were learned through human rights training helped to promote a safe school environment in an unexpected way. When the school community grew tired of waste that was being dumped on the school site, it compiled a complaint report that was sent to the ministries of education and health to demand an intervention. While this issue was not directly related to armed conflict, it nonetheless impacted on school safety and the protective environment for students and teachers.

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

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6. SMS alert system

UNESCO worked in cooperation with the mobile solutions company Souktel to develop an SMS alert system for use by schools to notify parents in case of an emergency. The system can be activated through an Internet website or through an SMS message sent via mobile telephone. Three people in each project school were trained in how to set up and use the system. In addition to the initial training a UNESCO consultant visited each school to solve problems and assist them with setting up and using the system. Each school was visited at least once, though most schools were visited twice to make sure that the system was working properly (a total of 53 visits were made to the project schools). By 2012, the telephone numbers of 6,767 parents had been entered into the

system and more than 2,200 messages had been sent. Schools are allowed to use the system to send up to 5 administrative messages and 30 emergency messages per year free of charge, while subsequent messages can be paid for by schools and communities. There have been some problems with sending messages by mobile telephone because of users not correctly entering the Souktel codes required to send an SMS message, but these problems have been addressed individually with the schools. The biggest obstacle to using the alert system, however, has been electricity outages and/or lack of fuel to run generators, making it difficult for schools to use computers and the internet which are necessary to set up and maintain records of parents' telephone numbers. Thus far, the SMS alert system has been successfully used already in three cases to evacuate schools in situations of armed conflict.

Lessons learned

Future iterations of the programme should consider further systematizing protocols regarding how and when to use the SMS alert system and message templates. This could be achieved by incorporating guidance on these protocols into the safety trainings provided to the schools.

It was found that *some of the schools in the programme made use of the system to facilitate non-emergency-related communications between parents, students, and staff announcements related to school life.* This alternative use of mobile technologies does not contradict its relevance for emergency programming. Rather, its potential to strengthen the overall school environment and community engagement in education merits further exploration by education practitioners.

Over the course of the programme, *staff turnover within the MoEHE was identified as an impediment to effective monitoring of the SMS system.* It would be important therefore to *train more than one staff member from the same institution on how to use the system.*

Box 5. The SMS system in action

The week 8–14 March 2012 saw another episode of escalation in Gaza. The Israeli military launched an offensive, during which planes conducted 36 air strikes and fired 43 missiles. There were many casualties: 24 people were killed, including a child, a woman, and two elderly men. 79 people were injured, 64 of whom were civilians, including 16 children and 7 women. At least 32 houses, a school, a centre of the Palestine Red Crescent Society, and a workshop were damaged (PCHR, 2012).

In this context the Martyr Hani Na'im Secondary Agricultural School in the North of Gaza was evacuated. On 12 March in the morning, as reported by a teacher, Israeli tanks were near the school and detonations were heard. Very quickly at 10:50 the entire school community was informed of the school evacuation, with the following SMS sent through the system: 'Students were evacuated from the school so they would not suffer the consequences from the current circumstances'. In December 2011 Khuza'a and Al-Qastina schools used the system in similar situations.

Source: UNESCO Ramallah Office.

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5. Additional field-based support suggested by schools

During the course of c-DRR activities, participants highlighted a number of additional areas of support that they feel would enhance the protection of education in their schools. These included:

1. A request for more extended training in some of the schools, in particular in first aid. This request concerned both a more advanced training for teachers and a suggestion that such instruction also be provided to students.

2. One of the head teachers whose school is especially close to the border raised the problem of transportation to and from the area. She said that one of the most helpful additions to the project to keep the children safe would be the provision of school transportation. This would also allow the transporting of injured children in cases where the ambulances could not access the area. Transportation was in fact an issue that came up many times in the interviews conducted with parents and teachers and remained largely unaddressed in the c-DRR design. Future projects could consider addressing this need.

3. Another problem is schools that are located close to Palestinian military/security-related sites and are thus frequently damaged when these sites are attacked. Although the responsibility in such cases lies with the attacking party to prove military necessity and ensure proportionality of the attack, the schools feel that they would be much safer from the outset if there were an established safe perimeter around them.

4. There is a need for safe play areas in or near the schools, where children can engage in recreational activities that nurture their psychosocial well-being. It was felt that these spaces would be best located within schools themselves as the surrounding communities had few safe spaces for children to play. It was noted that some enclosed spaces might be needed as well for older girls so that they would not feel uncomfortable being seen participating in activities.

5. Many of the schools were also keen to institutionalize and sustain some of the protection activities and approaches that they had learned. One suggestion was to include safety training and related activities in the annual school development plans in order to facilitate their continuation and support from MoEHE.

6. In a visit to the Qastina School just two days after it was damaged, SHPA recommended that schools would benefit from having greater visibility through the use of demarcation, flags, or an identifiable symbol.

7. With regard to the psychosocial support provided, several teachers recommended that this support be extended to parents who should be encouraged to communicate, cooperate, and undertake more structured play activities with their children.

In addition, participants have highlighted four lessons learned:

1. There is a need to increase awareness of the importance of ensuring that girls and women take part in these activities.

2. The impact of the training depended significantly on the participation of the school. The more proactive schools were, the more they were able to benefit from and shape the training to meet their particular contextual requirements.

3. Practical components of the instruction were well received and it is recommended that significant practical elements always be included in other such programmes.

4. Overall, the impact of the training was greatly increased by using real examples from Gaza as opposed to generic case studies. This not only helped participants to see the relevance of reporting and data collection relative to their situation, but also had an empowering impact as it gave them a direct means of telling agencies with which they otherwise had little contact about the events impacting their lives and what they were experiencing.

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The paper

From 2009 to 2012, UNESCO operated a crisis–disaster risk reduction programme to protect education from attack in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. Programme activities included establishing school safety committees; psychosocial support; an SMS alert system; human rights monitoring and reporting of violations of the right to education; and training on the INEE Minimum Standards, on safety and evacuation, and on first aid. The programme supported local protection strategies and worked closely with existing response structures such as those of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the education cluster.

This study provides a detailed description of programme activities, identifies lessons learned and includes up-to-date reflections following the devastation of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. It is proposed as a resource for education stakeholders in other countries where education requires protection from insecurity and armed conflict.

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