

Bridging the divide

As the West Bank and Gaza remain separated by the ongoing Israeli blockade and occupation, technology and new media are helping local and international NGOs to bridge developmental divides. With little freedom of movement, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have few opportunities to come together to share practical knowledge.

Beyond the familial and social ties that are broken due to the lack of freedom of movement between Gaza and the West Bank, Oxfam partner Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) says that a learning gap is also developing.

To help keep people on the same learning curve despite the physical

divide, Oxfam Italy and local partner UAWC have been using video conferencing technology over the past year to connect farmers in Gaza to farmers and agricultural experts in the West Bank for knowledge sharing and expertise.

“We are about to host new teleconferenced training sessions for small dairy producers to familiarise them with marketing and selling their products,” said Tariq Al Qattaa from Oxfam Italy in Gaza. “There is a lack of experts on dairy production and marketing in Gaza – the West Bank is more advanced in cheese production and is much more exposed to the market, unlike the domestic production in Gaza. This method of connecting people across the two divided territories is a great success, although of course nothing can replace people’s freedom of movement.”

The Emergency Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (EWASH) advocacy task force – a coalition of 30 agencies including Oxfam – helped organise a similar connection through video conferencing that brought youth in Gaza and the West Bank together to collaborate on advocacy actions for equal rights to water in the occupied Palestinian territory. The young people engaged in the project will continue to work together via teleconferencing and social media sites to raise awareness of and find solutions to water and sanitation issues in the OPT.

“The youth in both Gaza and the West Bank were so excited because it was the first time for them to meet their peers on the other side,” EWASH advocacy officer Ghada Snunu said. “The blockade has kept them apart for so long, and this was a good start. It’s not an alternative to Palestinians’ right to free movement inside their own country, but at least it’s a first step that is promising further joint activities, networking and follow-up.”

Text and picture: Karl Schembri/Oxfam



Oxfam Great Britain staff in Gaza hold regular teleconferencing sessions with staff in Jerusalem.

1. Headlines

- **Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions:** There were reports this week of 1 home made rocket (HMR), 43 mortars, and 1 anti-tank missile fired by Palestinian armed groups towards Israel or Israeli forces this week, as compared to 4 homemade rockets (HMR) and 1 Qassam rocket fired by Palestinian armed groups the week before.

There were reports of 12 airstrikes, 5 incursions, and 44 shells fired by Israeli forces this week. 1 of the airstrikes and 1 of the shellings reportedly directly targeted a Hamas training site and a Hamas National Security Forces site, resulting in the death of 2 Hamas officers and injury to 4 others. Last week, there was a report of 1 incursion by Israeli forces.

In addition to the casualties and injuries sustained as a result of the above-mentioned airstrike and shelling that reportedly targeted Hamas, there were reports of 2 other Palestinians killed and 1 injured as a result of Israeli military operations this week. There were also reports of 3 Israeli soldiers injured as a result of fire from Palestinian armed groups this week. No injuries or casualties of any kind were reported on the Palestinian or Israeli side the week before.

- **Fishermen:** There were 6 reports of Israeli naval vessels firing at Palestinian fishermen this week, with 1 fisherman reportedly injured. Last week, there was 1 report of an Israeli naval vessel firing at Palestinian fisherman, with no injuries reported. Since January 2009, Israeli naval forces have restricted the access of Palestinian fishing boats to three nautical miles from the coast; in practice, access is sometimes restricted to as little as one nautical mile, banning access to around 85% of Gaza's fishing water.
- **Tunnel related fatalities:** There was 1 report of a gas canister exploding in a tunnel beneath the border between Gaza and Egypt, resulting in the death of 2 Palestinian workers and injury to 4 other workers. Last week, there were reports that 3 Palestinian workers died in the tunnels beneath the border between Gaza and Egypt, 1 as a result of a tunnel collapse, 1 from a fall, and 1 from a heart attack reportedly caused by electric shock.
- **Palestinians in the access restricted area (the so-called "buffer zone"):** There were 2 reports this week of Israeli troops firing at Palestinians in the access restricted area this week, 1 of which resulted in the death of 2 teenage boys, both 8th grade students at UNRWA Nuseirat Prep C Boys School near Johr Ad-dik. Israeli authorities claim they are investigating the incidents that led to Israeli troops opening fire on the boys. Israeli aircrafts also reportedly dropped leaflets over the northern and central areas of Gaza this week, warning Palestinians to stay out of the access restricted area. There was 1 report of Israeli troops firing at Palestinians in the access restricted area inside Gaza's perimeter last week, with no injuries or casualties reported.

In 2010, 52 Palestinians were reported killed and 189 others were reported injured by Israeli troops while in the so-called "buffer zone." Israel first imposed a 150 metre-wide security 'buffer' within Gaza's perimeter in 2000. In certain areas along the northern and eastern perimeters, this official buffer extends up to 500 metres into Gaza. In practice, Israel restricts access to agricultural land up to 1,000-1,500 metres from the fence, which accounts for more than 30% of Gaza's agricultural land and a significant number of water wells. Most of the Gaza Strip's animal production is also concentrated in this area.

Oxfam partner Defence for Children International- Palestine (DCI) has reported this week that between March 2010 and February 2011 there have been 27 cases of children shot while collecting rubble and scrap metal in the so-called "buffer zone." DCI- Palestine has since launched an urgent appeal to stop targeting unarmed children working in the access restricted area.

- **Rafah border crossing:** Rafah border crossing was officially open 5 out of 7 days this week. During this week, there were reports of 604 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 1,255 leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 153 denied entry to Egypt. Last week, there were reports of 375 Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt, 1,013 leaving Gaza for Egypt, and 146 who were denied entry into Egypt.

Rafah border crossing remains the primary gateway to the outside world for the majority of Palestinians in Gaza, most of whom are not allowed to use Erez border crossing. While Erez border crossing remains open, very few Palestinians from Gaza are permitted to cross from Erez into Israel for medical treatment or emergencies. While Rafah was closed last month during the situation in Egypt, an estimated 500 people who use the crossing every month to reach scheduled or ongoing medical treatment abroad were unable to travel to reach the treatment they needed.

- **Power plant and electricity supply:** Israeli shells reportedly struck main electrical lines this week. According to news reports, areas to the east of Gaza City and in the north of Gaza were experiencing longer than average power cuts, with some neighbourhoods going without electrical service at all. A spokesman from Gaza's Electrical Company reported that the company lost between 12 and 50 Mw of power as a result of the shelling.

Since January 5th, Gaza's power plant has not placed an order for industrial fuel to be transferred from Israel. The fuel for Gaza's power plant is now being supplied through the tunnels underneath the Gaza-Egypt border in the form of Egyptian diesel, which has a much lower price than the industrial fuel supplied from Israel.

OCHA estimates that the power plant is buying between 300,000 and 400,000 litres of diesel from the tunnels every day. In addition to what is procured daily from the tunnels, the power plant in Gaza reportedly has a two-week back up supply of fuel, capable of running the plant at an output of 60 Mw.

- **Cooking gas:** 1,037 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza this week via Kerem Shalom crossing. This figure represents 59 percent of the 1,750 tons of cooking gas needed weekly. No cooking gas entered Gaza last week as Kerem Shalom crossing was closed due to a one-week strike by Palestinian truckers on the Gaza side. The strike last week was held to protest the permanent closure of Karni crossing by Israeli authorities. The overall cooking gas shortage has been a main concern for humanitarian agencies since November 2009. Shortages of cooking gas are hardest felt in the winter, when families rely on canisters of cooking gas to fuel space heaters during nightly electricity cuts. Cooking gas cannot safely be transported through the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border as it is highly combustible and requires a special pipeline to transport in bulk. The one tunnel equipped with a cooking gas pipeline was reportedly destroyed in an Israeli airstrike in December 2010.
- **Diesel/petrol:** No diesel or benzine was reported to have been delivered to the private sector this week or last week. A near total ban on fuel imports for public sale was put in place by the Government of Israel in October 2008. Around 600,000 litres of diesel and 200,000 litres of petrol for public sale are reported to enter Gaza every day through tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border (OCHA, January 2011).
- **Exports:** 9 truckloads of exports, including 8 truckloads of flowers and 1 truckload of cherry tomatoes, were reported to have left Gaza this week. This represents .018 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average of all exports leaving Gaza.* No exports left Gaza last week, as Kerem Shalom remained closed for the import and export of all goods due to a strike held by Palestinian truckers protesting the permanent closure of Karni crossing by Israeli Authorities. The limited exports leaving Gaza are allowed as a result of an agreement between Israel and the Netherlands allowing limited exports of flowers and strawberries. The agreement resumed on 28 November 2010.

This update is compiled by **Oxfam International** from the best available information drawn from reliable international sources. Some of the information is preliminary and may be updated in subsequent reports.

**Pre-blockade weekly average (490 truckloads) is calculated on the daily average of all truckloads that exited Gaza between January 2005 and mid June 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

- **Truckloads of supplies:** 1,140 truckloads of supplies entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing this week, representing 40 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average.**No truckloads of supplies were reported to have entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom crossing last week due to a strike from Palestinian truckers protesting the permanent closure last week of Karni crossing by the Israeli authorities. Citing security concerns, Israeli authorities have ceased all export and import operations at Karni crossing, forcing the transfer of all goods through Kerem Shalom, Gaza's sole remaining open crossing point. While Karni crossing was equipped to handle 1,000 trucks per day, the Kerem Shalom crossing can only accommodate up to 250 trucks per day. UNRWA has referred to the Kerem Shalom crossing, located in the deep south of Gaza, as an inefficient bottleneck that adds 20 percent in transport and labor costs to the price of humanitarian goods. Kerem Shalom crossing is also not equipped to handle the bulk transfer of large quantities of wheat and animal feed, while Karni is. For the second week in a row, Israeli authorities opened Sufa crossing point to accommodate the bulk transfer of aggregates (gravel) for an UNRWA project. This week, 19,473 MT of aggregates entered Gaza through the Sufa crossing point, as compared to 4,000 MT that entered Gaza via Sufa the week before. The opening of Sufa crossing marks the first time since 2008 that Sufa crossing has been opened. While imports remain limited, and raw materials severely restricted, exports remain banned almost entirely except for limited truckloads of strawberries and carnations exported to the Netherlands. As a result, the scale of economic activity remains heavily dependent on local demand in Gaza, which in turn is constrained by the low purchasing power of the population and the relatively small size of the local market. Until crossings are fully opened for export, the impact of the easing of the blockade on unemployment, poverty and food insecurity rates remains limited.

***Pre-blockade weekly average (2,807 truckloads) is calculated based on the monthly average of all truckloads that entered during the first five months of 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

2. Humanitarian trucks (week):

Truck originator	Total for week 13 March – 19 March
UNRWA	124
ANERA	6
WFP	24
ICRC	2
Islamic Relief	1
Gaza Institutions	15
Electric company	3
Commercial	965
Sofa Crossing (aggregates)	19,473 MT
Total trucks for the week	1,140
Percentage of pre blockade average (first 5 months of 2007)	40 %

3. Fuel deliveries (week)

		Diesel	Petrol	Cooking Gas
13 March – 19 March		0	0	1,037
	Percentage of need *	0		59 %
Previous week		0	0	0

* Fuel association 2006 estimates - ** Imports of diesel and petrol for the general public and public sector in Gaza were exceptionally authorized on 6 occasions since October 2008

Request* of Industrial Fuel to the Power Plant via Israel (week):

Industrial diesel from Israel	Previous week	13 March- 19 March
0	0	0
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply capacity of 80 MW		0%

Estimates of fuel supplied to the power plant from the tunnels

Diesel from the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border	Previous week	13 March- 19 March
	2.1- 2.8 million litres**	2.1- 2.8 million litres**
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply of 80 MW	60-80%	60-80%

*The power plant has not requested any industrial fuel to be transferred from Israel since January 5, 2010

**based on OCHA estimates of 300,000- 400,000 litres of diesel per day

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