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PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)

## **Policy Brief**

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# **The Governance of Aid to Palestine After the War on Gaza**

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) regularly publishes applied and scientific studies, in addition to brief research papers, as part of an annual series of roundtable sessions on important economic topics of interest to the public and decision-makers. The policy briefs outline the key recommendations of selected scholastic activities, in order to disseminate this information and maximize the benefits derived from this series of sessions.

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## **The Governance of Aid to Palestine After the War on Gaza**

This Policy Brief benefited from the research contributions of Ms. Nora El Zokm, Founding Director of DARNA Research.

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## 1. Background: Aid - from Relief to Recovery to Reconstruction

The ongoing devastation in the Gaza Strip since October 7 has led to a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale. The humanitarian needs, already dire, will be beyond comprehension the day the war ends. Food aid will be essential for the entire population, especially to address child malnutrition and immediate access to clean water and sanitation. Immediately, the displaced population of up to 1.7 million will need decent transitional shelter, and the wounded will require makeshift medical facilities and specialized care, with lifelong support for those left disabled. Mass trauma will necessitate long-term specialist programs. In the near term, innovative solutions must be devised for Gaza's 625,000 school-aged children and over 90,000 university students. Financial support, including cash-for-work programs and universal basic income, will be crucial to protect against abject poverty and prepare for recovery. These urgent relief measures must be addressed before recovery or reconstruction can begin in earnest.

Delivering aid to Palestine, specifically to Gaza, in this prolonged crisis, has revealed a quagmire of ethical, bureaucratic, and operational failures. The international humanitarian system largely circumvents Palestinian leadership due to political fragmentation, yet it remains willing to submit to Israel's never-ending and often arbitrary conditions for delivering aid. This was most evident in the access granted to small, unknown organizations like the World Central Kitchen, which partnered with Israeli entities, while other established local aid providers, such as UNRWA, were barred. The ethical failure was also evident when donor countries provided exponentially more expensive, less effective, and at times, deadly, airdrops rather than challenge Israel's closure of land borders on humanitarian grounds. Finally, the US government's ill-fated \$230 million Gaza pier and maritime corridor, ostensibly for the delivery of humanitarian aid, served as a distraction from USA partisanship towards Israel, based on a failed concept of intervention by military contractors, non-humanitarian personnel, and new aid actors.

The time has come for a shift in the governance of aid to Palestine, allowing Palestinians to be the architects of their own recovery and development. This is not merely a demand for inclusion; it is a call for justice and an insistence on adherence to internationally recognized principles of effective and responsible aid delivery. It is about recognizing that those who endure hardships are best positioned to understand and address them. It is about ensuring that aid is not a means of imposing external priorities but a mechanism that genuinely empowers Palestinians to pursue their own aspirations for peace, stability, and prosperity.

Palestinian ownership of aid governance implies Palestinian stewardship of the design and implementation of aid initiatives. It means taking the lead from those who understand the local landscape; who can see beyond immediate relief to long-term resilience; and committed to empowering their communities. It means that the design and coordination of aid do not happen in distant offices and boardrooms, but are lived and led by those on the ground.

These principles are not idealized notions; rather, they are the fundamental principles of effective aid delivery articulated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) framework, which emphasizes the importance of local ownership by the beneficiary country,

alignment with its national priorities, and true partnership between the beneficiary and donor country. These principles advocate for developing countries to establish their own development strategies, and for donors to support and align with those strategies. Other approaches and principles, such as the Triple Nexus Approach, similarly recognize the importance of this integration as well as the interconnectedness of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.

## **2. Challenges – Political and Institutional Fragmentation**

Reclaiming Palestinian ownership of aid is no simple matter. It will require transparent, accountable governance structures that inspire trust among the Palestinian people and confidence among international partners despite an ongoing belligerent military occupation and national political fragmentation. Despite nine months of a brutal Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Palestinian factions have not achieved the long-promised reconciliation and political unity. This will remain an essential task that the Palestinian people must achieve if they are to deal with an aggressive occupier and an increasingly interventionist aid/donor community and emerge from this ordeal stronger, and able to take charge of their fate.

Palestinian community and civil society organizations will need to coordinate and implement efforts despite Israel's control over borders, the movement of goods and people, and the targeting of civil society. This sector can play an essential role in the early stages of recovery as service providers, sectoral specialists, and non-partisan humanitarians. Additionally, the economic constraints, marked by a crippled Palestinian economy with high unemployment rates and widespread poverty, will be a serious barrier to collective recovery and development efforts.

Unfortunately, the collective ethos of the donor community also presents no less problematic challenges. To support this shift in aid governance, international donors must move from a mindset of control and political partisanship to one of universal humanitarianism and partnership, and from directing aid efforts to facilitating them. This transition demands humility and a commitment to upholding the dignity and agency of the Palestinian people, and an explicit commitment to achieving their national rights, not to prolonging Israeli occupation.

Furthermore, the international political agendas embedded in the humanitarian sector also pose a threat to Palestinian governance of aid. The international community must be willing to acknowledge and address the structural challenges facing Palestinian aid and development. This includes taking accountability measures to leverage international humanitarian law and norms when Israel prevents aid delivery or destroys civilian infrastructure.

## 3. Policy Recommendations

### Palestinian Governance and Stakeholders

#### 1. Develop a 2024-2025 National Aid and Recovery Strategy

- Formulate a comprehensive national aid strategy that outlines clear priorities, goals, and mechanisms for aid utilization. This strategy should be regularly updated to reflect changing needs and conditions and should be communicated clearly to all stakeholders.

#### 2. Enhance Local Ownership and Participation

- Promote deeper involvement of local communities and stakeholders in the planning and implementation of aid projects. This can be achieved through regular consultations, participatory planning processes, and community-based monitoring systems.

#### 3. Strengthen Capacity Building

- Invest in building the capacity of local institutions and personnel to manage and implement aid projects effectively. This includes training in project management, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation.

#### 4. Ensure Accountability and Transparency

- Implement robust accountability mechanisms to monitor the use of aid funds and ensure they are used effectively and ethically. Regular audits, public reporting, and independent evaluations should be conducted to maintain transparency and build trust among stakeholders.

### The International Community

#### 1. Strengthen Donor Aid Coordination Bodies

- Redirect the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) to better coordinate amongst themselves areas/sectors of targeted support to strengthen Palestinian institutions so they can manage and implement aid flows independently and efficiently.
- Enhance the effectiveness of the Local Aid Coordination Secretariat (LACS) by promoting integrated planning approaches that combine humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts. The Secretariat should work on ways to decentralize decision-making processes so that aid distribution reflects on-the-ground realities and is more responsive to immediate needs.
- Maximize the impact of the Sector Working Groups (SWGs) by fostering cross-sector collaboration to address interconnected challenges and leverage synergies between different areas of intervention.

#### 2. Support Local Leadership

- Commit to supporting Palestinian leadership in the design and implementation of aid programs. This includes respecting local priorities, engaging in meaningful consultations, and insisting that aid initiatives are led by Palestinian institutions and expertise.

### **3. Align Aid with Palestinian Development Strategies**

- Ensure that all Relief and Recovery programs are aligned with the Palestinian national development strategy and the priorities identified by the Palestinian leadership. This alignment should be a condition for funding and should guide the design and implementation of all projects.

### **4. Simplify Aid Procedures and Reduce Bureaucracy**

- Streamline administrative processes to reduce the burden on local partners. Simplify the application, reporting, and approval process.
- Refrain from imposing new political conditionalities in the guise of “security” on aid to Palestinian NGOs, local government, and other vital institutions.

### **5. Promote Long-term, Sustainable Humanitarian and Development Solutions**

- Shift the focus from short-term emergency relief as soon as basic living conditions improve to long-term development projects that address the root causes of poverty, instability, and underdevelopment.
- Leverage international humanitarian law and norms when Israel prevents aid delivery and establish a separate commission to document the cost of occupation, laying the groundwork for plausible future demands for reparations.

### **6. Enhance Coordination and Cooperation**

- Support and work with existing forums in more than a tokenistic manner.
- Strengthen the role of UNOCHA and the Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) in order to achieve stronger UN interagency coordination and leadership. OCHA should provide comprehensive data and analysis to inform decision-making while the RCO should work to develop stronger partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and community organizations.

