Consolidated Lessons Learned
Gaza Risk Reduction and Mitigation (GRRAM)
Catholic Relief Services/Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza

This document presents the consolidated lessons learned from the GRRAM project developed by CRS in Gaza. These lessons learned are a compilation of: lessons learned noted by the CRS JWBG throughout implementation; lessons learned as presented in the evaluation document of the GRRAM project; lessons learned produced by CRS JWBG following project close-out and post evaluation.

The lessons learned are organized in lessons applicable to general approach, planning and start-up, implementation, and lessons specific to Gaza.

1. General approach

- An approach where risk in a wider sense is examined and addressed (as opposed to only addressing specific hazards) is very relevant from a community point of view and can result in a high level of buy-in of the community.
- Working on the risk reduction can bring significant by-products that go beyond reducing risk. In the GRRAM project, women empowerment was one of these important results.
- The urban lifestyle in Gaza marked by limited availability due to family commitments influence possibilities of planned activities and attitudes of participants toward projects.
- The GRRAM approach was characterized by close engagement of community, small-scale community-led interventions, and community capacity building while using a flexible approach throughout the project. This approach, developed within the context of the presence of non-state actors, can be relevant in the following conditions:
  a. Where the approach is used to create credibility and rapport. However, the risk of alienating authorities with this approach also needs to be considered.
  b. Where activities involve elements that can be managed at community level, and that are largely independent on outside elements; examples would be traffic safety or capacity on first aid
  c. In latent conflict areas where the governing authorities have collapsed and where access to services are not yet obstructed.
  d. Where the context is very dynamic and changes are fundamental and rapid, and where it is not possible to work on services in a longer-term approach with stable external partners.
- Involvement of (officially or unofficially recognized) authorities where they exist and actively provide services to communities is important to maximize impact, and gain some level of sustainability. This is especially true in urban areas, assuming that involving these authorities don't pose a threat to communities. Where engaging the authorities is not a risk to communities but not permissible on the part of humanitarian organizations due to their de-facto status, such as the case in Gaza, the communities themselves should be encouraged to identify linkages/means of advocating for necessary support.
- Communities should be encouraged to seek linkages with local and national governmental and non-governmental actors and share their risk reduction/community development plans so that they become credible agents for bringing significant

change to their situation. Once an initial commitment is secured, it then becomes easier to mobilize additional resources.

- The intervention needs to address priority needs of the community/stakeholders. If risks are not covered in these priorities, then the activities developed and their outcomes should at least be made resilient to risk events.
- Community-based interventions focusing on the priorities of target groups can have a higher level of buy-in.
- Projects need to be developed in a flexible and responsive way to be able to adapt to the uniqueness of each community, priorities and changes that occur in the community and context.

2. Planning and start-up

- Input from local stakeholders is essential for mobilization of activities that need broader participation.
- Frequent follow up during the information gathering and sharing stages is necessary.
- Key influencers in communities often have different priorities than more vulnerable community members. The second group tends to focus more on day-to-day risks while the first group looks more at less frequent, larger impact hazards. Persons conducting assessments and analysis need to be aware of these differences in perception and priorities.
- There were other needs which emerged in different sectors within the community. In urban areas, in general, these may not be obvious. In the Gaza communities, the unemployed youth with university degrees were mentioned as a specific group that needed attention. It is important to understand and consider the needs of different groups within a community.
- Even though communities may not identify specific risks as important; existing risks such as natural disasters still need to be considered in programming. Raising the awareness on these risks within the community may be necessary.
- It is important to correctly determine the target group (i.e. who is directly involved in the project) and impact group (i.e. who benefits from the outcomes of the project). In GRRAM, they were largely the same, but it might have been better to split the two, given that the capacity and authority of the target group in the community was limited. The project could also probably have benefited from adding other target groups to the existing one (e.g. key community stakeholders).
- When funds are available to develop small community-led interventions, participants will tend to adapt their planned projects according to the available budget. This implies that priorities may not be addressed adequately due to financing limitations.
- When working with partners who have a different approach to programming, hierarchy, monitoring, and different administrative processes, enough time and resources must be attributed to streamlining the approaches of the different partners; this may involve making concessions to policy and 'normal' procedures.

3. Implementation

- Community mobilization meetings have to be held prior to project launch to ensure buy-in and understanding from participants.
- As literacy and education levels in vulnerable urban settings often vary widely, materials used for mobilization have to be adapted to the differences in level of participants. There is great diversity in urban communities with regard to education level, experience, background, time availability, attitude and affiliation and this diversity will have to be

considered in the roll-out of activities, in the content and depth of educational material, in the planning of activities, and in the composition of groups.

- Management of community expectations through clear communication is important for project ownership and community-led development.

4. Elements specific to Gaza

- Participants from more conservative families may not be allowed to leave the house or the community. This limitation has to be considered in the implementation of the project.
- Despite the presence of a de facto government, the vulnerability of peripheral communities was reinforced due to inadequate or absent municipal services.
- While larger risks of natural and man-made hazards may be considered important, the communities in Gaza identified unemployment and poverty as their priority concerns. Lack of capital and effective safety nets are a large issue in Gaza, and as long as unemployment and poverty are not addressed, households remain vulnerable.
- An important by-product of the GRRAM project was women empowerment. This will have to be built upon and strengthened further. Considering the context, this should be done indirectly to avoid alienating husbands and the community.
- The GRRAM project worked specifically with women. To increase buy-in and impact of projects, efforts should be made to engage both men and community stakeholders in follow-up projects as the buy-in of these groups is also crucial to the success of the follow-on project.