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Multidimensional poverty in the aftermath of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and the challenges of relief and social recovery

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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Multidimensional Poverty in the Aftermath of the Israeli War on the Gaza Strip and the Challenges of Relief and Social Recovery

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1. Background

The discourse on multidimensional poverty (MDP), its indicators, measures, and alleviation, from a policy perspective for post-aggression relief and recovery, may be trivial in light of the vast destruction. However, initiating this discussion is critical to laying the groundwork for the lengthy processes involved in early-stages relief and later MDP alleviation.

An analysis on the expected socioeconomic impacts of the aggression on the Gaza Strip has found that deprivation in all Multidimensional Poverty (MDP) indicators has substantially increased.¹ As this analysis covers only the first year of aggression, deprivation rates have likely increased since then. All indicators of MDP were impacted by the physical destruction, including destruction to water pipes, electricity networks, and most importantly housing units, schools and universities, health centers, and private sector establishments that provide employment. Displacement also constitutes a starting point for various forms of deprivation including frequent access to water and electricity, health in relation to increased likelihood of spread of contagious disease.

Current efforts between national and international organizations are ongoing to develop appropriate frameworks to measure MDP to ensure targeted support in the aftermath of the aggression, but are still in the early stages.² During the first phase of the ceasefire in January, some intervention efforts began, but the scale of destruction has led to widespread deprivation, demanding extensive, coordinated, and sustained responses. This policy brief therefore outlines the key policy challenges associated with addressing MDP in post-aggression contexts and offers targeted reflections and recommendations to inform policy responses.

2. Key Challenges

Key to this topic is the fact the aggression has produced a reality in which previous concepts, definitions, and measurements are rendered insufficient to capture the current realities of deprivation, such as monetary poverty being measured by income level, when nearly all the population in the Strip are unemployment with no constant income, or health being measured by accessibility within a 5 km radius of a clinic or hospital when at least 94% of all hospitals have been damaged or destroyed. Despite already initiating efforts to reformulate the framework that measures MDP to ensure enhanced targeting, multidimensional poverty requires vast surveying efforts, not only in terms of geographical coverage and sample size, but also in terms of measured indicators, which can be measured through up to 300 questions. The process to reconceptualize the MDP framework and its measurement requires extensive multi-lateral efforts, on the national and international level, to capture the new realities of deprivation.

Despite some coordination during the first phase of the (now broken) ceasefire under the Governmental Emergency Operations Room, the formal social protection and relief network remains largely unorganized in terms of strategy and implementation,³ and thus can be inefficient

1. UNDP and ESCWA. (October 2024). Gaza war: Expected socioeconomic impacts on the State of Palestine.

2. As stated by Minister of Social Development, Dr. Samah Hamad, during the round table session, 09 July 2025.

3. As stated in the discussions of the round table session, 09 July 2025.

in maximizing efforts, expertise, and resources. To provide targeted relief that responds to the different degrees of deprivation after the aggression, the absence of a unified database on the basis of national and international collaboration is a key challenge. A major critic of the National Social Registry prior to the aggression, posing a key challenge for post-aggression relief, was that it had not expanded past the MoSD's database, leading to problems of exclusivity. While the Registry was updated prior to the aggression to ensure better targeting of beneficiaries,⁴ it will need serious reformation to capture the new reality of the mass deprivation levels of all the Gazan population and intervene accordingly.

Such large-scale efforts, given the scale of deprivation, will however be hindered by the substantially required funding to match this level of deprivation. A constant issue in the Palestinian context in the past few years has been the decrease in international funding dedicated to Palestine, as well as the accumulative financial crisis the PA has been grappling with for the past few years, which will likely impact the PA's role in wide-scale relief-provisions in the Gaza Strip and leading said efforts, leaving most of this effort to international organization. National institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Development, have been providing relief of certain deprivation, particularly during the first stage of the ceasefire this year, yet governmental resources remain insufficient for the scale of deprivation.⁵

the key challenge that can hinder any interventions to alleviate MDP and the efforts of relief of deprivation and later recovery are still subject to the context of Israeli impunity and declared attempts to weaponize various human rights. Meaning, such efforts could render ineffective if the contextual factors, such as undermining Palestinian development the Israel-imposed siege and constant aggression, are ignored. This is a historical turning point in which all previous arrangement that ensure Israel remains in control of people's wellbeing, and weaponizes it for colonial purposes, must be challenged to provide urgent relief and lay the groundwork for a recovery and reconstruction that is by nature protective from deprivation.

3. Policy Implications

These conclusions are a product of the key findings of the background paper and the topic's challenges, as well as derived from the discussions from relevant stakeholders that attended the roundtable session. Each of the policy sub-sections reflects recommendations on each of the three key challenges presented in the background paper.

3.1 Measuring MDP amidst Demographic Shifts

- Expedite the revision of the MDP framework and indicators to enable prompt survey implementation post-aggression. This includes the immediate establishment of working groups of national and international expertise to drive the re-conceptualization and formulation of the MPI, ensuring all theoretical and technical components are ready for implementation once the aggression ends. This ensures that this process is not delayed by bureaucratic process after the aggression.

4. As stated by Samira Hillis, World Bank, during the round table session, 09 July 2025; <https://www.mosd.gov.ps/en/page/about-social#>

5. According to Minister of Social Development, Dr. Samah Hamad, during the round table session.

- Conduct large surveying efforts to complement the Social Registry, specifically capture people's emergent priorities regarding deprivation in the immediate post-aggression relief period. This ensures tailored interventions are provided based on people's immediate, most urgent needs.
- Invest in the reforming and establishing updated, more targeted, MDP data systems that provide more detailed aggregates for households, such as the sex of heads of household, specific types of disabilities of household members, or separated children, to customizing support that responds to household needs. And additionally ensure that the Social Registry for the Gaza Strip accordingly responds to the demographic shifts of Palestinian households and deprivation faced by these households. This is not only relevant for relief phases but also to ensure that medium and long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts are consistent with alleviating various forms of deprivation based on specific households, or by geographical location.
- Establishing a network of international and local governmental and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of data exchange on the basis of increasing data cohesion between institutions, and upholding standards of inclusivity of targeting, while also ensuring no beneficiary duplications occur.
- Extensive, collaborative surveying efforts between PCBS and on-ground survivors from international organizations are needed to mitigate wide-scale deprivation and displacement.
- Investing in expanding human capital to conduct rapid, large-scale surveying through Employment-for-Cash initiatives, targeting Gazan male and female heads of households. In a dual-purpose plan, this ensures rapid surveying for MDP, while also providing income opportunities for Gazans thereby alleviating monetary deprivation for several households.

3.2 Financing MDP Alleviation Efforts

- Establish a Gaza relief fund that utilizes various forms of funding, including crowdfunding, multilateral and bilateral funding, private sector financing, and investment, as well as community donations. Expanding the coverage of already existing programs of local NGOs, such as orphan sponsorship, by concerting national and international efforts or providing support to these programs can also be an essential source of social protection against deprivation. These efforts, however, must be coordinated under a unified MDP relief network to ensure efficiency in coverage and targeting.
- The provision of emergency pre-loaded cash cards with e-vouchers by international organizations providing cash assistance to allow for flexibility and immediate accessibility to cash.
- Collaborations between international organizations providing cash assistance with local banks to implement measures such as providing point-of-sale (POS) terminals or electronic/mobile payment devices to local merchants, to facilitate digital cash assistance receipt and usage.
- Vast monitoring and enforcement efforts, complementary to cash assistance interventions, are required to ensure people are not financially exploited in the relief stages after the aggression, and subjected to further deprivation resulting from high transactions and withdrawal fees of cash assistance, or unsupervised increases in inflation prices of essential products.
- Effective cooperation between international and local institutions, particularly banks and shops, is essential to ensure concrete measures are in place for redeeming digital payments and e-vouchers in local markets, benefiting both beneficiaries and the local economy.

3.3 Challenging the Status Quo in the context of upholding international law and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people

- Push for international accountability mechanisms by supporting investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ) and UN bodies into Israel's actions that directly result in mass impoverishment, including destruction of homes, targeting of civilian infrastructure, and denial of humanitarian access.
- Challenge current international systems to ensure that decisions of the international justice system are binding and enforceable, particularly in terms of sanctions on Israel for crimes of genocidal and deprivation intent.
- Address the root causes of multidimensional deprivation by countering Israeli impunity through global advocacy campaigns. This includes initiating large-scale advocacy campaigns to abolish or regulate the use of veto power, as a first step, to ensure accountability and enforceability for Israeli actions that weaponize of basic human rights such as food, health, education, and access to water.

