

## WAVES OF INSPIRATION DESPITE GENOCIDE –CASES FROM YOUTH AND CHILDREN OF GAZA

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the creative and proactive problem-solving behaviours of the youth and children of Gaza during the 2023/2024 genocidal and war zone challenges. Following Israel's decision to cut off essential supplies such as food, water, and electricity to the Gaza Strip and the subsequent destruction of civilian infrastructure, the already dire living conditions worsened significantly. With extreme poverty and food insecurity affecting more than 80% of Gaza's population, residents—particularly youth—have demonstrated remarkable resilience in addressing the challenges of displacement, scarcity, and violence.

Drawing from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 74 displaced individuals from various camps in Gaza, this research investigates how young Gazans use creative solutions to navigate the devastating conditions. The study identifies key cases of innovative responses, such as using alternative energy sources, creative income-generation activities, and establishing educational initiatives.

By analyzing these cases, the research highlights the role of inspiration and creativity as a survival mechanism and a source of resilience in times of conflict. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of how individuals in conflict zones adapt to severe environmental, economic, and social limitations through waves of inspirations that even raise their ingenuity. This study underscores the enduring human capacity for inspiration and creativity in the face of extreme adversity and examines how it fosters both individual and collective resilience in Gaza.

**Keywords:** Genocide in Gaza, Inspiration of Youth, Creativity in crisis, Resilience, Youth innovation, Problem-solving, Resilience, Coping Strategies

## 1.0 Background

In October 2023, following the events of October 7th, Israel announced its decision to cut off food, water, and electricity supplies to the Gaza Strip as part of a series of measures described as a genocidal war targeting approximately 2.23 million civilians. This news was reported by several outlets, including Al-Sharq, Al-Awsat and CNN, among others. Israel did not stop at these measures but escalated by bombing and destroying bakeries, desalination plants, renewable energy sources, as well as residential buildings, roads, towers, shops, and factories. Moreover, Israel forced residents from Gaza City and the northern part of the Strip to migrate towards the southern regions of Wadi Gaza, claiming these areas were safe. However, Israel pursued the displaced population with systematic bombings of facilities, institutions, homes, and towers in these supposedly safe areas. These punitive measures destroyed the modest food and water supplies available in the private sector. They prevented their replenishment, creating a severe humanitarian, environmental, and health crisis.

With nothing left to lose, Palestinians in Gaza faced a bleak reality. According to statistics from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), in August 2023, poverty rates had surpassed 80%. These figures were recorded less than a month before October 7th and underscore the already dire living conditions in Gaza, where basic life necessities are virtually non-existent. Extreme poverty, including food insecurity, had also risen to 60%, according to the same source. This is the result of one of the most severe blockades in the world, especially in Gaza. The blockade encompasses economic, financial, transportation, trade restrictions, and travel bans for medical treatment or tourism.

The economic and trade blockade severely restricted Palestinians' ability to freely import and export goods, making the process entirely dependent on Israeli approvals. Israel imposed hundreds of import restrictions, preventing the entry of essential materials needed for industry, agriculture, fishing, and construction under the pretext of dual-use concerns. This includes building materials like steel, cement, pipes, internet cables, raw materials for industry, fertilizers, and medicines for agriculture. The financial blockade targeted banks and financial institutions, limiting their operations by preventing many Palestinian banks from engaging in international transactions. Furthermore, Israel deprived the Palestinian Authority of the right to issue a national currency, which has led to ongoing financial struggles for Palestinians, especially in Gaza. They have long suffered from issues related to liquidity, change shortages, and foreign currency exchange, problems that become particularly acute during holidays like Ramadan, the start of the school year, and other occasions.

As for movement and travel, whether for medical, commercial, or tourism purposes, the Israeli occupation has severely restricted these activities for Palestinians, especially in Gaza. Gaza's residents have experienced various phases of travel difficulties, at times facing complete travel bans for months, affecting all groups. When travel is permitted, individuals may wait several months for their turn, often paying thousands of dollars—sometimes up to \$50,000 for an individual or family—to obtain permission to leave. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been completely prohibited from travelling, not only through the Erez Crossing but also via the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings between Gaza and Egypt. This restriction extends to the travel of patients seeking medical treatment abroad. Israel often imposes refusals or strict limitations on patients needing to travel, leading to the indirect killing of those suffering from critical conditions,

especially cancer and chronic diseases, due to the unavailability of proper medical treatments and equipment in Gaza. Even in cases where travel is permitted, patients may face long, indefinite waiting periods that stretch for months before they are allowed to leave.

These measures have gone beyond administrative restrictions to include direct violence, with countless Palestinians killed before October 7, 2023, through shootings, and bombings of homes, buildings, vehicles, and innocent civilians in markets and streets. Additionally, Israel has enforced a systematic policy of humiliation and domination over Palestinians and their leadership. The occupation has also waged a war of starvation and thirst, particularly in the northern Gaza Strip, making life exceedingly difficult for its residents. Moreover, the ongoing attacks on Palestinians in Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and other areas of the West Bank have made life nearly unbearable for Palestinians living there. The fragmentation of areas in Jerusalem and the West Bank has made it extremely difficult for Palestinians to move from one place to another.

All of this, combined with Palestinians' growing frustration over the lack of a political solution, Israel's stalling tactics regarding the two-state solution, and outright rejection of it by many Israeli officials, has compounded the despair. The Israeli Knesset officially voted against the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, in defiance of global consensus and United Nations resolutions. This and other factors contributed to the Palestinian initiative on October 7, 2023.

Amid these dire conditions, local merchants, manufacturers, and people in business have tried to do their part in providing essential goods and services. They have succeeded in many cases in circumventing the financial blockade, bringing in foreign currency and importing goods, which has significantly alleviated the effects of the blockade. However, the creativity in finding solutions has not been limited to businesspeople and adults. We have also witnessed repeated instances of ingenuity among adolescents and youth in Gaza, both male and female. Seeing their families and communities pushed to the brink, these young people, without access to water, food, fuel, and other basic necessities, have taken the initiative in devising immediate solutions to the crises they face. They have also shown remarkable foresight, anticipated future problems and worked on solutions in advance. Far from being passive, these youth maintain a consistently positive and proactive attitude despite their overwhelming challenges. The study aims to explore the participants' resisting attitudes towards their challenges, understand their approaches to addressing them, and identify the motivations driving their positive problem-solving efforts amid displacement and life in shelters. By examining their experiences, we seek to answer the following key research question:

*How have the citizens in Gaza engaged in creative and proactive problem-solving during the genocidal war crisis?*

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Creativity and Inspiration in Times of Crisis**

The relationship between creativity and crisis is a compelling study area, particularly in severe hardship and conflict contexts. Research indicates that creativity and inspiration often arise as powerful responses to adversity, providing individuals with a means to process and articulate their experiences in the face of overwhelming challenges. The act of creating, whether through art,

writing, or other forms, can serve as a therapeutic outlet that helps individuals navigate their circumstances and find meaning amidst turmoil.

Creativity, as described by Runco and Jaeger (2012), involves generating novel and valuable ideas or products, which can be particularly crucial during times of crisis. Inspiration plays a vital role in this process, sparking the initial drive to create and explore new possibilities. As Presiado and Jacob (2020) note, expressing war experiences through art can consequently function as a form of trauma therapy for both artist and spectator, underscoring how inspiration can lead to therapeutic artistic expression. Išoraitė and Alperytė (2023) further highlight that, despite its vulnerabilities, "Creativity, design, and artwork can help a lot, often in ways you cannot always predict" (p. 400), suggesting that the unpredictable nature of creativity can offer significant impacts in times of conflict. Thus, creativity and inspiration serve as vital mechanisms for coping and transcendence, reflecting the enduring human spirit even in the most challenging circumstances.

The study of creativity during times of crisis reveals how profound adversity can inspire diverse forms of artistic expression, offering both a means of coping and a reflection of personal and collective experiences. Kay's (2021) investigation into German children's wartime art during World War I demonstrates how creativity can serve as a vital outlet for processing the impacts of conflict, even within highly structured and controlled environments. This historical analysis shows that children's art during wartime often becomes a window into their emotional and psychological states, providing insights into how they navigate and interpret their circumstances creatively. Buheji and Buheji (2024). This perspective is crucial when examining creativity in Gaza, where ongoing conflict creates a similarly challenging environment. The artwork individuals produce in such settings can reveal how creativity functions as a form of resilience and expression amidst severe stress and uncertainty. Frijhoff (2012) and Olsen (2019) highlight the difficulties in fully capturing the emotional depth of individuals during crises, a challenge that is echoed in the historical record of wartime art. The study of creativity under these conditions underscores how art can serve as a personal refuge and a means of expressing and making sense of profound hardships.

By examining how creativity manifests in Gaza, we can gain valuable insights into how individuals channel their experiences and emotions into artistic forms, demonstrating the enduring power of creativity to provide meaning and solace in the face of ongoing adversity. This comparative approach helps frame the role of creativity as both a personal coping mechanism and a reflection of the broader human spirit amidst crisis.

The literature on creativity and resilience in times of crisis reveals that adversity often stimulates innovative solutions and responses, particularly in conflict zones. In such contexts, the necessity to adapt to extreme hardships and a lack of resources forces individuals to think creatively, fostering problem-solving behaviours. This section explores the key themes and findings from existing studies relating to the intersections of crisis, creativity, and resilience, focusing on how individuals, particularly youth, engage with their surroundings and challenges to find solutions. Al-Muhannadi and Buheji (2024)

## 2.2 Creativity and Resilience in Times of Crisis

Creativity often emerges as a natural response to the limitations of conflict, scarcity, and crisis. Runco and Jaeger (2012) define creativity as the process of generating novel and valuable ideas or solutions, particularly critical in severe hardship situations. In war-torn regions, where access to basic needs and resources is restricted, individuals are forced to think outside traditional frameworks to address pressing needs. This phenomenon has been observed in various conflict contexts, where individuals, including children and adolescents, display adaptive behaviours that utilize limited resources to meet their needs. Buheji and Buheji (2024)

For example, during World War II, children in war zones often created games, toys, and artwork from salvaged materials, as a way to cope with trauma and process their experiences (Kay, 2021). This coping mechanism provided a distraction and a form of emotional expression and resilience, Al-Muhannadi and Buheji (2024). Similarly, in Gaza, young people have been observed developing creative solutions to their challenges, from constructing solar-powered devices to finding alternative means of income, to navigate the intense restrictions on their daily lives.

## 2.3 Inspiration as a Coping Mechanism

Inspiration plays a crucial role in fostering creativity during times of crisis. As Presiado and Jacob (2020) explain, the expression of experiences through art or innovation often serves as both a therapeutic outlet and a means of survival. The act of creating, whether through physical innovation or artistic expression, can help individuals process trauma, maintain hope, and foster resilience. This is particularly true in conflict zones, where individuals often feel powerless; engaging in creative acts can restore a sense of agency.

Studies by Frijhoff (2012) and Olsen (2019) examine how individuals facing extreme duress—whether from natural disasters, war, or displacement—often turn to creative endeavours to reclaim their narrative and process their pain. In this context, creativity becomes vital for emotional and psychological survival. The artistic output of those in conflict zones often reflects not only the hardships they face but also the strength and resilience of their communities. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023)

## 2.4 Youth and Problem-Solving in Conflict Zones

Youth, in particular, have demonstrated remarkable creativity in conflict zones, despite limited resources and opportunities. Research on displaced and war-affected youth shows that they often engage in innovative practices to help themselves, their families, and their communities, Buheji and Ahmed (2019). In Gaza, as in other regions affected by war, young people are frequently at the forefront of efforts to solve everyday challenges, from securing water and electricity to finding educational opportunities amidst destruction. Buheji (2021)

Işoraité and Alperyté (2023) emphasize that youth creativity is a reaction to immediate crises and a long-term coping mechanism that shapes their resilience. In conflict-affected areas, young people often become resourceful problem-solvers, leveraging whatever materials and tools are available to create solutions for themselves and their communities. Whether through technological ingenuity or artistic expression, the youth's ability to respond to crises creatively reflects their adaptive capacities and potential for leadership in rebuilding efforts.

## 2.5 The Role of Art and Innovation in Conflict Settings

Art and creative innovations have been widely studied as coping methods in conflict settings. Kay (2021) documents the use of art by children during World War I as a window into their emotional and psychological worlds. Similarly, art, design, and other creative expression in modern conflict zones allow individuals to articulate their experiences and explore their emotional responses to the violence and destruction around them.

In Gaza, young people have been observed channelling their energy into practical and artistic endeavors, ranging from constructing renewable energy solutions to creating art reflecting their war and displacement experiences. These efforts serve as forms of personal resilience and provide a sense of community and shared purpose in the face of overwhelming adversity.

## 2.6 Creativity and Environmental Limitations

Conflict zones often impose severe environmental and material limitations on their inhabitants, forcing individuals to find creative solutions to survive, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023). For instance, in Gaza, the blockade and destruction of infrastructure have led to critical shortages of basic supplies, such as water, food, and electricity. These limitations have spurred innovation in unexpected ways, with individuals devising new methods to generate electricity through solar panels or collect potable water in environments where resources are scarce.

As highlighted by Išoraitė and Alperytė (2023), creativity in these contexts is often unpredictable and dynamic, driven by the immediate need for survival. In Gaza, these innovations often involve repurposing materials or developing alternative systems that bypass the constraints imposed by the conflict. Such ingenuity helps individuals meet their basic needs and fosters a sense of empowerment and agency amidst the overwhelming hardships.

## 2.7 Social and Emotional Impact of Creative Responses to Crisis

The act of creating during times of conflict has profound social and emotional impacts, both on the individual and the community. As studies show, problem-solving and innovation in crisis situations often foster a strong sense of solidarity and collective resilience. Through their creative responses, individuals in conflict zones can redefine their experiences, find meaning in their suffering, and build stronger social bonds with those around them.

The role of extended families and communities in fostering this creative spirit is particularly pronounced in regions like Gaza, where collective efforts are often necessary for survival, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023). As noted by Presiado and Jacob (2020), the extended family structure encourages youth to actively participate in problem-solving, whether by providing for the family's needs or developing community-based solutions for shared challenges. This collective approach to creativity enhances individual resilience and strengthens the community's capacity to endure and survive the ongoing crisis. Buheji and Ahmed (2019)

This literature review outlines the existing research on creativity and resilience during times of crisis, demonstrating how conflict and hardship often spur innovative responses and solutions, particularly among youth in conflict zones. Through creative problem-solving, individuals and communities in Gaza and other war-torn regions find ways to navigate their challenges, cope with their trauma, and maintain hope in the face of overwhelming adversity. Buheji (2021)

### 3.0 Methodology

The researchers employed a qualitative descriptive methodology for data collection and analysis. Data was gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews with the target group (a total of six interviews), utilizing a set of directed questions and allowing for additional questions as needed based on the interview situation. Alongside interviews, data collection included focus group discussions (FGDs) to derive answers to structured questions and address any emerging questions based on the situation.

The research team organized four focus group discussions, all conducted within displacement camps and shelters. The sample for each focus group was selected using an accidental sampling method, involving participants who were present and willing to join from the displacement camps.

The focus groups were as follows:

1. Deir al-Balah Focus Group comprises 18 children, adolescents, and adults.
2. Al-Zawaida Focus Group comprises 15 children, adolescents, and adults.
3. Khan Younis Focus Group comprises 26 children, adolescents, and adults.
4. Al-Nuseirat Focus Group comprises 15 children, adolescents, and adults.

This results in a study sample of 74 participants from focus groups, in addition to ten cases interviewed personally.

The research faced significant challenges in organizing these workshops due to repeated shelling and displacement. Intense shelling near the workshop locations often forced delays or cancellations, wasting valuable time in dangerous conditions. Transportation costs were also a concern, exacerbated by vehicle fuel shortages, with travel taking two hours for a distance of just 7 kilometres.

The target group for this study includes children, adolescents, and adults of both genders, residing in tents or shelters in Gaza, specifically in the central and Khan Younis governorates. The study aims to explore the participants' attitudes towards the challenges they face, understand their approaches to addressing these challenges, and identify the motivations that drive their problem-solving efforts amid displacement and life in shelters.

The data analysis is presented in the first person by the first author of this article, who is currently in Gaza and has had direct, daily interactions with some of the participants. This approach allows for a personal and immersive account, with the author occasionally referring to themselves as "I/me," reflecting their firsthand experiences and observations in the analysis.

Researchers encountered a scarcity of information and sources on the topic, resulting in field-based, primary data collected through the researchers' efforts, constituting a unique aspect of this research. Additionally, the researchers provided many data points, particularly the lead researcher, who worked on the ground with support from other team members.

#### 4.0 Cases of Inspiring Youth Amidst Genocide

The research team conducted six interviews with children, adolescents and adults from displacement camps in Gaza. The results are as follows:

##### 4.1 Case of Anas (18 years old)

Anas, an 18-year-old student specializing in automotive electrical systems, at a government school in Gaza. During the recent conflict, Anas demonstrated several instances of creativity and problem-solving.

- a. Reflecting on his solar panel initiative, Anas explained, "I had just one solar panel and wasn't sure how to use it, but I figured out a system providing electricity to charge our battery and even our neighbors' phones." His intuition extended beyond this; he persistently urged his family to buy car tires and a battery before prices skyrocketed, saying, "I knew we'd need them soon, even when others doubted me."
- b. Car Tyres Purchase: Anas found a new set priced at 1,200 NIS when the car tyres were worn out. Although the main researcher initially refused, he persistently persuaded the primary researcher to buy them.
- c. Car Battery Purchase: Anas found a new car battery priced at 600 NIS. Despite my initial refusal, he insisted on purchasing it. Soon after, the battery price increased to 2,500 NIS and was no longer available. This purchase enabled me to continue using the car, which would have otherwise been out of service.
- d. Solar Panels Purchase: Anas suggested buying several solar panels priced at 800 NIS each, emphasizing their future importance. Despite my initial refusal, he continued to urge me for a week. Eventually, the price of these panels surged to 2,500 NIS, and they disappeared from the market.

##### 4.2 Case of Safa (19 years old)

Safa is a first-year student at Al-Aqsa University, studying painting and arts. After experiencing 7 months in the Gaza Strip during the genocide, she was able to fly to Ireland. Despite displacement and financial hardship, Safa remained proactive. Her initiatives include:

- a. Selling Artwork: Safa used her drawing skills to create and sell paintings outside Palestine to help cover living expenses during the displacement. She continues this activity to support her family.
- b. Encouraging Textile Work: Safa motivated her mother and sisters to engage in weaving and textile art. This activity occupied their time and helped generate income by selling their woven products outside Palestine. Images of their Woolen products and textile artworks, created during the Gaza conflict, are provided, each accompanied by a story and explanation in Arabic and English.
- c. Exhibition in Dublin: Safa is preparing to participate in an art exhibition in Dublin, Ireland, where she will showcase her paintings and textile products. She managed to travel to Dublin amidst the Gaza conflict, and the exhibition took place on Saturday, August 24, 2024.



Figure (1) Sample of Safa’s Products



#### 4.3 Case of Ahmad (21 years old)

Ahmad, who has not experienced displacement, is studying at a university in Turkey. During the conflict, he felt a strong sense of responsibility and was reluctant to continue receiving financial support from his family in Gaza, given the war and the lack of salaries. In response, Ahmad developed a creative idea and utilized his drawing and wood carving skills. He established a small workshop to create wooden maps of Palestine and other woodcraft items. This initiative allowed him to earn money for living expenses independently, without relying on his family's support.

Ahmad is preparing for a specialized exhibition in Turkey and is actively seeking collaborations and support from business incubators interested in his field. He is looking for opportunities in marketing and acquiring equipment to enhance his production speed and to develop his project into a viable economic enterprise.

Figure (2) Images of his woodcraft products are included.



#### 4.4 Case of Layan (15 years old), and Sarah (13 years old)

The two sisters, Layan and Sarah, have experienced frequent displacement, moving seven times from Gaza to different locations, including Al-Mughraqa, Rafah, Khan Younis, and Al-Zawaida. In Al-Zawaida, with some free time and a strong interest in education, they noticed many children who could neither read nor recite the Quran. The sisters decided to start an educational center

focusing on Quranic studies and general education. They approached the main researcher, requesting prizes for the children enrolled in their center. The main researcher provided the prizes and discovered that they had over 30 children eager to learn despite the challenging circumstances. In addition to the educational center, the sisters created various games for entertainment in the small displacement camp. Their efforts brought together many children seeking friendship, amusement, and a temporary escape from the hardships and losses inflicted by the war.

#### **4.5 Case of Osama (2.5 years old)**

Osama, who is not yet three years old, lives with his family in a tent. Observing the activities of those around him—collecting firewood, transporting water, and preparing food—he noticed that whenever a vendor called out, "Potable water, potable water," children would rush to fill their water containers.

Osama associated the vendor's call with the action of filling water containers. One day, as soon as he heard "Potable water, potable water," he quickly grabbed an empty container and joined the other children, calling out the same phrase, despite his difficulty carrying the container. His actions, met with smiles and laughter from his family, demonstrate his innate spirit of initiative and positivity, even at such a young age. This example is not isolated; similar proactive attitudes are observed among hundreds of Gazan children who naturally engage in addressing and solving problems.

Figure (3) Photo of Osama carrying the Water Container



### **5.0 Results of Focus Groups**

As previously mentioned, the research team conducted four focus groups in various cities in the southern and central regions of Gaza, with a sample size of 74 participants. The focus groups aimed to explore the extent of inspiration and creativity among citizens in addressing the challenges they face. The questions addressed in the focus groups were as follows:

1. *Have you faced problems in your displacement life, and what are they?*
2. *Did you have a specific role in addressing or solving these problems?*
3. *How negatively has the problem affected your life and your ability to be creative and solve issues?*
4. *When faced with a problem, do you feel boredom, laziness, and frustration, or do you persist in finding a solution?*
5. *Do you believe your problems can be systematically solved?*

6. *Why do you believe it is important and necessary to solve problems in Gaza?*
7. *Does the extended family model in Gaza contribute to your ability to solve problems?*
8. *Do your significant challenges in Gaza contribute to your problem-solving abilities?*
9. *Do sacrifices, martyrs, destruction, and devastation motivate you to resolve problems?*

### 5.1 Focus Group in Deir al-Balah

Sample size: 18 participants, including only three females, aged between 10 and 20 years. Figure (4) shows a photo of the group interviewed under a tree next to a tent in the Deir al-Balah refugee camp, with the researcher discussing creativity and positivity with the children, adolescents, and adults.

Figure (4) Photo of main researcher conducting the Interview with the Children & Youth of Gaza



#### 5.1.a Responses from the Interview

- a. There was consensus among all these young participants that they face numerous severe and significant problems that even adults struggle with. There was also consensus that they do not allow themselves to fall into despair or hopelessness, as there is no room for such emotions in the face of the major challenges they encounter.
- b. Everyone unanimously confirmed that they did not leave the problems unaddressed. Instead, they actively sought a positive role in solving the issues that they and their families faced in the displacement camp. They also confirmed that, despite the complexity of these problems, it motivated them to find possible solutions within their limited capacities.
- c. Everyone showed determination that, no matter how severe the problems they face are, they must be solved, and they must play a role in addressing them, avoiding negativity, and contributing to a positive role within both the extended and immediate family.
- d. I observed that more than 90% expressed determination that they have no choice but to contribute to solving the problems due to the major challenges their families face, such as repeated displacement, lack of money, food, water, and clothing, as well as the constant threat of death and

dismemberment at any moment. All these factors left them with no option but to take a positive and essential role in solving the problems and crises they face.

e. I found a clear distinction between the nature of the work, participation, and contributions of males and females. While the participation of females tended to be more internal, helping the mother with cooking, sweeping, cleaning, and preparing food, the males' participation was mostly external, such as fetching water and food, and engaging in small-scale commerce and sales to earn money for the family's food.

f. Around 85% of the sample in the focus group indicated that the extended family structure drives the necessity for positivity, fostering a spirit of challenge, and emphasizing the importance of participating in solving the problems they face. The extended family system acts as a form of self-monitoring, not allowing any individual to lean towards laziness or ease, especially given the urgent need for every capable hand without exception.

g. Finally, everyone emphasized that the level of sacrifices, the extent of killing, destruction, displacement, and repeated displacement, did not lead to their laziness, negligence, or dependence. Instead, these conditions strengthen the spirit of teamwork, the division of labor, and continuous creativity and innovation in finding solutions to the ongoing and recurring problems they face due to war, destruction, siege, and monopolization. They mentioned that they feel ashamed of any shortcomings in light of the sacrifices made by the martyrs and the wounded. They affirmed that their role must be effective, and innovative in addressing the problems, on par with the sacrifices of the martyrs who gave up their lives, wealth, and homes. As Youssef (15 years old) said: "We did not give up, as there is no place for despair, because we will die if we do not provide for our needs of water, firewood, and money."

### ***5.1.b Problems Faced by these Young Gazan***

All these young participants agreed that they faced numerous problems during the war and displacement. However, they also agreed that despair and resignation are not options given the magnitude of their challenges.

a. Displacement Issues: Displacement represents a psychological trauma and significant financial loss. People have to leave most of their belongings behind, pay high transportation costs due to the absence of salaries, face bombing, killing, and loss, and struggle to find a place to set up their tents or rent accommodation due to a lack of funds.

b. Shelter Issues: This includes setting up the tent or shelter and the challenge of providing a bathroom.

c. Fuel and Cooking Problems: Difficulty in obtaining fuel or firewood for cooking and water for drinking or personal hygiene was a major issue.

d. Food Problems: Providing food for the family amidst rising prices, lack of funds, blockade, and absence of various food items was challenging.

e. Electricity and Lighting Problems: Issues related to electricity, charging mobile phones, and batteries.

f. Purchasing Power Problems: Weak purchasing power, lack of cash, few job opportunities, and high prices due to market monopolies.

### ***5.1.c Creative Solutions Brought forward by these Young Gaza Group Sample***

During the participatory focus group interview, we observed a strong insistence from everyone on positivity and contributing to solving problems within the family framework and through

cooperation among its members. The participants mentioned several creative approaches to problem-solving as follows.

There was consensus among the males on their unlimited contribution to cooperating in fetching water despite the great hardship of doing so two or three times daily from often distant locations. In addition to this, they also went to nearby soup kitchens to collect the daily lunch meal. There was also consensus among the females on their contribution to cooking, baking, general cleaning of the tent and its annexes, and helping the mother with daily tasks without complaint or fatigue. A contribution of no less than 70% was observed among the participants in searching for income-generating work to help meet the family's needs. This included working at a stall selling food items, working as a barber, charging mobile phones after setting up a solar charging point, or partnering with another to start a business. Some opened stalls selling cleaning products, and others worked in cooking and cleaning at soup kitchens serving displaced people. All of this stemmed from their sense of duty and the importance of supporting the father and family in providing for the household amidst the lack of salaries and widespread unemployment. For example, Abdul Rahman (9 years old) said, "I opened a stall selling cleaning products to help my family with the money."

Active participation in the repeated displacement process was noted. One example is a family that was displaced from the European hospital to the Mawasi area in Deir al-Balah. The family had three war-wounded members and could not afford transportation costs, so they carried the injured on hospital beds for a distance of 7 kilometres on foot, with active participation from the teenagers in the sample. More than 90% of the participants mentioned helping build the tent and its annexes under such challenging circumstances.

One participant, Hamza (17 years old), mentioned that despite suffering from a seventh nerve condition, which required rest and avoiding exposure to sunlight and wind, he never stopped contributing to helping the family by fetching water and bringing food from the nearby soup kitchen.

## **5.2 Focus Group at Al-Nuseirat**

The sample size of the Al-Nuseirat focus group consisted of 12 participants, including ten females and two males, aged 9 to 20. The image of the focus group meeting in the evening near a vineyard by the tent in the Al-Nuseirat refugee camp is attached. The workshop revealed similarities in their views on problems, motivation to address them, and a spirit of initiative.

### ***5.2.a Responses from the Interview***

a. Facing Problems: All participants confirmed facing numerous problems during displacement and afterwards in the tent. There was also a consensus that they do not allow themselves to succumb to despair, as there is no room for hopelessness given their major challenges.

b. Adaptation and Coping: Despite initial sadness and some frustration due to the significant changes in their lifestyle and the enormous difficulties they faced, participants adapted and learned to cope with the new reality, hoping for the war to end and return home. They had to accept and adjust to their new, harsh conditions.

c. Creativity in Problem-Solving: The severe challenges and the visible suffering of their families in displacement forced them to adapt and innovate solutions for various problems facing their families and themselves.

d. Positive Spirit: Despite their young age and the pain and sorrow they experienced, including the loss of homes and loved ones, they exhibited a resilient and positive spirit. This determination

drove them to seek solutions within their modest capabilities rather than resorting to negativity or indifference.

### ***5.2.b Problems Faced by these Young Gazan***

The study sample identified several problems faced during the war, displacement, and escape from danger, with some differences compared to the previous workshop due to the higher proportion of females in this group:

- a. Lengthy and Difficult Journey: The displacement route was long, tiring, frightening, and unpaved.
- b. Destruction and Loss: Witnessing repeated destruction, death, and injuries among loved ones without the ability to do anything, even to mourn the deceased, was a significant issue.
- c. Finding Shelter: Finding a place to relocate to or a spot to set up a tent due to the limited areas deemed "safe" by the occupation forces.
- d. Transportation and Costs: Challenges related to transportation include finding money for costs and purchasing supplies for setting up the tent and its accessories.
- e. Setting Up Shelter: Issues with setting up the tent and its facilities, such as bathrooms, cooking areas, and seating areas.
- f. Living Conditions: Living on sand with insects like scorpions, lizards, ants, and rodents leads to health problems such as itching, scabies, and other diseases.
- g. Basic Needs: Problems with providing water, firewood, lighting, and charging mobile phones in the tent.
- h. Personal Hygiene: Difficulty achieving personal hygiene due to limited water, inadequate bathroom facilities, and infrequent bathing opportunities.
- i. Social Issues: Conflicts with neighbours due to overcrowding, psychological stress, and boredom from lack of school and free time.
- j. Fear and Separation: Constant fear of bombing and destruction, with tents located near the sea. The separation from family members, with some staying in Gaza and others displaced south, filled them with sadness and longing, with frequent displacement and continued violence, especially in Gaza and the north.

### ***5.2.c Creative Solutions Brought forward by these Young Gaza Group Sample***

From the focus group interview, a strong sense of positivity, contribution, and competition was observed in responses. Participants shared their roles and creative solutions for problem-solving within the family and through collaboration. They highlighted several innovations and creative approaches to address the problems they faced:

- a. Traditional Roles: Participants discussed traditional roles, such as seeking water, collecting firewood, going to the local oven for baking, and assisting with cooking, dishwashing, and general cleanliness in the tent.
- b. Alternative Fuels: Due to the lack of gas and high prices for firewood, they collected and saved all types of paper, plastic, and other materials that could be used for burning, such as cardboard, paper, wrappers, plastic, and tree branches.
- c. Heating Water: Leanne, a fifteen-year-old, mentioned, "We developed a method to heat water for bathing to save on firewood. We placed water jugs in the sun from morning until noon, so the water stays warm for the rest of the day for bathing and personal hygiene."
- d. Physical Strength: Sarah, a thirteen-year-old, noted, "Constantly carrying water has made us physically stronger and helped us compete with the boys."

- e. Cooling Water: Ahmed, a fifteen-year-old, explained, "To keep water cool for drinking, we buried bottles in a gallon of water in the ground." Those who managed to get clay jugs used them for the same purpose. Lara, fourteen, added, "We only prepared enough food for each meal without leaving leftovers to prevent spoilage."
- f. Educational Initiative: Sarah, fourteen, initiated an outdoor Quran study circle by the tents in the evenings to keep the girls engaged and distracted from the difficult conditions. About 18 students joined her for learning and memorizing.
- g. Educational and Recreational Ideas: Layan, 15, expanded on the educational initiative by suggesting educational and recreational games to help distract from the hardships of war, displacement, and life in the tent.
- h. Positive Feedback: The rest of the group expressed their appreciation for the educational and recreational activities provided by Sarah and Layan.
- i. Friendship Building: Leanne highlighted the importance of quickly forming friendships due to the rapid displacement and constant moving, which differs from normal times.
- j. Crafts and Games: They created activities to entertain themselves, such as knitting with wool, crocheting, and playing games like hide and seek, broken phone, mafia, and drawing.
- k. Promoting Reading: They encouraged reading by setting up a program to read books they managed to carry during displacement.
- l. Wood Chip Stove: They built a wood chip stove using online resources. Their family had a carpentry shop, providing an abundance of wood chips, which served as a substitute for the gas they lost.
- m. Food and Nutrition: They dealt with malnutrition and lack of food by using available canned goods despite their poor quality. They recycled these items to make them palatable and faced hunger and malnutrition. They also had to eat exposed food and items they would normally avoid but had to adapt to the harsh conditions.
- n. Personal Hygiene: They emphasized the importance of maintaining personal hygiene despite the water shortage and difficult conditions to avoid spreading diseases like diarrhea, scabies, and hepatitis, which affected many families in the camp. Three participants confirmed having hepatitis, while others had not been tested.
- o. Waste Management: They made efforts to manage waste by removing garbage regularly to prevent disease.
- p. Cooling Solutions: Due to the extreme heat, they invented paper fans to help with ventilation and provide some relief from the heat in the tent.
- q. Dealing with Loss: One of the hardest issues was the loss of loved ones. Leanne and her siblings lost their uncle and could not even say goodbye, as he was in Gaza while they were in the south. Lara and Noor lost their grandfather and uncle due to a missile strike while leaving the mosque. Despite their profound grief, they managed to cope and find solace in their faith.

### **5.3 Focus Group at Al-Zawayda Beach**

The sample size of the Al-Zawayda focus group consisted of 22 participants, including 9 females and 13 males, aged between 10 and 20 years. Attached is a picture of the focus group at the displacement camp on Al-Zawayda Beach.

Figure (5) Photo of the main researcher carrying the Interview with the Children & Youth of Al-Zawayda Camp



There were noticeable differences in this session compared to previous workshops, particularly regarding problem-solving among adolescent males.

### ***5.3.a Responses from the Interview***

- a. Facing Problems: All participants confirmed they faced numerous issues during displacement and while living in tents. There is also a consensus that they did not succumb to despair or hopelessness, as there is no room for such feelings given their major challenges.
- b. Adapting to New Reality: Participants noted that despite initial sadness and some frustration due to significant changes in their lifestyle and the enormous difficulties they encountered, they had to adapt and live with their new harsh reality, hoping that the war would end and they could return home.
- c. Loss of Loved Ones: They all shared that they had lost many loved ones, including siblings, parents, uncles, aunts, and many other relatives.
- d. Creative Problem-Solving: The significant challenges and severe suffering faced by their families during displacement forced them to innovate solutions for various problems affecting their family and themselves, such as earning money for living expenses and helping their parents.
- e. Resilient Spirit: Despite their young age and the pain and sorrow they experienced—having lost their homes, possessions, and many close relatives—they maintained a proactive and positive spirit. They did not leave problems unresolved and tried to find solutions within their modest capabilities. Some even went to the beach near Nitzarim for fishing to help their families, although one such participant was killed in the process, as reported by his younger brother.



### ***5.3.b Problems Faced by these Young Gazan***

The study sample reported several problems they all faced due to war, displacement, and the flight from death. Some issues were similar to those reported in previous workshops but differed due to the nature of this sample, which includes more females. The problems were as follows:

- a. Repeated Issues: Many issues were reiterated from the previous groups, including the long and exhausting journey, high transportation costs, risks during the journey, lack of space, difficulty in providing a tent, and challenges in living conditions within the tent such as access to water, fuel, and charging facilities.
- b. Life on Sand: Living on the sand with pests like scorpions, lizards, ants, and rats, especially near the beach and a garbage dump, added further complications.
- c. Financial Strain: The issue of providing money for daily living was heightened as most of the displaced families were poor and had no source of income. Young people, feeling responsible, went to work in their previous field of fishing, despite the significant challenges and long distances involved, as well as the dangers posed by the occupation forces who periodically attacked those searching for their livelihood.
- d. Loss of Fishermen: Numerous fishermen have been targeted and killed, including a 19-year-old named Firas who was killed while fishing at the Nitzarim axis, along with four others. The cousin of the martyr, Shams, a 20-year-old, expressed profound fear and shock, having witnessed the death of five cousins. He initially appeared in a state of shock but later resumed his life, reflecting the resilience of Gaza's people.

### ***5.3.c Creative Solutions Brought forward by these Young Gaza Group Sample***

The participants demonstrated resilience, initiative, and teamwork in addressing their challenges. Here are some of the innovative solutions and creative approaches they employed:

- a. Traditional Roles: Participants continued traditional roles, such as addressing issues related to water, gas, fuel, phone charging, and cooking. They also tackled personal hygiene issues, especially due to living near a garbage dump. Many described their efforts to deal with snakes and scorpions to protect the camp's residents.
- b. Income Generation: Around 50% of the sample contributed to financial support through various means, including fishing at the Nitzarim axis, running small stalls selling food items like roasted nuts, ground red pepper, or falafel ingredients, and grinding meat for kebab.
- c. Challenges in Resource Gathering: Traditional activities such as collecting water and fuel were continued, but with new challenges. For example, Mohammad (14 years) and Lana (13 years) reported that they used to collect firewood from the garbage dump, but after displacement, people now live in the dump, making it difficult to find firewood.

## **5.4 Focus Group in Al-Mawasi (Khan Younis)**

The sample size of the Khan Younis focus group consisted of 25 participants, including 10 females and 15 males, aged between 10 and 20 years. Among the sample, 12 participants were aged 10 to 15, while 13 were aged 16 to 20. A photo of the focus group next to a tent in the refugee camp in Mawasi Khan Younis is attached. Through the workshop, we observed similar opinions regarding the problems they faced, their motivation for finding solutions, and their spirit of initiative.

#### ***5.4.a Responses from the Interview***

- a. The suffering reported by all members of this sample was similar to previous samples, with nearly identical issues experienced during displacement, with only slight differences noted in this sample.
- b. Sample members noted that despite the initial sadness and some frustration due to major lifestyle changes and the significant difficulties they faced, they were forced to adapt to the new reality. Muhammad, known as "Lamba," aged 14, said, "Despite not accepting this new reality and hoping the war would end and we could return to our homes, we were forced to adapt and live with these new hardships."
- c. They also mentioned that the severe challenges and suffering of their families during displacement and life in the tents forced them not only to adapt but also to creatively find solutions for many of the problems facing their families, especially as they were in a service-deprived area. Abdullah, aged 18, stated, "Our biggest struggle was providing water and transporting it from a distant place. We had no choice but to do it ourselves instead of leaving it to our mothers and sisters."
- d. They confirmed facing many problems during displacement and after settling in the tent, with an agreement that they did not succumb to despair, as there was no room for despair amidst the significant challenges they faced.
- e. During the discussion, I observed a vibrant and positive spirit despite their youth and the pain and sadness they endured. All had lost their homes and possessions, and most had lost first and second-degree relatives. This resilient spirit drove them to seek solutions to their problems within their limited capabilities, avoiding negativity and indifference.
- f. The similarity in responses was confirmed due to the comparable conditions faced by displaced people in all areas of displacement in central and southern regions.

#### ***5.4.b Problems Faced by these Young Gazan***

- a. The issue of water provision was more severe in the Khan Younis sample due to the lack of water sources, distant wells, and the absence of nearby water dispensers. This made fetching water a significant hardship, with most members of the sample, both male and female, focusing on this task.
- b. The sample also suffered from the distance of all facilities, particularly markets. Initially, they were alone, but after several months and repeated displacements, the camp population increased, and services became available due to the camp's growth.
- c. The repeated massacres among their families and loved ones, with no ability to act or even bid farewell to the martyrs, were highlighted. The massacres in Khan Younis, including the Al-Mawasi massacre, where about 300 people were killed, were particularly devastating.
- d. The problem of conflicts with neighbouring children due to crowding, psychological stress, and competition for water and food resources was noted. They sometimes sought help from local leaders to resolve these issues.
- e. Occasionally, the sample members experienced boredom due to a lack of school attendance and the long free time available to them.

#### ***5.4.c Creative Solutions Brought forward by these Young Gaza Group Sample***

The focus group interview in Khan Younis showed that the participants were as positive, optimistic, and solution-oriented as their predecessors. They highlighted their roles and

innovations in addressing problems within their families and collaborating with others. The sample provided several examples of creativity and innovation in problem-solving as follows:

- a. The group reiterated and confirmed traditional roles such as providing water, gathering firewood, going to the local bakery, heating water using sunlight, finding alternatives to refrigerators, assisting with baking, cooking, washing, general cleanliness, and shopping at the market or for food from charity kitchens.
- b. In the Khan Younis camp, the sample members mentioned a notable initiative in the Quran memorization and education field. Teenagers in the center established at least six educational circles for boys and girls, each hosting about twenty students. This was in addition to the play and entertainment sessions that distinguished the Khan Younis camp.
- c. Over 85% of the sample members contributed to income-generating activities to support their families financially. Some worked in charity kitchens, cooking and assisting with services, while others operated various small businesses, as mentioned in previous workshop analyses.
- d. An initiative by a group of young people organized food distribution in the charity kitchens. On a day when financial aid was received to cook rice and chicken—a rare event in the kitchen—there was a significant crowd, almost leading to a major problem. A group of young men volunteered to help organize the distribution and manage the queues in future instances to avoid repeating the issue. This initiative led to a change in the distribution method from direct handouts to thousands of individuals to distribution through about ten representatives, each managing their own area, significantly reducing problems.

## **6.0 Analysis of the Case Studies and the Interviews**

The children and adults residing in the displacement camps across Khan Younis, Deir al-Balah, Zawaida, and Nuseirat have universally endured significant hardships as a result of the ongoing crisis. The shared experiences of war and displacement have created a uniform pattern of suffering among the sample, with only minor variations in the degree of hardship. Despite these severe challenges, including repeated tragedies and acute shortages of essential supplies, all participants demonstrated remarkable perseverance. They consistently rejected despair, emphasizing the importance of patience and endurance in their daily lives.

In addition to their resilience, participants actively sought and created solutions to address the challenges faced by their families. Most engaged in income-generating activities to support their families financially, reflecting a proactive approach to their circumstances. They undertook traditional familial roles such as fetching water, gathering firewood, and procuring food and supplies, underscoring their commitment to meeting essential needs despite the harsh conditions. Participants were also keenly aware of the importance of personal hygiene in preventing the spread of disease, which further highlights their proactive stance. However, it is important to note that not all individuals displayed this proactive behavior. Through interviews and observations, it was evident that a few individuals exhibited greater dependency and reluctance to contribute to the family's needs. These individuals, who chose not to participate in the sample, may reflect a different experience or response to the crisis. The voluntary and random selection of the sample means that these non-participating individuals were not compelled to contribute their opinions.

The context of these findings is framed by the severe conditions described in the background. In October 2023, following the escalation of conflict, Israel's measures—including the blockade and systematic bombings—intensified the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The destruction of essential

infrastructure and the blockade's impact on basic supplies created a dire environment marked by extreme poverty and scarcity of necessities. The statistics from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) indicate that poverty rates had already surpassed 80% before the escalation, exacerbating the hardships faced by Gazans.

Amid these extreme conditions, the creativity and resilience observed among the youth in Gaza are particularly noteworthy. The literature highlights how creativity often emerges as a powerful response to adversity, providing individuals with means to cope and articulate their experiences. Runco and Jaeger (2012) emphasize that creativity involves generating novel and valuable ideas, a process crucial in times of crisis. Research by Presiado and Jacob (2020) and Išoraitė and Alperytė (2023) underscores that creativity can serve as a therapeutic outlet and a means of making sense of turmoil.

The ingenuity demonstrated by the citizens in Gaza, as they devise solutions to their immediate crises and anticipate future challenges, aligns with these findings. Despite overwhelming adversity, their proactive and positive attitude reflects the broader human capacity for resilience and creativity as described in the literature. This study contributes to understanding how creativity serves as both a coping mechanism and a reflection of the enduring human spirit in the face of systemic and severe hardship.

## 7.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the remarkable creativity and resilience demonstrated by Gaza's citizens, particularly the youth, in response to the extreme challenges imposed by the 2023 genocidal war crisis. Despite facing severe shortages of food, water, electricity, and basic necessities, along with the destruction of infrastructure and repeated displacement, individuals in Gaza have employed innovative solutions to address their daily needs. From the creation of alternative energy sources to small-scale income generation and educational initiatives, these responses reflect a determination to survive and a proactive attitude toward problem-solving.

This research underscores the critical role of creativity as a coping mechanism in conflict zones, where environmental, economic, and social constraints force individuals to think beyond conventional methods. The study reveals how youth, in particular, have risen to the challenge, showing adaptability, foresight, and a collective spirit in their efforts to mitigate the effects of war and blockade.

The study contributes to the broader understanding of resilience in conflict settings, showing how creativity can serve as both a practical and emotional tool for navigating the hardships of war. Ultimately, the resilience of Gaza's citizens highlights the enduring human capacity to adapt, innovate, and persevere even under the most extreme conditions. These insights emphasize the importance of supporting and fostering creative problem-solving approaches in other conflict-affected regions.

### Notes

i. Mohammad Migdad is a professor of economics who teaches at several Palestinian universities and serves as an advisor to the Ministry of National Economy. He is also the President of the

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ii. A Research Fellow in Norway, completing her Ph.D. in pedagogy at the University of Bergen. She has worked as a safety and security trainer at the UNRWA in Gaza.

iii. He also works in the field of organizing commercial crossings and managing and receiving aid from these crossings for the benefit of UNRWA. He held the position of monitoring the entry of construction materials during the 2014 war.

iv. Bank of Postal Services, National Bank, and Production Bank in the Gaza Strip, which Israeli banks and Palestinian Authority banks rejected, and their integration into the Palestinian banking system was also refused.

v. Israeli restrictions on dual-use goods refer to the claim that these goods can be used for military and combat purposes by Palestinians, which led Israel to prevent their import. Unfortunately, these restrictions affected most goods, exacerbating the hardships faced by Palestinians and weakening industrial and agricultural sectors, including fishing and construction, further increasing poverty and unemployment.

vi. The Salah al-Din crossing is considered a Palestinian-Egyptian crossing, and it is officially so. However, ongoing Israeli interventions have turned the crossing into a large prison and a major exploitation point for Palestinians, whether for passenger crossings or cargo transport. This has led to unfair and unacceptable siphoning of Palestinian liquidity through bribes and exorbitant fees for transportation, truck scheduling, delays, and additional waiting fees.

vii. Anas is one of the first author's children, known for his numerous creative ideas, which increased during the war due to the urgent need to find solutions to various life problems.

viii. Safaa is also one of the first author's distinguished daughters. She is an artist and a pioneer in the field of art, having created numerous paintings that are now exhibited and sold in Dublin, Ireland.

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