

Protection in the occupied Palestinian territories:

“They can do projects here for 1,000 years and nothing will change”

By Rafael Eguiguren & Luna Saadeh

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L2GP is an initiative, which works to promote effective, efficient and sustainable responses and solutions to humanitarian and protection crises with an explicit focus on enabling locally-led responses.

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About Local to Global Protection

Local to Global Protection (L2GP) L2GP is an initiative, which works to promote effective, efficient and sustainable responses and solutions to humanitarian and protection crises with an explicit focus on enabling locally-led responses. L2GP studies have been carried out in Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe and action research is currently undertaken in Syria, Myanmar, Sudan and the occupied Palestinian territories.

L2GP was initiated by a group of organizations within the ACT Alliance¹ in cooperation with other organizations and individuals where the studies have taken place. The initiative has among other been financially supported by Church of Sweden, DanChurchAid, Sida (Sweden) and Danida (Denmark).

A paper summarizing the initiative and synthesizing key findings from the first five studies has been published by the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI HPG) as the HPN Paper 72.²

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¹The ACT Alliance is a coalition of more than 140 affiliated organisations working together in 140 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.

²HPN Paper 72 - <http://www.odi.org.uk/events/2798-hpn-network-paper-local-global-protection-myanmar-burma-sudan-south-sudan-zimbabwe>

Protection in the occupied Palestinian territories - Summary

"They can do projects here for 1,000 years and nothing will change"

I don't understand why the international actors do what they do. They come here with aid and development projects, but that is not effective (...). It is not effective because the problem here is not a specific crisis, but a long-standing occupation. You have to realize that with the present logic, they can do projects for 1,000 years and nothing will change (...). So please stop giving us blankets and do the right thing by holding Israel accountable.

Woman, Ramallah, West Bank

1 Introduction and Executive Summary

Since 2009, the Local to Global Protection (L2GP) initiative has undertaken action research with crisis-affected communities to better understand protection challenges from a local perspective. Coupled with research on how communities are coping with crisis and their opinions on appropriate and effective solutions, the research hopes to contribute to increased effectiveness of humanitarian actors and action. The present research on the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) is the sixth full L2GP study to date, and it is based on interviews with over 500 men and women living in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

1.1 Threats Identified by Communities

Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories stress that the main protection threat they face is what they see as the very cause of the crisis itself - the Israeli occupation. Local communities consider this threat more important than any other and the root of any other significant protection vulnerability. Without further probing from the researchers, conversations about protection and self-protection tend to stop here. Repeatedly Palestinians expressed the opinion - and their frustration - that international protection and humanitarian actors focus primarily on providing a minimum level of survival assistance, and to a lesser extent focus on mitigating the impacts of the occupation. Rather, Palestinians feel that protection and humanitarian actors have a responsibility to protect that involves primarily demanding accountability from Israel on its obligations under International Law (*see details in the full report*) and should increase national and international advocacy efforts.

When probed, Palestinians report on how their protection needs vary significantly by location, even within the same city or between villages close to each other. The other major

source of variability in vulnerability and difference in perception of threats is gender. All interviewees emphasize how they depend on the degree to which restrictions are applied by Israel, influencing the degree of economic activity and subsequently employment, freedom of movement, the availability and quality of services and infrastructure, including housing and municipal services, and the policies and practice of local government. This complexity underlines the importance of a context-specific and participatory problem analysis when designing programmes meant to reinforce local coping strategies and resilience.

By geographic location, the main immediate protection threats and challenges can be broadly categorised:

1. In East Jerusalem, protection priorities include the "housing crisis" due to home demolition (and associated psychological trauma) and restrictions on home building, subsequent overcrowding, discriminatory provision of municipal services, risk of losing right to residency, severe lack of economic opportunities and resulting poverty, restricted movement and access to land and other livelihood opportunities not least due to "The Wall"^c all of which are perceived as strategies being employed by the Israeli government to encourage displacement or movement out of Jerusalem;
2. In the West Bank (Area C),^d extreme water shortages for both domestic use and for livelihoods, the latter resulting in reduced grazing areas and fodder for livestock-dependent Bedouin groups, shortages of electricity affecting livelihoods and schools, land confiscation, restricted movement not only of people but also of goods, lack of adequate transportation, the latter particularly affecting school-age youth and women, lack of private sector investment, and corruption/nepotism in local government. These culminate in a lack of economic opportunity and poverty. Poverty in turn is contributing to increasing school dropouts and child labour. Violence by settlers and settler activity including inappropriate disposal of waste contaminating water sources was further cited as a protection threat.
3. In the Gaza Strip,^e in addition to the occupation, the conflict between Hamas and Fatah adds another dimension to protection threats. Given its complete isolation, imposed by Israel, a greater percentage of Palestinians suffer from abject poverty. Unemployment is perceived as the major cause of divorce, drug abuse, domestic violence, and theft, and not least, loss of dignity.

All of these protection threats should be considered through a gender perspective. The study reveals important gender-related differences in the perception of protection threats, coping strategies and potential solutions. Whereas there is a consensus among the interviewees, regardless of gender in identifying protection challenges at general level, when the analysis is taken to a deeper level, women's responses were different from men in aspects as crucial as what problems should be given priority to.

^cThe wall between the West Bank and Israel is commonly referred to by Palestinians as the "racial segregation wall" (jidar al-fasl al 'unsuri), the "annexation wall" or "apartheid wall". Israelis most commonly refer to the wall as the "separation fence" (Geder HaHafrada) or "security fence". In keeping with the 2004 advisory decision by The International Court of Justice, this study will use the term the "Wall", "as the other expressions sometimes employed are no more accurate if understood in the physical sense".

^dArea C was created under the Oslo II Accords signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1995. Under the Accords the West Bank and Gaza Strip were divided into three areas with different status for a five-year transitional period.

^eThe fieldwork for this study was primarily carried out during 2013, before the Israeli bombardment of Gaza (start 8 July 2014) that affected heavily the civilian population and infrastructures. The authors consider that these events may affect some short-term protection needs, but they do not affect the results of this study for two main reasons. Firstly, the study methodology and aims focus on capturing long-term protection needs, not momentary ones; secondly, the recurrence of wars in Gaza and the population's awareness about the constant possibility of attacks puts this last one in a context already considered by the respondents.

In addition, protection threats can also be considered through an age-, ethnic group-specific perspective, with minority groups like the Bedouin bearing a disproportionate share of the protection threats and challenges encountered in the study.

1.2 Trying to deal with Threats

How local authorities, communities and families cope with the impact of the occupation has both short and long term consequences. The outcomes fall between two extremes, either reinforcing the importance of and capacity for good governance, self-reliance and resilience or, at the other end of the spectrum, corruption, lack of dignity, loss of livelihoods, aid-dependency and even violence. While the research was implemented with the intention of finding ways to support the former, understanding how to avoid the latter is equally important.

The day-to-day efforts of Palestinians to deal with the impacts of the occupation have largely gone unrecognised and unsupported. Their coping strategies are varied, dynamic and unfortunately oftentimes high-risk, e.g. working in the tunnels, building illegally, engaging in exploitive work, risking punishment by illegally crossing "borders" to find work, displacement and subsequent loss of access to livelihoods including social networks and capital, etc. The latter has longer term consequences for maintaining ownership of assets including property, and losing political ground, given the growing inability of Palestinians to remain in the occupied territories. The plight of rural women is particularly worrying as women leave agricultural/pastoral livelihoods and enter the informal sector, risking abuse during travel and/or at the workplace. Given inadequate and unsafe transportation, rural women often accompany daughters to school and this adds to their already significant work-load. Some families eventually decide to remove their female children from education when they reach secondary school.

Other coping strategies include reliance on networks (family and community) as long as these networks remain viable, being thrifty and rationing available space, water and electricity, including rotating or moving between houses, growing subsistence crops vs. for-profit, or conversely increased reliance on the market for purchase, e.g. potable water, and selling humanitarian assistance to get cash. "Depletive" strategies include reducing expenditures including food purchases, selling productive assets, accumulating debt, removing children from school, even early marriage of young girls.

Examples with longer-term positive consequences include being informed and up-to-date on legal rights, self-organising in committees with a focus on rights protection, and safeguarding essential documentation (e.g. residency permits). Communities are organising to buy community generators, to rebuild roads, and to provide essential services. Respondents noted agencies could (and do) help by facilitating access to credit for small businesses, increasing purchasing power either through cash-based safety nets or through employment schemes, support to the private sector, and when possible information and advocacy when solutions can be found locally vis-à-vis Israeli legislation and permits, e.g. allowing for and facilitating legal road repair. Women's income-earning strategies include work they can do from home (pastry making, cooking, sewing, tutoring, etc). Women in turn would benefit from support in upgrading their skills and marketing their skills and products.

Women reported that both local and international interventions are gender-blind when dealing with the specific protection threats mentioned above, specifically the cultural, financial and institutional obstacles that limit their participation in the work force. Small but significant efforts to ensure minimum work standards such as tea/coffee breaks and toilet breaks not only meet immediate health needs but also have social benefits that help

women cope. Women are demonstrating effective and low-cost solutions to their problems such as "solidarity" or savings schemes, which allow at least one woman once a week to "cook a good meal for [her] family". Palestinian women's organisations are promoting women's economic empowerment and offering start-up capital and loans to women. Gender mainstreaming also means targeting women in information campaigns; finding ways to ensure that women, who do not often leave the home, are aware of potential assistance/projects. To cope with domestic violence, women are referred to male-dominated 'reconciliation committees' (customary law). Formal law structures are not viewed as just or effective. There are women's organisations that offer advice and counselling, however only a few women reported having access to these. Some reported these organisations' lack of effectiveness in changing violence norms. Men suggested women take a stronger role in mediating domestic disputes, particularly mothers intervening on the behalf of daughters.

While demonstrating short-term effectiveness, due to the protracted and pervasive nature of the crisis, many of these strategies have diminishing returns. Unable to arrest a general decline in living conditions and well being, Palestinians report the disintegration of society, community and family.

1.3 Conclusions and General Recommendations

The findings of the study are directly relevant for humanitarian agencies and detailed recommendations are provided in the full study. Most important is the request from those interviewed, that humanitarian actors should prioritize and take much more serious their responsibility to perpetually advocate that Palestinians living under occupation should enjoy the full protection and respect of their rights as defined by International Law and International Humanitarian and Law.

It is recognized that finding a long-term solution to the Occupation does not appear forthcoming, but given its centrality in the source of protection threats, it should take center-stage in the strategies of protection agencies in whatever form is appropriate to the capacity and skills of each organisation. As for the continuation of these agencies' work to alleviate immediate suffering, it is important to change their approach in order to increase their effectiveness. The full study includes a detailed discussion of numerous general and specific recommendations. Many of the general recommendations relevant to humanitarian (protection) agencies center on themes and issues such as:

- Assessments need to shift from an exclusive focus on needs to a focus that also includes local capacities, assets and strategies, with flexible program approaches that allow for context- and target group- specific design,
- The context-specific nature of protection threats in different Palestinian communities and their impact on different gender- and age groups demands a much more specific and intense participatory approach to problem analysis and solutions,
- Monitoring and evaluation systems need to shift from a focus on merely monitoring and evaluating how activities are executed to an emphasis on results obtained, so as to understand which solutions actually deliver the desired results which do not work, and why,
- In spite of the existence of gender-related rhetoric, genuine gender approaches are seldom present in programs. This aspect becomes especially important as the study documents very important differences based on gender, both in the perception of problems and in their possible solutions/mitigation,

- Respondents demand that agencies (including donors) take a more "developmental" approach to project management, avoiding inadequate short-term goals and instead aim at real complementarities between relief, development and advocacy initiatives,
- Increased support is needed for the development of the collective capacity in existing local committees and coalitions as well as the development of new ones.

For a detailed discussion and analysis of the area specific findings and recommendations please see the subsequent sections.

2 Findings

2.1 General Findings

While most findings in the study reflect extremely heterogeneous situations in the different communities a number of issues can be considered general among the 287 female and 235 male interviewed Palestinian respondents.

1. **Practically all interviewees in the different Palestinian communities perceive and declare that the main protection challenge they face is "the Israeli occupation".**

This is by far the most repeated answer in the course of the research. This result has important implications, both substantial and for the research itself. It should be noted that in many vulnerable communities in the world, when a researcher asks the question *What is the main protection threat you face?* the answer typically includes very immediate and tangible needs or fears such as "we fear an attack from our enemies", "we don't have enough water" or "our houses might be destroyed". In contrast, Palestinians answer with a root problem, "our main problem is the Israeli occupation", and not with immediate threats even if these are as tangible as air attacks in Gaza or House Demolition in East Jerusalem or the West Bank. It should also be clarified, that this does not imply that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is not criticized as responsible for specific problems -there is in fact abundant criticism- but not as a "main" protection threat. The perception of the Israeli occupation as the major root cause is consistent throughout the interviews.

For this research, this had an additional and practical implication: even if the aim of the study is to try to capture the communities' perceptions and to develop each discussion on the communities' terms and not ours, this research betrayed that principle in this particular case. As the research team considered "the Israeli occupation" as too broad an answer to be treated effectively, instead of discussing this issue, the respondents were specifically asked to speak about more "immediate protection threats". This was the decision of the research team and not that of those interviewed. In consequence, there should be a distinction between what the communities perceive as 'the main protection threat' - the Israeli occupation - as identified by all communities and interviewees in every area of Palestine - and then the more "immediate protection threats" which vary in different areas and are explored in some detail over the subsequent pages.

2. **The local understanding of protection in Palestine is very different from the practice of the international community.** As explained, the Israeli occupation and the abuses committed within this occupation constitute the most repeated protection threat expressed by the interviewees. In a logical suit to this perception, the main "protection response" they expect from international actors is a clear focus on the enforcement of international law and humanitarian law and more specifically, a sustained call for the end of the occupation, end of the blockade in Gaza, end of

demolitions, displacement, illegal settlements, etc. The following quote illustrates a very general perception among most Palestinians interviewed:

I don't understand why the international actors do what they do. They come here with Aid and development projects, but that is not effective and that is not their place. It is not effective because the problem here is not a specific crisis, but a long-standing occupation. You have to realize that with the present logic, they can do projects for 1,000 years and nothing will change. Our people will still suffer the same deprivation, with one additional problem: every day counts to make it worse. When I say it is not their place, I mean a very simple thing: there is wide international consensus about the illegality of the occupation, so please stop giving us blankets and do the right thing by holding Israel accountable (Woman, Ramallah, West Bank)

In contrast, it would appear that most international protection/humanitarian actors perceive themselves as bearers of a much more limited responsibility, restricted to a minimum level of support including survival, resilience and mitigation support. Very few concentrate their efforts on advocacy based on internationally agreed international law.

3. **Main "immediate" protection threats identified** The immediate protection threats that appear with the highest frequency among interviewees are as follows:

Main Immediate Protection Threats

- East Jerusalem
 - Displacement-related threats, including housing restrictions such as overcrowding, home demolition, inadequate municipal services and residence limitations and revocations
 - Unemployment
- Area C in the West Bank
 - Water shortage,
 - Electricity shortage (and poor infrastructure)
 - Unemployment
 - Transportation limitations (frequent among youth)
- Gaza Strip
 - Unemployment,
 - Domestic violence

4. The study shows **important differences based on gender** in all dimensions e.g. in relation with the perception of protection threats, in relation with their opinion about which challenges should be given priority, in coping strategies, etc. In contrast, the research also shows that both local and international external interventions are gender blind when dealing with general protection challenges and gender mainstreaming is rare in programs and projects. (See also subsequent detailed discussion of gender specific findings)
5. **Palestine presents an abundant and very diverse range of severe threats.** The threats and challenges listed above show only problems that were mentioned in the majority of interviews as the most important or causing the highest degree of suffering in the opinion of the respondents. However, many other threats and challenges were repeatedly mentioned as equally severe and the only reason for not analysing each of these explicitly is that they are mentioned less frequently in relative terms and a study aiming at providing applicable analysis has limited capacity to treat an extended list effectively. To illustrate the term "extended" it suffices to mention a range of other threats identified by interviewees just in Jerusalem: Denial of family reunification, lack of access to residence permits or access to full citizenship or nationality-, problems with child registration, domestic violence, movement restrictions by dif-

ferent means among which the Wall^f and checkpoints, drugs, lack of entertainment, lack of trust in the judicial system, education restrictions -health service limitations, housing problems (demolition risk, lack of effective access to building permissions, insufficient space for extended family), severe economic limitations such as a disproportionate rate of poverty and unemployment of Palestinians, limitations due to the effective separation from the West Bank and feelings of deep humiliation and lack of freedom to decide a future. Please see the relevant sections for the extended threats identified by interviewees in all three areas.

6. **Most protection threats in oPt are strongly interrelated.** The second aspect in which this research was not completely faithful to its mandate of respecting scrupulously the communities' perceptions, was by insisting in each discussion that only three protection threats be chosen by the interviewees as the main ones. This decision was made for practical analytical purposes, but most interviewees emphasized that it is hardly possible for them to choose the *main* protection threats, as practically *all of these issues* (see point 4. Above) affect them in essential aspects of their life and are closely interrelated.

The most important protection threat? My house can be demolished, it is so difficult to find a job, my children are harassed by the soldiers for no reason, I cannot move freely to any place 20 minutes from here... You want me to decide on the most important? All are equally important to have a normal life! (Man, Silwan, Jerusalem)

7. **Heterogeneity of protection threats** The research shows a high degree of heterogeneity in the description of protection threats by the different communities in Palestine. This heterogeneity appears in three different ways. Firstly, protection problems and contexts are different in East Jerusalem, Area C in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Secondly, the main protection threats vary depending on the specific community, neighbourhood or village. Thirdly, even those issues that appear to be shared by many communities are in reality shared only at a general level. Often, what appears to be a common issue adopts different forms in different communities when the analysis is more detailed. This reality has important practical consequences for any actor planning to offer useful and well-targeted support in the field of protection, and more concretely in the program/project identification processes.
8. **Self-protection strategies show limited effectiveness** All coping strategies have as a common characteristic that their mitigation scope is limited or very limited in comparison with the magnitude of the problems faced. None of them is able to solve the problem in a satisfactory manner and -strictly speaking- they belong to those self-protection strategies that can be classified as *endurance or survival strategies*, but rarely as *sustainable solutions*. For example, typical coping strategies used to address Unemployment situations involve incurring into debt, relying on social networks to weather the toughest moments, reducing consumption, or cutting on social interactions that are costly. Given the general context of deprivation and imposed limitations attempting truly sustainable solutions becomes extremely difficult in practice. Again, the root causes related to the occupation and fragmentation of the territory become a ceiling that not only causes derived protection threats, but also affects coping strategies.

^fThe International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion in 2004 declaring that Israel's building of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory is illegal, that said construction must stop immediately and Israel should make reparations for any damage caused. By a majority of 14 to 1, the judges found that the wall's construction breaches international law and violates principles outlined in the UN charter. Observing that the wall does not follow the green line, but encroaches significantly into occupied Palestinian territory, the Court said the structure's route alters the demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territory and could "prejudge the future frontier between Israel and Palestine". The Court concluded that Israel could not rely on a right of self-defense or on a state of necessity to justify the wall and that the specific route chosen was not found necessary for security reasons.

9. **Self-protection strategies face "dynamic protection threats"**The fact that the main protection threats are not only man made but also "strategically induced" with a final purpose of displacement,¹ make coping strategies obsolete very fast, as most coping strategies elicit additional protection threats to counteract effective protection strategies. For example, when Palestinian families in Jerusalem grow, they typically face one important protection threat: "overcrowding". The first response is often to try to build new floors or annexes to their existing houses or to build a new house. However, this entails the request of an Israeli-issued permit in a system that involves strong uncertainties and high costs. This typically leads to a desperate situation in which construction is attempted without waiting to have a permit, which automatically makes the construction illegal in the eyes of the Israeli system. Thus, this strategy does not solve the problem, or to be more precise, it just transforms the problem "overcrowding" into a different one, at least equally harmful - the risk of demolition.
10. **External actors have acquired a good understanding of the main humanitarian protection issues at the general level** in the oPt. However, the problems are not sufficiently understood by donors and international humanitarian agencies in their full diversity and in the specific form that faces each individual community (see point 6. above and recommendations). After decades of interventions in Palestine, there is still a weak understanding among protection agencies of what works what does not work and why.
11. **External actors have underestimated local assets and strategies** in their identification and programming processes. The focus tends to be exclusively on "needs" and not on "assets", and as a result identification processes remain incomplete and there is ample margin to identify and contribute to local organic processes that can be enhanced or complemented.
12. **External Aid has short-term cycles and short-term goals.** The lack of long-term goals linking advocacy, relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) is inadequate in a framework of a protracted crisis as the time-length of the challenges obviously transcends the boundaries of interventions designed for short-term challenges.

Emergency and relief aid has a negative impact because it's for a short period and its impact vanishes with the end of the program. And it leads to lots of problems between the residents in the village. In contrast, development programs are more sustainable and their impact is more effective for the community.
(Man, Um al-Khair-West Bank)

2.2 Gender Specific Findings

The study adopted a gender-sensitive approach and analysis that reveals important differences in the perception of protection threats, coping strategies and potential solutions. The most important aspects are as follows:

1. There is a consensus among the interviewees; regardless of gender; in identifying protection challenges at general level i.e. water shortage, lack of transportation, etc. However, when the analysis is taken to a deeper level, the study shows **important differences based on gender**. For example, women's responses were different from men regarding what problems should be given priority to, and in this respect women expressed that issues such as child bearing, lack of recreation centers for children, lack of elderly shelters, violence against women, and early marriage are highly important for them, whereas these issues were not raised by male interviewees. On the other hand, there were no issues that were exclusively expressed by men.

2. The study shows that both local and international external interventions are generally gender blind when dealing with general protection challenges identified by the community. Gender mainstreaming is rare in programs and projects. Some protection agencies have specialized programs for women on specific issues directly related to women such as, women's economic empowerment, raising women's awareness on rights, violence against women, etc.
3. The female interviewees' responses show that the external interventions on women empowerment only fulfilled their basic needs in the context of the ongoing violations by the Israeli occupation in the three areas of the oPt. Women focused on their basic human rights and that prevented them from addressing more comprehensive woman rights claims, such as economic equality, social status or political empowerment.
4. Further gender differences were identified in relation to the self-coping strategies adopted to deal with the different protection challenges. Women's coping strategies were constrained and chosen based on the accepted social norms that determine the socially accepted jobs and roles women can play. For example, women mentioned the need to be empowered by facilitating job creation and vocational trainings close to their residence or at home. However, the social norms would add a layer of difficulty to these solutions. In contrast, social norms give men more privileges and alternatives to overcome the protection challenges.
5. Violence against women was identified in Gaza Strip as one of the main protection threats. This challenge was mainly identified by women. The results in Gaza Strip show that the closure and the internal conflict, together with the increased rate of unemployment resulted in an increase in domestic violence against women and children compared to the levels of the statistical survey carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2006.²

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

The opinions collected from the local communities and the findings point at two types of recommendations. On the one hand, *General conclusions and recommendations* that affect the overall approach and strategy of protection actors, on the other, *Operational conclusions and recommendations* which aim at improving the present Humanitarian Aid mechanisms so as to increase their effectiveness. Recommendations specific to either East Jerusalem, Area C in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip are further developed in the subsequent area sections of the study.

3.1 General Conclusions and Recommendations

The main mandate of the Local to Global Protection initiative is to try to capture the vision of local communities and in particular their perception of *protection* needs, coping strategies and how external actors can offer better protection. In this regard, two elements stand out as the most general and robust in the oPt study: how practically all interviewees in the different Palestinian communities perceive and declare that the main protection threat they face is the Israeli occupation, perceiving this problem as more important than any other protection threat, and the perception that international protection actors, while doing some valuable work, are not directing their efforts correctly. In this regard, the most important recommendation at general level is for protection actors **to demand accountability from Israel under International law**, in particular conformity to UN resolutions and application of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Additional Protocols

of 1977 in the framework of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). This recommendation reaches every protection actor, including international humanitarian NGOs, as from this perspective, the focus on the advocacy work at home becomes a necessary line of work that needs to be strengthened to accompany the humanitarian efforts in the field.

The fact that that international protection/humanitarian actors appear to perceive themselves as bearers of a much more limited responsibility restricted to the survival, resilience and mitigation aspects of *protection* entails a very important gap between the local perception of *protection* and the practice of international protection actors. This gap is by no means a theoretical abstraction, but a core issue with significant consequences, which demand analysis.

Starting with the most simple elements, it may look surprising how even if the oPt are proportionately one of the highest recipients of development and humanitarian Aid in the world,³ still the overwhelming majority of the interviewees feel that they are not protected. In this regard, it is easily observable that the large amount of investment and initiatives in the oPt do not match with the expected results.



Figure 1: Mismatch between protection activities and protection results in the oPt

How is this mismatch possible? To understand this phenomenon better, it is necessary to analyse and distinguish between different kinds of protection support. In this regard, a sustainable and effective protection in the context of a man-made protection threat needs to involve support in three different dimensions.

Dimension 1 looks at ways of stopping the threat itself, at the root causes. For example, this can be done by international NGOs through advocacy and awareness campaigns in their own countries to influence citizens and governments, by adopting clear stands about agreed international decisions and law in international fora, etc.; **Dimension 2** looks at the minimum obligations defined by Humanitarian law that an occupying country has towards the territory occupied and its citizens;⁴ finally, **Dimension 3** looks at survival, resilience and mitigation initiatives. This dimension will always remain insufficient and unsustainable as long as *1 and 2* are not adequately addressed. The importance of such activities though, derives from their capacity to at least partially and temporarily address urgent matters, but they can never be a substitute for the obligation to act in dimensions 1 and 2."

Despite this, the Humanitarian actors still concentrate their efforts on *Dimension 3* with a mix of good and bad results, whereas *Dimensions 1 and 2* seem to be considered outside their scope or marginal for the vast majority of external actors. Even though there are other secondary factors, the small proportion of *Dimensions 1 and 2* in the overall effort suffices to explain the lack of satisfactory protection results in the oPt.

In addition, the fact that the word *protection* is generally used without paying specific attention to this breakdown explains to a large extent the gap in understanding between local communities in Palestine and international actors. This has important consequences:

1. **International normalization of the understanding of protection** restricted to its dimension of survival and resilience. The practice of considering primarily survival and mitigation strategies as *protection* has become so established and normal, that the two first - and arguably most important - dimensions are regularly considered *political* and therefore perceived as beyond the mandate of most protection actors. However,

whereas the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is indeed political, the application of Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the oPt and to Palestinian citizens is a very different matter, as it counts with wide international consensus and it falls by definition within the responsibility of every protection and humanitarian actor.⁵ In this regard, the existing gap in the interpretation of protection is not only between the local communities and the international practice, but also between the international practice and the minimum legal standards that international actors have committed to.

2. **Evaluations of protection initiatives** take as their exclusive reference the protection initiatives included in the mentioned *third dimension* and not the overall framework of *protection*; consequently, protection results appear to be within acceptable ranges, when the real situation is that the analysis just shows a partial picture that renders invisible the failure to address the real and sustainable solutions included in *dimensions 1 and 2*. This invisibility facilitates unaccountability and plays a fundamental role in the perception of the general public opinion and taxpayers who remain unaware of the unacceptable protection breaches and of the very limited levels of protection offered. In turn, this contributes to entrench the status quo and an occupation that has lasted 65 years according to Palestinian perceptions - or 47 years as per international perception - a staggering duration for what should have been a transitory situation in either case. Taking the whole scheme in Figure A as a reference would at least improve visibility of the real situation and enhance transparency and accountability.

General recommendation Humanitarian actors must change the practice of understanding *protection* as a concept that exclusively involves survival and resilience support to a comprehensive understanding and practise which puts much more effort into holding all actors accountable to all relevant aspects of international law.

3.2 Operational Recommendations

The study has also identified a group of *operational recommendations* that aim at improving the present Humanitarian Aid in oPt in order to increase its impact and effectiveness.

1. **Need for higher investment in more detailed identification processes.** External actors have acquired a good understanding of the humanitarian issues at the general level in oPt. However, the study shows a degree of diversity of protection threats and challenges that makes this general knowledge insufficient to properly target humanitarian needs. As explained, not only protection problems and contexts are different in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but protection threats vary depending on the specific community. Often, even what appears to be a common issue takes on different forms in different communities when a detailed analysis is undertaken. In this context, identification processes that stay at a general level or one-size-fits-all approaches have high probabilities of failure. A larger investment in time and resources in the identification processes, reaching the level of the specific communities, is necessary.
2. **Need to better understand and support existing assets and practices.** External actors tend to focus exclusively on "needs" and not on "assets" or "positive local practices", and as a result identification processes remain incomplete. Identification and programming processes should broaden their perspective and aim not only at understanding "problems", but also at identifying and understanding local assets and strategies in order to obtain a complete overview. With this approach, programmes and projects would not just include strategies based on problems to be addressed, but also specific local initiatives to be supported or complemented. Due to the

heterogeneity in the different communities, these identification processes can not be general, but should look at the specific situation in each community.

3. **Need for results-based systems to understand what approaches work better and why.** After decades of interventions in Palestine, there is still a weak understanding among protection agencies - both international and national - of what works, what does not - and why. To understand change and successful approaches to adopt evidence-based decisions entails the existence of internal monitoring systems with every protection actor, with less emphasis on activity-oriented programs and a renewed focus on the monitoring of results to understand what works and what does not and as a basis to understand impact. In addition, lessons learnt should be better documented and better transmitted inside and between agencies, especially taking into account the difficulty in institutional learning created by the turnover of staff in the international protection agencies.
4. **Need for real gender mainstreaming.** In spite of the favourable rhetoric towards gender equality, both local and international external interventions are - with very few exceptions - gender blind when dealing with general protection challenges in oPt. Similarly, gender mainstreaming is rare in programs and projects. The study demonstrate important differences based on gender in all dimensions that can only be properly identified at program level and addressed if gender-sensitive analyses, tools and approaches are in place and taken seriously. The existence of specific projects addressing women needs is positive, but not a substitute for gender mainstreaming and for a comprehensive understanding of every protection problem through a gender-sensitive vision. This change in approach would involve many other specific changes, for example, the need to involve men in gender-related awareness, and not exclusively women, as both are actors of change.
5. **Need for a more strategic linkage between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) and with advocacy initiatives.** External Aid has short-term cycles and short-term goals that are inadequate in a framework of a protracted crisis. In addition, these three aspects of the same reality (LRRD) should be part of long-term goals that also involve advocacy as a complementary component in a long-term strategy.
6. **Need to enhance local capacity and leadership:** the study shows a general concern by local communities with the sustainability of the interventions, especially taking into account the prolonged unstable situation of the three areas. In this context, local capacity building is a priority in order to improve the situation when external interventions end. Four main needs were expressed in the three areas: a) Developing leadership, especially among the youth; b) Building capacity in resource management; c) Building capacity for local practitioners and researchers to ensure the community's voice is reflected in and strengthened in practice, policy and research; d) Facilitate community access to information. Many interviewees mentioned the need to understand better the available organizations and their mandate. The majority of women mentioned the lack of information they have about the projects in their area and the organizations working there. Access to information not only forms a major aspect of capacity building, but also contributes to a more balanced and fair relationship between those to be protected and the protection agencies. **Addressing the magnitude of the challenges requires not only individual skills but also collective capacity.** In this regard, the respondents stress the need to strengthen the existing local committees and coalitions or developing new ones. More specific needs are: a) to assert the participation of the local communities as real partners in identifying the approach and tools of implementation of the different projects through the establishment of civilian committees to help in decision making regarding the community needs, if an intervention is feasible, how should it be carried out, etc; b) To enhance the existing Human Rights and Women Rights Coalitions so as to become

more effective lobbying bodies; c) To enhance the capacity of NGOs in Area C to increase their capacity to support the community.

7. **Need to improve basic infrastructure, particularly in Area C.** Despite the imposed restrictions in Area C, efforts can be directed in several directions: Those most generally suggested among respondents are: a) Advocacy Level - an international campaign to support the right of improvement of the infrastructure in Area C; b) Improve the internal conditions of the schools and health centres; c) Establish playground and libraries for children and youth; d) Activate the law regarding disabilities so that public places can be used through improving appropriate and suitable access.

Notes

1. See factual information on displacement trends and causes in East Jerusalem: Key Humanitarian Concerns. Special Focus. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory. March 2011. See more interpretative analyses on displacement strategies by independent Israeli sources such as: The quiet deportation - Revocation of residency of East Jerusalem Palestinians. Hamoked B'tselem. 1997 / Revocation of social rights and health insurance. B'tselem. May 2006 / Nowhere Left to Go: Arab al-Jahalin Bedouin Ethnic Displacement. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. 2011 / Obstacles to peace - A reframing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. 2009

2. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Domestic Violence Survey 2006. June 2006. In:http://www.pCBS.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1258.pdf

3. See for example: Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council. Annual Report 2013 on the European Union's Development and external assistance policies and their implementation in 2012; See also OECD and DAC Development Aid statistics <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/aid-at-a-glance.htm>

4. For example, the Fourth Geneva Convention requires occupying powers such as Israel to protect the well-being of civilian populations under their control.

5. Apart from International Humanitarian Law, for example, the EU's Humanitarian Charter states: "we affirm the primacy of the humanitarian imperative: that action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict, and that nothing should override this principle..." It also declares "...The right to life with dignity entails more than physical well-being; it demands respect for the whole person, including the values and beliefs of individuals and affected communities, and respect for their human Rights".

Find the full report at the L2GP web site - including a detailed list and discussion of findings and general and specific recommendations. <http://www.local2global.info/>