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International
Development
A g e n c i e s

Dream On

5 Years Lost: *Case studies looking back at life under blockade*¹

Everyone in the world wishes they had done more with their lives over the years, but not everyone has a blockade standing in their way.

For the past 5 years, more than 1.6 million people in Gaza have been sealed in to 140 square miles, and big dreams have nowhere to go.

As dreams for a better life remain frozen, the quality of life has also declined. The blockade has had a disproportionate effect on civilians in Gaza. Severe restrictions on imports and exports have crippled Gaza's economy and people only too willing and able cannot find work. Aid dependency has grown as the private sector has all but shut down.



The quality and availability of essential services has also declined under the blockade, and severe obstacles on movement and access prevent many people from travelling abroad to seek health care or education and employment opportunities.

Half of Gaza's population is under 18 years of age. Many have never traveled outside of Gaza. They are nurturing frustration as they lack the opportunity and hope for a positive future. Instead of fulfilling their dreams, much of Gaza's youth today feel they have little to look forward to.

Facts and figures about unemployment, education, health, housing needs, water quality, imports, exports, electricity cuts, movement restrictions, and civilian injuries and fatalities are one way to show the impact of the blockade. But not all repercussions can be quantified.

Gaza's blockade is also about wasted time, loss and longing, and aspirations unfulfilled, which are universal themes that speak to the human emotions in us all. In order for people in Gaza to live with dignity and self sufficiency, the blockade must end.

¹ Citing security concerns, the government of Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza, which officially started on 14 June 2007. The term blockade is used to refer to the government of Israel's control of the Gaza Strip by land, sea, and air.

Living under blockade: meet the people

Just 1 kilometer outside the access restricted area known as the buffer zone, **Khaleel Zaanin**, 45, is irrigating eggplants, peppers, and potatoes on what is left of his land, about 7.5 acres. He owns an additional 37 acres inside the access restricted area that he is not permitted to cultivate. Citing security concerns, the government of Israel unilaterally imposed a buffer zone- or access restricted area- that extends up to 500 meters into Gaza. In practice, Israel restricts access to agricultural land up to 1,000-1,500 meters from the fence, with devastating effects on farmers who can no longer work in their fields. Khaleel's land inside the access restricted area once held 1,500 citrus trees, which the Israeli army cut down in 2007, citing security risks. "I had a great business in citrus, my life was very good. I used to employ 30 workers and export to Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank. Now, I work by myself just planting vegetables for local sale."



Khaleel says that he would like to return to citrus farming, but does not have the money to invest in replanting trees, which take 5 years to mature. He says that unless the situation changes he would be living with the uncertainty of new trees again being cut down. Still, he says he holds out hope that there are better days ahead. "All of us dream of this day where we live with freedom and I think it is still something we can achieve. Everything would be better if the occupation ended. In the past few years our life in Gaza was difficult. In the future I hope my family will be fine."

"My dream as a young girl was to have a home of my own and children, and to provide them with everything they need to live in peace and security. As I grew older I was dreaming of finishing high school and going to college so I can have a decent job. I'm an ambitious girl who wants to make a change in society. Unfortunately, I haven't achieved 1 percent of what I dreamed of."

Samia Othman Al Bea', 26, Beit Hanoun

Siham Abu Qainas, 43, is a mother of six living with her family in the Al Berka area in central Gaza. Her neighbourhood is not connected to the sewage network, and raw sewage flows openly through the streets. Her house has three improvised cesspits crawling with insects. Every two or three days, she uses buckets to empty the pits, dumping the waste into the street. Her two-month old daughter has a skin infection, which the doctor attributed to her unsanitary surroundings.

An international aid project initiated in 2010 planned to connect Siham's neighbourhood to a sewage system, but the construction is stalled. The building contractors are still awaiting

"I have a sick brother. He needs to go to Germany for treatment but we can't take him there. My dream is for the Gaza airport to open again, to have open borders so we can travel, and to get treatment for my brother whom I love very much."

Alaa' Mahmoud Al Najjar, 23, Al Maghazi

permission to bring in equipment for the wastewater pumping station through the Israeli-controlled crossings. The Israeli authorities have not explained the reason for the delays. Meanwhile Siham and her family dream of better days. "All I need is a dignified life for me and my family, but the blockade has destroyed my hope," she said.



Mona Abu Amer is 6 years old. She lives in Jabalia Refugee Camp in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Born with a congenital heart disease, she is 1 among 734 patients registered in the Union of Health Care Committees' (UHCC) medical records as a critical patient and hardship case requiring urgent medical support. Mona's mother, Zeinab, has found that the kind of care her daughter needs is just not available in Gaza. UHCC planned to build diagnostic, pediatric and state of the art specialty clinics. Without the necessary construction materials, new medical

equipment, or ability to travel for training courses to learn hi tech health services, all they have been able to offer Mona over the years was diapers and milk. "When my daughter was born with this condition 6 years ago I was expecting that social services would be available and that the government would help me get her advanced medical care. 6 years later I am hoping we can get the care and support she needs," says Zeinab.

"As a father responsible for five kids, I wanted to make sure they finished their education and that I helped them with marriage and building homes for them to live in. My dream was to give them a good and decent life. But I couldn't do any of that. I only was able to help pay for one of them to finish college and the rest quit school to work and help us financially."

-Jamal Mohammed Al Za'aneen, 60, Beit Hanoun

"Helping children was one of my biggest dreams in Gaza, along with building new green parks, cultural buildings, and community centers. I hope that I can achieve these dreams or at least I'll keep trying."

-Tawfeaq Abdelwahhab Hamad, 62, East Jabalia

"My dreams were to have a job in government, to continue my study abroad, and to improve my economic situation for me and my family. I couldn't have any of this because of everything happening in Gaza. No one can reach their goals or feel secure here and we don't know for how long it will stay this way."

-Suhayla Ibrahim Al Zenaty, 35, Nusirat Refugee Camp

"My dream is to complete my graduate project, which is a design for recycling and producing gas. But such a project can't be constructed locally because of the blockade on Gaza. So, I stopped dreaming about it and I'm living the reality."

-Ranya Fawzi Al Jamal, 30, Rafah

"Success at school, building a new house, participating in artistic exhibitions abroad-any dreams that I have I couldn't achieve because of the situation in Gaza. We want to live like normal people."

-Jineen Hani Abu Isaa, 12, Juhor Al Deek

In 2006, 38 year-old **Hind Amal** opened her own business. The divorced mother of 4 says the split from her unemployed husband inspired her to think big. "I planned to move forward and take care of myself, be a provider and role model for my children," she explained. With a combination of money she saved by doing odd jobs and taking a small loan from a local women's organization, Hind opened a beauty supply store. For the first year the store was a huge success and Hind was able to pay back her loan and see a profit. After the blockade started in 2007, business started to head downhill as Hind couldn't import the same products and people could not afford to pay retail prices. Determined to stick to her plan, Hind found creative ways to keep her shop afloat. She started making homemade creams and accessories and sold them at a lower price. As one of the only beauty supply stores still open in the Gaza Strip, she was making a profit again in 2008- only to find a new competitor when the tunnel trade started in 2009. As cheap goods flooded the market, Hind's store lost its appeal and she was again struggling to make ends meet. "If I look back at these past 5 years I am right back where I started. There has been so much pressure on me to succeed but the situation won't allow it. I'm working so hard to give my kids what they need. I have become a stronger person, a strong woman, but it shouldn't have to be this hard."

"My life-long dream was to improve the quality of life for deaf people in Gaza. My goal was to help sign language spread all over the strip, even in universities. More recently, my dream was to have a new home instead of living in the one which was destroyed during the Israeli military operation Cast Lead. I don't know if I can do any of this anymore."

-Darweesh Mustafa Al Hlouly, 79, Rafah



"My dream, like everyone in Gaza, is to live a decent life with my family and children, and to travel abroad to see other countries and to visit our relatives there. I can't do everything I dream of. The situation in Gaza will not allow us. You can only dream."

-Sami Ayed Abu Haddaf, 40, Al Qarara

"I dream of new clothes. You can't buy good clothes here, everything comes from Egypt through the Rafah tunnels and it's not high quality. I told my father to take me to the beach for the day, but he said there isn't enough fuel for the car. When I got hurt I needed stitches, but the hospital didn't have the stitching thread. What can I do? "

-Bahaa' Ibrahim Abu Khdeer, 10, Al Qarara

The Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) is a coordinating body of more than 80 aid and development agencies working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. The above is for information only and not attributable to AIDA, but to the sources cited.

People featured in these case studies are available for interviews. For media enquiries, or to schedule an interview or field visit please contact Willow Heske at willow.heske@oxfamnovib.nl or + 972 (0) 597133646