Activity Of Charity and Civil Society Organizations in Gaza*

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Introduction

The ongoing crisis in Gaza has evolved into one of the most protracted and severe humanitarian emergencies of the 21st century, exacerbated by political instability, blockades, and recurring conflicts (Diab et al. 2018). Gaza is still dealing with several issues as of 2024, such as extreme poverty, restricted access to essential services, and the devastation of vital infrastructure. Due to the region's precarious socioeconomic structure, the local government is unable to meet substantial humanitarian needs alone (Buheji–Hasan 2024). Charitable and civil society groups have emerged as a crucial core, offering short-term aid and long-term rehabilitation support. Nevertheless, there are persistent concerns regarding the effectiveness and durability of their initiatives because their work is carried out in a constrictive setting that prevents the full achievement of humanitarian objectives (Roy 1996).

Charities and civil society organizations (CSOs) work to fill gaps left by government institutions in areas affected by protracted crises. The work of these non-profit organizations is crucial in addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza, which include medical aid, food supplies, psychological support, and educational materials (Schultz 2021). However, the challenging environment in Gaza, characterized by military restrictions and limited access to external resources, hinders the work of these organizations in meeting the basic needs of the local population, as a result of their work being severely restricted and their vital contributions being obscured (Muslih 1993).

The main driving force behind this study is to examine the diverse functions and analyze the documentation of activities and contributions of seven major active nonprofit organizations in Gaza, identify their contributions to the local environment, and shed light on how these organizations operate within Gaza, the challenges they face, and their effectiveness in difficult circumstances. Given the numerous factors that influence these efforts in Gaza, it is essential to examine the strategies employed by these organizations and assess their capacity to adapt to ongoing and evolving challenges. This evaluation will enable a more comprehensive understanding of their broader and longer-term impact, as well as inform the delivery of strengthening their management strategies in times of crisis (Mali 2024). These organizations are working to coordinate efforts to alleviate the crisis, but their initiatives still do not fully address the full range of humanitarian needs. This examination will not only shed light on their immediate responses to critical needs. However, it will also emphasize the importance of long-term recovery initiatives to enhance resilience and sustainability in the face of ongoing hardship.

By emphasizing the contributions of organizations such as USAID, OCHA, and the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, this study contributes to the body of literature by thoroughly examining both group and individual initiatives in the humanitarian sector. A thorough examination of the patterns, difficulties, and achievements in the area's humanitarian response is made possible by the study's temporal breadth, which spans ten years of activity. Additionally, the geographic focus on Gaza underscores the localized nature of the crisis and the specific contextual challenges that impact humanitarian operations (Sanderson 2017).

To summarize, this study significantly contributes to our understanding of the role of nonprofits and civil society groups in times of crisis, particularly in areas like Gaza that are affected by violence. It evaluates the effectiveness of these initiatives, provides insightful analysis of the tactics used to address humanitarian requirements, and offers valuable suggestions for improving future responses in similar crises. By examining the activities of these groups, this study aims to contribute to scholarly discussions and inform real-world crisis management techniques by highlighting the necessity of coordinated, flexible, and sustained humanitarian measures in protracted wars.

Overview of Previous Studies

The intersection of humanitarian response, civil society organizations, and charitable efforts, particularly in conflict zones, has garnered significant public and scholarly attention. Most of these organizations operate in severely affected areas such as Gaza, and their role is particularly prominent in times of crisis, political instability, military occupation, and economic blockade. The literature on organizations that support and assist human suffering has increased, and efforts have been made to fill research gaps on this topic to enhance resilience in highly restrictive environments.

Alkahlout (2020) examines the role of Qatari humanitarian aid in supporting CSOs in the Gaza Strip since the 2007 siege. He explores the challenges CSOs face, including the Israeli blockade, political divisions, and restrictions on democratic processes. Through a combination of literature review and field research, including interviews with CSO staff, Gazan residents, and Qatari charity representatives, the study assesses the impact of Qatari aid on political, economic, and social developments in Gaza. The findings indicate that while Qatari aid has provided crucial support to CSOs, it has also led to unintended negative consequences that affect the operational dynamics of these organizations.

The study of Saad et al. (2022) examined the interconnectedness of social safety nets and cash assistance and voucher programs in Gaza. This study presents effective cash assistance programs to raise the minimum poverty line and build resilience in the face of economic volatility. It also examines how programs can help disadvantaged groups amid ongoing economic challenges, the fragmentation of restrictions on financial flows, and a lack of coordination with social protection and humanitarian relief systems. This study emphasized the need to integrate immediate assistance with ongoing social support.

In Gaza, a territory plagued by continuing crises and damaged infrastructure, Chilvers et al. (2017) investigate emergency preparedness initiatives for women with disabilities led by civil society. The study of the Within and Without the State program underscores how marginalized groups–especially women with disabilities–are often excluded during emergencies. These women collaborated with community researchers to develop crisis-response plans that prioritized long-term advocacy, effective emergency planning, improved support coordination, and accessible shelters for individuals with disabilities. The results underscore the importance of inclusive humanitarian interventions in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations during periods of instability and violence.

One of the topics consistent with the literature is the pivotal role civil society organizations play in providing essential services without direct state intervention. UNRWA's work by Akram et al. (2010) is often referred to in reconciling the services provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), including emergency services such as health care and education, the dual pressures it faces, meeting the population's basic needs, and providing detailed accounts of operational frameworks and providing assistance under siege and limited international support El-Mougher (2022). The study highlights the importance of coordination between international and civil society organizations to enhance the effectiveness of assistance efforts in conflict areas.

Siman (2021) and Rabbani (1994) provided strong evidence from several studies on the unique challenges faced by civil society organizations in reaching disadvantaged groups. Their final findings showed operational constraints resulting from movement and security concerns. Several reports have documented that international civil society organizations have continually adapted to the use of continuous confinement methods, with many organizations employing local workers who can

navigate checkpoints or developing methods to deliver aid in the event of physical obstacles.

Karlstedt et al. (2015) confirmed that civil society organizations in the occupied Palestinian territories are unbalanced in their tasks. This study's results emphasize the need to alleviate the pressure resulting from the political scene and enable humanitarian organizations to operate in conflict areas on a complete and equal basis with other areas.

A crucial theoretical contribution to this area of research comes from Paffenholz (2015), who introduced the concept of "civic space" to explain how CSOs operate within constrained environments, especially in conflict zones. The case of Gaza (Aall–Helsing, 2021) expands on this concept, describing the extreme limitations imposed by ongoing military operations and the near-constant threat of violence. These limitations, combined with political restrictions, have severely curtailed the ability of CSOs to function effectively. Asi and Williams (2018) further explore these dynamics by documenting the consequences of restricted humanitarian access on the population's overall well-being, emphasizing the need for international advocacy to address these barriers.

Moreover, the academic discourse has shifted towards examining the long-term impact of CSOs beyond immediate relief. Studies, such as those by Natil (2021), suggest that CSOs in Gaza play a dual role: they address short-term emergency needs while working toward sustainable development and resilience-building. These organizations promote education, foster economic opportunities, and support community cohesion, all of which are critical for the long-term recovery and resilience of the population. This dual role is increasingly being recognized as vital in conflict-affected regions, where cycles of violence and instability often render traditional development models ineffective.

The literature also addresses the financial and operational sustainability of CSOs. In conflict zones like Gaza, where state institutions are weak or absent, civil society organizations (CSOs) often rely on international funding, which can be volatile due to shifting geopolitical priorities. Vaughan and Hillier (2019) examine how fluctuations in donor funding impact the capacity of CSOs to plan and execute long-term projects. This is particularly relevant in the Gaza context, where international sanctions and restrictions on the movement of goods have severely limited the resources available to local organizations. The dependency on external funding also raises questions about the autonomy of CSOs and their ability to respond to local needs, as the priorities of their international donors may limit their flexibility.

The interaction between civil society organizations, governmental entities, and international organizations is an indispensable necessity for confronting the multidimensional challenges facing residents of conflict areas, such as Gaza, especially in long-term crises. Dynamic, political, social, and economic efforts must be integrated to respond harmoniously, and each of these parties must present its effective strengths. Recovery is a comprehensive, ongoing, and long-term process. Organizations must bridge these gaps and provide humanitarian relief with gov-

ernmental and international support while enhancing flexibility and sustainable development, limiting restrictions imposed on access, material instability, and significant political pressures, and continuing research on how to support the efforts of these institutions in areas affected by the conflict; this is what Lewis, Kanji, and Themudo (2020) emphasized in their article.

The theoretical foundation for analyzing the activities of charity and civil society organizations in Gaza heavily relies on theories of humanitarian aid, crisis management, and the operations of non-profit organizations. Barnett (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of humanitarianism as both a political and moral endeavor, framing aid work as a necessity and a form of international intervention. This aligns with Fassin's (2011) concept of "humanitarian reason," which describes the ethical imperatives driving humanitarian action, particularly in conflict-ridden areas such as Gaza.

Kaldor's (2016) "New Wars" theory also informs the operational dynamics of non-profit organizations in crisis zones. This theory posits that contemporary conflicts, such as those in Gaza, are characterized by the breakdown of traditional state structures and increasing reliance on non-governmental entities to provide essential services. Kaldor's theory helps explain the expanded role of CSOs in Gaza, where state capacity is severely limited.

As Coombs (2007) outlined, crisis management theory offers another valuable lens for understanding how organizations operate during emergencies. This framework assesses the effectiveness of CSOs in Gaza, examining how these organizations prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises. Adaptive management is particularly relevant, as it describes organizations' need to remain flexible in rapidly changing circumstances—a frequent occurrence in Gaza's volatile environment.

The role of civil society in conflict zones further underscores the importance of local actors in providing humanitarian aid. Edwards argues that civil society acts as a bridge between state structures and the local population. This function is especially critical in contexts such as Gaza, where governmental institutions are either absent or severely incapacitated. This theory is supported by Melese et al. (2024), who explore how CSOs in Gaza have adapted to the constraints of their operating environment by focusing on community engagement and localized solutions.

While studies by Farhat et al. (2023) and Butt and Butt (2016) have discussed the operational challenges faced by CSOs in Gaza, there has been limited exploration of how these organizations collaborate with international bodies. This is particularly important given the constrained environment in which they operate. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the collaborative strategies employed by CSOs and international organizations, providing insights into the effectiveness of coordinated efforts.

Another gap is the limited focus on gender-specific interventions, despite organizations like the Women's Programs Center in Rafah being at the forefront of providing services to women and children. Studies by Bouri (2024) and ActionAid briefly address the importance of gender-sensitive humanitarian strategies, but

few have provided an in-depth analysis of these initiatives. This research will focus on gendered approaches to humanitarian aid, highlighting the efforts of women-led organizations in mitigating the crisis.

In summary, this literature review highlights the considerable work done by scholars and organizations in documenting the activities of charity and civil society organizations in crisis zones and identifies several gaps in current research. This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the activities of CSOs in Gaza, with a primary focus on long-term recovery efforts, collaboration strategies, and gender-sensitive interventions.

Methodology

The primary method employed in this research is a qualitative approach involving data collection through remote interviews and field observations. This method was chosen for its effectiveness in exploring complex human behaviors, organizational strategies, and collaborative efforts within the humanitarian field (Silverman 2021). Given the sensitive nature of the conflict in Gaza, qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders without placing participants at additional risk.

Online interviews were conducted with five staff members from seven key organizations: Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Program, Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA. These organizations were chosen for their significant involvement in humanitarian operations within Gaza, providing a comprehensive perspective on the roles of international and local actors in crisis relief efforts. The interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into organizational activities from 2014 to 2024, including strategies for managing the ongoing crisis and specific challenges, particularly those related to the operational restrictions imposed by the conflict environment.

The seven organizations were selected based on their long-standing involvement in Gaza's humanitarian landscape and the diversity of their interventions. Each organization represents a distinct facet of the broader humanitarian effort, encompassing emergency food aid, healthcare, gender-sensitive programming, and infrastructure rehabilitation. This deliberate sampling approach ensures that the study captures the full scope of organizational responses to the ongoing crisis (Patton 2002).

The interview questions focused on organizational activities, crisis management strategies, and the challenges of operating under restrictive conditions. Field observations, drawing on reports from international organizations and local sources, were also incorporated into the study. This component facilitated a grounded understanding of the local context, capturing the tangible impact of organizational activities on the ground (Marshall–Rossman 2014).

The interview comprises seven questions that address key aspects of their humanitarian efforts, the challenges they face, and strategies for overcoming resource constraints. The responses were originally in Arabic and have been translated into English. Key topics include infrastructure development, collaboration with other actors, and adaptive strategies to maintain operations amid significant restrictions.

The online interview questions were designed to address several key areas, including:

1. The nature and scope of activities during the crisis.
2. Strategies developed for immediate relief and long-term recovery efforts.
3. How collaboration occurs between international and local organizations.
4. Challenges and limitations include access to affected populations, resource constraints, and security risks.
5. Adaptive measures are being taken to continue operations amidst severe restrictions and escalating conflict.

The Questions of the Study

1. What key activities has your organization implemented in Gaza during the crisis?
2. How does your organization balance short-term relief efforts with long-term recovery planning?
3. What collaborative strategies does your organization employ with other humanitarian actors in Gaza?
4. What challenges does your organization face in delivering humanitarian assistance in Gaza?
5. How does your organization overcome resource constraints by continuing to deliver aid?
6. What specific security risks does your organization encounter in Gaza, and how do you mitigate these risks?
7. What adaptive strategies have you implemented to sustain operations despite the severe restrictions imposed on you?

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, effectively identifying patterns and themes across large datasets (Braun–Clarke 2019). The data analysis process followed several steps, beginning with the transcription of interviews and field notes, followed by iterative coding to identify recurring themes related to organizational strategies, challenges, and impact. The thematic analysis focused on key areas of interest, such as:

Analyzing how organizations adapted their operations in response to the evolving crisis and the restrictive environment in Gaza.

Identifying synergies between international and local organizations and their collective efforts to provide humanitarian relief and exploring the primary obstacles organizations encounter, including restrictions on movement, resource limitations, and security concerns. The analysis process was facilitated by qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 12), which aided in the organization and retrieval of coded data (Jackson–Bazeley 2019). The themes of the humanitarian aid and crisis management theoretical framework were reviewed, allowing for a grounded analysis of the data within the broader context of non-profit work in conflict zones.

Given the sensitive nature of the research context, strict ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study. Ethical considerations are paramount when conducting research in conflict zones, where participants may be exposed to risks such as political persecution, security threats, or social stigmatization. Therefore, the confidentiality of participants was strictly maintained.

This means all participants were fully informed about the nature of the study, its objectives, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Moreover, confirmation was obtained from all interviewees, ensuring their participation was voluntary and confidential. Interview transcripts and field notes were anonymized to protect the identities of participants and organizations, particularly in cases where critical information could endanger the security of staff members (Mack 2005), and to minimize risks to participants, interviews were conducted remotely via secure video conferencing platforms, further reducing exposure to potential physical threats or political repercussions.

Findings and Analysis

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has elicited a multifaceted response from various charity and civil society organizations, each playing a crucial role in addressing immediate relief needs and long-term recovery. The collective efforts of organizations such as Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Program (WFP), the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA have significantly impacted the Gaza population.

Organizations have provided critical aid, including food, medical supplies, and emergency shelter. The WFP's food distribution programs have been pivotal in alleviating hunger among Gaza's most vulnerable populations. Their efforts have ensured the provision of essential food items to thousands of families, helping to mitigate the severe food insecurity exacerbated by the ongoing conflict (Hassoun et al. 2024). The Women's Programs Center in Rafah has focused on addressing gender-based violence and providing psychological support to survivors. Their initiatives have offered immediate assistance and counseling, addressing the acute needs of women and girls affected by the conflict (Tol et al. 2013).

Beyond immediate relief, organizations have also concentrated on long-term recovery and rebuilding. Rebuilding Alliance's efforts to reconstruct homes and

schools have contributed to the stabilization of affected communities. Their work in rebuilding infrastructure has provided essential services and fostered a sense of normalcy and hope among displaced families (Harrow–Sola 2022). UNRWA's educational programs have been crucial in ensuring that children continue their education despite the conflict. Their focus on educational continuity helps build resilience among the younger generation, which is essential for the long-term recovery of Gaza's socio-economic fabric (Parker 2020).

Rebuilding Alliance

The Rebuilding Alliance focused on infrastructure development, particularly on rebuilding homes and community centers that were destroyed in the conflict. They also provided legal assistance to displaced families and implemented solar energy projects to ensure reliable power in communities suffering from chronic electricity shortages. Moreover, they balanced immediate infrastructure rebuilding with long-term projects, such as developing sustainable power solutions and establishing legal frameworks to help families retain their properties. Their goal was to build resilient communities through long-term recovery strategies that address both physical and legal needs.

The Rebuilding Alliance worked with local contractors, engineers, and international organizations to allocate resources effectively. Collaborations included exchanging best practices in sustainable building techniques and combining efforts for legal advocacy to protect housing and land rights in Gaza. The blockade and security concerns significantly delayed their projects. Another challenge was the lack of materials, as restrictions made it difficult to import essential building supplies. Frequent airstrikes also endangered staff and ongoing construction projects, further impeding progress. They overcame resource constraints through donor engagement and by using locally available materials whenever possible. They also relied on community involvement, where residents assisted with rebuilding efforts, reducing reliance on external resources and building local capacity for future reconstruction work.

Security risks were ever-present, particularly during active conflict. They communicated closely with local authorities and community leaders to mitigate these risks and ensure their teams operated in safer areas. They also developed contingency evacuation plans and regularly trained their staff on security protocols. Their adaptive strategies included focusing on sustainable, low-resource rebuilding methods, such as solar energy and sourcing materials locally. They also engaged in remote project management, ensuring that rebuilding continued despite the restricted movement of international staff and supplies.

World Food Program (WFP)

WFP provided food vouchers and direct food aid to vulnerable populations. They also focused on nutrition programs for children and pregnant women. During the crisis, they ensured food security through local agricultural partnerships and supported livelihood programs to promote long-term sustainability. In the short term, they provided immediate food aid to those in need, while their long-term strategy involved building resilient food systems by supporting local farmers and offering training on climate-resilient farming. This approach ensured that local agriculture could withstand future crises, reducing reliance on external food aid.

The WFP collaborated with local NGOs and international organizations to coordinate food distribution and prevent duplication of efforts. Collaboration also extended to logistical partnerships, where they shared resources and infrastructure to streamline aid delivery, particularly during periods of heightened conflict and restricted access. Restricted access to certain areas and border delays were significant challenges, limiting the timely delivery of food. The destruction of infrastructure, such as roads and food storage facilities, further complicated their efforts. The volatile security situation also made it difficult to reach some of the most affected populations.

WFP overcame resource constraints by partnering with local suppliers to procure food and resources locally, reducing dependency on external imports. Additionally, they leveraged innovative technology, such as digital cash transfers, which enabled more efficient aid distribution and minimized logistical costs in times of crisis. Security risks were pervasive, including airstrikes and military operations that hindered their operations. To mitigate these risks, they implemented real-time security monitoring and collaborated with local partners who possess a deeper understanding of the security landscape. They also trained their staff on emergency evacuation protocols.

Women's Programs Center

WPC was an organization that provided educational programs, psychosocial support, and vocational training for women. It also offered trauma recovery services and mental health programs for women and children affected by the ongoing conflict. The organization aimed to empower women by providing them with the necessary tools to rebuild their lives. In the short term, they provided mental health counseling and emergency vocational support, helping women regain economic independence. Long-term recovery efforts included capacity-building programs that equipped women with the skills necessary for future employment, ensuring they could contribute to rebuilding their community after the conflict. They partnered with international NGOs, such as UNRWA and ActionAid, to offer integrated services for women and children. Collaboration included sharing trauma

recovery programs, jointly developing vocational training initiatives, and advocating for women's rights within the broader humanitarian response in Gaza.

The main challenges included limited access to healthcare for women, cultural barriers that prevented some women from accessing services, and security risks that affected both staff and the women they served. Additionally, funding constraints made it difficult to sustain long-term educational and vocational programs.

WPC addressed resource constraints by partnering with local organizations that helped them stretch their funding and resources. They also focused on community-driven solutions, such as involving local women in program design and implementation, which reduced costs and ensured that the programs were tailored to the community's needs. The ongoing conflict and airstrikes posed significant security risks. To mitigate these risks, they collaborated closely with local leaders and communities to ensure the safety of their programs. They implemented psychosocial support for their staff to help them cope with the stress of working in a conflict zone.

They implemented remote counseling and online vocational training for women, ensuring their services continued even during heightened conflict. They also relied on local trainers and staff, who continued to deliver services when international staff were unavailable.

ActionAid

ActionAid actively distributed emergency food supplies, provided essential hygiene kits, and offered mental health support services. It also focused on establishing temporary shelters and educational support for children affected by the crisis. ActionAid provided short-term relief through rapid response teams that addressed immediate needs, including food and medical supplies. For long-term recovery, they implemented community-based programs to rebuild infrastructure and support local livelihoods. This dual approach ensured a balanced response.

ActionAid employed collaborative strategies by participating in humanitarian coordination clusters and conducting joint assessment missions with other organizations. They shared resources, information, and logistical support to ensure an integrated response and avoid duplication of efforts.

Key challenges included severe restrictions on movement and access, intermittent funding shortages, and the volatile security situation. These factors complicated logistics and hindered the organization's ability to consistently reach and support affected communities. To overcome resource constraints, ActionAid prioritized partnerships with local organizations for resource sharing and operational support. They also sought flexible funding arrangements and implemented cost-effective strategies to maximize the impact of available resources.

Security risks included targeted attacks on aid convoys, threats to staff safety, and general instability. ActionAid mitigated these risks by implementing security

protocols, coordinating with local security forces, and adjusting operational plans to ensure the safety of staff and assets. ActionAid adopted adaptive strategies to maintain operational continuity, including leveraging local partnerships for operational flexibility, utilizing innovative technologies for remote monitoring, and adjusting program activities based on real-time situational assessments.

USAID

USAID implemented infrastructure repair projects, focusing on water and sanitation systems, as well as healthcare facility support. It provided emergency medical supplies and helped strengthen local healthcare networks. Additionally, it offered educational support for children by rebuilding schools and supporting remote learning initiatives. In the short term, USAID delivered emergency medical and water supplies. In the long term, it focused on rebuilding critical infrastructure, such as water treatment plants and schools. These efforts ensured that communities recovered and became better equipped for future crises through the development of sustainable infrastructure.

USAID partnered with local governments, UN agencies, and international NGOs to ensure its efforts were aligned and complementary. Since its work primarily focused on rebuilding public infrastructure, it coordinated with other organizations to prevent duplication of efforts and integrated its projects into broader community recovery plans. The key challenges included access restrictions, particularly in areas heavily affected by the conflict. USAID also faced bureaucratic delays in obtaining permits to work in specific regions and logistical challenges related to moving supplies through blockaded areas. Security risks further limit its ability to deploy staff efficiently.

To overcome resource constraints, USAID leveraged its extensive network of local contractors and partners, which allowed it to source materials and services locally. It also relied on public-private partnerships to maximize funding efficiency and shared resources with other NGOs and governmental bodies, enabling it to operate effectively despite restrictions.

Security risks, including airstrikes and general conflict-related violence, necessitated proactive measures to mitigate risk. USAID ensured its staff received regular security training and used satellite monitoring to track the evolving security situation. Additionally, it coordinated closely with local leaders to identify the safest areas for project implementation.

USAID adapted by implementing remote management strategies for infrastructure projects, allowing local contractors to continue operations even when international staff were unable to enter Gaza. It also invested in mobile water purification systems and temporary healthcare units to provide immediate relief in areas where permanent facilities had been destroyed or severely damaged.

Islamic Relief

Islamic Relief focused on providing emergency food aid, shelter, and healthcare services. It also ran orphaned sponsorship programs and provided cash assistance to highly needy families. Additionally, it established medical camps in response to healthcare shortages, offering free medical care to thousands of residents.

In the short term, Islamic Relief focused on delivering immediate food, shelter, and medical assistance to vulnerable populations. For long-term recovery, it rehabilitated healthcare facilities and supported economic development programs, including providing micro-loans to small businesses and offering vocational training programs. It collaborated with local charities and international organizations, such as UNRWA and OCHA. It coordinated with other humanitarian actors to ensure complementary services were provided, such as integrating its food aid programs with healthcare services offered by other organizations, which minimized service gaps and maximized resource use.

The main challenges included funding shortages and access restrictions. Additionally, supply chain disruptions due to the blockade made it difficult to bring essential supplies, such as medicine and food, into the region. The organization also faced staff safety risks, especially during active conflict, which limited its ability to deliver aid effectively. Moreover, the key security risks included airstrikes, military incursions, and restricted movement due to curfews. Islamic Relief implemented real-time security monitoring to mitigate these risks and provided staff training on handling crises. It also established safe zones in collaboration with local authorities to protect staff and beneficiaries. The organization developed mobile health clinics and temporary shelters that could be set up quickly in areas affected by the conflict. Additionally, it used remote distribution systems for food and cash assistance, leveraging local volunteers to reach areas where staff could not safely operate, ensuring aid reached those in need even during extreme restrictions.

UNRWA

UNRWA continued to provide education, healthcare, and emergency relief services for Palestinian refugees in Gaza. During the current crisis, the organization focused on emergency shelter, food distribution, and medical aid through its extensive network, which had been converted into temporary shelters for displaced families.

In the short term, UNRWA provided emergency food and shelter to displaced populations. Long-term recovery efforts included rebuilding educational infrastructure, focusing on teacher training, and providing vocational programs for young people to ensure they had the skills necessary to rebuild Gaza's economy. UNRWA collaborated closely with other UN agencies, including OCHA and WFP, as well as local NGOs, to coordinate relief and recovery efforts. Its collaborative strategies

included joint planning on food distribution, healthcare provision, and education services, ensuring that the population's diverse needs were met comprehensively.

The main challenges UNRWA faced were access restrictions, particularly for humanitarian staff, and ongoing security concerns. The damage to infrastructure, including schools and healthcare facilities, also hindered its ability to deliver aid effectively. Additionally, funding shortfalls continued to be a significant barrier to scaling up operations.

UNRWA overcame resource constraints by leveraging its extensive network of local staff who lived and worked in the refugee camps. This enabled the continuation of operations even when international staff were restricted from travel. The agency also relied on multi-donor funding mechanisms, which allowed it to pool resources and share operational costs with other humanitarian actors. Security risks included the bombing of facilities, such as schools and clinics, where displaced people sought shelter. To mitigate these risks, UNRWA worked closely with local communities to establish safe zones and continually updated its evacuation plans. It also collaborated with local authorities to ensure safe passage for staff and aid convoys.

UNRWA implemented remote learning programs for students unable to attend school due to the conflict. Additionally, it utilized mobile medical units to deliver healthcare in areas inaccessible to regular clinics. Focusing on community-based operations continued services, even under the most challenging circumstances.

Collaborative vs. Individual Efforts

The coordination among international and local organizations has been a defining feature of the humanitarian response in Gaza. Collaborative efforts, particularly those facilitated by OCHA, have aimed to streamline aid distribution and avoid duplication of services. OCHA's role in coordinating relief activities has enhanced aid effectiveness by ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and that service gaps are addressed (Groten 2021).

For instance, joint initiatives between UN agencies and local NGOs have provided more comprehensive responses to health and education needs. For example, the collaboration between Islamic Relief and ActionAid has leveraged their combined strengths in providing medical care and educational support, resulting in a more holistic approach to crisis management (Zaqout et al. 2024). While collaborative efforts have been beneficial, individual organizational activities have also made significant contributions. Organizations such as USAID and the WFP have implemented specific programs tailored to their respective areas of expertise. USAID's infrastructure projects and the WFP's targeted food assistance have effectively addressed particular needs, highlighting the strengths of specialized approaches (Gross–Feldman 2015). However, individual efforts have sometimes faced challenges related to coordination and integration with broader relief efforts. Differences in organizational priorities and operational methods have occasionally led to inefficiencies and gaps in service delivery.

Key Themes

One recurring theme is the challenge of coordination among multiple actors. Despite OCHA's efforts to facilitate collaboration, organizations often encounter difficulties synchronizing their activities. This can result in overlaps in some areas while leaving others underserved. The complexity of the operational environment in Gaza, characterized by frequent political and logistical obstacles, exacerbates these challenges (Qarmout–Bland 2012).

Another significant theme is the interplay between international and local organizations. International organizations, such as UNRWA and the WFP, bring substantial resources and global expertise but may face limitations in local knowledge and community engagement. In contrast, local organizations, such as the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, possess valuable insights into community needs and cultural contexts but may struggle with limited resources and capacity (Suraningsih et al. 2024). The sustainability of relief efforts is a crucial theme, as evidenced by the data. While immediate aid is essential, there is a continuing need to focus on long-term recovery and building resilience. Sustainable programs that address both the immediate needs and the underlying issues contributing to the crisis are vital for ensuring a lasting impact. Initiatives that integrate community participation and local capacity-building tend to have more enduring benefits (Buxton 2008).

Discussion

The humanitarian response in Gaza, as implemented by organizations such as the Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA, has had a significant impact on alleviating the acute needs of the population. This evaluation assesses the short-term relief efforts and the long-term development strategies employed by these organizations.

Organizations have demonstrated significant success in addressing immediate needs. The WFP's food distribution programs have effectively mitigated hunger among Gaza's vulnerable populations, with reports indicating a reduction in food insecurity among recipients (Zaqout et al. 2024). Similarly, the Women's Programs Center in Rafah has provided essential support for survivors of gender-based violence, offering psychological and emergency assistance that has been crucial for immediate recovery (Tol et al. 2013).

In the longer term, organizations such as Rebuilding Alliance and UNRWA have made significant strides in reconstruction and education. Rebuilding Alliance's efforts to restore homes and schools has been pivotal in rebuilding Gaza's infrastructure, contributing to community stabilization (Harrow–Sola 2022). UNRWA's educational programs have ensured continuity in education, fostering resilience among children and providing a foundation for future socio-economic recovery (Parker 2020).

Despite these successes, ongoing challenges persist, particularly regarding sustainability and the scale of recovery, as well as the scope of the need.

Unlike many other crisis settings, Gaza's ongoing conflict, coupled with stringent restrictions on movement and resources, creates a highly complex environment for humanitarian efforts. The persistent blockade and frequent hostilities exacerbate the challenges faced by aid organizations, limiting their operational capacities and impacting the effectiveness of their interventions (Groten 2021). This situation contrasts with other crises, such as those in Haiti or Syria, where challenges also exist, and the nature of the conflict or geographical constraints differ.

The operational environment in Gaza, characterized by political and logistical challenges, presents unique difficulties compared to other regions. For instance, in post-earthquake Haiti, while logistical challenges were significant, the lack of conflict allowed for relatively more straightforward access to affected areas (Chen et al. 2013). In Gaza, the dual challenge of conflict and blockade necessitates a more nuanced approach, striking a balance between immediate aid and sustained engagement in a volatile environment (Cordery et al. 2023).

The role of local organizations in Gaza, such as the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, highlights the critical importance of local knowledge and engagement in humanitarian responses. Local organizations often have a deeper understanding of the community's needs and cultural context, which can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of interventions. This scenario differs from situations where international organizations may dominate the response due to their scale and resources, as observed in the aftermath of natural disasters such as the 2011 Japan earthquake (Nassar et al. 2025).

Recommendations for Improvement

Based on the findings from the analysis of the activities of charity and civil society organizations in Gaza, several recommendations can be made to improve humanitarian strategies and policies for future crises. Improved coordination among international and local organizations is essential. At the same time, collaborative efforts have been beneficial; enhancing mechanisms for real-time information sharing and joint planning can address gaps and reduce duplication. As exemplified by OCHA's role, establishing more robust frameworks for inter-agency collaboration should be prioritized to streamline operations and enhance the overall effectiveness of aid (Qarmout–B-land 2012).

Also, it is crucial to invest in the capacity building of local organizations. Local NGOs and community-based organizations often have unique insights into the needs and dynamics of affected populations. Providing training and resources to these organizations can amplify their impact and ensure that interventions are better tailored to local contexts (Suraningsih et al. 2024). This approach should be complemented by ensuring that international organizations support rather than

supplant local efforts. On the other hand, Humanitarian strategies should be adaptable to the political and logistical constraints inherent in conflict zones. Developing flexible operational models that can swiftly adjust to changing conditions and incorporating mechanisms for conflict-sensitive programming is necessary. Strategies should also include advocacy for greater humanitarian access and efforts to negotiate temporary relief corridors to reach the most affected areas (Buxton 2008).

Integrating long-term recovery and development goals into immediate relief efforts should be a priority. Ensuring that relief activities are part of a broader strategy for sustainable development can enhance the long-term impact of humanitarian interventions. Programming that fosters resilience and promotes economic recovery, such as vocational training and small-scale economic initiatives, should be integrated into the response efforts (Kaidarova–Korganbekova 2024).

Conclusion

This research reveals several critical insights. The comprehensive analysis reveals that, while these organizations have made notable contributions to both immediate relief and long-term recovery, the scale of the crisis continues to pose significant challenges.

The organizations studied–Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Program (WFP), the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA–have collectively played a crucial role in alleviating immediate suffering and facilitating recovery efforts. Their activities have addressed essential needs such as food security, healthcare, and education, contributing to some stabilization of the region (Zaqout et al. 2024). However, despite these efforts, the ongoing conflict and blockade severely constrain the extent and effectiveness of their interventions, underscoring the persistent challenges in achieving comprehensive relief and development (Cordery et al. 2023).

The analysis highlights the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among organizations compared to individual activities. Collaborative initiatives have demonstrated higher efficiency and impact by pooling resources and expertise. For example, joint programs involving multiple organizations have addressed complex needs more effectively than isolated efforts (Qarmout–B-land 2012). Conversely, organizations operating independently often face limitations due to logistical constraints and lack of coordination (Suraningsih et al. 2024).

Several recurring themes emerge from the data, including the challenges of operating under restrictive conditions, the crucial role of local versus international organizations, and the need for sustainable relief efforts. Coordination difficulties and political barriers impede effective humanitarian response (Nassar et al. 2025). The study also emphasizes the importance of local organizations, which possess unique insights into the needs of the affected population and contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness of the response (Harrow–Sola 2022).

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