**Setting new standards in reconstruction**

**Jamal Abdel Nasser Child Friendly School in Gaza**

With an average of 12-16 hours of electricity cuts per day, energy remains an issue to overcome in the Gaza Strip, especially in the education and health sectors. The long blackout hours have affected the achievement levels of students; some unable to see what is written on board, others cannot even use a computer lab or electronic devices.

The Gaza hostilities in 2014 – third in five years – resulted in the destruction of houses, schools, hospitals, roads and massive damages in the infrastructure around the Strip. In the education sector only, around 192 educational facilities were destroyed. There was an urgent need for reconstruction so that students can get back to their schools and follow their dreams of a better future for them and their families.

At that critical time, UNDP’s focus was to create a learning environment that fosters quality education while at the same time meet the challenges resulting from the power crisis. With a budget of just over USD 21 million from Qatar Fund for Development through Al Fakhoora - a programme of Education Above All Foundation (EAA), the Right to Education programme was launched to reconstruct and rehabilitate educational facilities that were damaged and destroyed during the 2014 hostilities on Gaza, increase the capacity for mental health care in Gaza and restore the hope of youth for increased prospects of employment through e-work. Over 98,994 students will have access to quality education through the programme which targets 51 educational institutions including the rebuilding of totally damaged schools, rehabilitation of partially damaged universities, schools and vocational training centres.

It was no ordinary reconstruction process for UNDP. The Building Back Better modality was used so that students can enjoy a better learning environment, in an area with limited child friendly spaces. Innovative approaches were used to transform multi-purpose halls to emergency shelters during crisis, install sustainable green energy sources (PV cells) in order to address the electricity cuts and sustainable water and sanitation facilities.

The first Palestinian child friend school - Jamal Abdel Nasser – was built in the Gaza Strip with UNDP’s support. The school was provided with solar energy systems to cover the electricity load and operate the computer labs and laboratory. The windows were wider to allow for natural light to come in, class doors were made to collect and focus sunlight into the class and double walls to ensure a cool environment in the summer and warmth in winter.

In an unprecedented move, the school was also provided with green areas on the rooftop, to allow for ultimate space where students can enjoy their recess eating and talking. Many schools in Gaza are not equipped with computer and science labs or sports facilities. Jamal Abdel Nasser is different. There is ample space for students to read and a solar system that guarantees the operation of the computer and science labs for 24 hours. The multi-function hall was also built for students to practice their favourite sport in a closed and well-designed environment.

Living under blockade, children in Gaza feel imprisoned on their land, their home and even at school with its high walls and dull colours. Imagine that these children finally have the chance to change that and experience what it means to have a school with enough spaces to play and study. A school that they co-designed to be child friendly and more colourful and welcoming.

Empowerment through education is part of the Sustainable Development Goals which we aim to reach by 2030. This innovative approach is giving UNDP and its partners the tools to help more students in Gaza go to school, complete their education and transform their lives and communities.