**Scratching the surface and unleashing the potential of geospatial technology**

The 2014 hostilities on Gaza caused large-scale displacement, disruption of essential services and economic shut-down. All 1.8 million residents of Gaza were impacted. Damage was widespread affecting over 60 percent of Gaza’s housing stock, service infrastructure (including energy, water, health and educational facilities and government buildings) and private sector facilities and assets.

The role of UNDP’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP), in cooperation with national and international partners, was to support the Palestinian population and government to build back better what was destroyed. Urgent response was needed but the challenge that many actors faced; be them government, humanitarian or development, was measuring how big was the impact and which areas were affected most. Answering those questions would have been impossible without employing technological tools such as GIS, GPS, and remote sensing – applications that were not available within the Palestinian context.

Based on its extensive experience, UNDP/PAPP was tasked by the government to conduct a detailed infrastructure damage assessment in cooperation with line ministries and other actors on the ground. Since geospatial technologies were unavailable, UNDP/PAPP activated its partnership with UNOSAT and the European Commission. Remote sensing was introduced, and immediately after the cessation of hostilities, conducted a comprehensive infrastructure assessment together with the Palestinian Government of National Consensus, UNRWA and WFP.

Remote sensing was used for retrieving updated satellite imagery to identify the scale of the damage. GIS and GPS applications were used to divide the Gaza Strip into zones, pinpoint damaged homes, plan access routes for UNDP/PAPP engineers conducting the damage assessment and collect data through a mobile application and store it in a central database for analysis.

This innovative solution provided the Government, UN agencies and other partners with a broad platform to evaluate the situation and plan interventions in a responsive and transparent manner. It also developed UNDP/PAPP’s infrastructure unit in deploying this technology in emergency situations; saving time, effort, and cost. UNDP/PAPP also transferred that knowledge to its partners, including the Ministry of Public Works and Housing.

Capitalizing on their newly acquired knowledge of real-time information systems, UNDP/PAPP is using an ArcGIS online platform to store projects’ data in a central geographic database. UNDP/PAPP is considered as one of the first offices to use this platform. Projects are now being visualized into interactive story maps that combine the narrative along with infographics, images, and videos to tell a story. Story maps are now being introduced to some partners as effective tools for reporting, documentation, communication and advocacy, resource mobilization, and most certainly in supporting informed decision making.