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## **Japan's Developmental Role in the Gaza Strip**

The Constraints of the “Split”  
and the Promising Potential in  
Partnering with Civil Society  
and the Productive Sector

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The Constraints of the “Split” and the Promising Potential in  
Partnering with Civil Society and the Productive Sector

By

**Omar Shaban**

## Members of the Joint Working Group on Palestinian-Japanese Working Group

**Mr. Toshiya Abe**, Chief Representative of JICA Palestine Office

**Mr. Mohammad Daraghmeh**, Asharq news bureau chief – Palestine

**Dr. Ali Jarbawi**, Professor and director of Ibrahim Abu Lughod Institute of International Studies, Birzeit University

**Mr. Raja Khalidi**, Director General of MAS (Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute)

**Dr. Abdel Nasir Makky**, formerly with JICA

**Dr. Aiko Nishikida**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law Department of Political Science, Keio University

**Ms. Tomoko Ohji**, Editor & Senior Staff Writer, Mainichi newspaper

**Mr. Omar Sha'ban**, founder and Director, Palthink, Gaza Strip

**Dr. Khalil Shikaki**, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Ramallah, Palestine

**Dr. Hiroyuki Suzuki**, Associate Professor, the University of Tokyo

**Dr. Ryoji Tateyama**, Professor Emeritus, National Defense Academy of Japan

**Mr. Kohei Tsuji**, NHK Washington Correspondent

# PCPSR's Publications of the Joint Working Group on Palestinian-Japanese Working Group

## Background Reports prepared for the first workshop

Mohammad Daraghmeh, **Japan As Seen by the Palestinian Media: How the Palestinian Press and Social Media View Japanese Culture, Literature, Technology, Economy, and Palestinian-Japanese Relations**

Dr. Abdel Nasser Makky, **Strengthening Japan's "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" Initiative: Japan and the Jordan Valley**

PCPSR, **Japan in the Middle East, 2017-2021: The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations (excerpts from Japan's MOFA Bluebook)**

PCPSR, **Official PA-PLO Positions on Japanese-Palestinian Relations: recent statements on the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations**

Omar Sha'ban, **Japan's Developmental Role in the Gaza Strip: The Constraints of the "Split" and the Promising Potential in Partnering with Civil Society and the Productive Sector**

Khalil Shikaki, **Palestinian Public Perception of Japan: Report on Results of a Public Opinion Poll among Palestinians, December 2021**

## Background Report prepared for the Second workshop

Khalil Shikaki, **Japan and Palestine: Timeline of Main Developments and Turning Points in the last 50 years**

## Reports on workshop's proceedings

PCPSR, **Report on the Presentations and discussion of the First Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group, January 2022**

PCPSR, **Report on the Presentations and discussion of the Second Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group, March 2022**

## Other Publications

**The Future of the Middle East Peace Process: Policy Recommendations produced by the Middle East Study Group**, Headed by Dr. Ryoji Tateyama, Professor Emeritus, National Defense Academy of Japan, Organized by The Japanese Institute of International Affairs

Government of Japan, **Japan's assistance to the Palestinians**

Government of Japan, **JAIP: Jericho Agro-Industrial Park**

# Japan's Developmental Role in the Gaza Strip

## The Constraints of the “Split” and the Promising Potential in Partnering with Civil Society and the Productive Sector

This report reviews the interventions of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the developmental arm of the Japanese government, in the Gaza Strip. It presents and evaluates Japanese activities and their developmental implications for the Gaza Strip and how JICA has continued to work in the face of the Palestinian “split” since June 2007. The paper relied on a review of literature, paper and electronic publications of JICA, on field visits to some of the projects it funds, and on face-to-face and online interviews with the JICA’s staff, representatives of partner institutions and experts in the relevant areas. The paper does not provide a comprehensive assessment of Japan's role in the Gaza Strip, but rather provides a general and concise presentation of some of these interventions, ending with recommendations that can guide future interventions.

### The Premise of JICA’s Assistance

JICA began its work in the Palestinian territories shortly before the founding of the Palestinian Authority and was working exclusively through UNRWA. In 1998, it opened its office in the Palestinian territories in Gaza City following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), in line with its political position in favor of the peace agreement and in support for a two-state solution. Japan's cooperation with Palestine is based on supporting the peace process, the two-state solution and helping the Palestinians build modern state institutions. Japan, through JIAC and Japan's representatives to the PA in Ramallah, is working to achieve these goals through a variety of interventions:

- Bringing experts from Japan to Palestine to help transfer technology, expertise and the development of human resources.
- Organizing advanced training programs in Japan that benefit Palestinian teams.
- Providing equipment for projects in the health, education and local government sectors.
- Helping to cope with the repercussions of the coronavirus crisis by providing the necessary vaccinations and equipment.

## Japan's role in the current situation in the Gaza Strip:

Since Japan's official position is consistent with most of the Western position toward Hamas (no contact policy), JICA has no direct contact with Hamas or its Government in the Gaza Strip. Projects in the Gaza Strip are developed and implemented in coordination with the relevant official ministries in Ramallah such as the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. These ministries coordinate JICA's efforts through their staff in the Gaza Strip, who in turn coordinate with Hamas government officials in the Gaza Strip. In an online meeting with Mr. Toshiya Abe, Chief Representative of JICA in Palestine, he stressed that the Palestinian division and the unstable security situation in the Gaza Strip had added new difficulties to their work in the Gaza Strip, such as the inability to travel to the Gaza Strip on a regular basis, the inability of Japanese experts to visit the Gaza Strip, and the slow introduction of raw materials and equipment for projects in the Gaza Strip. JICA's representative in the Gaza Strip confirmed that the Hamas government facilitates the work of international institutions and does not put obstacles in the implementation of their projects. The employees of the PA inform Hamas of JICA's ongoing work. The coronavirus crisis has added further constraints due to its impact on travel, face to face training, and the ability of the agency to offer scholarships to Gazans.

### *Partnership with national authority institutions and international organizations:*

JICA and the Representatives of Japan work in full coordination with PA institutions as well as in partnership with many UN organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF, and others. Japan is a key supporter of UNRWA, both in supporting its budget and by funding humanitarian development programs implemented by UNRWA. It is also working with the PLO Refugee Department in the quality of life improvement program in three camps in the West Bank. To a much lesser extent, JICA works with a limited number of non-governmental and trade union institutions, including the Fishermen's Union and the General Union of Palestinian Industries.

### *Design interventions based on needs:*

Japan relies on an in-depth study of the actual needs of society, either by recruiting Japanese experts or in collaboration with local consultants to study the real needs of society and then determine the type and size of the intervention. Many partners in the ministries of local government, health and education have confirmed this conclusion. Japanese intervention is also flexible and determined by an assessment of need. With the coronavirus crisis, Japan was quick to offer drugs, vaccinations and other substances, but representatives of the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza suggested that JICA replace the aid, because of its availability in the Gaza Strip, with needed drugs such as those needed for cancer patients. The change has been made to meet the required needs. JICA continues to high-cost drugs, especially those needed to treat cancer.

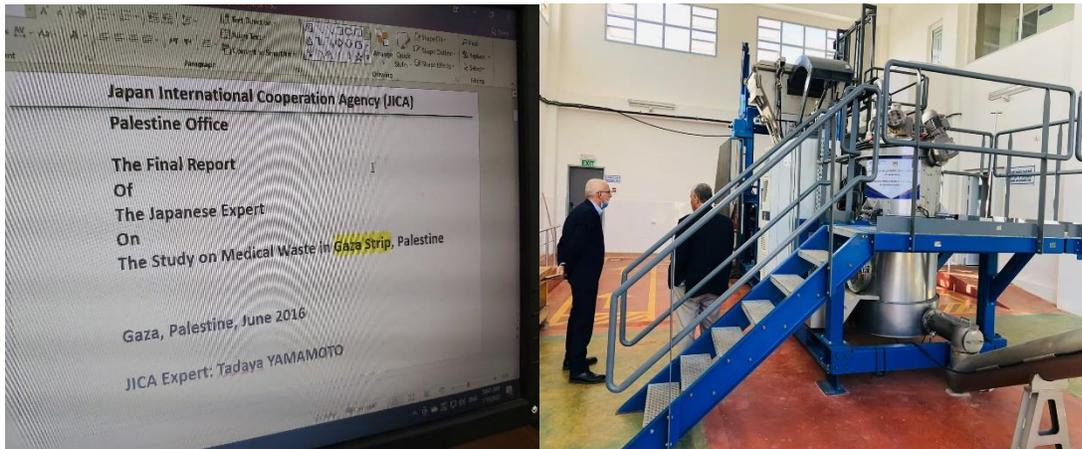
### *Treating solid and hazardous waste:*

Japan's important interventions in the Gaza Strip include work on the disposal of solid waste, refining and converting hazardous medical waste into harmless waste. Japan and other donors supported the construction of the two treatment plants in the Gaza Strip (in Rafah and Gaza City) in cooperation with the Joint Solid Waste Services Councils, whose members include all councils and municipalities in the Gaza Strip.



Japan's cooperation is credited with introducing modern technology to dispose of hazardous medical waste from health centers in the Gaza Strip. The volume of medical waste is about 2 tons per day, which is fully treated through two treatment plants, one in Khan Younis, serving 17 municipalities and village councils who are members of the Joint Solid Waste Management Services Council at a rate of 500 kilos per day, and the second in eastern Gaza City, in cooperation with the Joint Services Council of Gaza and Northern Governorates (1,200 kilos per day).

Prior to Japanese intervention in this area, these hazardous wastes were disposed of by incineration in hospitals, posing a serious public health risk. Japan's intervention in this area included not only the supply of machinery and technology, but also training courses in Gaza and Tokyo in this area. It also included training the cadres of the Ministry of Health and hospitals on the culture and methods of sorting hazardous medical waste. Japan's successful experience here has become a reference for many international donors wishing to work in solid waste. Japan's contribution included assistance in the formation of the Joint Solid Waste Services Councils, the official partner of Japanese cooperation in coordination with the Ministry of Local Government in Ramallah.



*Work in Education:*

Japan contributes significantly to supporting the Palestinian education sector by building schools, organizing training and capacity-building programs, and by providing the necessary equipment. Japan has developed science and mathematics curricula from first to ninth grade and made it a curriculum that encourages and stimulates thinking and creativity rather than memorization or dictation. This intervention included bringing experts to Palestine and bringing cadres from the education sector to Japan to learn about the experience there. Japanese cooperation in the education sector includes the supply of equipment, computers and laboratories to schools. Five schools are now being planned for the Gaza Strip.

## Observations on Japanese Cooperation in the Gaza Strip and Recommendations for the Future:

**Japanese activities in the Gaza Strip have decreased since the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip:** Japan's work in the Gaza Strip has declined significantly in recent years, with focus placed mostly on the West Bank. Some programs are being implemented in the West Bank but not in the Gaza Strip, such as the Life Improvement Program in three camps in the West Bank and investment projects in the agricultural and tourism sectors. This decrease is due to the internal split and the security conditions. Japanese cooperation in the Gaza Strip has focused on the service and humanitarian sectors, especially the education sector, through school construction, the development of teaching methods, the development of health services, medicines and the solid waste sector.

**Poor media coverage:** Poor coverage and media reports on the Japanese cooperation were observed by the author. Wide coverage is important in promoting transparency and oversight of implemented projects. Mr. Toshiya Abe acknowledged the need to develop a more effective media and dissemination strategy, stressing that JICA is currently developing this aspect of its activities. Media coverage of Japan's activities in Palestine in general and the Gaza Strip in particular is also necessary to popularize positive models, as well as an indication of a respect for the right to know.

**Emphasis is placed by Japan on material assistance rather than on soft support programs:** Japan's contribution is clearly evident in material support, such as the construction of schools, hospitals, treatment plants for hazardous medical waste, equipment and automobiles, but less in training, rehabilitation and awareness programs. According to some of the experts interviewed, Japanese cooperation in the Gaza Strip is not commensurate with Japan's financial and technical capabilities. Japan has a good reputation in Palestinian society, suffering from the ravages of World War II and succeeding brilliantly in overcoming it as one of the world's largest economies. The Palestinians look forward to maximizing Japan's contribution to alleviating the suffering of Gazans and continuing to provide assistance in various forms and in all fields.

**Decline in rehabilitation programs for human resources in municipalities and the education sector:** Japan has implemented intensive training programs for human resources since its inception in the late 1990s and beyond by recruiting dozens of engineers and medical staff to Japan. These programs have had significant positive results in improving performance, according to many who have benefited from these programs in upgrading the level of service and in introducing and integrating modern technology. But many of these cadres left work because of retirement, replaced by new engineers and specialists who did not have such opportunities, as scholarship programs were suspended years ago due to the split and the coronavirus crisis. There is an urgent need to re-implement training programs in a face-to-face manner when possible.

The situation in the **health sector** is no less serious, as at least 300 specialized doctors and nurses migrated from the Gaza Strip following the years of the split, leaving a huge void in hospitals and the health sector. This has resulted in a long waiting period for those in need of surgery, as well as a dramatic increase in the number of remittance applicants for treatment outside the Gaza Strip from 100 patients per week to 500, including 100 cases of cancerous tumors. The exodus of doctors from the Gaza Strip due to split and the lack of incentives to stay has increased the number of medical transfers for treatment outside the Gaza Strip, straining the budget of the

Ministry of Health and putting many patients at risk of dying due to delays in receiving the necessary treatment. Most of the doctors who work in the Gaza Strip now are graduates of medical schools from the Islamic University and Al-Azhar University. They lack sufficient experience and familiarity with international experiences. It is necessary to resume scholarship programs for new doctors and nursing staff to Japan to gain international expertise and to have access to modern methods and technology in the field of treatment.

**Weak cooperation with civil society organizations and the need to strengthen it:** Despite its great importance, there is hardly any cooperation between the Palestinian civil society sector and JICA. Japan tends to move away from areas that may approach politics, women's issues, youth and rights. While acknowledged this weakness, Mr. Toshiya Abe stressed that Palestinian citizens are ultimately the beneficiaries of all Japanese interventions, whether through the institutions of the PA or through international institutions. JICA has also been severely constrained in cooperation in the cultural and literary fields and on women's and youth issues. This may stem from Japan's eagerness to move away from social areas that may be politically sensitive.

Palestinian civil society organizations, particularly in the Gaza Strip, have played and continue to play an important and essential role in development. The split has increased the burden of civil society, which is often required to carry out government duties. The role of civil organizations is particularly evident at times of war and conflict in the Gaza Strip. It is therefore necessary for the Japanese cooperation to extend to civil society because of the importance of its role, especially because it is an independent body without links to the Hamas administration. This independence enables the Japanese side to reach broad sectors of society and provide diverse services. Particularly important is to target the youth sector, which accounts for two-thirds of society in Palestine and the Gaza Strip, which suffers from the crisis of unemployment, poverty and a tendency to gravitate to extremism and violence.

One of the recommendations of this report is to support civil society organizations with technology and capacity-building in planning and implementation programs and in addressing the repercussions of wars in the areas of psychosocial support and reconstruction. It should provide opportunities for young people who are qualified to benefit from recent developments in management and software building. The Gaza Strip has a number of successful business incubators that have allowed dozens of technology professionals to develop and design software marketed in multiple regions of the world. Japanese cooperation can invest in the development of technological incubators that accommodate dozens of new graduates and enable them to access the Asian market in general and the Japanese market in particular. There are real opportunities for partnership between Japanese technology companies and start-ups in the Gaza Strip and Palestine.

Also, one of the recommended areas for partnerships is the educational sector. Palestinian universities, whose contact with the world has been severed by the blockade and the spit, are in dire need of networking with universities around the world. Japan can allocate a number of scholarships to distinguished university students in the fields of engineering and graduates of other scientific disciplines. Also, cooperation with civil society is a necessity in the field of environment, pollution control and enhanced community participation in the treatment of solid and hazardous waste, which intersects with local government programs and the Ministry of Health. One of the important sectors that Japan can help develop is the vocational training in the fields of construction, technology and maintenance of modern equipment of all kinds.

**Weak intervention in productive sectors:** JICA hardly works in the productive sectors such as the agricultural, industrial and tourism areas or in supporting the private sector in the Gaza Strip. Needless to say, working with these sectors is a necessity for the integration of development efforts. JICA is currently working with the Federation of Palestinian Industries on an emergency support project for the industrial sector to deal with the repercussions of the coronavirus crisis. The project includes the provision of sterilizers to 500 industrial facilities and awareness programs on ways to combat the spread of the virus.

One of the recommendations of this report is for JICA to work on the mechanisms of supporting these sectors to contribute to enhancing food security, creating jobs, developing agricultural and industrial production and operating the tourism sector. Agricultural, tourism and industrial sectors are important because they have been destroyed, disrupted and bankrupted by blockades, wars and poor purchasing power. These sectors are in dire need of support and partnership to increase the level of production and alleviate the crisis of unemployment and poverty, which are serious phenomena that cause extremism, violence and instability. It should be noted here that these productive sectors were very active before the years of the split and closures. In the past, it exported many Gazan products (such as vegetables, fish, flowers, strawberries, clothing, plastic products, office and home furniture, embroidery products, etc.) in the West Bank, Israel and abroad. Despite the closure, products such as clothing, vegetables and fish are currently being exported from the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian and Israeli markets. As one of the oldest cities in the world, Gaza also has many tourist attractions, monuments and old houses that need to be restored and transformed into tourist attractions.

Supporting the fishing sector, developing fishing skills and providing it with modern equipment, as well as developing the fish farming sector are areas worth considering. Indeed, a partnership with the productive sectors will contribute significantly to bringing the private sector back to work, revitalizing the economy and creating jobs that can also contribute to reducing tension, violence and extremism.

Finally, one of the recommended areas for Japan to work on in the Gaza Strip is reconstruction; not the contribution to rebuilding destroyed homes and infrastructure, something the Government of Japan already contributes to through UN organizations, but by transferring Japan's experience in the process of reconstruction management. In doing so, Japan would capitalize on its own rich experience in reconstruction after World War II. In this context, it is possible to identify specific areas of assistance in planning, need-identification, and the strengthening of participatory management of the reconstruction process, thereby making reconstruction more effective. The management of the reconstruction process is as important as the reconstruction itself.

## Field Interviews and Visits:

- Joint Services Council in Gaza City, interview with *Dr. Abu Al-Qambos*, project manager, Tuesday, January 11;
- Interview with environment expert *Dr. Ahmed Hal*, on January 11;
- Interview with leading officials from JICA, January 13, with *Mr. Toshiya Abe* and *Mr. Saher Younis*;

- Interview with *Mr. Ali Barhoum*, Director of the Joint Solid Waste Services Council, Saturday, January 15, and a visit to the site of the solid waste treatment plant in the Fukhari area of Khan Younis;
- Interview with *Dr. Fathi Abu Warda*, international cooperation officer and representative of the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip;
- Interview with *Mr. Safer Younis*, Director of JICA's Office in the Gaza Strip, January 17.

The **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research** explored Palestinian-Japanese relations by establishing a joint Palestinian-Japanese working group made up of experts and academics to engage in a dialogue on the various facets of the relationship with the aim of proposing a joint vision on how to strengthen and advance that relationship in a manner that helps it meet the challenges of the future. This initiative sought to examine *Japan's role in the Middle the Middle East by focusing on Japanese-Palestinian Relation through a Joint Japanese-Palestinian second track policy workshops and consultation.*

The dialogue took place in two online workshops to discuss the current relationship and explore ideas and policies for the future. In addition, the effort included the preparation and publication of various background reports and working papers addressing some aspects of the current relationship. PCPSR also issued two reports summarizing the presentations and discussion of the two workshops as well as the recommendations of the second workshop.

**The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR)**

P. O. Box 76, Ramallah, Palestine

Tel: +970-2-2964933

[pcpsr@pcpsr.org](mailto:pcpsr@pcpsr.org)

[www.pcpsr.org](http://www.pcpsr.org)

