

Humanitarian Aid as a Tool of Domination

The implications of distribution practices on social cohesion, human dignity, and self-agency in the Gaza Strip

Researcher

Wessam Abu Amr

With the support of:





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At the heart of the protracted humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and more than twenty-two months since the outbreak of the war on October 7, 2023, humanitarian aid has become an integral part of the daily landscape for the population of the Strip, not only because of the magnitude of the humanitarian disaster resulting from the blockade, military operations, demolitions, destruction and displacement, but also because more than two-thirds of the population depend on it as the main source of food and basic needs, this growing dependence has made aid transform from short-term emergency interventions into a structural element of everyday survival, with the lives of individuals and families tied directly to the continuity or disruption of aid flows.

Since 1950, one year after its establishment, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has constituted the backbone of humanitarian operations in Gaza. It ensured aid reached the affected population with a degree of fairness and dignity, drawing upon its historical mandate to serve and protect Palestinian refugees, who comprise approximately 70% of the population¹. However, during its ongoing military campaign, Israel has systematically undermined this role, waging a targeted campaign to weaken UNRWA, including an outright ban on its operations in Palestine the grounds of alleged ties to Hamas, claims which have been rejected by multiple international relief agencies.

In March 2025, after two consecutive months of a total blockade preventing the entry of aid and commercial goods, and amidst a rapidly escalating famine, the **Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF)** emerged. Founded in February 2025 and funded by the U.S. and Israeli governments, GHF introduced itself as a non-profit humanitarian organization and, by May 2025, assumed full responsibility for aid distribution in the Strip. Despite its recent establishment, GHF has played a central role in reshaping distribution modalities. Yet, this role has been accompanied by practices that sparked significant international criticism, as they were seen to normalize a form of humanitarian action that lacks the fundamental principles of neutrality and dignity. Reports documented arbitrary distribution, lack of transparency, and the exposure of civilians to direct risks such as overcrowding and live fire. According to the United Nations, since 27 May, over 1,300 Palestinians have been killed while attempting to obtain food, including more than 800 near GHF distribution sites.² Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) further noted that these sites operated under a “first come, first served”³ logic, privileging those physically strongest rather than those most in need. These patterns demonstrate that GHF’s practices affect not only access to food but also directly undermine human dignity and the safety of the affected population. As a result, the humanitarian dilemma in Gaza has shifted from a question of *quantity* to one of *distribution modalities*, and their profound implications for individual dignity and social cohesion.

This paper aims to examine the impact of humanitarian aid distribution practices-using the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) as a case study-on the social fabric of Gaza.

¹ https://unispal.un.org/pdfs/UNRWAEMERAPPEAL_2014.pdf

² <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ohchr-killings-of-palestinians-seeking-food-in-gaza-continue-as-starvation-deepens-press-release/>

³ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/highlight/2023-10-27.html?utm>

It focuses on two interrelated dimensions: human dignity and individual agency on the one hand, and social cohesion on the other. The paper assumes that Gaza, as a conflict zone under prolonged blockade, recurrent wars, and the entanglement of political and humanitarian dimensions, represents a unique case that clearly exposes the complex relationship between humanitarian aid and the reshaping of society under emergency conditions. Accordingly, the study seeks to address the central research question: *How do aid distribution practices affect individual dignity and social cohesion in the Gaza Strip?*

Background: Humanitarian Aid in the Gaza Strip before the October 7 War

Before the outbreak of the October 2023 war, the Gaza Strip was already experiencing severe humanitarian conditions, making international aid an integral part of residents' lives. According to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, approximately 80% of Gaza's population relied on international assistance to meet their basic needs.⁴ UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) formed the backbone of this system, distributing food aid as well as educational and health services to more than two million refugees in the Strip, ensuring aid reached them in a more organized and equitable manner.

Economically, Gaza's situation was dire even before the latest war. The unemployment rate in the Strip stood at 46% compared to 14% in the West Bank, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics⁵, with women and youth bearing the heaviest burden of this economic exclusion. Regarding poverty, World Bank data (2022) indicated that around 59% of Gaza's population lived below the poverty line, making reliance on aid a daily necessity rather than an optional resource.

In terms of aid flows, the Strip received approximately 500 trucks of assistance daily before October 2023 through border crossings, forming a crucial lifeline that provided food, medicine, and essential goods. Although limited, this flow maintained a certain level of relative stability, before being almost entirely disrupted following the outbreak of the war.⁶

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored in three interrelated core concepts: human dignity, self-agency, and social cohesion. These concepts provide an analytical lens to examine the implications and effects of humanitarian aid distribution practices in Gaza, particularly the case of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). This selection is based on the premise that human dignity constitutes the foundational principle of any relief effort that respects the individual as an end in themselves, while self-agency captures the

⁴ <https://unctad.org/press-material/prior-current-crisis-decades-long-blockade-hollowed-gazas-economy-leaving-80>

⁵ https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_LFSQ012023E.pdf

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/highlight/2023-10-27.html>

essence of individual autonomy and the right to make decisions regarding one's life and needs. Social cohesion, in turn, highlights that the effects of aid extend beyond individual members of the affected population to reshape relationships within the broader community, either by reinforcing solidarity or by fragmenting the social fabric. Combining these three perspectives allows for a multidimensional understanding of how aid reshapes the relationship of individuals with themselves and with their social environment under coercive and complex humanitarian conditions.

1. **Human Dignity**

Human dignity forms the cornerstone of human rights and international humanitarian law. It asserts that every individual possesses intrinsic value and inalienable rights that must be respected regardless of social, economic, or political status. This includes treating people in ways that preserve their humanity without humiliation or discrimination and protecting them from threats or violence in extreme conditions. Sphere standards emphasize that dignity goes beyond meeting material needs; it also encompasses how assistance is delivered: are members of the affected population respected and treated as rights-holders rather than passive recipients?⁷

Any distribution mechanism that imposes long queues, exposes recipients to danger, or prioritizes the physically stronger over those most in need constitutes a direct violation of human dignity.

2. **Self-Directed Actions (Self-Agency)**

Self-directed action, as a core component of human dignity, refers to individuals' ability to think, act, and make decisions regarding their own lives and circumstances, reflecting their independence and providing them with a sense of control over their destinies⁸. It means that a person is not merely a passive recipient of imposed conditions or decisions, but an actor capable of choice and influence.

In humanitarian contexts, this capacity often erodes when aid types and delivery methods are imposed on affected populations without involving them in identifying their needs or offering genuine alternatives. In such cases, individuals are reduced to the position of "passive recipients" rather than being partners in shaping the humanitarian response. Literature⁹ on cash assistance demonstrates that enhancing individuals' capacity for self-directed action through cash or voucher programs not only improves living standards but also restores a sense of choice and dignity by enabling people to make their own decisions about how to meet their needs.

⁷ <https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf>

⁸ Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*.

⁹ <https://odihpn.org/en/publication/cash-transfer-programming-in-emergencies/>

3. Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the degree of solidarity and connectedness among individuals or groups within a society, enabling cooperation and participation in a peaceful and stable manner. It encompasses mutual trust, a sense of belonging, and collective responsibility. It is also understood as a condition encompassing both horizontal interactions (between individuals and groups) and vertical interactions (between individuals and institutions). Social cohesion is manifested through values such as trust, belonging, willingness to cooperate, and mutual assistance, which are reflected in individual behaviors and serve as indicators of a community's capacity to withstand and recover during crises. In humanitarian contexts, arbitrary distribution mechanisms or discriminatory practices targeting specific groups can disrupt social relations and exacerbate competition over scarce resources.

Interlinkages Between the Three Concepts

This paper argues that the absence of dignity in aid distribution mechanisms-such as long queues, lack of privacy, or exposure to humiliation-undermines individuals' capacity for self-directed action, reducing members of the affected population to passive recipients. This, in turn, negatively affects trust and social cohesion within the local community. Addressing these dimensions is therefore not merely an ethical imperative, but a critical condition for enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian interventions.

“Humanitarian aid is not merely a neutral act of charity; it is a political and social practice that reshapes the relationships between donors, organizations, and recipient communities. Even with good intentions, aid can reinforce new power structures that allow certain groups to control resources, undermining social justice and weakening internal cohesion.”

Anna Lindley explored this issue in her study of Somali refugees in Kenya, demonstrating that prolonged crises such as civil war-induced displacement, poverty, and insecurity create long-term dependency on humanitarian aid. Aid distribution in this case was managed through a centralized system run by UNHCR and international organizations, using pre-registered lists and periodic food rations. These mechanisms reproduced local power hierarchies, enabling elites to control distribution lists and access the best resources, while the unregistered were excluded, intensifying social tensions. Additionally, conflicts emerged with the host Kenyan community, which perceived that refugees were monopolizing resources and services. Consequently, the community's capacity for cooperation and solidarity weakened, and social ties within the refugee population were damaged, diminishing overall social cohesion.¹⁰

Similarly, in Gaza, the protracted conflict and the distribution practices of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) have had profound effects on human dignity, the

¹⁰ https://research-portal.najah.edu/migrant/24425/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

capacity for self-directed action, and social cohesion. These mechanisms contributed to the creation of new social strata and unequal access to resources, undermining social justice and threatening community bonds.

Transformations of Humanitarian Aid in Gaza After October 2023

The mechanisms for delivering and distributing aid in Gaza underwent rapid transformations following the outbreak of the war, which can be divided into three main phases reflecting changes in the operational environment and the actors controlling aid management.

Phase One (October 2023 – January 2025): The Traditional UN-Led System

During this period, aid relied on the institutional structure of the United Nations and its international and local partners. Most shipments entered through the Kerem Abu Salem, Rafah, and Erez crossings, with additional quantities arriving via air drops or a temporary seaport. Aid flows peaked in April 2024 with more than 6,700 truckloads according to COGAT and approximately 5,600 truckloads according to OCHA, before declining significantly to around 2,200 truckloads in December, according to UN figures.

Phase Two (January – May 2025): Temporary Surge Followed by Sudden Halt

With the onset of the second truce on 19 January 2025, aid deliveries reached unprecedented levels, allowing up to 600 truckloads per day (approximately 4,200 truckloads per week). Between then and early March, over 25,200 truckloads carrying more than 447,000 tons of aid—including food, water, fuel, and medical supplies—entered Gaza. However, this high flow did not last, as supplies nearly stopped in March following accusations that aid was being used for military purposes.

Phase Three (Since May 2025): The New GHF Mechanism and the Reengineering of the Aid Landscape

After more than two months of halted aid, Israel announced on 27 May 2025 the launch of a new mechanism led by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), in parallel with “Operation Gideon Vehicles.” At this time, approximately 90% of Gaza’s population (1.9 million people) were internally displaced, living within just 13% of the Strip’s area.¹¹

This step was not merely a technical change in distribution mechanisms but represented a profound political shift in the structure of humanitarian operations in Gaza. GHF emerged at a time when Israel had systematically weakened UNRWA by drying up its financial resources, engaging in political and media campaigns against it, and accusing it of bias and collusion with factions. Consequently, the introduction of GHF provided

¹¹ https://elnetwork.eu/policypaper/humanitarian-aid-to-gaza-inss-report/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

a practical alternative to UNRWA and the traditional UN system, opening the door for the privatization of humanitarian aid through reliance on private U.S. security firms to guard distribution centers.

GHF relied on a limited number of distribution centers under Israeli security control, with a weekly capacity of up to 300,000 people per center, roughly 1.2 million of the affected population. Despite being promoted as “more efficient” and “safer,” this mechanism faced widespread criticism. UN organizations described it as a politicized framework aimed more at reshaping control within Gaza than purely providing humanitarian assistance. Tragic incidents were also reported around distribution centers, where civilians were shot or injured in stampedes, with OCHA recording 758 deaths and over 5,000 injuries between 27 May and 7 July.¹²

In this sense, GHF cannot be understood merely as a food distribution mechanism but as part of a broader Israeli strategy to reengineer humanitarian operations in Gaza by weakening traditional institutions (such as UNRWA) and introducing a new model based on strict security control and oversight, at the expense of the principles of dignity, neutrality, and independence that underpin international aid.

Militarization of Humanitarian Aid

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) experience in Gaza exhibits clear features of the militarization of relief, where aid has become an instrument linked to Israeli military authority. Distribution sites were established in areas under direct security oversight and surrounded by armed contractors, making them resemble “combat zones” rather than safe humanitarian spaces. This arrangement not only undermines the principles of neutrality and independence that humanitarian work is supposed to uphold, but also instills fear among civilians, making access to food contingent upon submission to military control.

The exclusion of UN agencies and local actors—who publicly emphasized their refusal to cooperate with this mechanism—reflects the sidelining of accumulated expertise and the imposition of a model lacking transparency and oversight. The reliance on private security companies without clear regulations further exacerbates the fragility of the humanitarian environment, as incidents of excessive use of force against people waiting in queues multiply.

These practices do not merely produce an unsafe environment; they turn aid into a tool of collective coercion: civilians are forced into crowded military zones, risking their lives or being forcibly displaced to fortified centers. Furthermore, concentrating distribution in specific areas—particularly in the southern Gaza Strip—creates geographic discrimination that undermines the principle of equitable humanitarian access.

¹² <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-humanitarian-response-update-22-june-5-july-2025>

From the perspective of international humanitarian law, this model constitutes a blatant violation, not only because it weaponizes food, but because it directly threatens the dignity of individuals and their capacity for self-directed action, turning the pursuit of basic sustenance into a coercive experience governed by military authority rather than a protected human right.¹³

Thus, the militarization of aid extends beyond policy and procedure, shaping the daily lives of Palestinians at distribution centers, where queues and food parcels become concentrated sites of symbolic and physical violence.

Implications of the Humanitarian Crisis and Aid Distribution Practices on Social Values and Structure

In front of aid distribution centers in Gaza, the scene is no longer merely queues for food parcels; it has transformed into a new social space reflecting power imbalances and symbolic violence. From the early morning hours, hundreds gather under extremely dangerous conditions, often forced to lie prone to avoid direct gunfire before being allowed into areas crowded with aid parcels. These sites are often located in remote areas, making access particularly difficult for the elderly and persons with disabilities, who are effectively excluded from assistance.¹⁴

Inside these areas, new patterns of control assert themselves. At the forefront are armed groups, operating like organized gangs that protect each other; some members prevent people from accessing trucks or parcels, while others directly seize them. They take the highest-value items—such as sugar, oil, and flour—not out of necessity but to resell in the market, especially given the substantial profits from selling these goods amid escalating famine and rising prices. Following them are less organized actors, armed with knives or sharp tools, who take the remaining medium-value items; these are often young individuals seeking quick profits through easy means. The third and weakest group consists of hungry families who receive only scattered leftovers or empty boxes and are often assaulted by the previous two groups even if they manage to carry a bag of flour home. As a result, “affected populations” are stratified within a coercive hierarchy: organized armed groups, individual actors, and then those deprived of everything.

These scenes are not spontaneous but occur within a distribution system imposed by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), established by Israel with U.S. support since February 2025 to manage aid in areas under direct military control. All four of its centers are located in areas “secured” by American contractors¹⁵, with Israeli forces patrolling around them. Palestinians are required to undergo biometric verification and identity checks to access aid.

¹³ Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR). (2025). Fact Sheet: The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation and the Militarization of Relief. Gaza.

¹⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/un-experts-call-immediate-dismantling-gaza-humanitarian-foundation>

¹⁵ <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2025/05/09/us-gaza-aid-plan-un-rejection-intl-4>

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) noted the precision of injuries affecting the lower and upper parts of victims' bodies¹⁶, suggesting deliberate targeting within distribution centers. Most bodies received were young men in their twenties with gunshot wounds to the upper body. Humanitarian and rights reports confirmed the scale of the catastrophe: over 1,400 killed and 4,000 injured while attempting to access food, including at least 859 near GHF sites since the organization began operations until August 2025. Residents described the scene as a daily "humiliation": waiting from morning until evening for a box that may lack basic necessities, witnessing gate breaches, and being caught in crossfire.

This reality has also facilitated mass arrests, with dozens of young people detained at distribution points, turning "aid" into a tool of security control as much as relief. Thus, distribution spaces in Gaza have become a shocking laboratory for understanding how humanitarian aid can shift from a symbol of relief to an instrument of violence and social restructuring.

Impact on Human Dignity

Queues and stampedes around aid centers have turned into spaces of collective humiliation, where people lose even the most basic respect for themselves. A Gazan told BBC: "This is humiliation... we do this because of famine, there is nothing there... we want sugar to make tea¹⁷." Another testimony from a young man detained near a distribution point in western Rafah described: "They treat us like dogs," after being tortured along with nine others in Israeli prisons¹⁸. Even those who manage to obtain a bag of flour or a can of oil risk being killed or injured on the way, as one survivor said: "Bread is soaked in blood, tanks, quadcopter drones, and warboats were all firing at us."

These practices not only deprive individuals of their right to food but also profoundly violate their human dignity and undermine their capacity for self-directed action in determining their needs or protecting their families, reducing them to passive recipients under domination rather than actors capable of choice. This dual violation of dignity and agency, in turn, affects the structure of social cohesion, weakening the foundations of solidarity within the community.

Impact on Social Cohesion

Rather than serving as a foundation for solidarity, aid has become a mechanism for fragmenting the social fabric. The distribution process has reproduced a new hierarchy: armed gangs asserting control over the most valuable resources, less powerful groups seizing what remains, and a majority deprived of almost everything. This "power economy" not only undermines opportunities for justice but also fosters new divisions among social groups, where relationships are built on fear and exploitation rather than trust and mutual support.

¹⁶ <https://www.msf.org/not-aid-orchestrated-killing>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/cqxe37yv49do>

¹⁸ Interview with a young man arrested near a aid distribution point, Al-Arabiya Palestine

The repeated absence of dignity and individual agency has a destructive psychological impact: citizens experience helplessness and despair, feeling incapable of meeting their families' basic needs. This sense of humiliation erodes personal efficacy and makes social interaction and solidarity more fragile. Over time, the repeated shocks in pursuit of "a basic livelihood" lead to social withdrawal and the breakdown of trust networks that are essential for maintaining cohesion within the community.

Coping Strategies in Response to the Aid Distribution Crisis

Amid the near-complete collapse of traditional support networks and the transformation of aid distribution into dangerous spaces that threaten both life and dignity, Gazans have had no choice but to seek coping strategies to endure hunger and violence. These strategies were not merely temporary individual solutions but a complex system operating across multiple levels: local and international institutions attempting to reorganize their interventions within a politically and securitized environment; family and community networks developing alternative forms of solidarity and exchange; and individuals redefining notions of heroism and risk in securing basic sustenance. Examining these levels reveals not only the community's adaptive capacity but also the heavy toll paid in terms of dignity, agency, and social cohesion.

1-Institutional Level (Local and International)

At the local level: Palestinian civil society organizations attempted to reclaim some of the humanitarian role through limited initiatives, such as establishing community kitchens or alternative distribution networks to GHF centers. However, their efforts were largely paralyzed by Israeli security restrictions and the weakening of UNRWA, historically the backbone of humanitarian services in Gaza, as well as by international partner institutions that had supplied local associations with aid through the crossings. In this context, Mr. Saleh Al-Astal, director of a relief organization in southern Gaza, noted:

"After the crossings were closed and food aid trucks could not enter, we shifted to operating community kitchens and attempting to purchase what was available in the market at very high prices. Our work has focused on managing these kitchens and community ovens, as well as handling solid waste and providing drinking water for affected populations."¹⁹

At the international level: Organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Red Cross focused primarily on medical responses for victims of shootings at distribution sites rather than organizing the distributions themselves. Meanwhile, the United Nations called for the direct resumption of international oversight to prevent what it described as the "covert humanitarian practices" exercised by Israel through GHF.²⁰

¹⁹ Phone call with Mr. Saleh Al-Astal, Director of Al-Fajr Palestinian Youth Association

²⁰ <https://msf.org.uk/article/msf-gaza-report-not-aid-orchestrated-killing>

These practices contributed to the erosion of local trust in international organizations, as Gazans perceived distribution as a politically instrumentalized process, especially following repeated killings and assaults on civilians at distribution points, indicating collusion between the Israeli occupation, U.S. contractors, and the new GHF. This loss of trust was further highlighted in a secret meeting with GHF convened by several international relief agencies to coordinate interventions away from public scrutiny. The meeting was organized by the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Dorothy Shea, and attended by GHF Board Chair Jonny Moore, alongside U.S. diplomats and officials from the World Food Programme, UNICEF, the UN Migration Agency (IOM), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and InterAction. The participants agreed not to make public statements, a decision that drew widespread criticism from local civil society and international human rights organizations, who argued that these meetings represented a rollback of fundamental principles of neutrality and transparency.²¹

2-At the Popular and Family Level

At the popular and family level, Gazans were forced to reinvent their coping strategies in response to the new aid distribution centers, which are often located in remote areas that are difficult to access for the elderly and people with disabilities. Families reactivated traditional solidarity networks, sharing essential food items such as flour and bread, and relying on extended kinship ties to ensure individuals could meet their basic needs.

However, negative practices also emerged, such as selling aid on the black market at exorbitant prices, which exacerbated hunger. Some gangs and commercial networks seized portions of the aid intended for vulnerable populations and sold them at prices most residents could not afford-for example, one kilogram of flour sold for \$60, and lentils for \$35.²²

In some cases, local groups attempted to impose temporary control over the markets to prevent the sale of aid, but this measure worsened hunger and deprived families of basic food, which, despite the high prices, some better-off families were still able to purchase.

Risky practices also arose, with some families tracking aid trucks entering through Israeli-controlled crossings, such as Zikim and Kissufim, and attempting to seize food parcels themselves-a hazardous endeavor reflecting the loss of individual agency in the face of armed center dominance. Some families also resorted to selling parts of the aid they received.

Individual stories, such as that of Abeer Sobh, who had to personally go to the Zikim crossing to obtain food parcels, illustrate the human dimension of these strategies. Abeer attempted to secure the aid herself or by asking help from those who could reach

²¹ https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2025/08/08/international-aid-agencies-hold-secret-collaboration-meeting-gaza-humanitarian?utm_content=buffer1bd3c&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkedin.com&utm_campaign=buffer

²² <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-aid-un-ghf-567c5bffd5d7ae4cc54ea0816a159f8f>

the trucks. When unsuccessful, she sent her children to plead with neighbors or search the destroyed streets for any food to prepare simple meals for the family. These experiences reflect the ability of individuals to adapt despite the loss of dignity and high risks, while also revealing the impact of circumstances on social cohesion and individual agency.

3-At the Individual Level

At the individual level, many young Gazans, particularly from Generation Z, developed risky adaptive behaviors due to violent and hazardous distribution conditions. Going to major distribution centers, despite security risks, is sometimes seen as a form of “heroism,” demonstrating the ability to challenge danger and secure food for one’s family. These behaviors have evolved from mere survival strategies into social norms that value boldness and speed in acquiring aid.

These changes can also be observed through youth posts on social media platforms, where some document their experiences in short videos on TikTok or Instagram, sharing them as a form of self-assertion or to draw attention to their struggles. These digital practices not only reflect attempts at self-expression but also reveal the emergence of a “survival of the fittest” culture amid the absence of collective security and genuine channels for participation in aid management.

At the same time, the shortage of aid and rising poverty levels have led to informal individual skills, such as negotiating with those who succeeded in obtaining parcels, pleading for a share, or taking direct risks to acquire food. These individual behaviors, while temporarily effective, starkly illustrate the loss of dignity and agency under violent distribution conditions and demonstrate the impact of the crisis on social cohesion values within the local community.

Recommendations

Based on the above analysis of the humanitarian aid distribution crisis in Gaza, a set of practical and policy-oriented recommendations can be proposed to enhance human dignity, restore individual agency, and strengthen social cohesion:

Strengthen International Oversight and Independent Monitoring:

It is essential to reinstate United Nations and international humanitarian organizations’ oversight over aid distribution to ensure the neutrality of the process and prevent its use for political or military purposes. This oversight should include clear monitoring mechanisms, documentation of violations, and verification that aid reaches the most vulnerable populations, free from interference by armed groups or occupying forces.

Develop Flexible and Sustainable Local Networks:

Support Palestinian civil society organizations in establishing community kitchens, alternative distribution centers, and cooperative family networks, thereby enhancing the community's ability to respond to crises without compromising dignity or relying entirely on externally controlled mechanisms.

Ensure Inclusive Access for Vulnerable Groups:

Aid programs should be designed to address the needs of the elderly, people with disabilities, women, and children. This includes providing nearby and secure distribution points, transportation services if necessary, reducing physical risks, and ensuring equitable access to essential resources.

Promote Transparency and Build Trust:

International and local organizations should document community experiences and field testimonies and involve local populations in the design of distribution mechanisms. This ensures that communities feel they have a voice in decision-making and can exercise self-directed agency.

Focus on Education and Awareness:

Implement awareness programs within communities on the proper use of aid, combating exploitation in black markets, and promoting social solidarity as a means to maintain family and community cohesion, rather than allowing division and hierarchy to arise from resource competition.

Adopt a Multi-Level Intervention Approach:

Future strategies should consider the integrated nature of the crisis, including interventions at both institutional and individual levels. Efforts should focus on protecting individuals from risks, supporting families, and enabling youth to make safe and responsible decisions that strengthen their agency without endangering their lives.