

POLICY BRIEF: Sustainable Urban Reconstruction and Environmental Remediation in the Gaza Strip

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of June 2026, the Gaza Strip faces a compounding humanitarian and ecological emergency. With nearly 82% of land area damaged and millions of tons of hazardous debris, the current response—constrained by supply blockades and infrastructure collapse—is insufficient. This brief outlines an urgent shift from reactive aid to a resilient recovery framework, focusing on debris recycling, decentralized service restoration, and institutional capacity building as mandated by the ongoing health and environmental crisis.

1. THE CRISIS: CURRENT REALITY (JUNE 2026)

- **Sanitation & Health:** In May 2026, infectious diseases accounted for 20% of medical consultations. Overcrowded displacement sites, combined with the collapse of sewage systems and lack of cleaning supplies, have created critical outbreaks of skin diseases, diarrhea, and respiratory infections.
- **The Debris Crisis:** Millions of tons of contaminated rubble remain in situ. The lack of geotextiles and specialized equipment—long-awaited but only recently approved for procurement—has stalled the effective use of designated dump sites like Abu Jarad, forcing a continued reliance on hazardous temporary locations.
- **Resource Depletion:** Water production has declined by 20% due to critical shortages of chemicals and spare parts. Most displacement sites lack communal lighting and reliable cooking fuel, leading to the dangerous practice of burning plastic and waste.

2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Prioritize Debris Management & Safety

- **Operationalize Recycling:** Immediate scale-up of debris recycling operations is required to reduce landfill pressure. Use the Gaza Debris Working Group (DWG) guidance note (February 2026) to establish decentralized recycling sites.
- **Environmental Screening:** Ensure all reconstruction projects incorporate rapid screening for hazardous materials (asbestos/unexploded ordnance) to prevent long-term public health impacts during the rebuilding phase.

II. Transition to Decentralized Infrastructure

- **Modular WASH Services:** Move beyond failed centralized networks toward neighborhood-level, solar-powered wastewater treatment and rainwater harvesting to ensure continuity despite energy and fuel shortages.
- **Integrated Pest Control:** Formalize the Pest Control Plan launched in May 2026, ensuring the sustained entry of pesticides and fumigation equipment to mitigate rodent and insect infestations in displacement sites.

III. Strengthen Humanitarian Access & Governance

- **Bypass "Counting Trucks":** Shift the focus from input-based metrics (number of trucks) to outcome-based benchmarks (verifiable health and sanitation outcomes).
- **Local Professional Integration:** Integrate local environmental experts and academic partners, into the monitoring of recovery projects to ensure context-specific, sustainable implementation.
- **Conditional Funding:** Urge the international community to move beyond emergency appeals to long-term funding models—such as the FAO 2026-2036 Recovery Programme—to restore agrifood market infrastructure and productive assets.

3. CONCLUSION

The reconstruction of Gaza cannot be separated from its environmental survival. The current "system shock" requires a fundamental realigning of priorities: from emergency delivery to a durable, decentralized, and environmentally conscious reconstruction model. Failure to address the systemic environmental degradation now will lead to a multi-generational health crisis that will render future socio-economic recovery efforts obsolete.

References:

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- Gaza Debris Working Group (February 2026). Debris Recycling Site Operations Guidance Note.
- PCBS (June 2026). World Environment Day 2026 Infographic: Environmental Violations and Resilience.