

Rehabilitating Gaza with Self-Reliance Practices – Learnings from Poverty Elimination Lab & Gaza Resilience Lab

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Abstract—The devastating 2023-2025 war on Gaza necessitates a fundamental shift in rehabilitation paradigms, moving from a model of dependency to one of self-reliance. This paper argues for the adoption of a self-resilience framework, drawing critical lessons from the Poverty Elimination Lab's (PEL) successful initiatives and synthesising them with the foundational principles established by the Gaza Resilience Lab (GRL). Through a comparative case study analysis of projects in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya, we identify a proven roadmap for sustainable recovery. Key transferable strategies include: adopting an integrated "whole-of-society" approach that collocates infrastructure with economic opportunity; implementing the sequenced "Graduation Approach" to transition from relief to market-based livelihoods; and establishing supportive legal and digital ecosystems. By integrating these PEL models with GRL's emphasis on building "anti-fragile" systems, leveraging social capital, and addressing psychological trauma, this paper proposes a concrete framework for Gaza's rehabilitation. The fusion of PEL's practical, field-tested models with GRL's context-specific resilience theory offers a robust, community-driven blueprint for Gaza. The successful application of this framework can transform the rehabilitation process from a top-down intervention into a bottom-up movement, ensuring long-term sustainability and dignity for the people of Gaza. In conclusion, empowering the people of Gaza as the primary agents of their own recovery is not merely an ideal but a practical necessity for building a sustainable, dignified, and resilient future.

Keywords— Gaza Rehabilitation, Self-Reliance, Poverty Elimination Lab, Socio-Economic Inclusion, Community-Led Development, Anti-Fragility, Post-Conflict Recovery, Integrated Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rehabilitation of Gaza needs to be carefully orchestrated to create a shift from a pure humanitarian aid model to a development-oriented approach that fosters dignity, economic activity, and social cohesion is directly applicable.

The human and physical devastation wrought upon the Gaza Strip demands a response that transcends conventional humanitarian aid and reconstruction. The scale of destruction is not merely infrastructural but profoundly societal, eroding the very foundations of economic, psychological, and communal life, Wafi et al. (2025). Traditional post-conflict models, often characterised by top-down intervention and a dependency on external aid, have repeatedly proven inadequate for fostering sustainable and dignified recovery. Such approaches risk reconstructing the vulnerabilities of the

past, leaving communities perpetually exposed to future shocks. The pivotal challenge, therefore, lies not only in rebuilding what was lost but in reimagining a future for Gaza founded upon the principles of self-reliance and endogenous resilience. Hassoun et al. (2025)

This paper posits that the pathway to a sustainable future for Gaza must be engineered by its people. The concept of self-resilience—the capacity of individuals and communities to act as the primary agents of their own recovery, leveraging internal resources and social capital—must be the cornerstone of the rehabilitation phase. While the necessity of this approach is clear, the practical roadmap for its implementation is not. To bridge this gap, this study turns to a proven, yet underutilised, repository of knowledge: the practical experiences of the Poverty Elimination Lab (PEL) in fostering self-reliance within refugee and vulnerable host communities in East Africa.

Simultaneously, the extensive body of work produced by the Gaza Resilience Lab (GRL) provides a critical, context-specific foundation. Through over seventy publications since October 2023, the GRL has meticulously documented the emergent principles of survival and resilience in Gaza, arguing for the development of "anti-fragile" systems and the central role of psychological fortitude and social cohesion. However, these theoretical and observational insights now require a practical, actionable framework for application. Buheji (2025)

This paper serves as a crucial nexus, synthesising the field-tested, practical models of the PEL from Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya with the contextual, forward-looking principles of the GRL. It asks a central research question: How can specific self-reliance initiatives from the Poverty Elimination Lab be adapted and integrated with the resilience principles of the Gaza Resilience Lab to formulate an effective and sustainable rehabilitation framework for Gaza? Buheji et al. (2025)

To answer this, the paper is structured as follows. First, it conducts a comprehensive literature review of select PEL initiatives, extracting transferable strategies in integrated development, market-based livelihoods, and financial inclusion. Second, it synthesises key GRL publications to establish the non-negotiable pillars of anti-fragility, socio-economic mobilisation, and psychological recovery for the Gaza context. Finally, the paper moves to application and analysis, proposing a concrete framework that adapts the

"Graduation Approach," "whole-of-society" planning, and digital inclusion strategies for Gaza's unique post-war landscape. By uniting pragmatic field evidence with localised resilience theory, this study aims to provide an actionable blueprint to transform Gaza's recovery from a story of dependency into one of empowered, self-sustaining renewal.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Self-Reliance Initiatives from Poverty Elimination Lab

Poverty Elimination Lab is an initiative led by the first author, as part of the International Institute of Inspiration Economy (IIE) projects that started in 2015. The lab covered many several strategic self-reliance initiatives implemented specifically in African and Asian communities. In this paper and due to the limitations of the paper scope, only three countries are reviewed for their self-reliance practices since they are seen as more comparable to the Palestinians' situation in Gaza, especially after the devastating war in the strip led by the Israeli occupation. The review takes a deep look at the practices of self-reliance being promoted and supported in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya.

2.1.1 Self-Reliance Collaborating Initiatives in Rwanda

In Rwanda, several practical case studies highlight the significant progress made in promoting refugee self-reliance. The initiatives below demonstrate how refugees are increasingly participating in economic activities, strengthening their livelihoods, and contributing to local development.

The Misizi Marshland Project was jointly implemented by the Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) and UNHCR, in partnership with stakeholders including the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the District of Gisagara, with participants drawn from the refugee community in Mugombwa Refugee Camp and the neighbouring host-community in Muganza sector. Funded by the IKEA Foundation, the project ran from 2018 to 2021.

The Government of Rwanda provided 55 hectares of marshland in Gisagara District, which formed the basis of a joint cooperative comprising 1,427 households (300 refugee HHs from Mugombwa and 1,127 host-community farmers). The cooperative received support through subsidised agricultural inputs (such as seeds and fertilisers) and extension services.

This initiative enabled refugees to transition from life-saving assistance to life-building livelihoods in collaboration with host communities, following a "whole-of-society" approach. With the maize harvest, participants sold part of their produce to the market and retained the remainder for household consumption, thereby contributing to the local economy (Global Compact on Refugees. (2023).

2.1.2 Social and Behaviour Change Communication for Nutrition Project (SBCC-N) - Rwanda

According to WFP, & Plan International. (2025), the Social and Behaviour Change Communication for Nutrition (SBCC/N) project is implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) in partnership with Plan International Rwanda. The project operates in five refugee camps hosting Congolese refugees—Mugombwa, Kigeme, Kiziba,

Nyabiheke, and Mahama—as well as in 17 surrounding host-community villages. Initially launched in 2014 as a Nutrition Education and Counselling Programme, it transitioned in 2020 to focus on behaviour change communication aimed at improving nutrition and strengthening livelihoods among both refugees and host populations.



Figure (1) Growing Together Initiative in Rwanda
Source: UNHCR. (2019).

As of 2025, the project has reached 104,840 beneficiaries, comprising 52,023 direct and 52,817 indirect participants. SBCC/N activities promote diversified and sustainable nutrition-focused livelihoods, including mushroom cultivation, vegetable nurseries and kitchen gardens, small livestock rearing, and participation in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). These interventions aim to enhance household food security, increase income-earning capacity, and build community resilience.

Mushroom cultivation has emerged as a successful income-generating and nutrition-enhancing initiative for refugees in Rwanda. A 25-year-old Congolese refugee who has lived in Rwanda for more than 10 years and participates in a mushroom-growing cooperative highlighted the impact of the initiative, stating:

"Through my mushroom-growing cooperative, I have come to understand the true value of mushrooms. Not only do they provide nutritious meals to combat malnutrition in our families, but they have also created a life-changing business, something my colleagues and I have come to appreciate." This initiative demonstrates how livelihood projects can strengthen refugee self-reliance by improving both income and household nutrition.



Figure (2) Growing Mushrooms as a Striving Business
Source : WFP, & Plan International. (2025).

According to the World Bank Group. (2025, June 25). Phase I, which has been active since 2019, continues to deliver tangible results. A total of 261 infrastructure subprojects have been completed—upgrading schools, health centres, water systems, markets, and TVET facilities—benefiting approximately 194,000 people (including 38,000 refugees and 156,000 host-community members). The project has provided matching grants to 5,260 beneficiaries (35% refugees) supporting the establishment and expansion of small and medium enterprises, with 4,050 beneficiaries reporting increased income. Additionally, over 1,300 individuals have received business skills training. Environmental interventions have improved conditions for 48,000 people, including 27,000 refugees, by stabilising ravines and preventing land degradation around camps.

2.1.3 Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities in Rwanda Project (JYA MBERE)

Locally, the initiative is known as Jya Mberere, meaning “to progress” in Kinyarwanda. The project is implemented by the Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) in partnership with the World Bank, national and district institutions, the Rwanda Transport Development Agency (RTDA), the Development Bank of Rwanda (BRD), the Business Development Fund (BDF), and participating financial institutions. Refugees and host community members are involved through participatory consultations and implementation processes. The activities are carried out in six refugee-hosting districts: Gatsibo (Nyabiheke Camp), Gicumbi (Gihembe Camp), Gisagara (Mugombwa Camp), Karongi (Kiziba Camp), Kirehe (Mahama Camp), and Nyamagabe (Kigeme Camp) (World Bank. (2025).

The project in phase I aligns with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and Rwanda’s *Strategic Plan for Refugee Inclusion 2019–2024*, aiming to enhance access to services, expand economic opportunities, and improve environmental management for both refugees and surrounding host communities (MINEMA). (2020).



Linkage to Markets



Asset Transfer

Figure (4) Linkage to markets & Asset transfer
Source: AVSI People for Development, (2025)



GITI Technical School Boosts Skills and Opportunities for Refugees and Host Communities
Figure (3) Newly Constructed Giti TSS to Strengthen Technical Education and Employability

Source: MINEMA (2024).

2.1.4 Sustainable Market Inclusive Livelihood Pathways to Self-Reliance Project (SMILES)

The Sustainable Market Inclusive Livelihood Pathways to Self-Reliance (SMILES) project is a five-year initiative (2022–2025) in Uganda funded by the IKEA Foundation. The project is implemented by the AVSI People for Development in consortium with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), Makerere University, and DAI Global, in partnership with

UNHCR and the Government of Uganda. SMILES aim to support approximately 14,000 households, representing about 70,000 individuals, including women, youth, and their household members, in Kyaka II and Kyangwali Refugee Settlements in western Uganda. The project focuses on strengthening livelihoods, agriculture, food security, protection, energy, and environmental sustainability (AVSI People for Development. (2025). Ahmed et al. (2025)

The project addresses the rural livelihood challenges faced by refugees and host communities by supporting their transition from food insecurity and fragile livelihoods to self-reliance and resilience. It employs a combination of the Graduation Approach and the Market Systems Development (MSD) Approach to achieve sustainable economic empowerment DAI. (2025).

2.1.5 Refugee Financial Inclusion in Uganda

Opportunity International, through Opportunity Bank Uganda and its partner programs, launched a project in 2019 within the Nakivale Refugee Settlement aimed at integrating and financially including refugees, promoting self-reliance, and stimulating local economic activity in both refugee settlements and surrounding host communities Opportunity International. (2025).

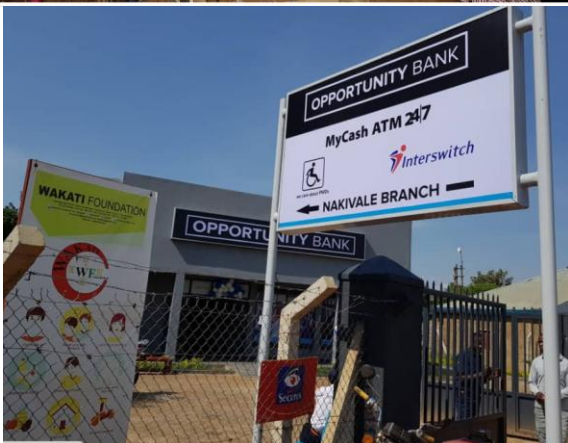


Figure (5) Refugee Financial Inclusion in Uganda
Source: Scurfield, T. (2025) & Opportunity Bank Uganda. (2021).

According to the *Opportunity International Fall 2024 Impact Report*, the project reached over 31,000 refugees and host community members through financial inclusion

initiatives, setting many families on a path toward sustainability and economic security. The report further highlights that the presence of Opportunity Bank Uganda in the settlement enables the processing of remittances and offers a currency exchange facility, both of which are crucial to meeting refugee financial needs. Additionally, the installation of an on-site ATM allows all refugees—not only Opportunity Bank clients—to withdraw cash securely, provided they possess a valid bank card (Opportunity International. (2024).

2.1.6 The Planning for Tomorrow (P4T) initiative- Uganda

The Planning for Tomorrow (P4T) initiative is a refugee-led, internationally recognised organisation whose mission is to empower communities to become healthy and self-reliant through the provision of knowledge and skills among refugees and host communities. Operating in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Kikuube District, Uganda, P4T focuses on four key thematic areas: Education, Health, Livelihood, and Community Service and Protection. The organisation implements its programs in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the European Union, various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities, and private sector actors (The Planning for Tomorrow. (2021).

According to P4T’s 2021 Annual Report, the organisation reached 3,472 vulnerable individuals across its intervention areas. In Education, 542 children gained access to affordable and quality learning opportunities. Under Community Services, 1,500 households received relief food items to help them survive and cope with emergency situations. In the Health sector, 1,250 people benefited from free, lifesaving health education and treatment. Within the Livelihood program, 50 of the most vulnerable youth and women acquired vocational skills, while in Protection, 130 cases related to child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) were referred and supported.



Home garden for vegetables Join Hands Together Women’s Group

Figure (6) Home garden for vegetables and Join hands Together women’s group
Source: The Planning for Tomorrow. (2021)

2.1.7 Kenya Inuka Project

The Inuka Project, implemented by AVSI in partnership with AVAID and funded by FOSIT, operated in Nairobi from September 2021 to August 2022. The project targeted areas including *Eastleigh, Kasarani, Kawangware, Githurai, Kayole, and Kariokor*, with the goal of enhancing self-reliance among vulnerable urban refugee and host youth. It provided selected skilled youth with financial start-up capital for micro-enterprises, job orientation, business incubation, and follow-up support.

In addition to economic empowerment, the project promoted integration and social cohesion between refugees and host communities through community dialogues across refugee-hosting neighbourhoods. These dialogues addressed emerging issues such as security, business, and education—fostering stronger relationships and reducing tensions between refugees and Kenyan host communities (AVSI People for Development. (2025a).

2.1.8 Skills for Life (S4L) Project

The Promoting Life Skills and Livelihoods Project, commonly known as Skills for Life (S4L), was implemented by Swisscontact. (2025a). It targeted refugees and host community youth aged 18–25, with a focus on women and other vulnerable persons living in Kakuma Refugee Camp and the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement in Turkana County, north-western Kenya. The project aimed to enhance the income-generating capabilities and self-reliance of unemployed and underemployed youth by improving their access to vocational and technical training, life skills and literacy, entrepreneurship and business skills, and market linkages with private-sector engagement for sustainable livelihoods. Swisscontact. (2025b).

The project was implemented from 2013 to 2022 in three phases. The first phase (2013–2015) was extended by one year due to its positive impact. The second phase (2016–2019) and third phase (2020–2022) continued to scale up the interventions. The initiative was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented in partnership with UNHCR, the Turkana County Government, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and various stakeholders, including community-based organisations, private-sector actors, non-governmental organisations, and government agencies. Swisscontact. (2025c).

In terms of achievements, the S4L project trained 3,096 beneficiaries in technical skills, who collectively generated CHF 135,411 from their businesses. In addition, many youths gained access to financial services through group savings and lending activities. By the end of the second phase, approximately CHF 672,299 had been loaned out and allocated to meet different livelihood needs. Swisscontact. (2025d).

2.1.9 The Urban Refugee Livelihood Project

The “Promoting Livelihoods and Resilience of Urban Refugees in Mombasa” project, shortened to Urban Refugee Livelihood Project – Mombasa) was implemented by Haki Centre (HCO) from July 26, 2021, to July 25, 2022, in Mombasa County, in partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Kenya. For this project, the urban refugees and host community members were provided Vocational & enterprise

skills training, In-kind / small grants and start-up support; support to small refugee-owned businesses to expand production and trade (Haki Centre, 2025a)



Figure (7) S4L Project Examples
Source: Swisscontact. (2025e).

For the achievements of the project, the soap-making training was conducted for 35 refugees and 15 members of the host community. The training focused on unique types of liquid soap, shampoo, shower gel, and bar soap. With grants to assist them deal with the negative economic consequences of COVID-19, the initiative supported 59 refugee-owned enterprises. Out of the 59 firms that were supported, 25 were owned by men, while 34 were women-owned. The grants were given in-kind and disbursed in two stages, with 35 recipients in the first phase and 24 in the second (Haki Centre, 2025b).



Figure (8) Urban Refugee Livelihood Project
Source : Haki Centre. 2025 c

2.1.10 RefugePoint’s Self-Reliance Runway (Nairobi)

RefugePoint’s Self-Reliance Runway (SRR) in Nairobi, Kenya, is an innovative approach designed to help at-risk refugees stabilise their lives and achieve self-reliance. The program enables participants to earn sufficient income to meet their essential needs and improve their overall quality of life.

This model demonstrates that self-reliance is attainable not only for refugees in stable conditions but also for those at heightened risk, provided they have the motivation and receive appropriate support. The initiative reinforces the principle that,

with the right combination of resources, mentorship, and opportunity, even the most vulnerable refugees can transition toward sustainable independence (Global Compact on Refugees, 2025).

2.2 Principles of Self-Reliance in Gaza Resilience Lab

Based on the extensive publications review of the Gaza Resilience Lab (GRL) that published more than seventy papers between October 2023 till October 2025, the authors reviewed the papers that recommended the necessity of adopting self-resilience during the Gaza rehabilitation stage. The selections are categorised by theme to highlight different facets of self-resilience.

The collective work of the Gaza Resilience Lab provides a robust evidence base arguing that the rehabilitation of Gaza must be rooted in principles of self-resilience. The selected papers demonstrate that architecting anti-fragile systems (not just rebuilding old ones), besides leveraging internal social capital and community networks, and addressing both psychological trauma and building mental fortitude, can make a great differentiation. By adopting these principles, rehabilitation becomes a process owned and driven by the people of Gaza themselves, ensuring it is more sustainable, dignified, and effective.

2.2.1 Necessity for Building an "Anti-Fragile" Gaza

This concept goes beyond mere recovery to building a society that becomes stronger through adversity. Ant-fragility practices covered all types of resilience techniques, including practices for food and water sustainability during and after the war on Gaza. The GRL even covered ways to ensure the reconstruction of an Anti-Fragile Universities in Gaza. While focused on universities, its principles apply to all sectors. The concept of "anti-fragility" is a proactive model for self-resilience, ensuring that future systems are not just rebuilt to a pre-war state but are designed to withstand and thrive amid future shocks. It argues for a reconstruction that embeds learning and strength from trauma. Al-Muhannadi and Buheji (2024).

2.2.2 Socio-Economic and Community-Level Self-Resilience

Many GRL papers provided frameworks and case studies on how communities can build internal capacity for recovery, reducing dependency on external aid, Migdad et al. (2025). For example, the paper titled 'Experiences in Protecting Socioeconomic Life During the War on Gaza' documents the grassroots, self-organised methods Gazans used to sustain basic socioeconomic functions during the conflict. For the rehabilitation stage, it offers invaluable lessons on leveraging local social capital, informal networks, and indigenous problem-solving skills—the very bedrock of community-led, self-reliant recovery. Migdad and Buheji (2025)

In another paper by the GRL team, 'Realising the Capacity of the Internal Front- Case of Gaza 2024', the authors explicitly analysed the "internal front" – the capacity of Gazans themselves and called to recognise and mobilise internal resources, skills, and determination as the primary engine for rehabilitation, rather than relying solely on external actors.

To build community-level self-reliance, 'Capitalising on the 'Social Capital' that would Accelerate the Collective Wealth of Gaza', the researchers argued that the dense social networks, solidarity, and shared identity forged in crisis are a form of "capital." For rehabilitation, strategically investing in and utilising this social cohesion can accelerate rebuilding efforts, foster trust, and ensure that development is community-owned and sustainable.

2.2.3 Psychological and Human Factor Resilience

Rehabilitation is not just physical but profoundly psychological; therefore, GRL did a lot of research to address the mental and emotional foundations of self-resilience in Gaza. One of the papers, for example, focused on addressing the Human Factors in Gaza to ensure the human element of post-war recovery. It outlines the psychological challenges (trauma, loss, betrayal) and proposes solutions for building mental and emotional resilience. A resilient population is the prerequisite for a successful rehabilitation; without addressing these "human factors," physical reconstruction will fail. Migdad et al. (2024a).

In another paper, the focus shifted to stories on Mothers of Gaza who are the cornerstone of family and community stability; besides, they provide a intergenerational model for self-resilience. It shows how nurturing and protective roles are critical for raising a generation that can withstand future pressures, making it essential for long-term rehabilitation.

The paper of 'Streams of Inspiration from Gaza Despite Genocide' argues that the immense suffering in Gaza has generated powerful stories of resilience that inspire global action and internal fortitude. For rehabilitation, adopting a narrative of inspiration rather than victimhood can empower communities, attract meaningful solidarity, and fuel the moral and psychological strength needed for the long rebuild. Migdad et al. (2024b)

GRL calls for actively managing Gaza's story to shape it as a new global identity as a place of resilience and determination. A strong, self-defined identity is a key component of self-resilience, as it fosters pride, unity, and a clear vision for the future, which are all vital during rehabilitation. This can be seen in the paper 'Branding Resilience: Shaping Gaza's Global Identity through Narrative, Solidarity, and Advocacy'.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design centred on a Comparative Case Study Analysis and a Systematic Literature Synthesis. The methodology is designed to facilitate a deep, transferable learning process by systematically analysing successful self-reliance initiatives in comparable contexts and integrating their lessons with the specific resilience principles emerging from Gaza.

Phase 1: Data Collection & Case Selection

1a. Systematic analysis of Poverty Elimination Lab (PEL) documentation.

1b. Systematic review of Gaza Resilience Lab (GRL) publications.

1c. Selection of comparable case studies from East Africa.

Phase 2: Thematic Synthesis & Framework Development

- 2a. Thematic Analysis of PEL cases to identify transferable strategies.
- 2b. Thematic Analysis of GRL papers to define core resilience principles.
- 2c. Synthesis of findings to create a preliminary integrated framework.

Phase 3: Contextual Adaptation & Validation

- 3a. Cross-context analysis to adapt strategies for Gaza.
 - 3b. Development of actionable application pathways.
- Output: A validated self-reliance framework for Gaza's rehabilitation.

3.1 Phase One: Data Collection and Case Selection

This phase involved the systematic gathering and selection of the core data for analysis.

Poverty Elimination Lab (PEL) Initiatives were used as a secondary data source, including project reports, evaluations, impact assessments, and published case studies from the PEL and its partner organisations (e.g., UNHCR, World Bank, WFP, implementing NGOs). The initiatives were selected based on their explicit focus on Self-Reliance. The primary objective of the initiative must be to transition beneficiaries from dependency to economic self-sufficiency. Preference was given to projects operating in post-conflict or protracted displacement settings with resource constraints analogous to Gaza. The selected cases had to demonstrate measurable outcomes in livelihoods, income generation, or social cohesion. A purposive sample was chosen to represent a variety of interventions, including agricultural cooperatives, integrated area-based development, and market-based graduation models.

3.2 Phase Two: Thematic Synthesis and Framework Development

In this phase, the collected data were analysed to identify core themes and construct the integrated framework. A thematic analysis approach, following the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to the PEL case studies. The process involved:

1. Familiarization: Immersive reading of the case study documents.
2. Initial Coding: Generating initial codes from the data (e.g., "land provision," "cooperative model," "vocational training," "market linkage").
3. Searching for Themes: Collating codes into potential themes that represent successful strategies (e.g., Integrated Multi-Sectoral Approach, Sequenced Graduation Model, Enabling Legal Frameworks, Digital & Financial Inclusion).
4. Reviewing and Defining Themes: Refining the themes to ensure they form a coherent pattern across the different cases.

A parallel thematic analysis was conducted on the GRL literature. This process identified the core principles deemed essential for Gaza's recovery, such as Building Anti-Fragile Systems, Leveraging Internal Social Capital, and Addressing Psycho-Social Trauma. The findings from the two thematic analyses were then synthesised. The transferable strategies from the PEL were mapped onto the contextual principles from the GRL. For example, the PEL's "Graduation

Approach" was examined through the GRL's lens of "psychological fortitude" to ensure the model would be trauma-informed.

3.3 Phase Three: Contextual Adaptation and Analytical Validation

The final phase focused on translating the synthesised themes into a practical, context-specific framework. This study utilised a cross-context comparative analysis to systematically adapt the East African strategies for Gaza. This involved asking, for each PEL-derived strategy:

"What is the core mechanism for success in this model?"

"What are the contextual barriers to implementing this in Gaza (e.g., scale of destruction, political constraints, specific trauma)?"

"How can this model be modified, using GRL principles, to overcome these barriers and function effectively in Gaza?"

The proposed applications in Section 4.0 were developed using a Logical Framework (LogFrame) approach. For each proposed intervention (e.g., adopting a "whole-of-society" approach), the analysis defines the long-term objective (e.g., sustainable self-reliance), the direct benefit (e.g., community-owned reconstruction), the tangible results (e.g., built infrastructure with integrated commercial spaces) and the specific actions needed (e.g., participatory planning, co-design workshops).

This methodology ensures that the proposed framework is not merely theoretical but is grounded in proven practices, tailored to the unique context of Gaza through a rigorous process of synthesis and analytical adaptation, and presented in a structured, actionable format for policymakers and implementers.

IV. APPLICATION & ANALYSIS

The lessons from Poverty Elimination Lab (PEL) in treating affected populations as passive beneficiaries is a recipe for long-term dependency. By contrast, viewing the people of Gaza as the primary agents of their own recovery—as was done in PEL case studies unlocks immense potential. The practices from PEL and when applied on GRL can provide a proven roadmap for moving from a handout model to a hand-up approach, transforming a humanitarian crisis into an opportunity for sustainable, community-driven development. The goal for Gaza should not be to return to a pre-war state of dependency, but to "build back better" as a self-reliant and resilient society. This paper dives into how specific best practices from Poverty Elimination Lab publications can be adapted for Gaza's post-war context.

4.1 Adopting a "Whole-of-Society" and Integrated Development Approach

The East African model moves beyond siloed humanitarian projects. This is crucial for Gaza to avoid perpetual dependency. The Jya Mbere Project in Rwanda and the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan (KISEDIP) in Kenya are prime examples. They integrate infrastructure (schools, health centres, markets), livelihood

support (grants, training), and environmental management into a single, multi-sectoral plan.

For Gaza, rehabilitation must be a unified effort that simultaneously addresses housing, water, energy, and economic opportunity. Instead of just building homes, a plan could include constructing residential blocks with integrated commercial spaces on the ground floor, powered by a new micro-grid, and linked to vocational training centers for construction, engineering, and renewable energy technologies. This creates jobs while rebuilding.

4.2 Leveraging the "Graduation Approach" and Market-Based Livelihoods

This approach provides a sequenced pathway from relief to self-sufficiency, which is essential for a population that has experienced profound trauma and asset loss. The SMILES project in Uganda combines asset transfers, skills training, and market linkages. While the Misizi Marshland Project in Rwanda provide land and inputs to a cooperative, creating a sustainable agricultural business.

These approaches can be applied in three phases in Gaza. The first phase would focus on stabilisation, which provides cash-for-work and food-for-work programs for clearing rubble and securing basic infrastructure, injecting liquidity and restoring a sense of purpose. The second phase is about skills and asset building. In this phase, more large-scale vocational training programs would be launched to focus on the skills needed for reconstruction (e.g., masonry, plumbing, electrical engineering, solar panel installation). Provide toolkits and seed capital as "asset transfers." The third phase creates market integration. It facilitates the formation of cooperatives and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) to bid on reconstruction contracts. Create economic zones focused on agriculture, light manufacturing, and digital services, explicitly linking trained graduates to these market opportunities.

4.3 Prioritizing Legal Frameworks that Enable Economic Participation

A supportive legal environment is the bedrock of self-reliance. Gaza will need clear policies that grant its residents the right and ability to rebuild their lives economically.

Learning from African countries as the Rwanda's Law No. 042/2024 that grants refugees the right to work, freedom of movement, and access to financial services, besides Kenya's Refugees Act No. 10 of 2021 provides similar rights; Gaza would need similar policies that can guarantee property rights and access to land for rebuilding, besides the establishment of new businesses and cooperatives. Also, formal accessibility to microfinance and SME loans, to fuel local entrepreneurship, is expected.

4.4 Fostering Social Cohesion Through Shared Projects

The Poverty Elimination Lab strongly emphasises including the host community to prevent resentment and build mutual benefit. In Gaza, the "host community" is the entire Gazan population, and projects must be designed to be inclusive and community-owned.

Rehabilitation projects must be participatory. Decision-making should include community leaders, women's groups, and youth representatives. Rebuilding a neighbourhood market, a school, or a water treatment plant should be a collective endeavour that strengthens community bonds and creates a shared sense of ownership, reducing the potential for internal conflict.

4.5 Building Digital and Financial Infrastructure for the Future

Modern self-reliance is digital. The rehabilitation of Gaza presents an opportunity to leapfrog outdated systems. Alongside physical infrastructure, Gaza needs to invest in digital infrastructure, which includes expanding mobile network coverage and internet access. Thus, promoting digital payment systems for aid distribution and salaries which are more efficient and transparent. This means Gaza needs training in digital skills for remote work, e-commerce, and tech entrepreneurship, similar to the Skills for Life (S4L) project but with a digital focus.

Inspired by the lab work on the Global Compact on Refugees, a dedicated compact for Gaza could operationalise the following principles. The first principle is creating an integrated infrastructure that has the basic services. This would help to co-design the rebuilding of homes, schools, hospitals, and water/energy systems with the community.

The second principle is focused on creating economic revival and livelihoods. This would help implement a large-scale graduation program, seed funding for Gazan-owned reconstruction companies, and create special economic zones. The third principle is focused on social cohesion and governance. It would ensure community-led oversight of projects and invest in mental health and psychosocial support to heal the social fabric. The fourth principle is digital and financial inclusion. It helps to build a modern digital economy from the ground up.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Increasing Self-Reliance Approaches in the Gaza Rehabilitation Plan

The catastrophic destruction in Gaza presents a critical inflexion point. The path of conventional, top-down humanitarian aid, while necessary for immediate relief, is fundamentally insufficient for building a sustainable future. This paper has argued that the only viable pathway forward is to place the principles of self-reliance and community-led resilience at the very heart of the rehabilitation agenda. By deliberately synthesising the practical, field-tested models of the Poverty Elimination Lab (PEL) with the context-specific, forward-looking principles of the Gaza Resilience Lab (GRL), we have moved beyond theoretical advocacy to present a concrete and actionable framework.

The core finding of this research is that self-reliance is not an abstract ideal but an achievable outcome, contingent on the deliberate implementation of integrated strategies. The comparative analysis of initiatives in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya demonstrates that success hinges on several transferable pillars: the adoption of a "whole-of-society"

approach that seamlessly connects infrastructure, livelihoods, and environmental management; the application of a sequenced Graduation Model to provide a structured pathway from relief to market-based self-sufficiency; the establishment of supportive legal and policy frameworks that empower economic participation; and strategic investment in digital and financial infrastructure to foster a modern, inclusive economy.

5.2 Fusing the "how" with the "what" and "why"

Crucially, this paper has demonstrated that these PEL strategies cannot be mechanically transplanted. They must be filtered through and enriched by the foundational insights from the GRL. The GRL's emphasis on building "anti-fragile" systems ensures that rehabilitation is not about restoring a fragile status quo but about creating structures that gain from shocks. Its focus on leveraging social capital and addressing profound psychological trauma provides the essential human-centric dimensions that make economic models truly sustainable. The proposed framework, therefore, represents a hybrid model where the "how" from East Africa is fused with the "what" and "why" from Gaza.

5.3 The Implications of this Study

The implications of this study are clear for policymakers, international organisations, and donors involved in Gaza's recovery. It calls for a fundamental reorientation of investment and effort—away from short-term projects and towards long-term, capacity-building partnerships with the people of Gaza. The proposed framework for integrated development, graduated livelihood support, and digital inclusion provides a tangible starting point.

Ultimately, the goal for Gaza must be to "build forward better," not just "build back." The immense suffering and resilience demonstrated by the people of Gaza have created a unique, albeit painful, window of opportunity to forge a new reality. By embracing the models of self-reliance proven in comparable contexts and grounding them in Gaza's own demonstrated capacity for endurance, the international community can help ensure that the reconstruction of Gaza is not merely an act of rebuilding bricks and mortar, but a transformative process of empowering a robust, self-determining, and hopeful society. The choice is not whether Gaza will be rebuilt, but how—and this paper conclusively shows that a future built on self-reliance is the only one that promises genuine sustainability and dignity.

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