

Chapter Three:

Community Participation in Local Government and Development.

Forward

Section One: **A General Framework of Participation in Local Government.**

Section Two: **The PNA and Community Participation.**

Section Three: **Relationship between Local Councils and the Ministry of Local Government.**

Section Four: **Local Government in Practice.**

Section Five: **The Boundaries and Constituents of Participation and Development (Case Studies).**

Section Six: **General Conclusions**

Forward

This chapter addresses participation, delegation of authority, and advancement of human development in local communities under the current conditions in Palestine. Delegation of authority in the context of the PHDR means the full involvement of local councils and institutions as decision-makers in the development process. Those who have followed the general course of Palestinian development during the past seven years and specifically the progress made in building and empowering local government councils will notice that new challenges have arisen. The development process still faces many difficulties, some of which are caused by political instability and others caused by the management methods employed by the Palestinians to address them.

Section One:

A General Framework of Participation in Local Government

This chapter, like the rest of the PHDR, assumes that resources are available to resolve problems faced in the process of enjoining local councils to advance the cause of sustainable human development under the current conditions. Development requires the activation and enhancement of the abilities of Palestinians. The Palestinians must help to determine the course of their own lives, and make maximum use of available freedoms and mobility. Palestinians must resist not only the occupation, but also many self-imposed hindrances to their active participation in the development process.

This chapter also discusses the factors that weaken Palestinian community participation, especially in local government. Levels of community participation in the activities of official institutions and local councils are explored. Case studies illustrate the role of local councils and NGOs currently active in areas of PHDR research. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the importance of community participation in local government organizations and its relationship to the success of the development process.

Palestinians need to increase their participation in the securing of their rights more than ever. Under the pressures of the continuing Israeli occupation, many institutions stopped providing services and some fell into a state of general chaos. Potent, professional governmental institutions derive legitimacy from the public, directing assets and organizing human and institutional resources to advance sustainable human development in the full emancipatory sense. An equitable partnership cannot be achieved without the presence of local government institutions whose operations are based on the rule of law and democratic work mechanisms. The degree to which centralized institutions are desirable is a topic of debate. PNA institutions have been strongly encouraged to amend their operations to conform to recommendations embraced by the PNA before the Intifada.

Local government in the fullest sense includes various development, democratic, and institutional aspects. It requires a high degree of delegation of responsibilities to local councils in matters of making decisions, executing them, and assessing results. The work of local councils requires them to engage in the social, economic and political arenas. It also demands a high level of community participation, public lending of legitimacy to councils, and accountability of local council representatives.

Development requires the activation and enhancement of the abilities of Palestinians

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Reclaiming part of the initiative

The Palestinians invested a large portion of their limited resources in the restoration of their social, political and economic fabric. The Palestinians, after 1967, established a network of human relationships, economic activity, and political efforts in the occupied territories. They also established a network of NGOs that provided services to the people in the fields of human rights, education and health care. These efforts reinforced the concepts of patriotism and the Palestinian identity. Partial autonomy was achieved, and the community began to participate in decision-making. In addition, community interest in education and cultural activities was raised. Efforts in these areas became increasingly flexible and adaptable to changing conditions. The results paved the way for limited Israeli withdrawal under the Oslo Accords and laid the foundation for the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority.

Factors affecting local government and participation

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land in 1967 represented a time of marked inconsistency. The Palestinians had political representation in the occupied territories (the PLO), but they enjoyed no legal rights, political influence or decision-making ability. Two sessions of local council and municipal elections were held in the West

Bank, but not in the Gaza Strip due to complexities in its legal system. The next elections, held in 1976, provided a better chance for local and political participation (National Steering Committee, High Council of Education, and others). In 1980, the Israeli authorities prevented new municipal elections, and actually dismantled some municipalities and appointed alternate councils, some of them headed by Israeli military commanders.

Section Two:

The PNA and Community Participation

The role of the PNA in achieving sustainable development is positive, but generally modest and greatly affected by external circumstances. Self-imposed factors influenced both the successes and failures of government and civic performance. The Oslo Accords limited the authority of the PNA in the eyes of most Palestinians. The agreement weakened PNA control over the future of the Palestinian land. Oslo tipped the balance of power largely in favor of Israeli interests, and gave Israel the chance to create new realities on the ground¹. The PNA failed to build a relationship based on confidence and mutual respect with the Palestinian community, local councils and NGOs. Support withered for the positive aspects of the Oslo Accords. The PNA's

In 1980, the Israeli authorities prevented new municipal elections, and actually dismantled some municipalities

The PNA failed to build a relationship based on confidence and mutual respect with the Palestinian community

1 . Mustafa Al-Barghouthi, NGOs and their Role in the Future, paper presented at a conference at Birzeit University on 13-15 May, 1994.

mandate to negotiate on behalf of the people eroded in subsequent years.

One of the PNA's self-imposed obstacles was the failure to provide policies of good governance and a balanced framework under which to organize key Palestinian initiatives. A number of Palestinian ministers accepted their appointments solely for the sake of prestige. Many lacked any relevant experience in the areas of governance for which they were responsible

The PNA similarly failed to recognize the relationship between development and resistance. Government officials separated development from politics and both from community participation. The political agenda consumed the lion's share of human resources and available assets. Decision-makers at the PNA failed to assess the Palestinian condition. They did not grasp the concept that to a large degree, resistance efforts take place at the local community level. This failure is partially attributable to inexperience in local community affairs. Decision-makers did not establish defined and institutionalized tools to arrange the priorities of the community. The professional experience needed to properly address those priorities was at times absent. Decision-makers did

not exhibit ample understanding of the practical aspects of human development and in general, did not take it seriously².

As a result, Palestinians in the occupied territories expressed disparate levels of satisfaction with the national authority's governance, and were dissatisfied overall with their quality of life. The mixed feelings were intensified with the eruption of Al-Aqsa Intifada at the end of September 2000 and the widespread failures of official institutions. The leadership exhibited in the handling of ensuing legal, security, service, and supply crises was inadequate to nonexistent. The community demonstrated its dissatisfaction by demanding increased democratic access and permission to guide their own community affairs. A general call was raised to resolve the political and developmental crises and to abolish the central control of the PNA over local affairs. Demands were made to stimulate the relationship between local government institutions and NGOs to empower the latter to perform. Criticism was leveled at the increase in the number of local councils, such as municipalities and town councils. Few receive adequate funding to allow them to assume their tasks and most are not delegated sufficient authority to participate in decision-making.³

Decision-makers did not exhibit ample understanding of the practical aspects connected of human development

Demands were made to stimulate the relationship between local government institutions and NGOs

2 . Mustafa Miree, Legislation in Palestine: Mechanisms, Objectives and Priorities; Ramallah, Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights, May 2000, pg. 49.

3. See for example: Abbas Abdul-Haqq, Urban Schemes and Building Permits in Palestine; Development Affairs, Volume Ten; first and second issues, pg. 52.

Local government in practice

The official local government system includes development planning institutions, including the Higher Council for Urban Planning, regional planning committees, local planning and building committees, and other permanent and temporary bodies entrusted with addressing issues or executing specific tasks. At the community level, the local government system includes local councils and NGOs of various types.

A consensus appears to exist on the philosophical basis and the desirable organizational structure for local government and its relationship with the central government. Various constitutional provisions lay out a framework for this structure. Article 176 of the Temporary Palestinian Constitution Project⁴ provides for “organizing relations between the administrations of local units on the basis of non-central democracy in managing units of local government.” Article 168 provides that “local councils should enjoy authority, be elected according to the law, and practice their legally established authorities. Local councils shall not be forced to sign commitments or agreements except in their area of specialty and in coordination with the Ministry.” Article 95 of the Constitution Draft⁵ provides that the law shall establish “the tasks of local councils, their financial resources,

and relation with the central government, as well as their role in preparing and executing development plans and supervising various activities. Distribution shall be based, as much as possible, on the number and distribution of residents.”

In practice, Palestinian governmental institutions and local councils remain subordinate to a central management system in which decision-making is made at the highest levels. Thus, the legislation delegating authority to local councils and administrative entities mentioned in the three legal texts above and accountability concerning their performance in the governmental framework is moot. A constitution that defines the boundaries between the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government and organizes relations among them has not been ratified. Legislation to delegate authority and allow for accountability has not been passed. Community participation is therefore restricted to receiving and executing decisions, without the right to participate in making them. Strengthening the institutional, political, judicial and executive infrastructure of the PNA is a first step toward achieving competent local government, bolstering participation, holding elections, and following professional methodologies in making decisions, planning, and appointing personnel.

A consensus appears to exist on the philosophical basis and the desirable organizational structure for local government

Strengthening the institutional, political, judicial and executive infrastructure of the PNA is a first step toward achieving competent local government

4 . Issued on 1 September 2000 by the drafting committee formed by the Central Council in October, 1999.

5 . The Fourth Draft of the Constitution for the Interim Status Stage, a document prepared by the Palestinian Legislative Council and published on 22 January, 1996.

No constitutional provision designates the body or bodies responsible for making development decisions within the PNA. After the PNA arrived in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the only call for the establishment of a development planning council was the Presidential decree issued on 10 January 2000, calling for the establishment of a high development council headed by the President. The decree was issued after the publishing of the "Rokar Report," which was widely embraced by the donor community. It is difficult to gauge the performance of the development council in light of the lack of information about its activities.

Preparing plans and budgets

There are indicators that point to the absence of a development vision to guide the work of Palestinian governmental and non-governmental organizations. These indicators also highlight a lack of community participation, a recognized and enforceable system of laws, management systems, and ample monitoring provisions and follow-through. The role of the Legislative Council and local councils in creating plans and establishing priorities and distributing budgets is inadequate. Guidance from the Ministries of Finance and Planning is noticeably absent. For example, the Palestinian Development Plan for 1999-2003 was not presented to the PLC for deliberation and approval, and the presentation of the 2001 budget was delayed until five months after the established

October deadline, which is a violation of the third article of the budget law. Also, the year-end budgets for 1998, 1999, and 2000 were never presented. This, of course, assumes that the budget law is a legal framework for the development plan, and requires that the PNA, community development organizations, and donors adhere to it in their work. Community participation, however, in the review of the year-end budget and establishment the general budget was practically nonexistent. The general budget for the financial year 1996-1997 presents an example of flawed development decision-making processes within the PNA. The third article of the law provides that income in the form of grants and foreign aid can be used to fund development initiatives only after "prioritized projects funded by external aid receive Cabinet approval, based on recommendations from the Finance Minister. The aid should be distributed fairly according to sector and geographical distribution."

In addition, there are several examples of disregard for provisions of the general budget law despite enforcement mechanisms the law provides. For example, the Ministry of Finance is still unable to cover the budgets of ministries and fails to publicize local council budgets, as the law requires. Ministries that do not have budgets fund their activities from loans granted by the Ministry of Finance. The situation is different for other ministries; the

Community awareness of the importance of budgets is still weak

Ministry of Education, for example, has operated with an established annual budget since 1996, covering expenses incurred in the prior period (1994-1996) with Ministry of Finance loans. It is interesting how loans provided by donor countries and other financiers are handled; in most instances, the loans are transferred between donors and the governmental institution without the oversight of the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and without commitment to the provisions of the development plan and the budget law.

Community awareness of the importance of budgets is still weak. Civil society institutions and various interest groups fail to follow up on the preparation of budgets. They do not attempt to influence them in favor of neglected segments of the community, or advocate the importance of investing in sustainable human development.

There is a gap between the stated objectives and what was actually implemented

Section Three: The Relationship of Local Government Councils with the MOLG

The Ministry of Local Government (MOLG) was formed by a decision from the Palestinian leadership in Tunisia on 25 February 1994. The

Ministry was to implement a limited version of a local government structure and to ensure that “local government consists of local councils in the form of municipalities, town councils, and joint service councils that work for the benefit of the residents. Each local committee has an area of jurisdiction within the boundaries of the state”.⁶ The Ministry adopted a general policy based on the following four basic objectives:

1. Advancing the concepts of local government and decentralized management, and to create local government institutions that support the national objective of building Palestinian local communities that embrace democratic elections.
2. Raising the quality of services in the Palestinian rural community to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.
3. Developing the abilities of local councils.
4. Reviewing the performance of local councils established before the inception of the PNA in order to arrive at a local government vision concurrent with the Palestinian agenda.

Nevertheless, there is a gap between the stated objectives and what was actually implemented.

The recurrence of terms such as centrality, decentralization, and participation in the literature of

6 . The PNA, MOLG, no publication date.

7 . Local Government, Issue 1, September 1999.

8. See for example: Hasan Al-Araj, Deputy Minister of Local Government; The Development of the Palestinian Local System.

Box (3 - 1): A comprehensive approach to local government

“The MOLG pursues the general goal of developing, uniting, and achieving comprehensiveness in local government and realizing high quality local government, thereby nurturing democracy and the participation of citizens in the building and development process. It is responsible for organizing regional planning and drafting laws and regulations for local councils and developing the councils to the level of securing infrastructure services to all areas.”

Saeb Erekat, Minister of Local Government⁷

local government is interesting⁸, in the absence of a clear context for interpretation. The legal system's references to local government are marked by a high degree of ambiguity. Some officials at the MOLG objected to the phrase “appointing members of local council,” explaining that forming the local councils was accomplished not through “appointment” at President's orders, but rather through “selection meant to steer the affairs of the residents and with the help of the residents themselves.” The officials also insisted that the terminology represented a middle ground between “election and appointment”.⁹ Regardless of the words used, the phrasing did not agree with any legal texts or with the publicly avowed commitments to decentralization, which were designed to ensure free elections and professional basis for “selection,” or with the concept of community participation. In addition, the Minister of Local Government issued decisions

regarding internal policies that conflicted with the authorities delegated to local councils by law¹⁰. Also, the appointment mechanism revived and strengthened tribal system and favoritism.

It can be said that the circumstances surrounding the inception of the PNA and its failure to implement human development in the broader sense, in addition to the absence a national policy of local government within a comprehensive political vision explains the lack of planning, allotment of funds, and delegation of authorities¹¹.

The Intifada affirmed that implementation of the principles with which most Palestinians agree and which the MOLG supports - decentralization, local and community participation, strengthening of local councils, and others - was and still is a decisive factor in empowering the Palestinian community to resist and develop.

Appointment mechanism revived and strengthened tribal system and favoritism

The legal system's references to local government are disabled by a high degree of ambiguity

9. In an interview with the Local Government magazine, “Erekat confirms the formulation of a national strategy for urban planning that challenges settlement;” Local Government; Issue No. 1, September 1999.

10. Previous reference, pg. 12.

11. Tareq Toqan, Report on Decentralization and Local Government in Palestine; Ramallah, the Independent Commission for Human Rights; May 2001; pg. 23-30 and 35-37.

The Intifada affirmed that decentralization, local and community participation, are decisive factors in empowering the Palestinian community

Box (3 - 2): The Higher Planning Council

The Higher Planning Council and its affiliate bodies are considered vital to the work of local councils. The Council was established by presidential decree issued on 21 August 1995 and is headed by the Minister of Local Government. Council membership comprises representatives from the Ministries of Planning, Public Works, Transport, Housing, Health, Labor, Tourism and Antiquities, Industry, Agriculture, Trade, Culture, and Environment, in addition to the Attorney General, the Jerusalem Custodian, the Chief Engineer, and the general director of Urban Planning at the MOLG. The council works to enforce the modified temporary (Jordanian) Law No. 79 issued in 1966. The council is noted for “centrality, especially in financial affairs¹².” Examining the composition and performance of the council, the absence of community participation is evident, especially considering that the “Jerusalem Custodian” does not actually exist and that the Chief Engineer is the only elected member from the engineering community as per the law. Also, the Executive Council plays a dominant role in formulating planning policies that directly affect the community. Preserving the laws that restrict the role of local councils and their desire to develop, especially those concerning the responsibilities of governors, further strengthened the centrality of the Executive Council and limited community participation. The administrative structures law reinforced centralization and failed to clarify administrative policies. Although Articles 12 and 13 of the law suggest that the authorities of the governor focus on security affairs, Article 15 nonetheless grants the governor authorities that should be delegated to local councils.

12. Consultation Group for Rural Development (ARD Decentralization in Local Government in Palestine; Study of the Opportunities and Possibilities of Implementing Decentralization in Local Government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (draft); February 2000, pg. 13.

Section Four: Local Government in Practice

The law defines a local council as a financially independent entity, but it does not define its level of independence. In practice, the financial independence of local councils is limited, as will be later shown, and the same applies to the level of administrative independence.

Comparing the condition of local councils under occupation to their condition under the administration of the PNA, a positive change appears. Under the PNA, local councils have been freed from the numerous Israeli policies that worked to weaken their ability to serve the community¹³ and from the unfairness inherent in the Jordanian law. The rise of the PNA protected areas under its control from Israeli settlement expansion, but the PNA, despite its other accomplishments, failed to involve the community in local administration and in development efforts. The PNA did not delegate authority or create mechanisms to enable local councils to fulfill their potential role in the development and administrative processes. Central PNA institutions currently find themselves unable to work harmoniously with local councils and other community institutions and appear increasingly bureaucratic in their outlook and function. The people find

themselves confused as to institutional jurisdiction issues, as authority remains vested in high-level officials and in specific geographical areas, such as Ramallah and Gaza, both according to the law and in terms of actual practice.

An analysis of indicators helps introduce a discussion of the relationship between local councils and the performance of the PNA. Foremost among those indicators is the great discrepancy in living standards between rural areas and urban centers, between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and among the north, center, and south of the West Bank. Also, the status of the council, its relationship with official governmental institutions, its authority, and its source of income as defined by the local councils law of 1997 are important indicators, as is the relationship between living standards and the authority of the council in addressing them. Available information shows that 25% of the West Bank suffers lack of local representation. The percentage varies from the north of the West Bank, and to its center and its south; while 25% of locales in the Jenin district are not represented, only 6% of Ramallah locales are not represented, rising to 44% in Hebron. The same applies to education; 74% of locales in Tobas in the northern West Bank lack elementary schools, compared to 25% in Ramallah, 17% in

The law defines a local council as a financially independent entity

Central PNA institutions currently find themselves unable to work harmoniously with local councils

Great discrepancy in living standards between rural areas and urban centers exists

13. Anthony Cone, *Urban Israeli Planning of the Cities of the West Bank--the Law and the Bulldozer in the Service of Jewish Settlement*; Palestinian Studies Center; January, 1995. Also see Addendum No. 2 of Military Order No. 418 concerning the urban planning and building code, issued 23 March 1971.

Jerusalem, and 61% in Hebron in the southern West Bank. This situation also applies to water and power utilities.¹⁴ Case studies, which will be presented later, reveal strong correlation between the power of the local council and the power of civil community institutions, meaning that the strength of one also strengthens the other.

Another noteworthy indicator, albeit titular, is that most local councils use the letterhead of the

MOLG, which promotes the perception of the ministry's dominance. Other local councils, especially bigger, richer ones connected politically with decision-makers, do not use Ministry letterhead. Also, the presence of several mayors and local council heads in high-level posts at legislative and executive institutions lends their councils greater weight in political and economic decision-making and in obtaining funding compared to their counterparts.

Box (3 - 3): The relationship of local councils with the MOLG, residents, and project implementation

In a study of the relationship of the MOLG with ten local councils and the residents, it was revealed that meetings with the MOLG usually invite the minister, the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister and the ministry director. The visits of the minister and the deputy minister differ from the others; while the attendance at meetings of the first two were marked as “several” and “never”, attendance of the assistant deputy minister and local council director were marked as “often”. As for the Allar Municipality, the assistant deputy minister never visited it, while the local government director visited “often”. Local council contact with the residents differs, ranging from periodic meetings to invitations to limited meetings or open meetings with limited objectives. According to polled residents, the best ways to initiate projects are to attend official and non-official meetings, to make continuing requests, and to foster personal relationships with decision-makers. In Turmusayya, the residents believed that “nothing was useful”.¹⁵

14 . World Bank 2001 (Ibid)

15. From: Nasr Yaqoub, Hussein Al-Araj, and Suheil Khalileh; The Palestinian Experience in Formed Municipalities; Schedule No. 6, Arab Thought Forum, February 2001 (Beit Lahia, Al-Qarara, Tammoun, Al-Sumua, Allar, Burqueen, Aseera Al-Shamalieh, Turmusaa, and Abasan.)

Local councils, as per Article 2 of the law, are obliged to conform to general policy defined by the MOLG and to abide by its financial and administrative supervision. According to the law, the council does not have the authority to represent the interests of the town, directly or indirectly, at the Higher Planning Council, although it must abide by its decisions. As for the relationship with governors, local councils must heed the administrative structures law. Often, the authority of the council and that of the governor entangle, and authority extended local councils is unclear due to the vagueness of governor authority. The administrative structures law, in its form presented to the PLC for a second reading, added to executive centrality by diminishing the role of councils in bolstering community participation in decision-making, shrinking the role previously extended them by the law. The administrative structures law “obliterates the council and strips it of all authority, turning it into an employee of the district”¹⁶. The law diminishes local councils’ authority and prevents them from exercising authority spelled out by the law. The abilities of local councils to play a partnership role in decision-making vary according to council reliance on self-sufficient funding and on its relative influence within the ranks of the executive authority, decision-making powers, and donors.

Some larger municipalities, whose reliance on executive authority ministries, especially the Ministry of Finance, is limited, are able to overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable for smaller municipalities, aided in doing so by their great ability to influence decision-makers and donors, which enables them to avoid complications. On the flip side, smaller, weaker municipalities, especially newer ones, do not enjoy such influence and resources, increasing the gap between them and their bigger counterparts.

Also, the overlapping of the roles of ministries and other institutions regarding their relationship with local councils confuses the latter, causes conflict within the authorities of the ministry itself, and also wastes resources because of the lack of ample coordination.

Financial revenue of local councils

Article 22 of the local councils law defines three sources of revenue for local council income: taxes and fees determined in Palestinian laws, donations and grants, and the budget of the executive authority. However, local councils do not have the authority to collect taxes and fees or determine spending; they are obligated to obtain Ministry approval to do so according to the law. Municipality budgets are subject to the approval of the Minister of Local Government. Articles 8 and 11 of the financial system of local

The law diminishes local councils’ authority

Local councils do not have the authority to collect taxes and fees or determine spending

16. Nasr Yaqoub and Hussein Al-Araj, previously cited reference, pg. 63.

councils issued on 4 March 1999 provide that the council does not have the authority to amend budget articles without the approval of the Minister. Local councils also do not receive their share (90%) of local property taxes and professional

licensing fees collected by the Ministry of Finance. As for donations, they come from four sources: the residents, residents living abroad, sisterhood projects, and other donors.

Box (3 - 4) : Failure of residents to pay fees

Municipalities suffer budget deficits due to the failure of residents to pay their dues from time to time and from town to town. Before the Intifada, no more than 70% of the people paid their bills, dipping to 30% during the Intifada.¹⁷ The regression is attributed to worsening economic conditions and negligence caused by other factors, such as the belief of some that taxes and fees are not invested into development projects for the benefit of the residents and the dissatisfaction of some with the structure or performance of the municipal council.

Media, NGOs, and governmental organizations are to spread awareness about development and participation

Residents and residents living abroad offer monetary donations as well as non-financial contributions, such as land, schoolrooms, clinics and mosques. In a study about municipalities, the researchers urged the municipalities to cooperate with the Ministry of Waqf to regulate mosque building, to decrease the high cost of constructing them and using the

savings to build schools or health centers.¹⁸ Participation is not possible in absence of raised awareness of these issues. It also necessitates diligent work by the media, NGOs, and governmental organizations to spread information about development and participation and its mechanisms.

17 . Meetings with municipality officials.

18. Previous reference, pg. 62.

Box (3 - 5): Community participation

Community participation is a characteristic of the Palestinian local communities, and many of them proved they are able to cooperate in building schools, donating land, and providing funds, equipment and labor. For example, in 1999-2000, the local community in Hebron and the area to its south donated 483 classrooms, compared to 187 offered by the Ministry of Education. In Nablus, the municipality offered 34 classrooms, and a city resident donated \$1 million to build a school, with other donations coming from “education taxes.” Several municipalities in the West Bank collect donations from students at instructions from the Education Ministry as per a Jordanian law that is not implemented in the Gaza Strip. One shekel (less than 25 cents) was collected from every student monthly in Hebron and Nablus. The money collected is used to buy land, maintain buildings and buy equipment. However, the system is not employed uniformly across the West Bank, and everybody needs to exert more effort to raise the standing of education in the territories. Also, official institutions must revitalize the cooperative community spirit among residents, which develops with the belief in belonging and partnership in the responsibilities and rewards of development work.¹⁹

“Twin cities” programs with cities abroad are not a significant source of income, usually restricted to cultural exchange and exchange of

technical expertise. Because most local councils are not involved in these programs, they do not benefit from this resource.²⁰

Box (3 - 6): UNDP Local Rural Development Programme

The philosophy of this program relies on community participation in determining needs, establishing priorities, and planning and execution. To that end, regional planning committees were formed that included representatives from the local community and the MOLG. Community participation covered 17.6% of the cost of 123 projects executed in the West Bank. Communities of 39 villages also participated in determining the development needs of their villages by way of questionnaires.²¹

19. Dag Aarnes, Ibrahim Dakkak, Romi Khoslam, and Amjad Yaaqba; Joint Review of School Infrastructure, Development Programme in the West Bank and Gaza, Commissioned by the Education Sector Working Group; Ramallah/Oslo, 2000; pg. 33.

20. Workshop: The Geographical Relationship of Municipalities in the Bethlehem District with the MOLG and Refugee Camps; Bethlehem, 10, July, 2001.

21. Drafted by LRD - MOLG.

Assessment of the performance of local councils

In an opinion poll focusing on community participation in the work of local councils, only 21% of those polled believed that local councils involved the community in decision-making, while 56%

thought the opposite (67% in the Gaza Strip). Dissatisfaction with the performance of local councils seems higher in the Gaza Strip than it is in the West Bank.

Members and heads of local councils are appointed by the PNA

Table (3-1): Participation in Local Government according to Public Opinion			
1. Do you believe that the local council in your community represents more the interests of the residents or the government (PNA)? (Percentages)			
	West Bank and Gaza	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Represents the interests of the community	33.6	37.4	27.7
2) Represents the interests of the government	15.6	13.5	18.7
3) Represents the interests of segments or individuals	36.4	36.1	36.8
4) Undecided	14.5	13.0	16.8
2. Does the local council in your community involve residents in making decisions regarding important projects that affect your community? (Percentages)			
1. Yes	20.5	23.6	15.6
2. To an extent	14.5	17.8	9.3
3. No	55.9	48.5	67.5
4. Undecided	5.1	5.0	5.4

A possible explanation for the levels of dissatisfaction indicated by the opinion poll may be that members and heads of local councils are appointed by the PNA, and appointment is reliant more on tribal and factional interests than on the input of the average citizen and is not based on

professional standards. Although no elections were held for local councils as per Law No. 5 for the year 1995 since the inception of the PNA, there is a level of satisfaction with the performance of the PNA in terms of community participation.

Box (3-7): The MOLG and the participation of women

There is some indication that the MOLG is keen to involve women in its operation and in local councils, although only limited participation was achieved, and in general membership, not positions of leadership. The Ministry established the Women's Program in order to involve women in the planning process and its programs and to increase women's membership in local councils. As a result, the number of women in local councils totaled 52, compared to 3,535 men, with one of the women occupying the post of head of the village council of Khirbet Qais in the Salfeet District, which was an unprecedented occurrence.

It should be mentioned that some local councils refuse female participation, basing their rejection on religious and cultural reasons. Also, many councils in the Gaza Strip and in several locales in the West Bank do not have female members. The manner in which women were appointed to local councils was inappropriate and frustrating for many women, because tribal and factional connections superseded merit and the desire to represent neglected segments of society, as there was clear preference to appoint people of certain clans that made up a robust percentage of the local community. Many appointments were made amid disputes and struggles in which women could not engage for social and political reasons. Although men were appointed directly, without the need for consensus and the approval of the Minister of Local Government and the President, women needed the approval of the local council members to become members, and a single objection could result in the rejection of membership. In many instances, women were required to hold elections among themselves to choose a candidate.

From a practical standpoint, women were faced with obstacles and impossible conditions meant to keep them from becoming members. Some officials play a negative role in appointing women because their interests are connected with those of residents opposed to the idea of involving women. For example, most of the women in the village of Kufr Ein signed a petition demanding that vacant posts at the village council be filled by women they had chosen, but the appointment was never made because several members of the council disapproved and the council director agreed with them. Generally, women's participation remains limited due to the absence of a clear and enforceable decision on the part of concerned PNA institutions.

As for employment, female employees of the Ministry make up 19% of the total workforce, 52% of them working as housekeepers, switchboard operators, and secretaries, with a visible lack of female representation in leadership positions and middle and high administrative posts.²² Most local councils have no female employees.

Many appointments were made amid disputes and struggles in which women could not engage for social and political reasons

22. See the statement of the Minister of Local Government on 10 February 1999, in which he said that "work must be done to involve women in the membership of local councils in order to activate the role of women in the Palestinian society." Refer to Local Government, Issues two and three, first year.

In some cases, the conditions of donors do not correspond with the priorities of local communities

There is a need to develop the capabilities of local councils

The role of donors in community participation

Donor countries are the most important source of funding to local councils. In many cases, the councils are restricted to the agendas of the donors themselves. In some cases, the conditions of donors do not correspond with the priorities of local communities. In many instances the donors require the participation of residents in funding projects at a rate of 10%-25% of cost.²³

Government grants, when available, are a source of income for local councils. The grants are few and are not distributed according to the number of residents, the size of the town, or the demonstrated need for it. However, the PNA President, by virtue of his authority, provides support for some local councils based on local or national political considerations²⁴ concerned with protecting certain areas from Israeli settlement expansion or aggression.

A World Bank report²⁵ about the flaws in the donor performance indicates weakness concentrated in four areas:

- Allowing beneficiaries to play a more active role in sustaining projects in addition to involving them in determining their own needs and making them believe that they are part of the

development process.

- The donors did not adequately support the process of developing the capabilities of local councils in order to maintain the pace of progress on existing projects, sustain results, and launch new projects. The same applies to resources.
- The donors should have coordinated their poverty relief efforts and developed a unified strategy.
- The donors overemphasized the funding of projects with tangible results, such as infrastructure, and while these projects are important, they often came at the expense of needed improvements in health and social services.

The problem is not caused only by the factors listed by the World Bank. There are other reasons that play a role in creating the defect, such the difficulty of cooperation between the donors and the recipients due to differences in culture, values, and work style, and the discord in the work mechanisms of the donors themselves and their inability to unify them.

The absence of a unified, consistent legal fabric to govern the various activities of the Palestinian community adds another problem. Matters are further complicated because the PNA failed to adopt standards, which allowed donors to

23. Source: MOLG.

24. Consultation Group for Rural Development (ARD) Decentralization in Local Government in Palestine, a study to examine the chances for implementation of - decentralization in local government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (draft;) February 2000, pg. 14.

25. See: The World Bank, West Bank and Gaza-Social Analysis of the Rural Sector within the CDF Framework (unpublished mimeographed draft.)

push their own agendas to the forefront, without heed for Palestinian priorities.²⁶

Section Five:

Participation and community development (case studies)

Five local councils were selected as cases representing, to a degree, the patterns of local government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Although the sample studies do not offer details about similar cases, they do provide important insight about other councils and about local government in general. It was obvious that local councils suffered due to the unclear relationship with the central PNA institutions. Most of them suffered lack of funding and inequity in allocated budgets. Consultation between the public and local councils was limited in all cases, and discrepancy in the ability of councils to make decisions clearly relied on their size, years in operation, experience, managerial and political aptitude, and influence at the level of Palestinian decision-making. Mechanisms of strengthening participation depend

greatly on the effectiveness of local community institutions working in the locale and their influence and ability to move projects. There was no effective framework, in almost every case, to institutionalize the participation of the local community and its organizations in local government, both in terms of consultation and execution. Additionally, women, the segment of society most affected by the work of the councils, were far from represented, and youth and children were ignored to a large extent in the planning and execution of projects. Several Palestinian institutions emphasized the need to integrate the opinions and interests of children in the work of local government councils in order to push forward participation and sustain development.

First: larger councils with influence (Gaza Municipality as a model)²⁷ Gaza City is one of the biggest Palestinian cities, with a population of close to 400,000, 57% of them under the age of 19. The city is renowned for political and hierarchical diversity and population variety. A large majority of its citizens are refugees from 1948 Palestine, and it is home

The PNA failed to adopt clear standards, which allowed donors to push their own agendas

Strengthening participation depends on the effectiveness of local community institutions

Youth and children were ignored to a large extent in the planning and execution of projects

26. The President's Adviser for Economic Affairs, Maher Al-Kurd, said the following, "The economic goals of the international aid program were modest (or realistic from the standpoint of the donors,) limited to rehabilitation of economic conditions to restore them by 1998 (at the end of the five-year interim period) to the indexes of 1987 that preceded the first Intifada.... More than 25% of the funding offered for infrastructure projects was spent on research, as was the case with the housing sector, which received \$110 million, more than half of which spent on studies and consultation. Likewise, half the spending on the production sector went to research and studies, and most of the funding allotted for developing the industrial sector (\$32 million) went to studying industrial zones." Al-Quds, 9 July, 2001. Also see the first part of the study published in Al-Quds on 8 July, 2001.

27. Data about the priorities of children presented in box No. (3-9) and about the Gaza Municipality obtained from a study about children and local council budgets prepared by Nader Said for the Palestinian Children's Secretariat in 2000. The indicated workshops involved 48 children from Gaza and Salfet.

to one refugee camp. The city of Gaza was among the most attractive cities for Palestinian returnees because of the abundance of PNA institutions in it.

The Gaza Municipality receives the largest share of allocated budgets because of its size and because of the power of the municipal council in reaching decision-makers. In 1998, the development budget of Gaza City reached \$14 million.

The municipal council was appointed in 1994 by presidential decree and included personalities that represented the most notable families in the city. Gaza is the center of the PNA and is home to all ministries and PNA councils. Also, many international institutions make headquarters in Gaza City, most notably UNRWA, and the majority of NGOs in the Gaza Strip are concentrated in Gaza City. This leads to many advantages terms of the scope of activities in the city and the potential for interaction among institutions, but lack of focus, weak coordination, conflicting authorities lead to ineffectiveness and waste of resources.

The Gaza Municipality undertook a limited number of activities to involve the community in assessing priorities. Nine meetings were held in 1999 with prominent citizens of the community to discuss problems and determine priorities, and despite the value of the meetings, they are not considered an institutionalized manner of interaction. Also, the majority of the members of neglected segments of society, such

as women, children and youth, have little access the municipality and do not participate in decision-making.

The municipality does not discuss the budget with the residents, instead determining its operating budget internally and development budget with the donors. NGOs have no role in this process.

Second: Councils connected geographically (Bethlehem District municipalities as a model)

Five local councils/municipalities are connected geographically: Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, Al-Doha, and Al-Khader. Two were recently established: Al-Doha (1996) and Al-Khader (1997). Boards that comprise 62 members and mayors appointed by the MOLG, including seven women, none at Al-Doha, operate municipal councils. The participation of women in this district is noticeably higher than in others, and the councils are geographically responsible, directly or indirectly, for the refugee camps of Dheisheh and Aida.

The municipal councils represent political and tribal factions. Nonetheless, there is a consensus among the residents that decision-making is still internal, and the representatives of the political factions and tribal groups play a large role in affecting the nature and work of the councils. There is as yet no serious effort to involve the community in decision-making, with the exception of one or two councils that coordinate with the residents and community

In 1998, the development budget of Gaza City reached \$14 million

Lack of focus, weak coordination, conflicting authorities lead to ineffective and waste of resources

representatives before making major decisions. Thus, the relationship between council and community varies from council to

council, and despite the presence of many NGOs in the area, they do not try to influence the policies and programs of the councils.

The municipal councils represent political and tribal factions

Box(3 - 8): Selected results of a workshop with mayors and local council members ²⁸

Cooperation and coordination among area municipalities is very limited, usually confined to consultation on very specific issues that still require the approval of the MOLG and other concerned parties. The weak levels of cooperation among municipalities are a result of the nature of the residential areas and the way in which they are connected by vague geographic borders that blur the jurisdictional authority of the municipalities. This geographical convergence leads to conflict because of the intertwining of authority among the municipalities and with the responsibilities of UNRWA in refugee camps.

There was not enough coordination among the five municipalities to resolve their problems in the past. However, conditions that emerged in the Intifada prompted the municipalities to renew efforts to coordinate in order to overcome the siege imposed by Israeli authorities. As a result, the municipalities jointly established a solid waste dump and are currently discussing the founding of a cooperative services council after realizing the economic value of such a council and its importance in the provision of services. The project is currently awaiting the completion of cost-profit analyses. Officials of the five municipalities who attended a workshop in Bethlehem expressed interest in the idea of turning the five areas of jurisdiction into one contiguous development area.

Available funding resources are clearly inadequate and cannot support the number and size of governmental institutions providing services in each jurisdiction.

Various groups are engaged in development projects in the five municipalities, some local and some relying on international support. Some of the most visible and active parties in the five areas are the Bethlehem 2000 Project, the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR), and several ministries and NGOs. Joint ventures between the institutions are rare. Municipal councils establish their budgets individually, without conferring with one another.

Despite the interest expressed by workshop participants in preserving membership in the General Union of Local Councils, most of them considered the achievements of the council limited and felt that the council needed reinvigoration and should provide better representation of the interests of local councils.²⁹

28. Interviews with mayors and a workshop attended by mayors or their representatives. Bethlehem, 10/07/2001

29. Workshop, previously cited reference.

The council has held one meeting with the residents in the past three years

Third: recently-established councils (Tammoun as a model)³⁰

Tammoun is located in the northern West Bank and is under the administration of the Tobas District, but it still relies on scattered administrative and service-related support from Nablus, Jenin, and Tobas. The original Israeli plan for the town was 250 acres, but it has grown well beyond those boundaries to its present size of 1,412.5 acres. The population stands at 11,000 and the town contains 1,900 homes. The Tammoun Municipality was founded in 1997.

■ Because of historical neglect of Tammoun, the local council received considerable attention from official PNA representatives as well as from donors, largely because the local council proved able to pressure them. Despite the presence of representative at the PLC, the representative visited the town only once in four years, and none of the town residents occupies an influential post at the PNA. Members of the local council express dissatisfaction with the council relationship with the Ministry, believing that the council heeds only the Minister, not the entire Ministry, and that the nature of the current relationship hinders their ability to work.

■ The council has held one meeting with the residents in the past three

years inviting the “prominent” members of the community. The council established a services committee made up of residents and town institutions entrusted with offering opinions about the priorities established by the council. However, the council did not remain true to its agenda during the past three years, and its performance dispirited the residents and convinced them that the services committee was founded at the behest of the donors, not because of any intent to involve them in decision-making. In short, as is the case at many councils, the Tammoun local council does not see the involvement of the residents as a priority at present, especially in light of the lack of institutional mechanisms to guarantee the participation of the community in local government and decision-making. This situation can be partially attributed to the newness of the council and the lack of awareness on the part of its members of this issue.

■ Eight NGOs operate in the town with varying levels of productivity, three of them women's groups. Nevertheless, civil society organizations in Tammoun endure many problems, at the heart of which is the sporadic activity of the NGOs, their relative lack of experience and democratic organizational structure, the ambiguous relationship between

30. Data obtained from a study prepared by Nader Said for the World Bank about poverty and rural development (1999) and from Nasr Yaqoub and others (previously cited reference) and a World Bank report (previously cited reference.)

the NGOs and the PNA, and the local council's ambivalent attitude towards the NGOs.

- The council does not adequately represent the majority of the town citizens. Children, women and youth are not represented in the membership of the council, although women are very active in NGO activity.

- The council suffers from serious financial problems, with revenue of 603,865 shekels and debts exceeding one million shekels (approximately \$250,000).

Fourth: village councils (Nouba as a model)³¹

- The village of Nouba is one of 156 residential locales in the Hebron District. Its population is estimated at 4,000 (in 2000), and it is bordered by the villages of Kharas, Beit Oula and Khirbet Hatta.

- The Nouba Village Council was appointed in 1996 by the MOLG and comprises seven members that almost resigned at the time the Development Studies Programme was conducting fieldwork for this study. The council director and the members work as volunteers, and the director does not receive a salary, which renders him unable to assume his tasks on a full-time basis. The absence of an active village council may have played the biggest role in the deterioration of conditions in the village, the disorganization of programs, and the lack of community

participation.

- The absence of a local council or any other institution appears in the attempts to influence decision-makers. Part of the negligence is attributed to the isolation of the village and the feeling among the residents that they are neglected because of the small size of their village compared with others.

- The majority of the residents, including the council members, views the council as part of the PNA and expects it only to provide water and power and collect refuse.

- NGOs in Nouba play no important role; there are only four such organizations in the village, mostly inactive. According to the participants of a workshop held in the village, negligence in this regard is caused by the intervention of the security apparatus in the work of the NGOs and the refusal to license them for political reasons.

- Only the heads of families were consulted when the council was formed, and not the rest of the residents.

- Women in Nouba do not participate in public life and are not represented at the council. Women do not have an organization tending to their affairs or expressing their ambitions. There are no health or education services for women, with the exception of very limited prenatal care. There are also no institutions providing

The absence of an active village council may have played the biggest role in the deterioration of conditions in the village

The majority of the residents, including the council members, views the council as part of the PNA

31. Data and analysis from a study mentioned above (Nader Said, for the benefit of the World Bank.)

Refugee camps, with the exception of a few in the central Gaza Strip, have no councils affiliated with the PNA

services for youth and children.

■ There are two kindergartens in Nouba; one operated by a charitable organization and one a private enterprise.

■ Nouba representatives agreed to form a service council to serve the village and others nearby, but implementing the idea was difficult due to tribal conflict and a lack of constructive ministry involvement. However, there is a level of cooperation with neighbor villages in the area of refuse collection services.

■ Nouba does not attract local attention or international funding; it does not lie in the most disadvantaged section of the district (the south), it is not one of the bigger cities that enjoy political influence, and is not home to a strong community capable of placing pressure on decision-makers.

Fifth: refugee camps (Al-Jalazoan camp as a model)³²

Refugee camps, with the exception of a few in the central Gaza Strip, have no councils affiliated with the PNA, nor do they have internal councils to lead community efforts. Popular committees/service committees are the semi-representative bodies in refugee camps, serving as the counterpart to local councils in cities and villages.

■ Al-Jalazoan camp was established in 1950, northwest of Ramallah. The 8,382 residents (according to UNRWA resources in 2000) of the camp came from 36 villages destroyed in the war of 1948. There are approximately 2,040 families in the camp.

■ The camp is run by a manager appointed by UNRWA who enforces the agency's decisions and programs, upholds the law, and examines the needs of the camp and the concerns of the residents to convey them to UNRWA in the hopes of having them included in the UNRWA annual budget.

■ There are a few active NGOs in the camp that in one way or another follow UNRWA. There is the camp manager's office (UNRWA representative), the public committee (or services committee, which coordinates between UNRWA and the PNA), a youth center, a women's center, the Local Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, and the Friends of the Elderly Committee.

■ The camp residents express concern about the continuing decline in the level of UNRWA services in all fields. In the field of education, the camp schools are in dire need of renovation, suffering congestion and lack of students' supplies, such as stationery. Another problem is the salary cutbacks endured by new teachers.

32. DSP meeting with the UNRWA office manager at the camp (Mahmoud Radhwan) on Saturday, 23 June 2001, and camp residents.

■ The public committee³³, or services committee, operates in the camp and is considered the cornerstone of potential municipalities or village councils. The committee is comprised of political groups and institutions inside the camp and of prominent residents (15 members, including two women.) The popular committee coordinates with institutions inside and outside the camp to provide services and projects and collect donations to improve the infrastructure. UNRWA established guidelines to organize interaction between the two groups. The guidelines dictate that the camp manager cannot be a member of the popular committee. UNRWA employees are permitted to join the committee as long as it operates within its jurisdictional boundaries. The committee is not allowed to interfere in UNRWA affairs. UNRWA also demands that the UNRWA-appointed manager and his office are the primary coordinators of interaction between the committee and institutions. The agency has recognized the committee and awarded it operating space inside the camp, but the camp residents feel UNRWA is trying to limit the activity of the committee and other institutions in the camp. Some residents expressed concern about possible abuse of power among UNRWA employees and about discrimination between camp residents working at the agency

and non-residents, who hold various positions, which has created an atmosphere of distrust between the residents and the agency. Nonetheless, the relationship is generally cooperative and coordinated on the matter of providing services for the camp.

Section Six:

General conclusions

■ It is clear from the models above that the conditions of local councils vary according to the living standards of the communities that they serve and the ability of civil society institutions to influence funding sources and decision-makers. There is also a disparity in levels of experience, with some councils enjoying long histories while others have only limited expertise as a result of a long period of dormancy under occupation. In addition, establishing a large number of councils without preparation or council member training further widened the performance gap between new councils and older, more experienced ones.

■ The scope of public participation in government generally and in local government specifically is narrow. This phenomenon is detected at all levels of Palestinian institutions. It is manifested in a uniform lack of development vision, failure to promote a philosophy of involving the

The popular committee coordinates with institutions inside and outside the camp to provide services and projects

33. Meeting with popular committees (the camp services committee). The meeting was with four members of the committee, held by DSP on 26 June, 2001. The idea of popular committees was formulated at a conference organized by the MOLG in cooperation with the Refugee Affairs Department at Palestinian camps in Jericho in 1997.

Establishing a large number of councils without preparation or council member training further widened the gap between new councils and older, more experienced ones

Participation levels are linked to the general political and economic conditions

Funding is one of the most important challenges facing local councils

community in bearing the responsibility for development and reaping its rewards, and by the prevalence of overly centralized, ineffective work coordination methods.

■ Participation levels are linked to the general political and economic conditions, especially the spread of poverty, which keeps most people busy fending for themselves and renders them often unable to pay dues to local councils.

■ Social and cultural restraints dictate the level and nature of participation. The role of women, youth, children and the disadvantaged in the development process and in local government is neglected.

■ The centralization of authority in a ministry or minister reinforces the perception that local government councils are obliged to heed ministry officials, not the people, which in turn bolsters the influence of tribal and political factions.

■ Funding is one of the most important challenges facing local councils. The income of councils, mostly from taxes and fees, especially for smaller, newly established ones, does not meet their basic needs. The councils suffer meager budgets and insufficient tax revenue. Financial difficulties are attributed to the absence of steady support from the Ministries of Finance and Local Government. The loss of fuel taxes

(an important source of income) and a decrease in the number of citizens who paid their taxes further reduced revenues. (The PNA failed to enforce the law against citizens who refused to pay taxes.) Participants in a workshop about local government held in Bethlehem agreed that solving the financial crisis could be achieved by adopting the following three measures³⁴.

1. Ministry of Finance and MOLG commitment to providing budgets that would enable local councils to provide services.
2. Restructuring tax collection mechanisms and enforcement measures.
3. Raising public awareness about the importance of supporting local councils considering their role in providing services and giving the public incentives for community participation.

■ The low level of authority extended to local councils and the meagerness of their financial resources are reflected in the living standards of residents. Statistics and studies about the living standards of residents reveal that 43% of the poor live in rural areas, 33% in cities, and 25% in refugee camps.³⁵ Poverty rates in the Jenin area are nine times higher than in Jerusalem and threefold the poverty rates in Ramallah. In general, there is direct correlation between local councils' lack of empowerment and paucity of financial resources on the one hand, and the debilitated

34. Workshop; previously cited reference.

35. See: National Commission for the Alleviation of Poverty; Palestine: Poverty Report, 1998 and data from the PCBS, 2000.

conditions of residents on the other.

■ The situation is different in refugee camps from the prevailing conditions in cities and towns. Camps are locales established after 1948 inside the Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as temporary settlements that in time became permanent. Development, at the planning, organization and management levels, was therefore random to a great degree. Relationships between UNRWA on the one hand and adjacent municipalities and PNA institutions on the other are defined by agreements UNRWA signed with the concerned parties. The agreements provide that the agency is the body responsible for the affairs of the camp with the exception of security and also that the PNA becomes a host country, not entitled to interfere in camp affairs, except security, without prior coordination with UNRWA. Also, no person has the right to intervene in camp affairs or visit it without the consent of UNRWA, even if the camp lies within municipality jurisdiction.

■ Coordination is needed between the camps and adjacent municipalities in several areas, including environmental issues, general rights, and emergency programs to address the current political situation. For example, UNRWA and the Birzeit and Al-Bireh Municipalities cooperated to connect the sewage systems of both cities and also coordinate

concerning real estate deeds and the alleged boundaries of building space outside the camp limits. In addition, personal relations play a major role in defining relations between municipalities. However, municipality support of camps remains nominal, such as spraying pesticides or periodically offering fire department aid. However, politics plays a role in determining interaction with camps and their institutions.

■ Some camps in Gaza (Al-Maghazi, Al-Bureij and Al-Nuseirat) are marked for turning into municipalities offering the full scope of services expected of a city municipality. There are camps inside cities or adjacent to them and others isolated or in rural areas, which is expected to have an effect on future elections in which camp residents participate. It is unclear whether the isolated camps would be treated as separate entities or part of the electoral process within the city.

■ The strength of the local community is connected with the strength of the local council and its ability to convey the needs of the people to concerned authorities. It was also noticed that the weight of the local council is connected with the weight of local institutions and vice versa, because communities that featured capable NGOs also featured capable local councils.

■ Achieving active community participation in the development process and local government requires the fulfillment of five basic requirements³⁶:

There are camps inside cities or adjacent to them and others isolated or in rural areas

36. Workshop; previously cited reference.

***Holding periodic
PLC and local
council elections***

***Encouraging
local community
institutions to
take on an active
role in raising
public awareness
of the duties and
rights of
citizenship***

1. Holding periodic PLC and local council elections in a free atmosphere.
2. Making the necessary reforms to developing PNA institutions, enabling them to cope with the requisites of sustainable human development. Such development would also give rise to a central authority that possesses the confidence and the ability to relegate authority to local councils.
3. Encouraging local community institutions to take on an active role in raising public awareness of the duties and rights of citizenship.
4. Enacting laws and taking

measures to institutionalize participation through periodic meetings of local councils and resident councils and activating the supervisory role of NGOs and the PLC over the work of local councils.

5. Recruiting civil society to form lobby groups to pressure decision-makers in support of NGOs and founding neighborhood committees.

The following letter, written by children from Gaza, and recommendations, prepared by children from Salfeet, expresses the essence of activating participation through local councils.

Box (3 - 9) Recommendations of children regarding local councils

Sustainable human development requires the integration of the needs and interests of children in planning and executing the work of local councils and evaluating them. Several children from the Gaza Strip wrote the following letter about their aspirations regarding the work of local councils concerning participation and development.

“We the children of Palestine...come here, together, to support democracy and women’s rights and to bring joyful life to children where their dreams could come true. We would like to achieve cooperation, solidarity and love. We strive for a better life for all children, poor and rich, by consulting them in democracy and in a community that respects children’s rights.”

In workshops conducted by the children, they asked municipalities for the following:

- * Raising community awareness of the role of local councils.
- * Reinforcing the sense of belonging, cordiality and cooperation among residents.
- * Establishing mechanisms to develop ties between municipalities and the people.
- * Establishing educational, cultural and recreational venues for children, including playgrounds, clubs and kindergartens.
- * Encouraging creativity among children by paying attention to artistic and literary activities.
- * Establishing programs to help poor children.
- * Training municipality members and staff to be more sensitive to the needs of children and ways of dealing with them.
- * Avoiding discrimination among residents³⁷.

37. The National Children’s Secretariat has a group of 40 children and youth working closely with local councils.

