

Case Study Tulkarm Municipality

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Tulkarm is a city in northern West Bank located just inside the Green Line, 15km east of the Mediterranean Sea. The first municipal council in Tulkarm was established in 1886 under the leadership of Saleh Awwad when the city's population was approximately 3,000. Currently, the city has a population of over 50,000¹.



Tulkarm's significance stems from its historical importance in commerce and transportation. During the early 1900s, the city was the crossroads for transportation during the Ottoman and the British eras. It had two main railways, namely: Hijaz railway that connected Tulkarm all the way to Syria and Turkey, and Egypt railway that connected Tulkarm to Cairo. Both railway lines were shut down in 1948.

Tulkarm municipality employs over 500 staff members. The local council consists of the mayor and 14 council members (three females and 11 males.) There are ten departments including health, water, electrical, mechanical, finance, engineering and projects, administration, works and transportation, urban planning and development, municipal court, as well as seven units including library, computer lab, strategic planning, public relations, human resources, procurement, and capacity building.

In line with the strategy of the Palestinian local governance sector and the model for governance excellence, Global Communities' partnership with Tulkarm municipality focused and still focuses on three key areas – leadership development, management of service delivery, and community participation – to support the municipality's vision of being a responsive, efficient, and effective potential Center for Governance Excellence.

In 2008, Global Communities and Tulkarm municipality began a partnership under the Local Democratic Reform (LDR) program. This partnership continued under the Local Government & Infrastructure (LGI) program funded by USAID, following the decision to select Tulkarm as one of the potential Centers for Governance Excellence. The selection was based on the remarkable strides Tulkarm municipality has achieved during the course of the past few years in enhancing the municipality's ability to meet the needs of its citizens in a transparent and effective manner.

The methodology used in writing this case study includes a desk review of the municipality's Municipal Capacity Index (MCI) results and its Strategic Development and Investment Plan (SDIP), data revealing the municipality's achievements to-date regarding the implementation of projects presented in their institutional development plan, in-depth interviews with key staff including head of institutional development plan committee, IT manager and IT assistants, finance manager and employees working in the finance department, human resource manager, and Citizen Service Center (CSC) manager.

At the outset, LDR supported the municipality in developing its Strategic Development Framework (SDF) during 2010 in which the municipality prioritized approximately 70 projects with high levels of participation and community engagement. Additionally, support was provided through the installation of new networks

¹ This number is according to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007.

and cables to improve and enhance connectivity and speed among various departments. Prior to this installation, each department was working separately, and the municipality suffered from regular interruptions and disconnections to the servers and networks resulting in distracted work environment and minimal productivity. Furthermore, the municipality had limited numbers of personal computers.



“In general, the municipality would buy PCs only for people whose work required having one. In some cases two or three staff members would use the same PC. Global Communities provided the municipality with 15 additional PCs following the opening of the Citizen Service Center, under the current Local Government and Infrastructure (LGI) program.” – Omar Sa’eed, IT Manager, Tulkarm municipality.

Also, under LDR, the municipality received a server, a backup library, a storage room, a firewall, a plotter, printers, and scanners. As a result of the installation of the new fiber optic network, the municipality was able to connect its main building with other satellite offices half a kilometer away as well as the municipality’s Citizen Service Center. Newly established departments or units are now easily connected to the network. An additional milestone in improving the service delivery was the establishment of the Citizen Service Center, which was constructed and officially opened to the public in 2011. These major interventions were key elements and an eye opener for the leadership and staff at Tulkarm’s municipality to exert their utmost effort and play a proactive role in the path of becoming a prospective E-municipality.



Caption (left to right): old and new cables and network connections, and the Citizen Service Center in Tulkarm municipality.

Soon after LDR’s close out, and the setting of the ground works within Tulkarm municipality, LGI continued extending its support to the municipality after witnessing its high upbeat role and efforts in advancing its service delivery levels to community members. Among the many examples serving as a proof of the municipality’s efforts, despite the financial crisis the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) witnessed during the period of 2011-2012, was the reactivation of the administration unit, and the implementation of various projects mentioned in the SDIP, such as the rehabilitation of the city center. This was indicative of a new vision and strategy by the municipality’s mayor, council members, and staff; it resulted in LGI’s decision to include Tulkarm as a potential Center of Governance Excellence (CGE), as well as selecting the municipality in LGI’s E-Municipality pilot phase.

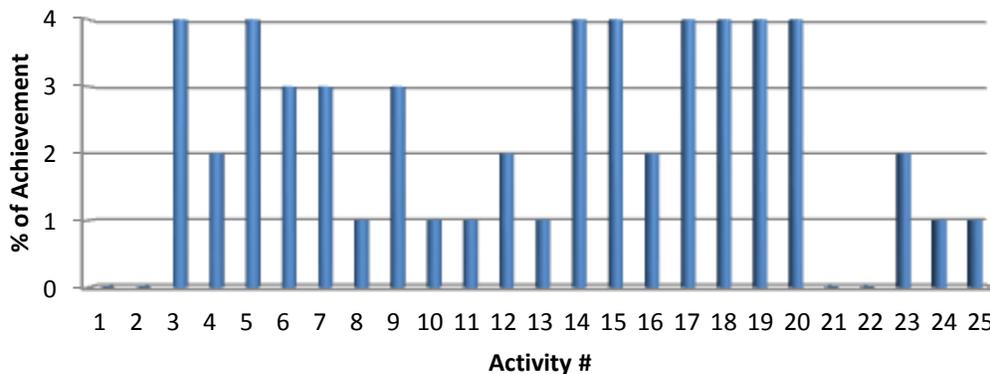
Under LGI, and in accordance with the model for governance excellence, Tulkarm participated in three main workshops to develop their Participatory Performance Management (PPM) – a self assessment tool where the municipality scored 47% (out of 100%). The main challenges facing the municipality included planning, internal communication, a dysfunctional administrative department, building public-private partnerships, and needless to say the election period, which paralyzed the process in implementing new initiatives for few months as a result of prolonged period of hand over by the old council.

The development of Tulkarm’s institutional development plan in June 2013 coincided with the municipality’s update of its SDIP for the period (2011 - 2014.) The objective of the institutional development plan was to address ways forward in enhancing areas in need of improvement at the municipality and enhancing its leadership, management of service delivery, and community participation elements.

Those elements were not taken lightly by the mayor, council members, and to a certain extent a significant number of department heads and staff members. At the same time, the institutional development plan revealed several strengths such as the existence of common institutional values and objectives among the various departments, regular meetings for the municipal council, available SDIP, and an operational Citizen Service Center. Moreover, weakness were identified such as the absence of an annual plan for each department, technical and financial procedures are not documented nor shared within departments, lack of human resource management procedures and systems, and lack of sufficient meetings with community members.

The updated institutional development plan included 25 main activities the municipality must implement, during a year, to improve the results of its municipal capacity index score. From October 2013 until January 2014 (four months), the municipality implemented 57% of those activities, which is significantly high in such a short period of time. For instance, the municipality finalized the preparation of annual operation plans for all municipality departments, employee performance evaluation forms, policy on overtime hours, manual for administrative policies, increasing the number of meetings with community members, and annual emergency plan for all services. If anything, this is indicative of collective efforts, mutual vision, and high sense of ownership among municipal leadership and staff.

Percent of Achievement per Activity



Note: In the above graph, numbers (1-25) reflect each activity/intervention and its percent of achievement.



“Our plans were realistic to ensure our ability to achieve it within a year. We weren’t dreaming. I believe I will have a comprehensive administrative system and full coordination between departments is achieved. I also foresee improved provision of services to citizens and significant communication between the municipality and the local community.” – Nehad Abu Sheikha, Strategic Planning Unit & Focal Point for the institutional development plan, Tulkarm municipality.

LGI’s main interventions in Tulkarm’s municipality include the piloting of the E-municipality concept (planned), the establishment of an internal audit department (on-going), business restructuring and process re-engineering (on-going), the development of procurement process and manuals (on-going), the development of human resources procedures and system (completed), updating the strategic development framework (completed), the development of municipal spatial planning management and administration systems (on-going), and numbering and coding of streets and buildings (on-going).

This case study will highlight the impact of LGI’s main interventions, but will mainly focus on the impact of developing human resource procedures and systems, given the disparate systems and the reliance on manual processes with the municipality. LGI’s HR intervention had a momentous influence on various departments within the municipality in terms of re-engineering organizational processes, ensuring compliance, maximizing employee performance and productivity in service of the institution’s strategic objectives, and managing transformation and change across the board.

The main challenges facing the municipality can be summed up as follows:

1. Minimal community engagement.
2. Absence of an organizational chart and job descriptions for each respective department.
3. Absence of a structured and objective evaluation process for employees.
4. Lack of documentation and integration between departments.
5. All data was documented manually increasing the potential for error. Calculating an employee’s salary was a complex process.

Under the leadership and management competency area, the newly elected mayor and municipal council members have been highly active in terms of being present at the municipality on a daily basis to follow up and monitor the actual implementation of the institutional development plan by having direct communication with staff. According to the mayor **“If we want to improve the municipality, we must improve our overall performance.”** The mayor and council members firmly believe in becoming an e-municipality. As such, pride and sense of ownership can be seen in their day-to-day follow-up on the achievements within the CSC and the impact it has on citizens, the installation of new systems, the level of integration between departments as a result of the installations, and the effects/results they have on improving the overall outcomes within the municipality.

Council members are primarily gratified by the newly installed human resource system and the development of the human resource procedures. Certainly, they have realized that if a municipality doesn’t have written policies and procedures that are implemented in a consistent and fair manner, chances are policy makers will be making personnel decisions based on personal hunches, likes/dislikes, attempts to avoid an issue, or the philosophy that “we’ve always done it this way.” The provision of job descriptions is an effective management tool for communicating job requirements and performance standards to employees; hence, the municipality is currently developing job descriptions for all staff. Job descriptions play a key in evaluating job performance by comparing an employee’s actual performance with the performance standards of the position, as indicated in the job description.

Furthermore, they give managers the guidelines to hire, promote, and supervise with maximum effectiveness, and increase employee communications and maximize productivity. Clear and endorsed HR procedures also apply fair and rational performance appraisals for employees by providing regular job performance, constructive feedback, acknowledging employees' contributions, setting challenging but attainable goals, which will all ultimately lead to increased employee motivation.

“Department Heads are the same, they didn’t change. What changed is their behavior in terms of seeing improvements and wanting to enhance performance. The council members’ commitment and belief is the main reason for where we are now.” – Islam Yaseen, Human Resource Manager, Tulkarm Municipality.

Employees' perspective regarding the active role of council members and the mayor were all positive and showed extreme appreciation and acknowledgement for the support they are receiving in general.

The impact of LGI's intervention specifically in this area is exemplified in the enormous proactive approaches the municipality's leadership has undertaken during the past few months. For example, the municipality is currently leading the implementation of various activities without LGI's support or involvement, such as soliciting a unified financial system, allocating budget for establishing a municipal warehouse, updating the GIS by piloting the project utilizing available resources to be better equipped when LGI initiates the implementation of this activity, the mayor attending all workshops being held for the GIS, advertising for an internal audit manager in preparation for the establishment of the internal audit department, hiring two employees to serve at the CSC's information desk, issuing a decree requesting employees to submit their annual leave electronically – this is part of institutionalizing the HR procedures and systems, increased responsiveness to IT needs after witnessing the impact of other systems in order bridge any gaps, and finally lending an open ear to all employees to enhance communication, mutual feedback, and increase the level of trust between management and staff, which will, in turn, result in higher productivity, increased employee morale, and minimal turnover rate.

“In the past, we would fear to state any criticism if a council member is present. We used to feel embarrassed. Now, this changed because council members speak with the same voice as staff. Mistakes are no longer an individual but rather collective responsibility. In the beginning, staff members used to think individually. Now, the staff has more loyalty to their unit and other units that can benefit from their improved functions. We used to go on strikes as a result of council decisions. Today, the council is aware of staff's needs. All people that came into my office, today, while you're here today are council members. This shows you how active they are.” – Nehad Abu Sheikha, Manager, Strategic Planning Unit and Focal Point for Institutional Development Committee.

Another key proactive role by the municipal council can also be seen through seeking public-private partnerships with local companies. For instance, the municipality met with the Palestinian Communications Company (PALTEL) to explore the possibility of jointly rehabilitating the municipal building, as well as knocking the doors of many other civil society organizations.

Under management of service delivery competency, the municipality has achieved major strides as a result of LGI's interventions. The Citizen Service Center is fully automated as a result of the installation of the EDRMS minimizing time and effort as well as improved services to citizens. **“In the past, all process and services were on paper. The citizen would submit the request to the mayor, and if the mayor is free, the application is processed. Moreover, if the citizen had connections, their application would be processed instantly. If not, it would be kept in the mail until someone remembers it. We used to lose a lot of documents. Nothing was documented; transparency was not part of our culture.” – Khalid Al Hamshari, CSC Manager.**

Today, the CSC manager can retrieve all types of services being implemented in a specific area of the city. As referred above regarding piloting the GIS, projects for the city are being uploaded on the system on a regular basis. For instance, CSC employees realize the required water and sewage projects for the city since they are on the system with exact coordinates.



“The EDRMS defined roles and responsibilities, minimized time, and forced traditional mentalities to adapt to a more professional way of working. The system allows the employee to solve problems and challenges instantly. Employees are accountable and aware of the fact that they are monitored.” – Ahlam Husso, CSC, IT Assistant.



Caption (Left to right): Tulkarm CSC and ticket dispenser displaying the type of services to be requested.

During the interview with the CSC Manager, he stated that in the past all documents were archived centrally, and it would take days to find a specific document. Citizens used visit various departments to submit their applications and receive approvals. This process used to take from ten days to one month on average; it was time consuming and exhausting. Currently, citizens come in and submit, for example, an electricity connection request. CSC employees can pull out any debts citizens may have, and instantly inform citizens. Furthermore, the mayor and council members agreed with the CSC manager on a flexible payment schedule he is allowed to grant to citizens who can't afford paying their debts all at once.



Caption: CSC Manager, Tulkarm municipality.

This is part of the new council's vision in terms of delegating authority. CSC's list of services is on the municipality's website informing citizens of required documents prior to visiting the CSC. This saves time and effort for both parties. The citizen is given a follow-up card, approximately ten days following the submission of the request, but normally the application doesn't take more than three days. As soon as the application is processed, citizens receive a telephone call to notify them that their application is ready.

Khalid Al Hamshari, CSC Manager mentioned **“I experienced one specific incident where a customer had applied for building permit. When I went back to the paperwork, I found out that the request was approved two years ago. However, after following up and implementing the CSC procedures, we realized that the approval is not valid based on current rules and regulations. This reflects how there was much space for corruption in the past, yet, now, there are clear criteria for employees to follow and for citizens to expect.”** Presently, there is a monitoring system and high level of oversight as a result of the automated system. A unique service delivery that distinguishes Tulkarm CSC form others is that it does not charge its citizens for any application fees. Hence, citizens are more encouraged in requesting services. The municipality is aware that this is an added financial burden, but they were keen to encourage citizens to utilize the new service and absorb the new culture before they introduce fees for services in the near future.

Due to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, the municipality eliminated many positions, such as application writers, and placed them in other departments. Add to that, the enhanced service delivery created a new culture of mutual respect and tolerance as well as a firm belief in providing equal treatment to all employees and citizens regardless of their sex, age, or circumstances. For instance, the municipality hired a person with disabilities to work at the CSC's helpdesk. The new employee is currently being trained by other staff members on the types of services provided to better serve citizens.



Caption (Left to right): CSC's special ramp for persons with disabilities and a person with disabilities working at the help desk; meanwhile being trained at the various types of services being offered at the CSC.

In the past, Tulkarm municipality was using an old HR system installed in 1992. The system was very limited in terms of its capacity, and was solely utilized for salary calculations. The system was incapable of showing cumulative historical data for employees' salaries. Deductions from salaries, loans, electricity water bills, and vacations were done manually. For example, if the employee took a loan, the employee in charge used to enter the monthly payment each month. For overtime hours, the employee in charge used to check the respective employee's daily rate, register it and calculate it manually which was subject to human error frequently. The sign in clock was old and could only produce daily reports. The municipality did not have reliable data, and it was unable to verify the data given the lack of documentation. Following up on the attendance of over 500 employees was nearly impossible. Gathering daily attendance sheets used to take hours and effort in collecting the data from each department. HR department had only three employees.

Finalizing the time sheets for employees used to last from the 20th – 30th of each month. It used to take a lot of time to manually collect all the data from the different departments and field offices. For overtime hours, the employee in charge used to check the respective employee's daily rate, register it and calculate it manually which was subject to human error frequently. The municipality did not have any standardized performance evaluation forms or processes. The employee would get annual increments based on their years of service regardless of their actual performance. It was like a given right for the employee. Moreover, the old system was not equipped to calculate the income tax based on the Palestinian system. This was especially challenging for Tulkarm since it has permanent employees, contracts, daily employees, retirees, inheritors who receive ½ of their families' salaries, and so on.

Currently; salaries, leave request, vacations, as well as personal employee data is available in one place. The municipality is working on developing job descriptions for each employee, which is expected to be finalized in the coming couple of months. The mayor requested from each department or unit head to draft a job description, approved by both parties, and submitted to the institutional development plan committee for review before it is submitted to the mayor for final approval. LGI provided the municipality with 18 time clocks that were installed in the various departments of the municipality. This eased the tracking of employees' time, and controlling the attendance of laborers who work at water wells became manageable and more efficient.

Management of service delivery in terms of planning and review; innovation and change; service management; and resource and assets management is noticeably emphasized in the rapid strides Tulkarm municipality undertook following the development of its HR procedures and the installation of its HR system. Achievements included, but were not limited, to the following:

1. More accurate payroll due to improved quality of information.
2. Integration among various departments leading to enhanced responsiveness to employee requests, salary payments, and others.
3. Robust support for the decision-making process through reliable management information plus strong analysis tools and reporting.
4. Platform for introduction of new services such as e-recruitment and performance management systems as well as strong analysis tools and reporting.
5. Increased flexibility in processes and procedures of payroll and reward systems.

Employees at the finance department suffered from the lack of human resources as they only had three employees who had to serve more than 500 employees. HR and finance departments' employees used to work overtime, reaching up to three days a month, in order to finalize salaries.

Additionally, salary deductions were done manually for loans, electricity and water bills. For example, if the employee took a loan, the employee in charge used to enter the monthly payment each month. For overtime hours, the employee in charge used to check the respective employee's daily rate, register it and calculate it manually which was subject to human error frequently. This process used to last for more than five days before it is finalized. Moreover, the old system was not equipped to calculate the income tax based on the Palestinian system. This was especially challenging for Tulkarm since it has permanent

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Perspectives from key personnel on the impact of HR procedures and Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS)

Human Resource & Administrative Affairs Perspective

“Today, our reports are much more accurate as we can pinpoint easily any mistakes or if any form had or lacked the necessary signatures.”

“In the past, we were mainly focused on salaries; we did not do anything else and this limited our capacity development as HR employees.”

“Now, everything is saved electronically to avoid loss or misuse of information. It’s much easier to retrieve employees’ data.

“In my opinion, our success in implementing this system is mainly due to our own conviction that this system is tailored to enhance our work and improve our service delivery.

“We are utilizing the system for additional purposes. For example, the council requested the number of females at the LGU because they wanted to celebrate International Women Day. We provided the information in a click of a button. Had this been requested in the part, it would’ve taken us days to collect the data. We plan to better use it in the future especially to provide data for council members.

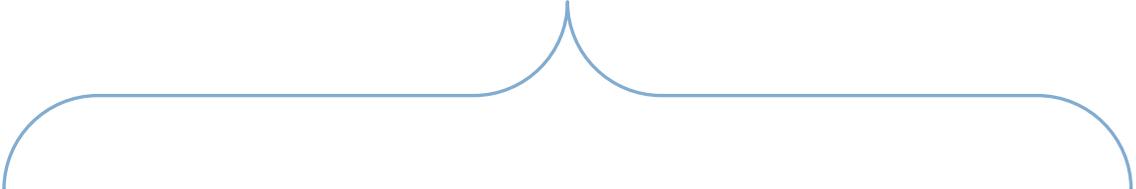
“We would like to enhance the system in a way where HR can receive online resumes for any job adverts it places. We also intend to have the performance evaluation filled online instead of manually.”

“I have so many new ideas as a result of working on this system. It allows you to be more creative in developing new solutions that would result in further efficiency, effectiveness, and enhanced service delivery. We were thriving for this system...it’s a dream come true.”

Iyad Al-Jallad, Administrative Affairs department

“Now, preparing daily attendance sheets takes three minutes maximum. Vacation requests were in hard copy and I had to manually enter it on excel. On certain days, I would have 100 requests. Now, we overcome this and it became faster and more accurate.

Islam Yaseen, HR department



Finance Perspective

“Now, attendance is controlled. Documentation of data is available. Salaries are now prepared instantly based on what’s on the HR system without any delay. HR procedures are so practical and ensure transparency and integrity in terms of hiring, promotions, and performance evaluation. “

“Today, we have criteria for hiring. We wanted this system to succeed. Many were surprised that we managed to advance within few months. Having the time clocks, documenting all the historical data was done in a very short period of time. This is a step forward toward Tulkarm becoming E-municipality.”

“Employees appreciate the ability to retrieve their information online without having to run around departments.”

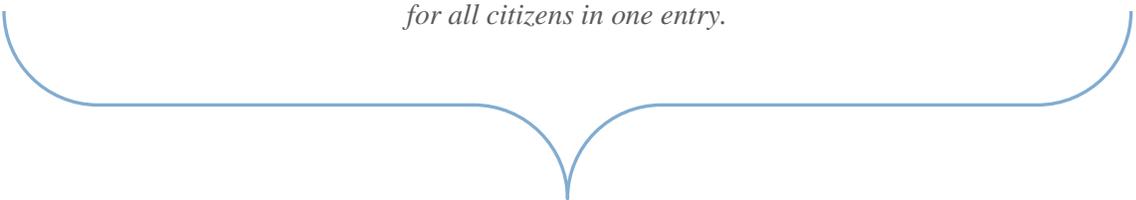
“Our integrated financial system allows us to monitor the budget and account balances. For example, when salaries are paid, the system automatically shows the current balance in the municipality’s accounts without having to upload any information from our end.”

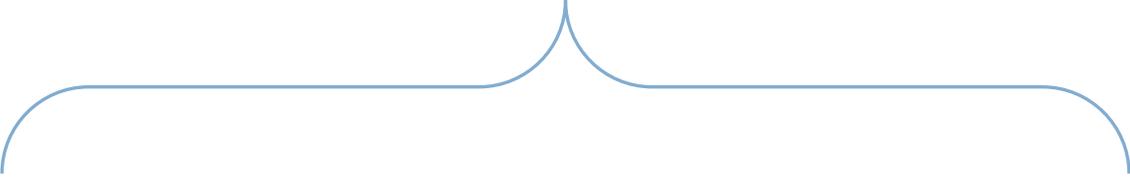
Ahmad Yacoub, Finance department

“Currently, if the 500 employees have overtime hours, we can calculate it in a matter of two hours. The system calculates it automatically. This saved time and effort and resulted in more accuracy and efficiency.”

Mahmoud Al Ghoul, Finance department

“Now we have comprehensive financial and HR systems. We plan to include all departments in this financial system. Department include water, electricity, solid waste, legal, garage, and many others. That way, we can find out the overall debt for all citizens in one entry.





Information Technology Perspective

“All employees were committed and involved in the development of the system. Now, each employee has a user account and has access to their HR information.”

“The system is comprehensive and has been piloted in Nablus. As such, we feel it was successfully implemented in Tulkarm.”

Omar Sa’eed, IT department

“We used the system to see how many employees have a B.A. in accounting or management. This was based on a request we received from the council because they wanted to fill certain gaps in the LGU or to rotate some employees from one department to the other.”

Reem Jayousi, IT department



Tulkarm municipality recognizes that in order to change, one must be patient and tolerant enough to put the desired change into effect. Employees may tend to feel that the flexibility they enjoyed in the past is no longer available. It is very difficult to convince employees who have been working for more than 20 years at the municipality to follow new rules and regulations. Exceptions used to be made; hence, resistance was expected but will be dealt with.

In light of the above, Tulkarm municipality was able to synchronize its work procedures across HR, IT, Finance, and Administration systems to eliminate manual processes and support the municipality’s vision of a paperless, streamlined operation on the path towards becoming an E-municipality.