



Case Study Al Bireh Municipality



*Written by: Ruba Al Adham, M&E and Reporting Officer
Local Government & Infrastructure Program, Global Communities/ West Bank & Gaza
July 30th, 2014*

Al Bireh is a Palestinian city located in the central West Bank, adjacent to Ramallah City, 15 km north of Jerusalem. The city hosts important political and civil institutions, national ministries and embassies. In recent years, it has become a vibrant center of commercial activities, hosting over 80,000¹ inhabitants. Al-Bireh Municipality was first established as a local council in 1928 under the British mandate and in 1952 it became a municipality.

The municipality employs more than 220 staff members, of which 34 have temporary employment contracts. Various services are provided to citizens through the municipality's various departments including administration, engineering, planning, financial and accounting, health and environmental, public relations, culture and media departments. The municipal council consists of the mayor and 14 council members (Two females and 12 males).



In 2013, Global Communities and of Al Bireh municipality began a new partnership under the Local Government and Infrastructure Program (LGI) funded by USAID. In line with the strategic objectives of the West Bank's local governance sector, Global Communities' partnership with Al Bireh focuses on three key areas of governance excellence— community participation, leadership development, and service delivery—to support the municipality's vision of becoming more responsive to community needs and achieving integrated socio-economic and infrastructure development in the city, as stated in their SDIP:

“A prosperous, clean, beautiful and green city, thriving to provide quality life to its citizens with loyalty and respect amongst all”

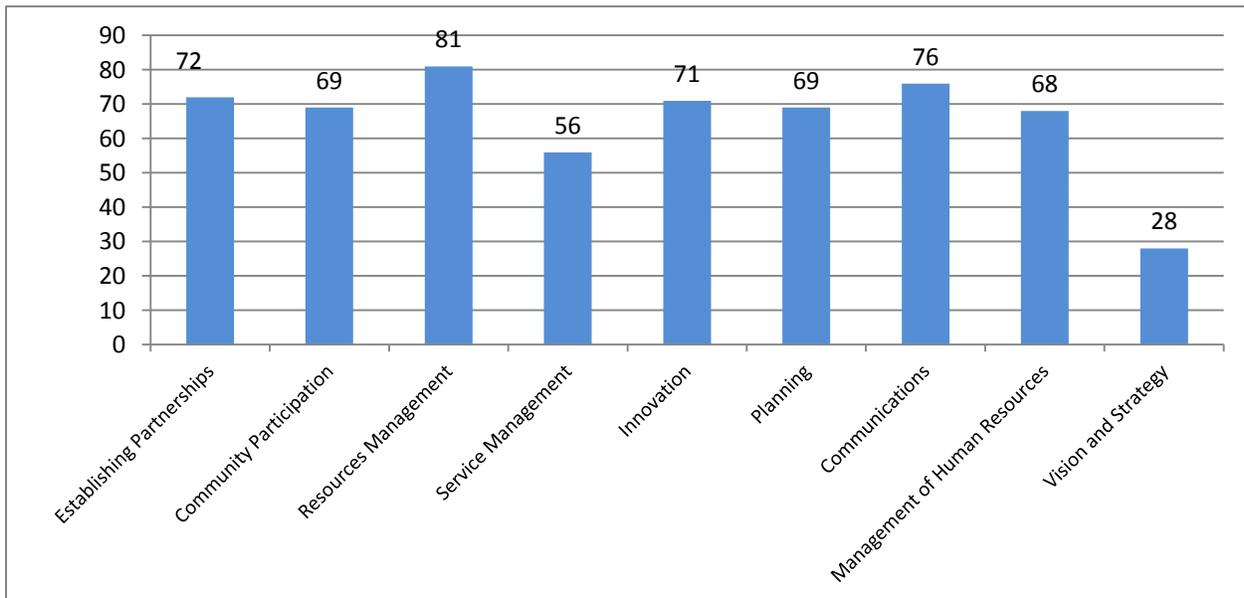
Early in FY13, LGI worked with Al Bireh municipality on finalizing a self-assessment exercise and evaluation of core competencies of the leadership and staff of the municipality, utilizing the "Participatory Performance Management (PPM)" in accordance with LGI's governance excellence model. The tool enabled the municipality to transparently determine areas of weaknesses and strengths in the overall performance of the municipality. The PPM utilized a participatory approach, as the process involved the majority of municipal staff. Additionally, results revealed that the municipality scored lowest in a number of core competencies under the leadership role; namely in communications, vision and strategy, in addition to human resources management. Overall, the main challenges facing the municipality included the absence of clear institutional vision and a well-tailored strategic plan for the city, the absence of competent staff to fill the gaps in the organizational structure, the absence of clear staff job descriptions, deficiency in internal and external communication, very limited community participation in addition to the lack of integrated data management system for enhanced internal management decision making and

¹ The number above is based on the calculation of actual number of inhabitants as presented in Al Bireh SDIP. The population of Al Bireh City as per the population and housing census published by the Palestinian Center Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2007 is 40,000. According to the municipality, this number is inaccurate as many residents in Al Bireh are registered for census in other cities of West Bank.

service provision. Those areas are the key focus of LGI program's interventions towards achieving its goal of Al Bireh in becoming a potential Center of Governance Excellence.



"We were transparent during the implementation of the PPM tool because we needed realistic scores. We unanimously believe that Al Bireh municipality is in need of institutional reform and capacity building, which can't be achieved unless we open our eyes to the gaps in our organizational structure and performance management."
Dima Jodeh- planning department.



Caption: PPM scores for Al Bireh municipality.

Based on the above PPM results, LGI's main interventions in Al Bireh municipality were identified and approved by the municipal council including the Strategic Development and Investment plan for (2014-2017) (completed in 2013), development of Municipal Corporate Strategic Plan (MSCP) (completed in 2013), the development of procurement process and manuals (on-going), the development of human resources procedures and system (ongoing), establishment of internal audit department (ongoing), physical planning interventions including GIS/spatial data management, street coding and naming (*ongoing*), and the development of public notifications policies and communication plan (ongoing). *Additionally* LGI targeted Al Bireh municipality for implementing complementary sectorial plan (planned), metropolitan planning (planned) and piloting E-Municipality concept(planned) interventions to enhance its capacity towards becoming an actual CGE and a Grand Municipality like the other large municipalities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin targeted under LGI program. Moreover, these interventions will enable better management of planning processes and implementation of integrated projects with Ramallah and Beitunia municipalities targeted in the proposed metropolitan area.

The following case study reviews the completed and ongoing Global Communities' interventions in Al Bireh municipality under LGI program aiming to highlight the successes and challenges facing the municipality during implementation. The case study focuses on the municipality's efforts to improve its performance in the three key areas of governance excellence namely community participation, leadership development and service delivery. The methodology used to write this case study included in-depth interviews with related staff including the municipal director, head of management affairs department, head of planning unit, head of fees collection unit, head of childhood and youth unit, head of financial and internal audit unit, Citizen Service Center (CSC) deputy manager, two of the CSC staff and two short interviews conducted randomly with CSC visitors. Additionally, a focus group was held with three municipal council members.

Under leadership and management competency: In its effort to promote and institutionalize community planning and citizen democratic engagement processes as per the Palestinian local governance system, LGI supported the municipality, during FY13, in developing their first Strategic Development and Investment Plan (SDIP) for (2014-2017). The municipal council and key staff were aware of the need for a comprehensive strategic plan given that the municipality had a low score in the area of vision and strategic planning (28%). The development of the SDIP was among the first priorities to enhance the overall effectiveness of projects prioritization, design and implementation. Prior to LGI's interventions, the municipality used to rely on the available budget to randomly implement developmental projects mainly infrastructure without taking into consideration participatory planning methodologies or transparent implementation mechanisms. In 2003 and 2008, there were attempts to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the city. The first was conducted in partnership with Beitunia and Ramallah but the absence of institutionalized strategic planning process and lack of coordination resulted in a strategic plan that doesn't meet the needs or expectations of the three municipalities. In 2008, the municipality attempted to independently develop a strategic plan solely for Al Bireh. The process entailed many challenges including lack of competent staff and the absence of mutual shared vision among existing municipal staff and council members, which resulted in lack of agreement in terms of projects prioritization.

The SDIP process was a unique opportunity to diagnose the status and potentials of the public and private

sectors in Al Bireh city to determine the points of weakness and strengths in addition to challenges and opportunities using institutionalized methodology. The strategic planning methodology which is in line with MoLG's policies and guidelines, the inclusion of the community participation concept, qualification, commitment, and willingness among staff and the municipal council to change their management practices were the key SDIP success elements. Moreover, the SDIP process enabled the municipality for the first time to engage the local community in identifying the main developmental issues that need to

"The newly developed SDIP is the foundation for an optimized and collective effort towards achieving our goals at the community and municipal levels. We realized during the planning process that we've been overlooking some developmental issues in the areas related to childhood, youth, gender and persons with disabilities that are actual priorities for our community. We didn't have the required knowledge in these fields, and we would've not been able to address them without the support of CBOs and community members who participated in the planning process." Ziyad Al Taweel- Municipal Director.

address in the upcoming four years.

To enhance the concept of metropolitan planning for Ramallah and Al Bireh cities during the SDIP process, Al Bireh municipality invited Ramallah municipality's strategic



planning coordinator to attend the open community and SDIP committees meetings to attain better understanding about the prioritized



“SDIP projects were prioritized in a participatory approach regardless any personal agendas. Now, even if I don't have a close personal relationship with council members, I am confident that my reference is the approved projects, timeframes, and budgets within the SDIP.” Sa'ed abu Baha'- Childhood and youth unit.

projects for Al Bireh, prevent projects overlap and discuss the potential for joint projects between both municipalities.

The newly developed SDIP is also considered as a tool to market the developmental projects in Al Bireh. Large scale public investment shareholding companies like Palestinian Development and Investment Company (PADICO), Palestinian Real Estate Investment Company (PRICO) and other individual investors were impressed by the high level of planning in Al Bireh's SDIP. As a result, they decided to invest in large scale projects including the centralized poultry slaughter house, tourism project in Al Bal'u neighborhood, as well as a public transportation station for Al Bireh. The municipality is eager to establish such partnerships with the private sector to overcome its limited physical and human resources. For example, the municipality owns minimal areas of land, as 60% its lands is located in Area C, which are subject to rigid restrictions by the Israeli Authorities when requesting the necessary permits for construction. However, unlike other big municipalities in the West Bank, Al Bireh municipality has relatively sufficient financial resources coming from the revenues of existing projects such as real estate for rent and parks. This is considered a feasible and sustainable income generating strategy to fund the implementation and operation of new developmental projects in the city.

With respect to management of human resources, the new elected council members have sensed the urge for organizational re-structuring and capacity building to enhance the municipality's performance for effective implementation of the SDIP. In this context and per Al Bireh MSCP, developing job description for all staff members is considered a key staff management tool to improve their performance, productivity and enhance their sense of accountability. To-date, the municipality has finalized job descriptions for senior management and aims to finalize the remaining job descriptions by early January, 2015. Moreover, the municipal council completed the preparation of the internal staff appraisal guide and sent it to MoLG for endorsement. The guide entails a fair performance appraisal system for employees that would be a catalyst to motivate employees for performance excellence once it is applied. However, the municipal council is concerned that the appraisal system won't be reflected in staff raises or promotions if it isn't approved by MoLG's Local Government Employees' By-Law, which doesn't provide adequate salaries based on positions, qualifications, and competencies. Therefore, the performance appraisal would be redundant in enhancing the level of municipality employees' commitment and effectiveness if it wasn't linked with salaries increments.

Moreover, Local Government Employees' By-Law set by MoLG do not correspond with the municipality's needs when it comes to filling key positions such as a communications manager and a senior electromechanical engineer. The salary scale for local authorities' employees doesn't match the expected and fair market wages for the required qualifications and experience for these positions. However, the municipality made a decision to hire qualified staff (using temporary contracts) despite the financial burden it may incur. Through temporary contracts, three new employees were recently hired to work at Al-Bireh's Citizen Service Center (CSC) and another three engineers who are also GIS specialists were hired to work in the planning department to assist in the implementation of physical planning interventions.

Internal communications in Al Bireh municipality remains to be a challenge that needs to be addressed at different organizational levels. Although the level of communication between staff in the same department is high, there is a witnessed gap in the internal communication between different departments within the municipality. Heads of departments interviewed in this case study revealed their deep concern regarding the negative impact this may cause during the implementation and integrations of LGI's interventions. The local council believes that the absence of job descriptions resulted in unclear reporting process and cycle between different departments. Additionally, lack of meetings at different organizational levels was a trigger to widen the communication gaps between different departments. However, under LGI program and in line with the MoLG new policy paper on Public Participation and the Community Participation Manual, Al Bireh municipality have recently launched the process of developing its public notification policies and communication plan. Once finalized, these policies and plans will contribute in enhancing effective internal and external communications and prompt provision of the needed information for public and municipal employees use.

In the area of physical planning, the absence of accurate and integrated database to enhance the decision-making process was identified as a weakness point in the SWOT analysis of Al Bireh's MSCP. For example, the provision of data regarding land ownership, land use and infrastructure services, the engineering and planning departments currently follow a time consuming procedure that also results in a high margin of error. They still refer to the old database and send surveyors to the field whenever they need information about an area served by the municipality. Under LGI program, Al Bireh municipality has made significant strides in terms of physical planning when compared to other LGUs. For instance, the spatial data management & administration intervention is in the final stages and the GIS application is almost ready for use. The Staff who is involved in implementation is beginning to see the fruits of physical planning activities. They will soon witness the reduction in time and effort in terms of the provision of planning services and support decision making regarding planning for infrastructure projects. Moreover, integrating the GIS application along with the Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS) will enable the CSC employees to provide the majority of building services without the need to refer to planning or engineering departments.

"Proper physical planning is the first step towards implementing the E- Municipality concept and metropolitan planning. There is a witnessed buy-in for physical planning interventions among municipal staff and council members. Soon, we will be able to provide the necessary and accurate information in a press of a button. This will contribute to the optimization of infrastructure planning and the provision of services in Al Bireh City." Dima Jodeh- Planning department.

Under community participation competency, the SDIP methodology places greater significance on public participation. However, the municipality faced a big challenge specifically in terms of the low level of community participation in the planning process. Municipal council members stated that community participation is a new concept to Al Bireh citizens who were unaware of the significance of their role in advocating for the community priorities. Council members believe that such approach requires a significant period of time to be adopted and practiced by community members. Moreover, the social fabric in Al Bireh is unique; bringing together different community and cultural backgrounds given that the city has been witnessing high levels of internal immigration from other West Bank cities. The new mixture of cultures in Al Bireh still depicts low sense of ownership and awareness of community needs and priorities. On the other hand, Institutionalization of the SDIP process contributed in enhancing the level of community participation through involving community members in the various SDIP committees. Community members and representatives of CBOs who participated in the SDIP process were very effective in providing the needed support in data gathering and analysis. Moreover, community participation ensured transparent SDIP process and most importantly encouraged community members to get involved in decision making related to their local affairs. Mr. Saed, Abu Baha', the head of childhood

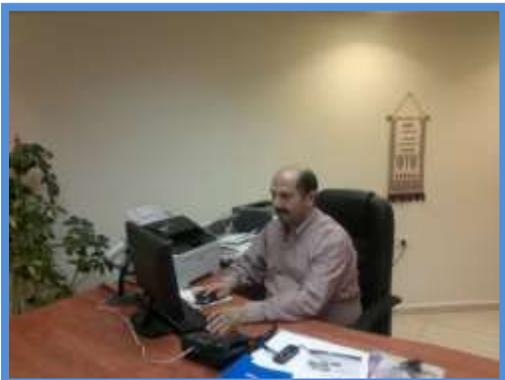
and youth unit, stated *"There were always boundaries between the municipality and the local community. The municipality has been overlooking the impact of community participation in supporting the municipality's efforts in advancing the development process within the city. Additionally, the local council used to focus only on engaging high profile figures in the community to discuss developmental issues. However, following the SDIP process, the municipality started to recognize the importance of engaging community members of different backgrounds in the planning process."*

As a first step to strengthen relationships with local community, the municipality has prioritized the implementation of a number of community based projects aiming to enhance the quality of cultural and social life in the city. These projects include the expansion and rehabilitation of the public library, rehabilitation of childhood development center, and the construction of public swimming pool. These community projects will enhance the level of trust with community members and understanding of the municipality mission that extends beyond the provision of basic infrastructure services.

Since the beginning of Global Communities partnership with Al Bireh municipality, LGI team introduced the concept of establishing a Youth Local Council (YLC) in Al Bireh to enhance the community participation and sense of ownership among youth. The idea was received with hesitation by the local council and ultimately the YLC was not formed. Mr. Sa'ed Abu Baha, the head of childhood and youth unit in Al Bireh municipality, who was also a member in the SDIP social committee stated *"YLC members would have been additional resources at the municipality to serve the goal of enhancing the sense of ownership and voluntarism among community members, we should have oriented them about our vision and strategy, customized and integrated their agenda for effective youth involvement in the municipal work."*

Under management of service delivery competency, the CSC in Al Bireh, established under LGI, is fully operational and has all the necessary IT equipment to function efficiently in addition to the comprehensive EDRMS. Formerly, the municipality used to accept service requests through a help desk managed by two employees in the municipal building entrance hall. Additionally, the tasks for those employees were limited to providing guidance to citizens regarding service applications and service requests were only documented on paper. Moreover, citizens used to follow up on their application statuses by conducting numerous visits to several departments. This resulted in wasted time and effort for both citizens and municipal staff. Now, open to public, the new CSC is providing services in one stop, well-designed and furnished space that provide comfortable atmosphere for citizens visiting the CSC.

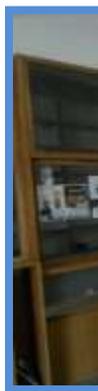
"You can witness a huge shift in the attitude of citizens visiting the new CSC. They seem more relaxed and have trust in employees' integrity regarding service delivery. They can also witness transparency and accuracy as a result of the new automated system."- Ra'ed Al Taweel- CSC deputy manager.



The council members are very satisfied with the level of professionalism in the CSC, they believe that the citizens financial debts would significantly decrease given the CSC new workflow procedures and systems: *"In the past, social considerations and lack of documented proofs limited us from litigating citizens who aren't in need and have accumulated debts. Nowadays, and through the new CSC, we hired a lawyer who is following up on these cases in court supported by official reports generated from our EDRMS."* Jamal Shlataf- Council member.

The number of services provided through the CSC has increased from seven to twelve services. However, some of these services, mainly related to building licenses and land use certificates, are not fully functional/ automated awaiting the newly installed GIS software in the planning department to be integrated with the EDRMS. Additionally, the financial system is old and incompatible with the new features of the EDRMS. To overcome this obstacle, the fees collection department has also a help desk in the CSC to provide financial services to citizens in-line with other services provided through the EDRMS. For example, in the current CSC workflow procedure, the citizens must check their debts first through the financial services help desk before applying for a clearance certificate.

Both the CSC deputy manager and the fees collection manager prefer to have an integrated EDRMS/financial system to save time and effort, which would also allow them to generate in depth analytical financial reports regarding fees collections and debts for CSC services. They also prefer to have more decision-making power and authority delegation regarding CSC related services. For example, they prefer if there is an agreement with the municipal council regarding a fair standard payment schedule for citizens who can't pay their debts at once and delegate the CSC to approve such payment schedule instead of judging each case separately during the municipal council weekly meetings.



"My husband works in the US and I'm here responsible for our family. I also pay taxes and follow-up on the family real estate. Since it has been opened to the public, I've visited the CSC few times. Employees are very kind and provide the necessary support. The CSC building is comfortable, easily accessible, it takes few minutes to apply or pay for a service while my kids are waiting the at CSC reception area." Maysoun Jodeh- a citizen



Caption (left to right): The old help desk and the new CSC in Al Bireh municipality.

"The CSC also serves as a point of communication with citizens. During service provision, we survey citizens' opinion concerning the implementation of developmental projects in Al Bireh City." Ala' Abed, CSC employee.



"Due to inconsistency of the old HR procedures with Local Government Employees' By-Law, the penalties were not processed as they were considered illegal and hence dismissed in the Palestinian courts. The new HR manual is a rational reflection of MoLG laws and regulations."



For HR management, The HR staff with the support of LGI team formulated a new HR manual that includes all related HR procedures and forms, which are consistent with Local Government Employees' By-Law.

LGI is currently working with the municipality to install, customize and train staff on the new Human Resources Management Information System HRMIS, which will



"I'm a businessman working in Al Bireh. In the past, I used to send one of my employees to submit certain service requests. This used to take two or three visits to the municipality, running between different departments to finalize it. In the new CSC, I easily submit a service request by myself. The request is either completed instantly or I am given an exact date to return and receive the service. I'm gratified with this professional and effective way of work that saves my time and effort." A businessman

"Each month, many employees refer to us for mistakes in vacations, overtime in their time sheets and it takes double work to modify these mistakes. We look forward to eliminating these mistakes in the new HRMIS." Ra'ed Al Taweel- internal and financial audit department.

enhance the effectiveness, responsiveness of the HR department. Currently, the HR department is managed by one HR officer, who handles human resources issues for more than 220 employees. Due to the high load of work, the HR officer is forced to work extra hours each month just to finish the employees' time sheets for salaries release. Moreover, the output of the current HR system incorporates many errors including the calculation of remaining vacations/ sick leave and working hours in time sheets. The HR system also lacks flexibility in generating reports and the data can't be exported to other computer applications for analysis or data management: *"The current HR system is too slow; sometimes it takes more*



than a week to generate the monthly attendance sheets for the employees" said Mohammed Qer'an- HR officer. Moreover, the HR officer has to enter the employees' vacations, sick leaves, overtime and deductions manually, which increases the level of inaccuracy in data entry.

Despite all limitations in the current HR system, there was some internal resistance among some council members and the internal & financial audit department regarding the installation of a new HR system as they prefer to upgrade the current system rather than install a new one. They were concerned about not having the required resources to transform all the data from the old system. In order to reach to a consensus and make the right decision, the municipality held separate meetings with HRMIS and the old HR system vendors and invited the related staff. After exploring the capabilities of both systems, there was an agreement that installing a new HRMIS would be more effective and feasible to sustain, than upgrading the old system. Moreover, the new system will offer seamless integration with other management information systems recently introduced in the municipality, such as the workflow engine (part of the EDRMS), in addition to its ability to provide online services to all employees in the municipality, which greatly enhances transparency and accountability.

Although most of Global Communities' interventions in Al Bireh municipality are still ongoing and their long term impact cannot be captured yet, this case study reveals the high potential and willingness among municipal staff for change in addition to their awareness regarding the gaps in the internal and external communications in Al Bireh municipality. Municipal council and employees believe if cooperation and coordination between employees at different organizational level are enhanced, the municipality will accomplish the desired outcomes and impact of its institutional and strategic development efforts and ultimately achieve its goal in becoming an actual center of governance excellence.