

Case Study Jenin Municipality

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Founded in 2450 B.C.E, Jenin is the largest and oldest city of the Jenin Governorate located in the northern West Bank. The first municipal council in Jenin was established in 1886 under the leadership of Haji Abdul Majid Mansour. The city now has a population of over 39,000.

Jenin city overlooks both the Jordan Valley to the east and the Marj Ibn Amer Valley to the north. It serves as the administrative center of the Jenin Governorate and is a major agricultural center for the surrounding towns.



Jenin municipality employs over 460 staff members following the recent retirement of an additional 125. In the past, the municipality had more than 1,200 employees¹. During that period, the municipality was paying around NIS 2,400,000 in salaries. Of the 460 employees, approximately 40 employees hold a bachelor degree while the rest either hold a high school diploma or lower.

In 2013, Global Communities and Jenin Municipality began a partnership under the Local Government & Infrastructure (LGI) program funded by USAID to further enhance the municipality's ability to meet the needs of its citizens in a transparent and effective manner.

In line with the strategy of the Palestinian local governance sector and the model for governance excellence, Global Communities' partnership with Jenin 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 center for governance excellence.

Following the municipal elections that took place in 2012, Mr. Walid Abu Mweis was elected as a Mayor. The local council consists of 13 members, of which three are females. Since then, the Mayor along with the local council members has been keen to improve the existing conditions of the municipality to elevate the internal and external responsiveness, competence, and service delivery.

Global Communities has extensive experience in the local governance sector at the national and local levels; hence, is aware about the current local governance situation in Palestine. Main challenges include the absence of an elected Palestinian Legislative body, the capacity of the Ministry of Local Government, the credibility of the Association of Local Authorities (APLA), the lack of a clear vision and strategy for the local governance sector in Palestine, lack of non-donor-based financial resources, and the limited capacity of human resources, only to name a few. Having said that, this reality must be considered when working with big municipalities such as Jenin which requires massive technical and financial resources as well as a sufficient period of time to ensure their sustainable development.

¹ In January 2009, the municipality released more than 700 employees based on a Palestinian Cabinet decree.

Within this context, and given the constrained political and economical environment, in addition to the fact that LGI program is expected to end in September 2015, and had just begun working in Jenin², this document will only serve to highlight key successes and challenges that Jenin municipality face in its endeavor towards becoming a model for governance excellence. The methodology used in writing this document includes observations of municipal meetings, staff feedback, and in-depth interviews with key staff including finance manager, procurement manager, and human resources assistant.

LGI has completed the development of HR procedures as well as the installation of a human resources management information system providing the municipality with a well-developed and automated human resource management information solution to improve their HR operations and reduce total operating costs; a Municipal Strategic Corporate Plan that outlines how the municipality will address its institutional development priorities; streamlined procurement procedures to be more efficient and transparent, that will be followed, in the future, by a database to institutionalize this new system. According to its organizational structure, the LGU has an internal audit department, but it is not functional as of yet. The LGU, however, and following the completion of its institutional development plan intends to re-activate the unit. Accordingly, LGI developed internal audit procedures that will ensure the LGU adheres to the required procurement, financial, and administrative regulations, which will also enhance the transparency and accountability of the municipality to citizens. LGI will also construct and complete the establishment of a Citizen Service Center (CSC) in 2015. The CSC is will help the municipality establish services in an automated and transparent manner. Processes within the municipality will also be overhauled to reduce time spent to process requests.

The above interventions have been designed based on the Participatory Performance Measurement (PPM) – self assessment tool in which Jenin municipality's score was 50% (out of 100%). The main challenges or weaknesses in the LGU included administrative, communication, and financial challenges.



Caption: Jenin Mayor meeting with department manager to discuss the main challenges facing each department.

Under the leadership and management competency area, and since presuming his post as a Mayor, the newly elected council members have made key management decisions to eliminate incompetency, corruption, and favoritism. This includes firing four key staff members: the Municipal Director, the Strategic Development & Investment Plan Officer, the Administration Manager, and the Internal Audit Manager. As quoted by the Financial Manager, Mr. Imad Al I'toom *"The local council observed the weaknesses among those departments; hence, the four were forced to retire."* Apparently, the four managers were teaming up for their own interests and were using their positions to benefit at the expense

² LGI program, and based on USAID's request to work with big municipalities, began its interventions in Jenin less than a year ago. Other big municipalities include Al-Bireh, Nablus, Bethlehem, and Hebron.

of the public interest of Jenin citizens. Accordingly, the four have been forced to retire based on allegations of corruption. However, despite this courageous and transparent act, the municipality is still unable to fill the void for those key positions due to lack of financial resources and the existing inflated number of staff.

Moreover, the local council members formed an internal committee to follow-up on Jenin's institutional development plan. However, the committee is being led by an engineer who is not fully aware yet of the plan and who does not possess the confidence required to carry out this task. This has been observed during meetings, feedback received by LGI team, delay in forming the committee, not informing all departments of the existence of the plan, as well as the action steps that should have been done since the development of the plan in July 2013. It was also noted that not all departments have been invited to participate in drafting the institutional development plan. This is due to the high level of centralization and power among those who are active and hold key positions in the municipality.

For example, the department of logistics and the department of health and environment were unaware of the institutional development plan. This issue was immediately resolved by Global Communities' staff who requested, during a meeting with the Mayor, that the plan must be shared with all department heads to receive their feedback given that the plan is currently being updated. As a result, another meeting took place with more than 25 participants attending including the Mayor. During the meeting, each department head shared their feedback on the plan and their planned projects with detailed timeframes and budgets.

In general, it is fair to say that LGI interventions cannot bear the desired outcomes without working in parallel with the municipality's local council members to enhance their leadership and technical skills. This will ensure proper oversight and management of staff, as well as effective service delivery. Enhancing leadership capacity of council members will guarantee more transparency, accountability, and productivity. One of the main challenges facing department heads is their sense of disempowerment. This is directly linked to the lack of knowledge among council members who are not aware of the functions of each department, which results in them making unsound decisions.

Strong leadership skills will also authorize department heads to manage their departments without fearing threats or retaliation from their staff that happen to have family power or nepotism. Imad Al I'toom, Financial Manager, said *"Some department heads are afraid of their staff. They are not willing to raise complaints about them or to poorly evaluate their performance."* When asked why, his reply was *"They fear retaliation. Some staff members have political power, and others come from well-known families...."* This was also confirmed by the Procurement Manager, Sahem Hindawi, who said *"Why are you surprised? People like you working in NGOs do not face such situations. But in governmental bodies, the situation is always vice versa. The manager constantly fears people they supervise."*

*"One of the most important challenges that we are facing in Jenin revolved around the administrative aspect. For example, we faced a weakness in communication between staff and management despite our continued requests to hold regular meetings. The municipality also did not make enough efforts to reach out to the community due to the lack of financial resources." – Imad Al-I'toom – Financial Manager, Jenin Municipality
(Photo below)*



Another main challenge facing the municipality is the lack of coordination and communication among its various departments on one hand, and the Ministry of Local Government, on the other hand.

Internally, and given the size of the municipality, and the diversity of cultural, educational, and management background of its staff, the local council must take the lead in promoting the importance and inevitability for these departments to coordinate and harmonize their work on a regular basis. This will grant maximization of efforts, efficiency, and responsiveness, but will only be achieved once the local council members are knowledgeable and informed about the functions of each department. It is worth mentioning that this challenge is currently being addressed by many head of departments who are eager and dedicated to improve their performance. For example, regular coordination and communication is being witnessed between the finance and the procurement departments. This is mainly as a result of the procurement procedures that have been developed by LGI, as well as the internal commitment and loyalty among the two heads of department to cooperate together and achieve real results on the ground.

However, this has not been streamlined and will require great efforts from local council members and department heads themselves. The ideology among the leadership and the head of departments is witnessing slow improvements, but it shows the internal will, among many, to change in terms of focusing on participation and having a clear understanding of roles versus responsibilities. For instance, the local council now requires that each department sends in their plans on a quarterly basis. To what extent is this going to be implemented is yet to be determined.



Caption: Jenin Mayor, Waleed Abu Mweis holding a meeting with department heads to follow up on the institutional development plan

Externally, the local council members have been striving to find solutions to major challenges facing their local community. For example, the local council drafted a local law for Jenin to change the violation fees for illegal parking. The approved fee by MoLG is JD 5 – too minimal and affordable to all. In order to overcome this challenge, and reduce the incidence of illegal parking, the local council raised this fee to JD 100. The draft local law was sent to MoLG for approval; however, it has been with MoLG for several months pending review and discussion. This is one example that hinders the local council's efforts to improve local enforcement and address a long-term challenge.

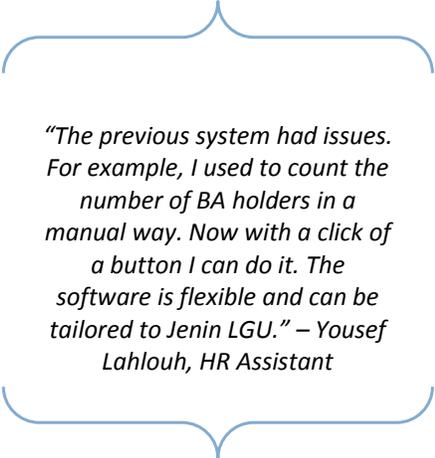
Significant efforts must be exerted by the local council under the management and leadership competency. Although extensive follow up is being carried out by Global Communities team members to

ensure the actual implementation of what has been developed, further practical follow-up mechanisms need to be considered. Moreover, for big municipalities such as Jenin, Global Communities is considering to modify their methods of interventions and to put additional focus on enhancing the capacity of the local council members. Big municipalities require tailored and intensive capacity building to ensure that maximum desired impact is achieved.

Amongst this seemingly dismal reality, one can notice considerable progress and improvements under the management of service delivery competency. The development of the institutional development plan, the HR procedures and the installation of the HRMIS, the procurement and internal audit procedures have resulted in facilitating the work processes and flows in various departments. It also introduced a new culture of accountability and transparency especially within the HR department.

For example, following the development of the HR procedures, the installation of the HRMIS, and training three HR staff members on how to utilize the system, major progress is witnessed in terms of what this department has managed to achieve within a very short period of time. In the past, this department faced multiple challenges including obstacles in identifying actual working hours for employees –due to problems in the old attendance clock, lack of job descriptions for all staff, HR staff having to run after department heads to get approvals for vacation requests submitted by employees, in addition to not having a copy machine and the need to walk to another building for copying, let alone the massive amount of wasted paper as a result of the absence of an automated system.

Currently, HR staff members are among the most enthusiastic and comfortable following LGI's development of the procedures and the installation of the HRMIS. According to Yousef Lahlouh, HR Assistant, *"In the past, we had signing in system through fingerprints. We had issues because it didn't work all the time. This led to abuse in terms of reporting to work where some employees would claim they were at work but in fact they were not. The new system now identifies the face and the fingerprint. Moreover, it can calculate the working hours of employees who work 24 hours. Previously, the system was capable of calculating workers' time within the same day only. HR had to fix that manually for those who worked 24 hours," he also added "I no longer have to go back to personnel files to pull out any document such as an employee's degree or identification number. Today, with a click of a button, I have access to all that information."*



"The previous system had issues. For example, I used to count the number of BA holders in a manual way. Now with a click of a button I can do it. The software is flexible and can be tailored to Jenin LGU." – Yousef Lahlouh, HR Assistant

The HR department is currently working with the various departments to collect the job descriptions for all staff members and upload it on the system. Salary information and slips can now be accessed by all employees without referring back to HR. The department will also complete the scanning of all its hard copies in order to minimize the use of paper as part of their approach of being more environmentally friendly. Furthermore, HR assigned assistants for each department to help those who are computer illiterate in filing their vacation requests or in case they want to pull out any information from their automated files.

Among the challenges facing members of the HR department is the rejection to change among most staff. This is normal since people, in general, have the tendency to reject change until they witness the benefits generated from this change. Another challenge was the absence of an annual performance evaluation form. To-date, employees receive their annual increments during a verbal evaluation that is done in any given month. Again, such challenges demand affirmative leadership and willpower to ensure that implementation is being carried out across all departments. Despite that, HR staff firmly believes that positive change is underway but needs some time.



“Staff feels it’s a monitoring system, but we’re trying to convince them slowly that this system is there to help them and facilitate their work, and not watch tower. Technology is there to serve you not to harm you.” – Yousef Lahlouh, HR Assistant (shown in the photo to the left.)

The procurement procedures developed by LGI increased the productivity of the department and eliminated potential fraud or corruption. Previously, work processes within the department were basic without enough checks and balances or an audit of the department, opening opportunities for corruption.

Sahem Hindawi, Procurement Manager said *“There was no equal opportunity to service providers, and we didn’t follow best practices.”* He also added *“I had no other alternative but to believe the staff member’s recommendations in terms of best prices received. I didn’t receive proper and official invoices. I used to receive them on small notepads or pieces of paper.”* Now, the process, the mechanism, the forms/templates, and the cycle of each request have all resulted in more accountability and transparency. In the near future, Global Communities plans to automate the procurement department and tailor the automation to be linked with other departments such as the warehouse and finance departments.



“When I was appointed, I didn’t have any clear mechanisms for work. I used my own judgment, and tried to develop tools to the best of my knowledge.” –

Sahem Hindawi, Procurement Manager

“The local council members must be more affirmative in implementing the new manuals and procedures. It must force the departments to coordinate among each another.” – Sahem Hindawi, Procurement Manager

That said, the Procurement Manager stated that a lot of progress can be done should all departments join their efforts. He said *“The main problem is the lack of collective work and communication between departments. The local council needs to enforce the newly developed procedures among all departments. It must also force department to coordinate among one another. Most importantly, the local council members need to be trained and well informed of functions for each department instead of feeling weak before department heads. This training should be done jointly (local council*

members and heads) to ensure accountability and commitment as well as collective decisions in the future. This will also create harmony and care among participants.” Add to that, the reactivation of the internal audit department is extremely vital to ensure that all technical and financial aspects are being implemented according to best practices. Despite the development of internal audit procedures by Global Communities, the municipality has yet to appoint or hire internal audit manager although this issue has been discussed among the local council members who stated that this issue will be resolved soon.

Other ongoing interventions carried out by LGI include the installation of the GIS system including numbering and naming of streets and buildings, as well as the construction and establishment of a Citizen Service Center (CSC), which are expected to be completed in 2015.

Lastly, Global Communities is a firm believer that out of adversity come enormous willpower and determination for improvement. As such, and despite the numerous and substantial challenges that currently exist in Jenin municipality, Jenin still has a huge potential and can realize the required progress to succeed. As a result, LGI will continue to conduct in-depth case studies among big municipalities as well as comparative studies to measure the impact of LGI’s interventions and adjust them accordingly.