



## The Role of Local Authorities in The Development and Restoration of Life in The Governorates of The Gaza Strip

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The process of developing local authorities is of particular interest to developed and developing countries alike, due to the consequent advancement of local communities and raising the level of income and living for individuals. In recent years, the local government sector has witnessed many political, economic and social transformations, which have had repercussions on the role of the state in general and the role of local authorities in particular with regard to the development process. The most prominent of these transformations is the increasing tendency of the Palestinian National Authority and the Ministry of Local Government to adopt trends of decentralization and consolidation of principles of good governance, the development of the role of the private sector and the relationship with non-governmental organizations, the empowerment of citizens and the growing strength and influence of civil society<sup>1</sup>.

The trend to decentralization allowed to identify the needs of individuals and solve their problems through participation in planning and decision-making processes.

Also, this trend contributed to the creation of an increasing interest from the government and the Ministry of Local Government, and thus local bodies in the local development process that is based on the transfer of responsibilities and roles from the central government to the local authorities, which now have to improve their working methods, adopt the concepts of sustainable development, and apply what is known as local governance, which is based on the involvement of the private sector and NGOs in the local development process. From this perspective, local bodies can play their roles and be more responsive to the demands and aspirations of society, which contributes in local development.

The local authorities and municipalities in Palestine have begun to work according to the urban development planning approach based on the foundations of broad community participation, and to restore the relationship with the community through participatory planning to develop their areas of influence. The strategic development planning guide was adopted in 2016 and then developed and approved by the Ministry and local authorities in 2018, upon which strategic plans were prepared for all 417 municipalities and municipal councils for the years 2018-2021- in the West Bank and Gaza Strip<sup>2</sup>.

## First: Paper's Preparation Methodology

### 1.1 The problem of the paper:

The local bodies, both municipalities and village councils in Palestine, are considered the direct executive tool of the Ministry of Local Government, and therefore for the government in implementing its policies and strategies for local development in Palestine. The government through the national policy agenda worked to adopt many policies at the national level, in addition to the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Local Government, which works to enhance the role of local authorities in the local development process.

The paper seeks to examine the role of local authorities in bringing about local development, within the broader concept of sustainable development adopted by the government, which is in line with the development vision of the government in accordance with its commitments to the sustainable development goals, and thus answering the following problem: **Did local authorities contribute to local development according to the national vision for development?**

In addition, the 25 municipalities of the Gaza Strip faced additional challenges than the municipalities and councils in the West Bank.

During the past fifteen years, the municipalities of Gaza witnessed, in addition to the siege, 4 consecutive wars that contributed significantly to the destruction of infrastructure, which is one of the most important pillars of sustainable development. Also, the Israeli occupation continuous siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, which in turn contributed to reducing the development opportunities of the municipalities. In the face of this challenge, the paper also raises other questions:

- **Did the local authorities in Gaza contribute to local development?**
- **How was its role in the reconstruction after the wars Gaza witnessed?**
- **Did they play a pivotal role in that process, and what were the most important challenges they faced?**

## 1.2 Paper's Preparation Methodology

The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical approach in preparing the paper by relying on the literature available at the municipalities, the Ministry of Local Government, and the competent authorities on one hand, and on the other hand, he worked on collecting data from the specialists through meetings with the head of the

Municipal Union in the Gaza Strip, Dr. Yahya Al-Sarraj and the Mayor of Gaza. In addition to the participation in the specialized workshop held by the NGO Network on “Challenges Facing the Municipalities in Gaza Strip during the Current Circumstances”, After the Aggression on Gaza<sup>3</sup>, and inclusion of the recommendations of experts and specialists within the general context of the research paper.

## Second: The reality of local government in Palestine:

Political factors played, and still are, the largest role in influencing the development process in the Palestinian Territory in general, and especially the southern provinces, where the political factor overlaps with development in a clear context and with mutual influence. The impact of this can be clearly read by following up on the economic and social changes that have limited the development and evolvement of the local government sector with all components. There is no doubt that the political instability plays as a key factor, the policies of the Israeli occupation, the recurrent aggression against the Gaza Strip, the destruction of the infrastructure and all the components of the development process, in addition to the problem of coordination with the

occupation regarding the crossings, and the materials prohibited from being imported from inside the occupied territories or from abroad in normal times, or in times of reconstruction under the pretext of dual use, the lack of clarity in the political horizon, the division in the Palestinian arena, the absence of national sovereignty over the borders and crossings, and the absence of national resources. All the previous factors have hindered the Palestinian government and the various ministries from achieving their goals and development plans, and the local government sector and municipalities were not far from those influences.

The mayor of Gaza confirms that the municipalities of Gaza suffer from multiple problems as a result of these reasons, as he referred to the most important challenges faced by the municipalities during the recent Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, which were the direct targeting of municipal facilities and the accumulation of waste, the shortage of fuel quantities, and the difficulty of accessing some municipal facilities, especially in the border areas. In addition to the lack of materials and equipment needed to repair the damage, targeting municipal workers by the occupation forces without any consideration for the nature of their work, as they are both workers and civilians<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.1 Components of the local government sector in Palestine

A group of actors contribute to local development led by the Ministry of Local Government, where the roles of actors differ according to the legal, political and financial context. In order to achieve its development vision «good local governance, capable of achieving sustainable development with effective community participation», the ministry seeks to institutionalize work in the local government sector by developing a legal and procedural system that enhances its orientations.

The following figure shows the main actors in local development through the local government sector; Where the Ministry of Local Government represents the main pillar and is considered a regulator of the relationship between the actors in the local development process. The Ministry of Local Government in Palestine is considered a responsible and reference ministry for local authorities, working to develop their capacities and resources to become more capable of achieving the welfare of its citizens within the framework of good local governance. The concept of local governance has been linked to local authorities (municipalities and village councils), providing services to citizens and participating in the development process. Each local authority has an

area of influence within the state as a whole. Palestine falls under the so-called unitary system of local government, where the government is the central controlling body with some powers and responsibilities being delegated to local bodies <sup>5</sup>.



**Components of the local government sector in Palestine**

## 2.2 The legal framework regulating the work of local authorities

The laws and legislations related to local authorities in Palestine experienced multiple stages and developments. In 1934, Local Authorities Law No. (1) was issued to organize the work of local authorities in the Gaza Strip, while in 1944 Village Management Law No. 23 was issued, which was in force in the

Gaza Strip. In the year 1954 AD, Village Administration Law No. (5) was issued, which was in force in the governorates of the West Bank, and in 1954 AD, the Local Authorities Law No. 29 was issued, which worked in the West Bank, and this historical development of the Palestinian laws and legislation regulating the work of the authorities continued. Local Authorities Until 1997, the date the elected Legislative Council issued the Local Authorities Law No. (1) of 1997.

In accordance with this law and Article No. (2), the Ministry of Local Government has been entrusted with the powers of drawing up the general policy established for the work of local councils, and supervising the functions and competencies of these councils, the affairs of organizing public projects, and the work of budgets and procedures for forming these councils.

The laws and legislations related to local authorities in Palestine experienced multiple stages and developments. In 1934, Local Authorities Law No. (1) was issued to organize the work of local authorities in the Gaza Strip, while in 1944 Village Management Law No. (23) was issued, which was in force in the Gaza Strip. And in the year 1954 the Village Administration Law No. (5) was issued, which was in force in the governorates of the West Bank, and in the year 1954 the Local Authorities Law No. (29) was issued, which was in

force in the West Bank. This historical development of the Palestinian laws and legislations regulating the work of local authorities lasted until 1997, the date on which the elected Legislative Council issued the Local Authorities Law No. (1) of 1997.

In accordance with this law and according to Article No. (2) thereof, the Ministry of Local Government has been entrusted with the powers of drawing up the general policy established for the work of local councils, and supervising the functions and competencies of these councils, the affairs of organizing public projects, and the work of budgets and procedures for forming these councils<sup>6</sup>.

While Article (3) defines the local body as “a legal entity with financial independence who is managed by a freely and directly elected body.”

As for Article (15); it provided for granting local authorities the power to issue regulations or executive regulations necessary to organize the work of the local authority, and to secure its interests and needs, provided that the Ministry of Local Government approves and adopts the system. While the Palestinian Basic Law categorically specified that the regulations in general must be adopted by the Minister of Local Government and published in the Official Gazette.

Article No. (15) referred to the powers granted to local bodies, which were mostly service-oriented, including, but not limited to<sup>7</sup>:

- **Urban planning:** It includes planning and organizing streets, lighting them, naming and numbering their buildings, beautifying and afforestation, preventing encroachment on them, monitoring what falls on the streets from the open lands and assigning their owners to erect fences around them.
- **Buildings and Building Permits:** Granting building permits and supervising the construction, demolition and restoration of buildings.
- **Electricity:** Supplying electricity to public roads.
- **Sewerage:** the construction, management and control of public sewage and latrines.
- **Water:** Providing the population with drinking water or for any other use.
- **Crafts and Industries:** Organizing crafts and industries and assigning special places for each type of them.
- **Cleanliness:** collecting, transporting and destroying waste and litters from streets, homes and public stores.

## 2.3 Local elections<sup>8</sup>

According to the statistics of the Central Elections Committee for the municipal elections for the year 2017, the total number of local authorities in the West Bank and Gaza amounted to (417) local authorities, with (142) municipalities, and (275) village councils, of which (392) are in the West Bank, (117 municipalities and 275 village councils), while in Gaza there are (25) municipalities.

The first municipal elections were held in two phases, as they were divided into five phases, four of which were carried out during 2004 and 2005, and the fifth and final phase was delayed, as the responsibility for implementing local elections was transferred to the Central Elections Commission according to the text of Article (72) of the Local Council Elections Law No. (10) of the year 2005, and the last stage remained unimplemented.

The first phase of the local elections targeted 36 local authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the first phase of local elections was held in 22 local councils on December 23, 2004, while it was held in 14 local councils in the Gaza Strip on January 27, 2005, and the Majority system was followed at this stage in accordance with Law No. (5) of 1996 regarding the election of local councils.

In the second phase of the elections, it was held in 82 local councils on May 5,

2005 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the second phase of local elections was held in 76 local councils, while it was held in 6 local councils in the Gaza Strip. The Majority system was followed at this stage as well.

The third stage of local elections was held in 104 localities in the West Bank only on September 29, 2005. At this stage, the proportional representation system (lists) was followed in accordance with the Local Authorities Council Elections Law No. (10) of 2005. The fourth stage of local elections was held On December 15, 2005, in 40 local authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During this stage, the proportional representation system (lists) was followed.

As for the second local elections 2012, which were held in light of the Palestinian division, where local authorities participated in the West Bank and local authorities abstained from participating in Gaza<sup>9</sup>, 272 out of 353 local bodies participated in these elections. And then the first complementary elections in 81 local bodies, and a second in 22 local authorities.

In 2017, the third round of local elections<sup>10</sup> took place. Elections were held in local bodies in the West Bank only, and 326 out of 391 local bodies participated in these elections. Later, the Council of Ministers issued another decision to hold complementary local elections held on July 29, 2017, in which

32 local bodies<sup>11</sup> participated.

Hamas refused to hold elections in the local bodies in the governorates of Gaza. The movement informed the Elections Committee of its refusal to hold elections in the Gaza Strip. Accordingly, the Council of Ministers issued a decision in February 2017 to postpone the elections in the governorates of Gaza<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the municipalities of Gaza have not held any elections after the 2005 elections. The government in Gaza adopted a policy of appointments to municipal councils.

## Third: sustainable development and its social, economic and environmental dimensions

### 3.1 Local development

Local development means: carrying out a set of operations and functional activities, which aim to develop all economic, environmental, social and cultural areas of the local community, by supporting and empowering the local community, which reflects positively on the community, contributes to local development and leads to development within the influence of Local authorities, where local development is based on a set of main components, illustrated by the following figure <sup>13</sup>:

The local community is the individuals and institutions in the area of influence of the local authority, and the main component of local development.

Local Authorities: They are a group of municipalities and village councils, which aim to provide individuals with diverse jobs and professions, and help increase the efficiency of local development.

Individuals: They are the group of people who live in a place, and they are considered effective elements, which contribute to supporting local development to achieve its goals.

## 3.2 Characteristics of local development

- Local development is a comprehensive process that includes all segments of society;
- It contributes to the development of society.
- It works to make use of all resources.
- It seeks to provide all basic services to the local community.

## 3.3 Concept of Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development is defined as development that enables the satisfaction of the needs of current generations and the achievement of their well-being (including the poor) without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs, taking into account the challenges of preserving ecosystems and the limited renewable natural resources.

## 3.4 Dimensions of sustainable development:

1. The economic dimension: It is related to the production of what covers all the basic human needs and improves his well-being and standard of living.

2. The social dimension: by ensuring inclusive growth through a fair distribution of wealth and resources.
3. The environmental dimension: by working to reduce the harmful effects of production activities on the environment, rational consumption of non-renewable resources, and striving to develop the use of renewable energy sources and waste recycling.

## Fourth: Local Authorities and Development

Development is the organized effort in which all sectors of society participate to improve/develop it. The development process is very important because of its positive role in important areas, including the economic, social and political fields. Development will not achieve its goals without continuous and viable cooperation based on a clear plan by all actors in the state and society.

The situation is no different when talking about local development and the roles played by municipalities. Local development plans prepared by municipalities and municipal councils are required to be complementary to government programs at the national level. There is a need to distribute powers and tasks between the central government and local bodies, in order

to ensure that these bodies play a more effective role in local development as a result of their proximity to citizens and are therefore more capable of identifying problems, challenges, aspirations, and local development potentials. This justifies the tendency of the Palestinian government to rely on local bodies to achieve the goals of economic and social development plans through its harnessing of many policies that guarantee the provision of better services in a broader context of participation and community accountability<sup>14</sup>. The decentralization that the Ministry of Local Government seeks to adopt and work to strengthen through its strategic plan 2017-2022 cannot succeed without adopting practical procedures for institutionalization and the correct application of decentralization and increasing the space for freedom and creativity of local authorities in the field of optimal investment of their resources within their geographical scope, especially in light of government's inability to meet all the needs of society, especially in the governorates of the Gaza Strip, due to the political division, the imposed blockade, and the cessation of the democratic process.

#### 4.1 The role of municipalities in achieving local development

Municipalities play an active role in achieving local development. It

also contributes to achieving social development, which has been proven by the experiences of local authorities in Palestine during the past years since the formation of the Palestinian National Authority, and the adoption of the approach to building state institutions. The restructuring of municipalities and municipal councils on a national basis, away from their functional role during the time of the Israeli occupation, played a role in bringing about local development, as it inherited destroyed infrastructure and almost non-existent municipal facilities. The current situation of municipalities and village councils, despite the weak participation in the development process, which is due to many reasons that were addressed later, but the reality of the situation at the level of services, infrastructure, and the improvement of daily services for citizens has significantly improved than it was under occupation. **It can be noted that the improvement was at the following levels:**

- Ratification of the local authorities' law and a set of decisions related to improving the level of work in local authorities.
- Building the technical, administrative and financial capacities of workers in the Ministry of Local Government and local authorities in the West Bank and Gaza since the establishment of the

## Palestinian National Authority

- Improving the resources of local authorities by developing financial resources and improving the level of international financing for municipalities.
- Establishing the Municipal Development and Lending Fund as a financial arm of the Ministry that works to implement strategic visions through direct financing to municipalities in order to improve infrastructure and services provided by municipalities from the perspective of a participatory approach.
- Improving the level of services by activating formal and informal monitoring and follow-up tools by the local community and its various institutions. Accountability and community participation have become an approach adopted by the Ministry and local bodies according to the policy paper issued by the Ministry in 2014.
- Developing the administrative systems, structures and financial systems of local authorities with the aim of improving and facilitating service for citizens.

- Orientation towards E-municipalities as part of the improvement, through the adoption of the strategic framework for the transformation into E-municipalities 2019 - 2023

## 4.2 Analysis of the role of municipalities in the development process in the southern provinces

Municipalities in Palestine in general, and in the governorates of Gaza in particular, are trying to play their development and service role, by exploiting the available resources. By linking their strategic and service development vision with the national vision, in the context of the ministry's strategic plans and the national policy agenda, the municipalities seek to contribute tangibly to the development process at the level of its influence first and then contributes to sustainable development according to the comprehensive vision of development in Palestine. This relationship can be summarized through the figure shown below, which sequentially shows the interconnected relationships between the strategic visions and the various interventions of the actors in the local government sector.

A figure showing the interrelated relationships between the components of the local government sector<sup>15</sup>

A lower rate of achievement than planned in the development field

Ambitious projects and budgets - based on the local developmental role of the authorities

25 strategic development plans aimed at enhancing the role of the authorities in local development. Regional strategic development plans at the governorate level.

Continue to support the bodies in the reconstruction process. Providing basic services to citizens. Bridge the development gap between the two parts of the country.

Goal 1: Improving the institutional performance of the bodies and providing quality services to the citizen

Increasing and sustaining the bodies' revenues. Common tax restructuring. Ensure regularity of government transfers.

Goal 2: More stable or financially sustainable local bodies.

Investing in infrastructure and implementing feasible economic projects. Institutionalization of local development departments in the Ministry of Local Government

Goal 3: Organizations are playing an active and supportive role in stimulating economic development.

Promoting decentralization in local authorities. An effective system for the transfer of tax revenues to agencies - the development of the local economy

National Policy 9: Strengthening Accountability and Transparency

Strengthening the integrative partnership in providing services with NGOs and the private sector.

National Policy 8: Upgrading the level of public services provided to citizens

Human Resource Development. Gender mainstreaming.

National Policy 7: Strengthening the responsiveness of local bodies to the citizen

## Local Sector Development Strategy - National Policy Agenda

### 4.3 Conclusions according to the interrelationships between the components of the sector

- Municipalities contribute to local development in a restricted way; this depends on the concept of development in the municipalities on the one hand, and on the other hand on the available resources and roles that were defined according to the law which gave the municipalities service tasks, rather than development in the three dimensions of development (economic, environmental and social). This reduced the ability of the municipalities to the actual contribution to comprehensive development. As the strategic plans of the municipalities show that their general directions focus on infrastructure development as a priority and then other development issues.
- There is complementarity in the policies, strategic objectives and development outcomes from a theoretical point of view, but the conclusions indicate the weak contribution of municipalities to local development despite the development of their capabilities in strategic development planning based on participatory planning; this is due, according to many reports and specialists' opinions, to a set of obstacles, the most important

of which are: The occupation and its arbitrary measures stand in the way of achieving real development progress in the Palestinian society as a whole. The period 2008-2021 witnessed the continued escalation of the restrictions of the occupation, which was represented in the continued imposition of the blockade on the Gaza Strip and its separation from the West Bank, and control over the natural Palestinian resources of land, water, sea and sky, in addition to the repeated aggression against the Gaza Strip, 4 wars in less than 14 years. In fact, the practices of the Israeli occupation are still working to destroy the achievements that have been achieved at the national and local levels, as the occupation has demolished and destroyed many projects and infrastructure that were financed with Palestinian capital or by international partners, as well as demolishing many buildings, homes and roads. This had direct repercussions on the local government sector with all its capabilities and components. During the past years, the Gaza Strip has been exposed in an unprecedented way to the harassment of the occupation (blockade and recurrent aggression) and prevented ministries and local authorities from completing their structural plans and from

implementing many projects as a result of the restrictions imposed on the crossings and the nature of the permitted materials, especially after the aggression in 2014.

- Although the government, within its general policies, and the ministry, within its strategic objectives for the local government sector, have adopted trends towards enhancing the participation of agencies in local development, the reality indicates the weak commitment of the government and the ministry to its financial commitments, and its objectives, which stipulated the development of an effective system for transferring tax revenues to agencies and promoting the development of the local economy<sup>16</sup>.
- Although the 7th policy in the policy agenda explicitly provides for the promotion of decentralization in local bodies, the reality and reports issued by municipalities and supervisory institutions confirm that the ministry is still adopting a policy of centralization that limits creativity in exploiting opportunities available to local bodies<sup>17</sup>.
- Strategic development step plans are an important towards contributing to a greater developmental role for local authorities, despite the low rate of achievement of these plans as a result of many political and economic factors and the conditions of the Corona epidemic in the last two years.
- Despite opportunities to fund strategic development plans by the Municipal Development and Lending Fund and international financial institutions, the restrictions of these institutions› dealings with municipalities in the Gaza Strip within the policies of No Contact policy with the political levels in the municipality reduced the chances of achieving the development goals of the municipalities within their plans. The mayor of Gaza believes that donors should deal with municipalities as service agencies that provide services to citizens without any political or partisan orientation, and this approach must be adopted by all funding agencies, noting that there are many funding agencies in Gaza that have begun to deal with municipalities in a manner direct manner which in turn enhanced the ability of municipalities to carry out their service and development role without the presence of intermediaries <sup>18</sup>.
- All strategic development plans for the municipalities of the Gaza Strip carry a developmental dimension within their strategic objectives and priorities. The

concept of development in those plans focuses on infrastructure, economic development based on municipal resources from craft fees, but environmental and cultural development aspects are almost non-existent; this is due to more than just one reason, one of the most important reasons among which is that the societal priorities in the projects are directed towards the necessities represented in infrastructure, and the second is that the directions of the municipality and the financiers also tend to improve the infrastructure as a necessity in exchange for working on cultural, social or environmental priorities <sup>19</sup>.

#### 4.4 A reading of the budgets of local authorities in the Gaza Strip<sup>20</sup>

Talking about local development is linked to many elements that support the achievement of the development goals of local authorities, this is reflected in the budgets of local authorities in Gaza, where the data of those budgets show the reality of local development, and the restricted roles of municipalities in performing better roles in the field of local development. **These indicators can be summarized as follows:**

- **Developmental budgets:** In the best cases, they do not exceed 30%

of the total budgets and mostly depend on expectations of funding opportunities, as other revenues cover salaries and some operating expenses.

- **Funding opportunities:** government opportunities are weak; donor countries are linked to a political agenda that limits dealing with municipalities in Gaza. The best financing opportunities that cover the bulk of the development revenues of municipalities and projects come through the Municipal Development and Lending Fund.
- **Regular government transfers:** Gaza municipalities are still suffering from the issue of government transfers, as the majority of municipalities have dues from the central government.
- **Authorities revenues and their sustainability:** In the face of the difficult economic conditions and the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip, the revenues of the local authorities are decreasing, and the municipalities' dues to citizens increase on a monthly basis. This limits the ability of these municipalities to move forward in local development. For example, the Gaza municipality, which is one of the largest municipalities in the Strip, has debts owed to citizens of more than 990,000 shekels, meaning that the municipality has debts estimated at 9000 shekels per

participant, where the rate of commitment to repay does not exceed 20%. This applies to all 25 municipalities of the Gaza Strip. The following table shows the extent to which municipalities in the Gaza Strip depend on development revenues based on development projects financed by the Fund and other sources of funding, which indicates the fragility of local development in the face of any changes in the policies of the funders. This illustrates the financial crisis that the municipalities are experiencing, which greatly affects their ability to implement their financing vision. This became clear during the Corona crisis, in terms of changing the trends of donors and the difficulty of obtaining financing as a result of the economic crisis that afflicted all countries as a result of the epidemic and the continuous lockdowns.

### Table No. 1 Summary of Municipal Development Revenues<sup>21</sup>

	Municipality	Development budget revenues (projects)	Total revenues	%
1	Jabalia	53,378,000	75,081,500	71
2	Beit Lahia	7,028,225	18,697,425	38
3	Beit Hanoun	9,000,000	15,062,000	60
4	Um Al Nasr	993,800	2,051,566	48
5	Gaza	41,541,298	125,625,373	33
6	Al Zahraa	0	1,978,266	0
7	Wadi Gaza	0	981,766	0
8	Al Mugraqa	796,330	2,175,500	37
9	Dair Al Balah	2,815,050	12,579,208	22
10	Nuseirat	10,009,444	20,992,000	48
11	Bureij	3,755,700	7,268,700	52
12	Maghazi	1,568,000	3,800,000	41
13	Al Zawaida	0	2,537,533	0
14	Wadi al-Salqa	699,950	1,478,950	47
15	Al Musaddar	0	862,266	0
16	Khan Younes	16,821,520	59,836,090	28
17	Al Qararah	3,592,866	7,464,366	48
18	Bani Sohaila	1,509,300	6,977,724	22
19	Abassan Alkabeera	4,248,000	9,141,000	46
20	Abassan Al Jadeda	12,656,363	14,160,953	89
21	Khuza'a	7,049,000	9,163,000	77
22	Al Fukhari	0	917,000	0
23	Rafah	3,230,467	20,846,617	15
24	Al Nasr	0	916,500	0
25	Al Shuka	2,563,000	4,268,020	60

## 4.5 The role of NGOs in enhancing the developmental role of local authorities in the governorates of Gaza

Measuring the role of any party in the local development process is achieved if the main objectives of the development interventions are achieved, which are: empowering the local community by providing the necessary quality resources and services, improving the living conditions of the community in a sustainable manner, and protecting the basic social, cultural and economic rights of people.

From an analytical perspective, Palestinian NGOs have contributed in various forms and at various levels to the local development process since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. According to the experts' opinions, NGOs have contributed, within their interventions, to helping the municipalities in bringing about development, even if only to a small extent. It can be noted that it worked in several important areas, such as raising awareness of the political, economic and social rights of citizens, which contributed to the process of political development and increased demands in activating the democratic process as an important entry point for development. In addition to building the capacities of the local government sector, which contributed to improving services and increasing requirements

for good governance. sector in general and municipalities in particular.

In addition, NGOs, through promoting the values, principles, and systems of participation and community accountability, have effectively contributed to developing the municipalities' capabilities to adopt the participatory planning approach, which strategic development plans were among its most important outputs. Municipalities adopted them during the year 2017 as a basic approach to planning, and this also contributed to strengthening the municipalities' capacities for participatory planning, thus improving the annual evaluation opportunities by the Ministry and the Municipal Development and Lending Fund, which in turn increased funding opportunities for projects within the scope of each municipality's work according to evaluation and classification.

The work of NGOs was not limited to aspects of awareness and capacity-building, but went beyond it to playing a greater role in financing community initiatives and projects in partnership with the municipalities in the Gaza Strip, especially in light of the political position of many donors not to deal directly with the municipalities of the de facto government in Gaza after 2006. These organizations worked as community mediators with municipalities to implement many projects and initiatives

based on the active participation of local communities. The interventions of NGOs contributed to redefining vulnerability, vulnerable groups, and fragile areas, which contributed significantly to the redistribution of resources in local bodies.

#### 4.6 Local development opportunities and challenges for the municipalities of the Gaza Strip

When analyzing the reality of municipalities in the Gaza Strip in the sense of opportunities and challenges they face to play their role in bringing about local development, the following points can be mentioned:

##### Opportunities:

- Qualified human resources and accumulated experiences from working during emergencies in light of the recurrent aggressions of the Israeli occupation.
- Direct interaction of some donors with the municipalities of the Gaza Strip without an intermediary and bypassing the policies of conditional funding by not dealing with the municipalities.
- Promises of reconstruction after the recent aggression on the Gaza Strip.

- Commitments of the Municipal Development and Lending Fund towards working in accordance with strategic development plans.
- Changing the stereotype about the roles of municipalities, especially in light of the extensive use of social networking sites by municipalities.
- Commitment to standards of transparency and integrity through the reports of indicators of the integrity system in municipalities, which contributed to increasing openness with international institutions.
- The openness of civil society to the municipalities through the strengthening of the mechanisms of social accountability by municipalities.
- Orientation of municipalities towards participatory planning and its adoption by the Ministry and the Government as a basic method in the assessment of municipalities.

##### Challenges:

- Central administration: and the dependence of municipalities to it in their budgets, polices, and work in general, which weakened its role in planning community development, as its financial budget decreases by the size of the gross product and depends on international aid.

- Disruption of the democratic process: Adopting the policy of appointing members of local councils has reduced the ability and role of municipalities in achieving local development. As democracy is an essential foundation in achieving sustainable development.
- The Israeli blockade: The continuing Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip and the prevention of freedom of movement. In addition to controlling the border crossings, which limits the ability of municipalities to provide materials for local development.
- The recurrent Israeli aggression on Gaza; 4 wars that significantly destroyed the infrastructure. In addition to destroying the economic and environmental components, all of which contributed to the delay in local development, and made the municipalities deal according to the method of extinguishing fires and providing the basics instead of development.
- The political and administrative division has hugely affected the performance of the municipalities in the Gaza Strip, one of the most prominent challenges and obstacles that faced and still face the local government sector is the continuation of the political and administrative division and the forced separation between the northern and southern governorates, which continues to cast its shadows on the Palestinian work in general and on the local government sector in particular. National and international reports on the performance of local authorities show that the programs for reforming and developing the local government sector in the West Bank have made important strides but have significantly declined in the southern governorates as a result of the deepening isolation between the two parts of the country due to the continuing political division.
- Lack of trust between local government bodies and the community, as a result of their failure to meet the needs of the citizen and the community.
- The low participation of women in both local bodies, where the percentage in the West Bank is 24%, while it is almost non-existent in the specific municipalities of the Gaza Strip as a result of the appointment policies followed in Gaza.
- The low participation rate of the youth, as the law on candidacy for local bodies sets the age of candidacy above thirty for the president and 25 years for a member, which prevents a large segment of young people from running for themselves.

- The regulations, laws and decisions that limit the powers of municipalities and instruct their work to the service side at the expense of the development side, as these powers must include many aspects of economic, social, cultural, and human life.
- Effectively reducing the powers of the municipalities, as the responsibility of the municipalities for electricity has been withdrawn while the authority over water is expected to be withdrawn. Also, some powers have been withdrawn, such as issuing crafts and industries licenses which was commissioned to the Ministry of Industry and the control of some authorities such as the government and the military which was commissioned the authority to sell sand. Withdrawing these powers from local authorities weakens its financial resources and thus limits its ability to play its developmental role.
- Political subordination in its work to the central ruling authority.
- Scarcity of financial resources to implement necessary and basic infrastructure development projects.
- Weak entrepreneurial spirit and community participation.
- Citizens' failure to pay their financial obligations to local authorities due to the difficult economic situation, and the high rates of poverty and unemployment.

### Recommendations:

Local bodies in Palestine in general, and in the governorates of Gaza in particular, can play a fundamental and effective role, more than they are doing now in bringing about local development, and this requires a set of interventions at the level of the ministry, government agencies, local bodies, civil society institutions, and finally the local community. **Through the following:**

- Developing the legal environment for the work of local authorities, updating Local Authorities Law No. (1) of 2007 to reduce centralization, and encouraging development initiatives based on community capabilities.
- The actual and gradual trend towards decentralization.
- Increasing the revenues of local authorities in order to enhance their operational and development capabilities.
- Government commitment to transfer revenues and budgets allocated to municipalities.

- Resolving overlap with relevant ministries and government institutions, with a focus on developing policies regulating the relationship between different ministries and local authorities.
- Develop the strategic development planning guide, giving more space to measure the impact of participation and community accountability.
- Strengthening the democratic process and calling for quick municipal elections, and to neutralize local work and citizen services from the attractions of political division.
- Adopting a policy of merging between municipalities according to a strategic vision based on the maximum utilization of resources, opportunities and human resources.
- Increasing work through NGOs to enhance community participation.
- Developing the capabilities of municipal workers from the perspective of sustainable development.
- Developing the relationship with the private sector, and adopting joint development initiatives that help bring about development.
- That the local government units enjoy an appropriate degree of autonomy that enables them to exercise their powers, formulate

policies, take decisions related to local affairs, and implement them without direct interference from the central authority.

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5. Local Elections Report 2017, Central Elections Committee, Palestine, September 2017
6. The Palestinian National Policy Agenda, Citizen First, 2017 - 2022.
7. Various reports to evaluate the

performance of the strategic plans of the municipalities are published on the websites of the municipalities.

8. Read budgets published on the websites of 25 municipalities in the Gaza Strip

## Government laws and decisions

1. Palestinian Local Authorities Law No. 1 of 1997.
2. Council of Ministers' Decision dated 7 / 10 / 2012
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## Interviews:

1. An interview with Dr. Yahya Al-Sarraj on 17/ 6 /2021
2. Dr. Yahya Al-Sarraj's intervention, "Challenges Facing Municipalities in the Current Situation" workshop, Gaza 6 -8 -2021 .
3. Palestinian NGOs Network, Workshop «Challenges Facing Municipalities Under the Current Situation, Gaza 6/ 8 /2021

## Footnotes:

- 1 The strategy of the Ministry of Local Government 2017- 2022, Ministry of Local Government, Palestine published on the Ministry's website <https://www.molg.pna.ps/>
- 2 An interview with Dr. Yahya Al-Sarraj (Gaza Mayor) on 17/ 6 /2021
- 3 Palestinian NGOs Network, Workshop «Challenges Facing Municipalities Under the Current Situation, Gaza 6- 8 -2021
- 4 An interview with Dr. Yahya Al-Sarraj on 17 /6/ 2021
- 5 The strategy of the Ministry of Local Government 2017- 2022, Ministry of Local Government, Palestine published on the Ministry's website <https://www.molg.pna.ps/>
- 6 The Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (Aman) 2020, «The Integrity System in Local Government Authorities, Beit Lahia Municipality as a Model» Ramallah - Palestine
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- 13 2017 أبعاد التنمية المستدامة، <https://mawdoo3.com>
- 14 The Palestinian National Policy Agenda, Citizen First, 2017- 2022
- 15 The figure was designed by the researcher according to multiple reviews of national plans and the national policy agenda
- 16 The Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (Aman) 2020, "Integrity System in Local Government Authorities, Beit Gaza Municipality" Ramallah - Palestine
- 17 Various reports to evaluate the performance of the strategic plans of the municipalities are published on the websites of the municipalities
- 18 Dr. Yahya Al-Sarraj's intervention, "Challenges Facing Municipalities in the Current Situation" workshop, Gaza 8 -6 -2021
- 19 Desk review of plans for large municipalities by the researcher
- 20 Budgets of 25 municipalities in the Gaza Strip published on websites
- 21 The table was designed by the researcher with reference to the data of the read budgets, a previous reference

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