Citizen Engagement in MNA Operations is anchored in the new Regional Strategy, which links the need for increased trust and improved service delivery through greater citizen participation as a key mechanism to renew the social contract between MNA Governments and their citizens. This case series aims at sharing examples and drawing lessons from CE initiatives in MNA Operations to inform and inspire task teams in their continued efforts to mainstream CE for better development outcomes.

CASE NOTE 5

Social Accountability in Municipal Development

WEST BANK AND GAZA

Background

Palestinian municipalities are required to deliver basic services to their inhabitants within twenty-seven different functions. The majority of municipalities, however, only consistently delivers on three: solid waste management, street maintenance and water supply. The municipalities lack sufficient budgets as well as capacities to effectively deliver. Palestine is made up of a largely urban population, with 74% of citizens living in 146 municipalities, and it is marked by fragility and conflict, thus increasing the importance of local development given that central governance is often hampered. The World Bank is therefore supporting the Municipal Development and Lending Fund (MDLF) established by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in addressing the financing and capacity building of municipalities through its Municipal Development Project (MDP).

The project, the first iteration of which was approved in 2009, is in line with the PA’s National Development Plan, which aims to “empower local government and bring public services closer to citizens”. The plan furthermore stresses the importance of community participation. Citizen engagement in municipal development serves a variety of goals from increasing trust between citizen and the state, to improved service delivery, revenue collection and good governance. The project’s goal of improving municipal transparency and service delivery is thus supported by an approach that includes citizens and strengthens social accountability. The Municipal Development Project does so through a variety of mechanisms, including information disclosure, participatory planning, budgeting and monitoring, as well as citizen service centers.

Information Disclosure and Outreach

A prerequisite for effective citizen engagement and social accountability is the availability of information. Only when budgets are disclosed can citizens voice their opinion on how the money should be spent and can they track whether money that was allocated for a specific task actually reached the appropriate place. While access to information is only a first step in the cycle of citizen engagement, it is a crucial one. Under the MDP, municipalities are encouraged to publish their budgets as well as their Strategic Development and Investment Planning (SDIPs) updates. Municipalities are regularly ranked in their
Effective citizen engagement requires that citizens cannot only access but also understand the information. This is especially relevant if the program involves participatory budgeting and thus seeks to encourage meaningful participation of citizens in decision-making on budgets. Since many citizens do not pay their taxes, fees or user charges for municipal services, the readable budget campaign informs them about the use of those revenues and the ways in which services could be improved with those resources. This way, a vicious cycle of weak service delivery and refusal to pay can be turned into a virtuous cycle of participatory planning, improved services, and improved revenue collection.

**Participatory Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring**

Part of the rationale behind strengthening social accountability through citizen engagement in the MDP is to increase trust between citizens and public institutions and to improve good governance of the municipalities. Three key mechanisms for this are participatory planning, budgeting and monitoring. Citizens are able to voice their priorities, have insight into the budget and participate in decision-making regarding how resources are used, and finally are able to see for themselves whether the expected results have been achieved and the resources appropriately been used.

Each year, the MDLF is conducting orientation workshops for the municipalities to brief them on the requirements concerning the disclosure of their budgets. The SDIPs, similarly, are updated annually and municipalities encouraged to invite citizens to participate in planning committees on the SDIP, to present a final draft for feedback at a public meeting and to distribute 1000 copies in town. Citizens can thus participate at all phases of the process, from joining the committees who are determining key priorities to providing feedback on the final version. Under MDP2, the focus is particularly on achieving representative community participation, especially of women, youth and vulnerable groups. An updated manual on SDIPs and the new generation of SDIPs foresee increased participation of women and youth. The MDLF is currently working with GIZ on the best approach to implement participatory budgeting under the next phase of the program. Participatory

Since information is only as useful for citizen engagement as it is available to and understandable by citizens, the MDLF has launched an online portal ([www.baladiyat.ps](http://www.baladiyat.ps)) where municipalities can publish their budgets and SDIPs. Around half of Palestinian households are currently connected to the Internet – a number that is growing. In addition to the portal, the program is conducting e-governance pilots in four municipalities. The move toward e-governance goes beyond publishing information online and includes portals that enable a two-way interaction between citizens and multiple institutions or departments. Citizens will for example be able to electronically register complaints and track the respective department’s response to the complaint. These grievances will automatically be linked to the ministry-level Grievance Redress Mechanisms, thus making it possible to track grievances and their resolution also at the national level.

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monitoring pilots are planned in ten municipalities. Engaging citizens not only in planning but also in monitoring is expected to strengthen municipal responsiveness to citizens, their understanding of citizen perceptions, and help contribute to improved municipal service quality.

**Citizen Service Centers and Grievance Redress**

One-Stop-Shops are a model from the private sector where multiple services are provided in one central location so that customers do not have to visit different locations for each service. This model has been adopted by the public sector in the form of Citizen Service Centers (CSC), where citizens can access information and services provided by different departments in one central location. This facilitates the interaction between citizens and the state as citizens can in one and the same location inquire about and request services from building licenses to water fees. In addition, some CSCs in Palestinian municipalities have a computerized complaints handling system where citizens can register grievances related to the services. The complaints are received by a committee that is tasked with resolving them within 1.5 days or, if they are more complex, transfer them to a technical department that will in turn come back to the CSC within 1.5 days. The average time for grievance redress before this centralized computerized system was 10 days, so the new system is shortening that time by over a week.

Over twenty Palestinian municipalities currently have a CSC and the MDP aims to extend the model to all municipalities. The municipal staff working in the CSCs receive capacity building under the MDP, including training on social accountability and citizen engagement. Guidelines on citizenship as well as communications have been developed for the CSCs. They lay out the rights and obligations linked to citizenship, the relevance of citizen participation and gender sensitivity, as well as specific steps to better communicate with citizens and engage them. The CSCs also provide service charters with which citizens can monitor municipal service provision and responsiveness regarding administrative services (e.g. clearance, profession license, building license, etc.), fees for all utility services provided by the municipality, and the automated Complaint Handling Mechanism. The charters provide the charges per each service provided by the municipality, and the time needed to have the service completed, connected, and repaired. Such information allows citizens to hold their municipality accountable if municipal service provision is not in line with the service charters.

**Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement**

As activities on social accountability and citizen engagement have been piloted in the MDP since its inception in 2009, the agenda is being mainstreamed. This is visible in citizen engagement being integrated into the program’s Grant Allocation Formula, windows 1 to 4, the results indicators, the operational manual, and the assessment of subprojects.
Lessons Learnt

Citizen Service Centers and e-governance initiatives are complementary. While both offer citizens the opportunity to seek information about services and to register complaints, the program has found that it is essential to have both, since some people do not have access to the internet or may simply prefer a physical center where they can talk to a representative face-to-face. Having both an online as well as a physical space for interaction between citizens and public institutions ensures that all segments of society can be reached and served.

Social accountability and citizen engagement need to be further institutionalized into local governance to ensure that feedback loops are effectively closed. The program has found that while individual initiatives and mechanisms are useful for increasing participation and transparency, they need to be better embedded in the local government structures to ensure community participation in decision-making, holding citizens accountable for failing to pay taxes and fees, and finally assisting municipalities in revenue generation and service improvements, which is at the heart of the MDP.

Citizen engagement is an incremental process that requires time, continued support, and operational concreteness to be meaningful and show results. Moving from pilot activities towards scale-up and institutionalization can be challenging but is manageable if resourced with adequate budget, tailored skills and a programmatic time frame.

This note was prepared by Berenike Schott, Christianna Johnnides and Sabine Beddies under the guidance of Najat Yamouri and Janmejay Singh. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this note are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank, its Board or its member countries.

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