



« THE CHILDREN’S MUNICIPAL COUNCIL (CMC) OF JERICHO: A SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY »

Jericho, Palestine

Period of implementation: 1999 (launch) | Study case written in 2007

The Children’s Municipality Council has actively taken charge of addressing problems that negatively affect the empowerment of youth in local communities. Through establishing a ‘leadership group’ consisting of children, the Municipal Council aimed to raise awareness among children on behavioural aberrances such as smoking, violence, and drugs. Objectives were set to address complaints about drug abuse among youth and the community. Parents asked for an awareness campaign about the negative impact of drugs on younger generations. The leadership group aimed to ignite youth’s inner sense of responsibility towards themselves and others by enhancing their awareness of the importance of avoiding at-risk behaviours that manifest themselves through violence, drugs, and alcohol abuse. They also aimed to increase awareness of the impacts of social problems and behavioural aberrances among the members of the Children’s Municipality Council. In the process, the youth gained new skills and experience in solving problems confronting their generation. Overall, Jericho works to enhance society by investing in youth because this population is considered a cornerstone to healthy communities.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

Context

Government and decentralization context

Palestine has a land area of 6,207 km² – 5842 km² in the West Bank and 365 km² in the Gaza Strip – with a population of approximately 3.5 million inhabitants. The territory is organized into 14 Governorates, 9 in the West Bank and 5 in the Gaza Strip.

After almost 30 years of systematic destruction of the structures of the Palestinian state, the Oslo Accords aimed to rebuild the Palestinian state. However, as it was impossible to establish a real central government due to non-territorial contiguity between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the only way of providing services to the people was through local governments (Adib 2008). This shift from a central authority to a decentralized system has greatly increased public confidence in local government, an institution closer to its citizens (Adib 2008). The Palestinian Authority was especially keen to accelerate the decentralization process and the population made local government its favourite forum for the public expression of demands, including practical requests regarding services (Adib 2008).

Moreover, it is important to remember the beginning of the process of democratization in the Palestinian Territories. In 2005, elections were carried out both in the Gaza Strip, for the first time in 71 years, and in the West Bank, after 29 years. Voter turnout was extraordinary. The average turnout was 82% and reached a peak of 98% in certain area (Adib 2008). The elections were seen as the restoration of the right of Palestinian to self-determination after years of destruction of their social and economic structures.

City and social context

Jericho is one of the smallest cities in the Palestinian Territories with a population of approximately 20,000 inhabitants (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2006). It is located in the far east of the West Bank with the lowest altitude of any city (250 meters below sea level). In the first census carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 1997, Jericho's population was 14,674. Palestinian refugees constituted a significant 43.6% of the residents or 6,393 people (PCBS 1999a). The gender make-up of the city was 51% male and 49% female. Jericho has a young population, with nearly half (49.2%) of the inhabitants under the age of 20. People between the ages of 20 and 44 made up 36.2% of the population, 10.7% were between the ages of 45 and 64, and 3.6% were over the age of 64 (PCBS 1999b). Based on PCBS projections (PCBS 2004),

Jericho presently has a population of over 20,000, with a large part of the population engaged in agriculture – Jericho is considered a green oasis in the Jordan Valley.

The political situation¹ has played major role in shaping the development and local government policies in Jericho. The city witnessed increasing development after gaining autonomy under Palestinian rule. However, the city's economy suffered when Israeli-Palestinian conflict flared, beginning in 2000. Since the breakout of the conflict, various economic activities and developmental projects in the Palestinian Territories were suspended. The damages to human lives as well as to economic activities were quite serious. The unemployment rate increased from 11.8% in 1999 to 27.5% in 2004. Moreover, in a city where tourism plays significant role

¹ The city was occupied by the Israelis in 1967. In 1994, it became the first Palestinian city in the West Bank to be autonomous under the agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

in the economy², the political unrest directly affected these economic activities. Before the Second Intifada (in 2000), the number of visitors to Jericho was 230,000-290,000 per annum, which drastically dropped after the Second Intifada but then gradually recovered to 100,000.

In addition to the challenges generated by the political situation, Jericho shares challenges with many other similar-scale cities in developing countries, such as high unemployment rates, a high percentage of youth in the population, and a lack of income-generating activities. The Municipality of Jericho plays a significant part in responding to these challenges at a city level by formulating policies with economic and social agendas. In 2004, the process of policymaking became more democratic through the introduction of local elections, the first one since 1976. As well, the municipality is increasingly being asked to respond in a more coordinated manner to social and cultural issues, and a more democratic decision-making process has been promoted for better local governance.

Institutional level of policy development: Municipal

Policy development

The policy promoted a democratic approach in decision-making processes through introducing democratic principles for children in the council's operating mechanisms, thus helping children to build self-confidence, respect others, and develop conflict resolution skills. The introduction of democratic principles was intended to help build an early understanding for practicing democracy and objectivity in choosing candidates without partiality and to improve their political skills.

Background

Since 1999, the Municipality of Jericho has worked closely with its communities in addressing social exclusion, developing participatory planning models, and developing social capital. The municipal council approach has highlighted the importance of fostering social inclusiveness and equality of opportunity in urban life through improving the urban governing system of Jericho and local government policies. In order to improve the municipal governance system, a study was conducted in August 2006 by the Japan International Cooperation Agency entitled "Jericho Regional Development Study Project in Palestine." The Municipality adopted major topics of the study, highlighting the importance of incorporating social inclusion within its policies through communicating and integrating different segments of the city. In particular, the municipality pays a great deal of attention to its youth and children population, which represents more than 60% of the city inhabitants. The municipality worked in translating these ideas into tangible results by including them through municipal policies. Many programs have been implemented during the past 10 years, beginning with temporary activities with children and youth and, later, the idea of establishing a Children's Council (in 1999), illustrating the municipal commitment to promote more inclusive policies.

Policy goals

One significant social inclusion policy directed towards youth in Jericho was the establishment of the Jericho Children's Municipal Council as the first Children's Municipal Council in Palestine.

² Jericho is located on the crossroads of the east-west tourist corridor from Jerusalem to Amman and the north-south tourist corridor from Tiberias to Eliat, and thus has an immense potential to attract tourists with diversified tourism objectives such as pilgrimage tourism, cultural tourism, resort tourism, and nature/eco-tourism.

The objective for creating the Jericho Children's Municipal Council was to provide a social space where children have the opportunity to express their opinion about the different issues affecting their lives and, more importantly, to provide them with the opportunity to influence decisions. The main goal was to facilitate children's ability to advocate and lobby for their aspirations and needs in different disciplines.

Chronological development

The policy's objectives will be achieved, initially, by creating the awareness of children's rights among children themselves, then by lobbying for a child-friendly environment. Moreover, the introduction of democratic principles is intended to help build an early understanding of practicing democracy and objectivity in choosing candidates without partiality and to improve political skills. These goals have been met through the activities conducted by the Jericho Children's Municipal Council, such as children's elections, where all children aged between 12 and 15 years old are given the chance to participate in elections. This is carried out in two phases: first, in internal elections in local schools and, second, in general elections. During the election campaign, each nominated child prepares his/her own election campaign and participates in campaign activities such as schools visits, election seminars, and publicity festivals. Through weekly meetings, the Council conducts discussions on issues of high concern to children. The main issues were:

- To identify the main challenges facing children in the city,
- To develop a plan to solve the challenge faced,
- To fundraise for the planned project,
- To implement the project,
- To ensure wide coverage in the media for awareness-raising and advocacy purposes, and
- To monitor its impact through discussions with peers

Institutionalization and financing

No information was included in the original case. Information collected via the Internet indicates that UNICEF provides both technical and financial assistance to the Children's Municipality Councils, along with the Canadian International Development Agency which provides additional funding for the project (UNICEF 2005). The municipality finances the activities from its own sources, supplemented by fundraising activities of community-based organizations.

Outcomes and reflections

Key results and achievements

Since its establishment, the Children's Municipality Council has had many achievements. In the first Council (1999 -2000), awareness-raising campaigns targetting the whole Jericho population were implemented, on topics such as the hazards arising from spoiled food items, maintaining a clean environment, and road safety. During the second Council (2000-2002), more advanced responsibilities regarding children and youth were conducted: a situation analysis was conducted to identify the key challenges facing children, which included early marriage, school dropout, and child labour.

The result of this research was documented in a film on these issues produced by the Children's Municipality Council.

During the third Children's Municipality Council (2003-2004), the main activity carried out was an awareness-raising campaign on improving environmental quality. The awareness campaign targeted the whole Jericho population and addressed two topics: maintaining a green and clean environment, and provision of clean water and sanitation. Various activities were carried out, including field visits to schools, workshops for more than 1800 students, planting trees in schools, and school beautification campaigns.

One main activity to promote the social inclusion of children and youth (other than building their capacity and skills) was to organize the participation of the Children's Municipality Council members in local, national, and regional meetings and activities to discuss children's issues. For instance, an important local activity was a series of joint meetings between the Mayor and the City Municipal Council. Another important outward-focused activity was to build networks with other Children's Municipality Councils in Palestine and in other countries such as France, Norway, Greece, and Jordan.

Overall assessment and replicability

The Children's Municipality Council has actively taken charge of addressing problems that negatively affect the empowerment of youth in local communities. Through establishing a 'leadership group' consisting of children, the Municipal Council aimed to raise awareness among children on behavioural aberrances such as smoking, violence, and drugs. Objectives were set to address complaints about drug abuse among youth and the community. Parents asked for an awareness campaign about the negative impact of drugs on younger generations. The leadership group aimed to ignite youth's inner sense of responsibility towards themselves and others by enhancing their awareness of the importance of avoiding at-risk behaviours that manifest themselves through violence, drugs, and alcohol abuse. They also aimed to increase awareness of the impacts of social problems and behavioural aberrances among the members of the Children's Municipality Council. In the process, the youth gained new skills and experience in solving problems confronting their generation. Overall, the Jericho Municipality framework plan works to enhance society by investing in youth because this population is considered a cornerstone to building healthy and developed communities.

Further information

The narrative was written in 2007 by Samar Othman Tamimi, Mayor's Office of the City of Jericho under the coordination and edition of Prof. Cabannes assisted by Yasar Adnan Adanali, at the Development Planning Unit, University College London, UK.

All narratives compiled in 2007 including this one were revised by a DPU editorial committee composed of Ernesto Jose Lopez Morales, Sonia Roitman, Michelle Pletsch, Steffen Lajoie, Luisa Dornelas, Iyad Issa and Pechladda Pechpakdee.

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