COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: PUBLIC CONSULTING AND TRANSPARENCY IN GAZA STRIP, PALESTINE

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Abstract

The objectives of this study are to identify and examine the community participation strategies concerning consultation and information disclosure and to identify and evaluate major barriers to community participation development. A questionnaire survey was developed to elicit the perceptions of the municipality's officials (top management and/or mayors of the selected sample) of Gaza Strip municipalities regarding community participation practice. The results indicated that there is a weak transparency (information disclosure) and community consultation in the municipalities of Gaza Strip. The findings revealed that, the major barriers of information disclosure approach are due to legal challenges, public awareness, lack of community members' skills and knowledge and social factors. In addition, the major barriers of community consultation are mainly due to lack of community members' skills and knowledge, lack of social capital and trust of local people in their leaders, political, economic challenges, community culture and municipality council awareness. It is recommended to expand the scope of public participation and developing strategies that maximize citizen input in community development activities in local governments of Gaza Strip. The findings can assist in identifying new directions for enhancing public participation in Gaza Strip local governments.

Keywords: Community Participation; Public policy; Municipalities; Local government; Palestine

1.0   Introduction

The beginning of the local governments in Palestine has witnessed a course of four historical periods: the Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians, and the Palestinian Authority. During the last ruling period, the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) was formed by a decision from the Palestinian leadership in Tunisia on 25 February 1994. The MoLG has established a local government structure and ensure that local government consists of local councils in the form of municipalities, town councils, and joint services councils that work for the benefit of the residents. Each local committee has an area of jurisdiction within the boundaries of the state. The MoLG adopted the following four basic objectives [1]:

1. Advancing the concepts of local government and decentralized management; and to create local government institutions that support national objective of building Palestinian local communities that embrace democratic elections.
2. Raising the quality of services in the Palestinian rural community to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.
3. Developing the abilities of local councils.
4. Reviewing the performance of local councils established before the inception of the Palestinian national authority in order to arrive at a local government vision concurrent with the Palestinian agenda.

The scope of community participation in local government is considered very limited. This phenomenon is found in all levels of Palestinian institutions. It is manifested in an uniform lack of development vision, failure to promote a philosophy of involving the community in bearing the responsibility for the development and reaping its rewards, and by the prevalence of overly

centralized, ineffective work coordination methods [2].The objectives of this study are to identify and evaluate the community participation strategies concerning consultation and information disclosure and to identify and assess major barriers to community participation development.

2.0   Literature Review

The debate about the community participation aspect in local governments and its effects on developing local government are getting more important all over the world. There are numerous research works considered the community involvement in local governments. Silverman [3] examined the socio-economic characteristics and public participation strategies of municipalities in USA and Canada. The Study aimed to survey the mechanisms used by municipalities to stimulate community participation and to argue that contrasts available between the socio-economic make-up of central cities in the USA and Canada and to explain the divergent techniques used for community participation. The results indicated that Canadian municipalities adopt a boarder range of public participation techniques related to: voluntarism and public engagement, neighborhood and strategic planning, and e-government. In contrast, the USA municipalities are more likely to promote community participation through mechanisms such as annual community meetings and referendum on public issues.

Another more recent study was conducted by Monfardini [4] purposed to analyze the effect of new public management-based reforms on public accountability in two countries, Italy and Sweden, explaining what strategies can be used to enhance accountability toward citizens. In which, two case studies have been analyzed in order to compare how public accountability has been enhanced in different cultural and geographical contexts. Monfardini [4] argued that the enhancement of public accountability, in both countries, is at stake both in the political debate and the public policies, but the strategies implemented resulted are path dependent especially in the choice between more disclosure and more citizen participation.

Other researches were built to clarify the benefits that could be achieved from development of community partnerships at the local level. In Ponta Delgada (Archipelago of the Azores), for the first time in Portugal, the relevant stakeholders were involved in the development process of sustainable mobility plan. The case study proved that, on a participatory basis, sustainable transport planning provides more satisfactory and efficient solutions. Gil et al[5]found that the active and participatory management plans are mandatory in order to fully and truly address the mobility issues. Sebina and Rosenzweig [6]presented the process and results of a local-level South African action research project on introducing foresight methods into a local government planning process. They found positive outcomes in the King Sabata Dalindyebo (KSD) foresight process included a high level of stakeholder engagement and senior management buy-in, supported by positive evaluations by diverse participants. The learning was subsequently incorporated into long-term development plans and proposals such as the ten-year development plan for the region.

Participatory governance mechanisms have been widely promoted in developing countries. They are claimed to bring about several public policy benefits, including increased accountability, higher government responsiveness, and better public services [7]. In this context, Njoh [8] reported that the citizen participation is a viable cost-saving strategy in the development process especially in resource scarce settings. Ngowi and Mselle [9] concluded that all communities need a variety of facilities in order to function well. While some of these facilities need outside input to implement, the majority may be planned, implemented and managed by the beneficiaries in one way or another. Therefore, it is confirmed that community involvement is key to fostering significant and sustainable changes in under-developed communities [10]as well as public inputs will enhance the public's confidence in governments [11, 12] .

Some researchers are intended to identify the barriers and obstacles hindering people involvement in local governments. In this context, Adamson [13] examined the community first program, an area-based regeneration policy, in Wales (UK) to explore the barriers to community

empowerment. He considered three related research projects provide data to inform the discussion of community empowerment and to consider the implications of delivery of the policy for theorizing the relationship between the citizen and the state as mediated through regeneration partnerships. The findings identified major barriers to the achievement of community empowerment including issues of community capacity, institutional capacity, organizational cultures and regulatory frameworks. Waheduzzaman[14] tried to find out the barriers to people's participation for good governance in developing countries. The specific objective was to explore the attitude of stakeholders responsible for ensuring people's engagement with local development programs. His study revealed that one of the major barriers to people's participation in local government affairs is the traditional attitude of related stakeholders. This study thus unlocked the practical knowledge about making people's participation effective in implementing development programs, specifically in the developing countries.

In Palestine, the community participation approach was mainly studied in an ordinary way. Rare studies have focused in participation issues in local governments. However, this study is an extension of some past researches on public participation in the policy processes of municipalities in Palestine. For instance, this research builds upon Sabri and Jaber [15] of managerial performance of Palestinian local authorities. They surveyed the Palestinian municipalities examining whether the contribution of residents in the local government aspects have been increased or not during the rule of the elected councils and mayors of Palestinian municipalities.

Similarly, this study offers extensions to Khalifa [16] research on planning with citizen participation in the Palestinian novelty municipalities. He tried to examine the current environment of community participation in planning in the Palestinian Novelty Municipalities and to Pinpoint the adopted strategies of participatory planning as practiced in the Palestinian novelty municipalities and analyze the effectiveness of such strategies. He concluded that there exists a gap of understanding between the community and the municipalities regarding this issue, since the participatory approach is new and both the municipality and the community are entrenched in the old paradigm. Each party blames the other, as the municipality is concerned that participation will diminish its role while the community thinks of participation as waste of time. Ammar et al [17] investigated the effect of residents' participation in management and maintenance works on residents' satisfaction in new multi-story housing projects in Gaza, Palestine. The result of the analysis showed a significant relation between the level of the residents' participation and their satisfaction. From the previous literature and other research works, it is concluded that community participation in local governments can be classified into five levels as following:

- Information disclosure: (some researchers mentioned the synonym 'Transparency') This level stated that the local government should provide the public with balanced and objective information on municipal services and procedures, plans, challenges, available resources and opportunities for development, and achievements [18-20].
- Public consultation: In which the public's input on matters affecting them is sought, in other word, this level ensures soliciting feedback from the public on the local government plans, budget, performance, municipal service procedures, and activities [21, 22] .
- Participation in the planning process: such as the public's participation in developing strategic development plans and identifying the community's needs, and the participation of specific groups (such as youth) in the designing of a community project [6, 23, 24].
- Participation in the decision making process: meaning that public should be involved in exploring alternatives and deciding on the best appropriate option, which takes into consideration interest and priorities of the local community [25-27].
- Participation in municipal budgeting and financial contributions: participation in the form of financial and in-kind contributions is mostly reliant on initiatives from citizens or institutions. These contributions include: voluntary work, implementation of programs/projects authorized by the local government, and financial contributions [28].
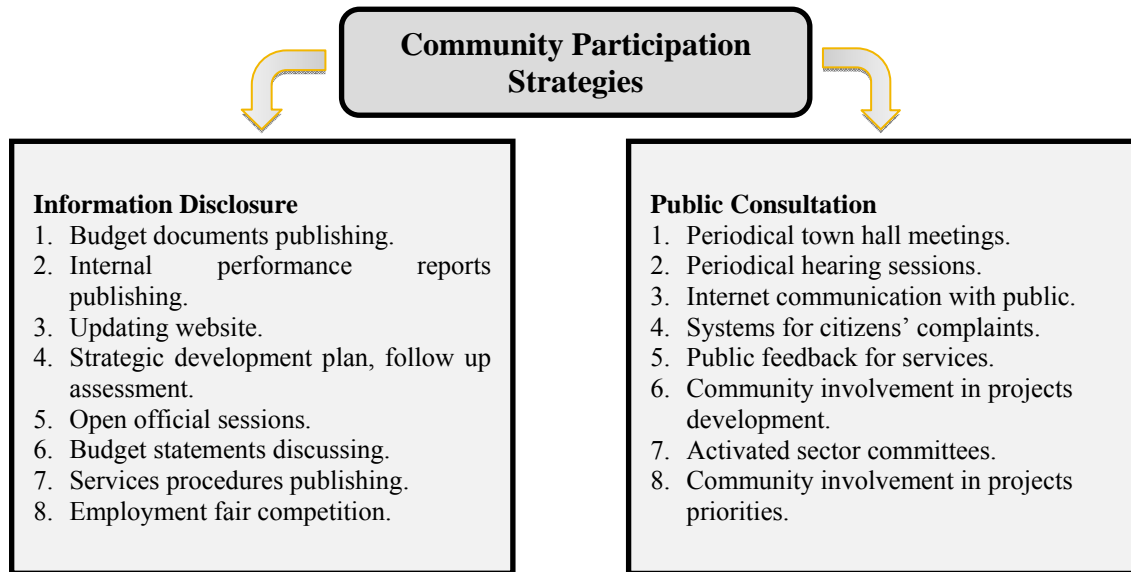
Figure 1: Community participation strategies

Table 1: List of barriers for each level of community participation approach

List of barriers	Group\Level	Ngowi and Mselle[9]	Kastlunger et al [29]	Adamson [13]	Monfardini [4]	Sabri and Jaber[15]	Waheduzzaman [14]	Wallis and Dollery[30]	Cumbers and McMaster [31]	PytlikZillig et al [11]
										Reference
None existence of obligatory community membership.	Community Consultation		√	√						
Weakness of statutory agencies capacity.		√		√			√			
Lack of community members' skills and knowledge.				√		√				
The local governments' organizational structures.			√	√	√			√	√	√
Financially expensive strategies and programs.		√								
Lack of incentives and promotions to the public.		√				√				√
Political and economic issues.					√		√			
Lack of awareness of the value of people's participation.		√		√						
Administrative centralization.				√			√	√	√	
Lack of social capital.			√		√	√	√	√		√
Local governments' organizational structures.	Information Disclosure		√	√	√			√	√	
Lack of community members' skills and knowledge.		√		√	√	√	√			
Political and economic challenges					√	√			√	√
Financially expensive strategies		√								
Awareness of local governments representatives					√	√	√			
Community culture		√		√	√		√			√
Social factors		√			√					√
Difficulty to ensure authenticity and quality of information.					√					
Legal challenges			√		√	√		√		√

This paper considers the first two levels (Information disclosure and public consultation), trying to examine the existing strategies conducted to ensure those two levels and to find out the barriers hindering its implementation. Based on the reviewed literature, a list of barriers hindering the first two levels of community participation was considered as shown in Table 1 above. Figure 1 above illustrates the community participation strategy.

3.0   Methodology

A questionnaire survey was developed to elicit the perceptions of the municipality's officials (top management and/or mayors of the selected sample) of Gaza Strip municipalities regarding community participation practice. The questionnaires seek also to elicit the respondents' opinion regarding major barriers that face municipalities' administration and hindering community participation development. A pilot study was carried out in order to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The pilot study included selected sample of top managerial staff as well as mayors of Gaza Strip municipalities. The comments of the respondents have been taken into consideration; the final research instrument has been formulated in Arabic.

The total number of municipalities in Gaza Strip is 25 municipalities. The number of respondents was 21 which yield 85 percent of the total target sample (table 2).The officials who filled out the questionnaire were either the mayor, or the general manager of the municipality. The questionnaire had been filled out directly through interviews or sent by e-mail. For municipalities that were contacted by e-mail, two letters of reminder were sent after one week in order to assure the response, while others were contacted again by telephone to return the filled questionnaire.

Table 2: List of Gaza Strip municipalities and respondents of the questionnaire

No.	Municipalities of Gaza Strip	Respondents	No.	Municipalities of Gaza Strip	Respondents
1.	Gaza Municipality	√	14.	Rafah Municipality	√
2.	Al-Zahra Municipality	√	15.	Almosadder Municipality	
3.	Wadi-Gaza Municipality		16.	Nuseirat Municipality	√
4.	Beithanoun Municipality	√	17.	Alburaj Municipality	√
5.	Bietlahia Municipality		18.	Alzawaida Municipality	√
6.	Jabalia-Alnazla Municipality	√	19.	Wade-Alsalqa Municipality	√
7.	Deir Al-Balah Municipality	√	20.	OmalnaserMunicipality	√
8.	Almghazi Municipality	√	21.	Absan-Alkabera Municipality	√
9.	Khanyounis Municipality	√	22.	Absan-Aljadida	
10.	Banisuhaila Municipality	√	23.	Khuzaa Municipality	√
11.	Alqrara Municipality	√	24.	AlnaserMunicipality	√
12.	Alfukhare Municipality	√	25.	Almoghraqa Municipality	√
13.	Alshoka Municipality	√			

Validity can be defined as an instrument as a determination of the extent to which the instrument actually reflects the abstract constructs being examined, it refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to be measuring [32]. High validity is the absence of systematic errors in the measuring instrument. When the instrument is valid; it truly reflects the concept it is supposed to measure. Achieving good validity required the care in the research design and sample selection. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured by a scouting sample, which consisted of 11questionnaires, through measuring the correlation coefficients between each paragraph in one field and the whole field. Table 3 shows the correlation coefficient and p-value for each field items. As shown in the table, the P- Values are less than 0.05 or

0.01.The correlation coefficients of this field were significant at α = 0.01 or α = 0.05.Therefore, it could be said that the paragraphs of this field were consistent and valid to be the measure what it was set for.

Table 3: Correlation coefficient and p-value for testing questionnaire validity

No.	Statements	Pearson coefficient	p-value	Sig. level
Information disclosure barriers				
1	The present local governments' organizational structures are not ready for information disclosure to the public.	0.719	0.000	**
2	Public awareness is considered a barrier to information disclosure.	0.608	0.001	**
3	Lack of community members' skills and knowledge are hindering the local government to disclose information.	0.889	0.000	**
4	Local governments are afraid of information disclosure approach due to the political and economic challenges.	0.736	0.000	**
5	Strategies to disclose information are financially expensive to be implemented.	0.666	0.000	**
6	In your opinion, information disclosure is not important for the public and it has a negative effect on the community development.	0.680	0.000	**
7	The community culture is considered a reason for hindering information disclosure approach.	0.692	0.000	**
8	Social factors restrict some information to be published to the public. (For example: it May affect privacy)	0.555	0.004	**
9	Difficulty to ensure authenticity and quality of information is considered an obstacle to information disclosure.	0.530	0.006	**
10	In your opinion, information disclosure will lead to legal challenges.	0.674	0.000	**
Community consultation barriers				
11	None existence of obligatory community membership is an obstacle to community consultation.	0.822	0.000	**
12	Weakness of statutory agencies capacity to work in community-sensitive ways is considered an obstacle.	0.607	0.001	**
13	Lack of community members' skills and knowledge are hindering their involvement in local government consultation. (community culture)	0.575	0.003	**
14	The present local governments' organizational structures are not ready for community consultation approach.	0.513	0.009	**
15	Strategies and programs improving community consultation are financially expensive to be implemented.	0.815	0.000	**
16	Community consultation is weak due to lack of incentives and promotions to the public.	0.461	0.021	*
17	Community consultation is negatively affected by the recent political and economic issues.	0.763	0.000	**
18	The reason behind community consultation weakness is that none of the local government's representatives and local people are aware of the value of people's participation.	0.646	0.000	**
19	One of the factors that hindering public consultation in local governments is the administrative centralization.	0.545	0.005	**
20	Lack of social capital, mainly trust of local people in their leaders, is hindering true people's consultation.	0.427	0.033	*

* *   Correlation coefficient is significant at the α = 0.01
 *   Correlation coefficient is significant at the α = 0.05

Reliability of an instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures the attribute it is supposed to be measuring [33]. The test is repeated to the same sample of people on

two occasions and then compares the scores obtained by computing a reliability coefficient. For the most purposes, reliability coefficient above 0.7 is considered satisfactory. Period of two weeks to a month is recommended between two tests. But due to complicated conditions that the municipalities' mayors are always too busy, so that it was too difficult to ask them to responds to our questionnaire twice within a short period. Therefore, in order to overcome the distribution of the questionnaire twice, the reliability measurement can be achieved by using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and Half Split Method.

Half split method depends on finding Pearson correlation coefficient between the means of odd rank questions and even rank questions of each field of the questionnaire. Then, correcting the Pearson correlation coefficients can be done by using Spearman Brown correlation coefficient of correction. The corrected correlation coefficient (consistency coefficient) is computed according to the following equation: Consistency coefficient = $2r/(r+1)$, where r is the Pearson correlation coefficient. The normal range of corrected correlation coefficient $2r/(r+1)$ is between 0.0 and + 1.0 [33]. As shown in Table 4, the general reliability for all items equal 0.892, and the significant (α) is less than 0.05, so all the corrected correlation coefficients are significance at α = 0.05. It can be said that according to the Half Split method, the dispute causes group are reliable.

Table 4: Split-Half Coefficient method

Section	Person-Correlation	Spearman-Brown Coefficient	P-value
Barriers Hindering Community Participation	0.805	0.892	0.000

Cronbach's coefficient alpha method is used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire between each field and the mean of the whole fields of the questionnaire. The normal range of Cronbach's coefficient alpha value between 0.0 and + 1.0.The higher values reflect a higher degree of internal consistency. The general reliability for all items equal 0.920. This range is considered high; the result ensures the reliability of the questionnaire [Table 5].

Table 5: Reliability Cronbach's Alpha

Section	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Barriers Hindering Community Participation	20	0.920

4.0   Results and discussion

4.1   Community participation strategies used in local governments

4.1.1 Information disclosure (Transparency)

The results shown in Table 6 indicate that all municipalities in the Gaza Strip did not publish the internal performance assessment reports of their employees. Eighty six percent of municipalities did not let the public know about its annual budget documents and discuss the final statements of budget with residents. Eighty one percent of the municipalities did not have official councils meetings that are open for public attendance. Just 33 percent of municipalities have an updating website to publish their activities. Sixty two percent of municipalities have a strategic development plans and follow-up assessment for these plans are published to public. Sixty seven percent of the municipalities appoint their employees according to an advertisement and using competition among applicants and 81 percent of municipalities guide their residents for their services procedures.

Table 6: The existed information disclosure strategies

Information disclosure (Transparency)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Are the internal performance assessment reports published to public?	0	100
Are the major annual budget documents published to public?	14	86
Are the final statements of budget discussed by residents?	14	86
Are official sessions of the council opened to public?	19	81
Is there updating website to publish the local government activities?	33	67
Are the local strategic development annual implementation plans, as well as the results of follow-up assessment for these plans published to public?	62	38
Are the employees appointed according to advertisement using fair competition?	76	24
Are the municipal services procedures, especially, the procedures for the permits and basic services published?	81	19

The findings showed that there is a real need to enhance the concept of open councils meeting to public and local citizens, to publish a summary of the internal performance assessment to public. This issue may implicate encouragement to municipalities' employees, to discuss the final statements of budget with residents, to publish the major budget documents annually, to call citizens for attending the official sessions of municipality council. It is important for every municipality to have an updating website to present its activities to public, this issue is fetal to enhance confidence and support the two-way commitment between local council and the community. This concept are internationally recognized and recommended by various studies such as [3, 18, 20, 29].

4.1.2 Community consultation

The results in Table 7indicated that the available strategy to insure community consultation is the existence of a system for receiving citizens' complaints. The second most available strategy is the hearing sessions conducting periodically. Seventy one percent of municipalities concerned involving their community in selecting projects priorities and the process of projects development. Sixty seven percent of them have an activated advisory and sector committees. On the other side, around two thirds of municipalities did not have an active internet communication with its citizens, 48 percent of municipalities did not consult a feedback from the public on the quality of services and fairness of its distribution, and 43 percent of them did not periodically conduct town hall meetings between the municipality council and citizens. This result agreed in part with Sabri and Jaber [15] study of managerial performance of Palestinian municipalities.

Table 7: The existed community consultation strategies

Community consultation	Yes (%)	No (%)
Is there an internet communication between the municipality and citizens?	38	62
Is the feedback on the quality of services and fairness in distribution consulted from the public?	52	48
Are there periodical town hall meetings between municipality council and citizens?	57	43
Are an advisory and sector committees formed and activate?	67	33
Is the local community involved in projects development process?	71	29
Are the projects priorities are selected through participation of citizens?	71	29
Are there hearing sessions held periodically?	76	24
Is there a system for receiving citizens' complaints?	90	10

Community consultation concept can be implemented by activating the internet communication between municipalities and citizens since it's the easiest and most comfortable way for citizens to communicate the local council. Feedback consulted from the public on the quality of services and fairness in distribution has a great impact on community consultation and satisfaction, and there is a real need for conducting town hall meetings that calling citizens and municipality council for attendance.

4.2   Major barriers of community participation development

4.2.1 Information disclosure

Table 8 illustrated that the major barriers of information disclosure approach that facing the municipalities of Gaza Strip are mainly due to legal challenges, public awareness, lack of community members' skills and knowledge and social factors. Other effective barriers are due to community culture, municipality organizational structure and the difficulty to ensure authenticity and quality of information. Some barriers that have a small degree of effect are due to the political and economic challenges, municipality council's awareness, and financially expensive strategies to be implemented.

Table 8: Major barriers of information disclosure that facing municipalities

Barriers to community participation	Mean (5)	Rank
Legal challenges.	3.84	1
Public awareness	3.68	2
Lack of community members' skills and knowledge	3.56	3
Social factors (For example: it May affect privacy)	3.48	4
Community culture	3.08	5
Local governments' organizational structures	3.04	6
Difficulty to ensure authenticity and quality of information	2.88	7
Political and economic challenges.	2.64	8
Municipality council's awareness.	2.32	9
Financially expensive strategies to be implemented.	2.24	10
All barriers	3.076	

According to the results, legal challenges are the most barrier of information disclosure concept in Gaza municipalities, common reason of this are that municipality plans and orientations may assault the rights of citizens and this make the municipality council afraid of disclosing information to public. This challenge can be dissolved by discussing the municipality plans and orientations with the public before adopting it. The next significant barriers of information disclosure concept are the public awareness, lack of community members' skills and knowledge, social factors and community culture. This can be enhanced by conducting awareness meetings and publications in order to make the community aware of the value of his contribution in community development.

4.2.2 Community consultation

The major barriers of community consultation approach facing the municipalities of Gaza Strip as presented in Table 9 are mainly due to lack of community members' skills and knowledge,

lack of social capital, mainly trust of local people in their leaders, political, economic challenges, community culture and municipality council awareness. Other less effective barriers are due to administrative centralization, non-existence of obligatory community membership and the weakness of statutory agencies capacity to work in community-sensitive ways. Factors such as lack of incentives and promotions to the public, local governments' organizational structures, financially expensive strategies and programs to be implemented have an insignificant effect on community consultation development.

Table 9: Major barriers of community consultation that facing municipalities of Gaza Strip

Barriers	Mean (5)	Rank
Lack of community members' skills and knowledge.	4.16	1
Lack of social capital, mainly trust of local people in their leaders.	3.68	2
Political and economic issues.	3.34	3
Community culture and municipality council awareness.	3.04	4
Administrative centralization.	2.88	5
None existence of obligatory community membership.	2.8	6
Weakness of statutory agencies capacity to work in community-sensitive ways.	2.68	7
Lack of incentives and promotions to the public.	2.44	8
Local governments' organizational structures.	2.04	9
Financially expensive strategies and programs to be implemented.	1.72	10
All barriers	2.87	

The results indicated that the most barrier of community consultation approach is the lack of community members' skills and knowledge and as mentioned in the barriers of information disclosure concept. This barrier can be dissolved by conducting awareness meetings and publications and by conducting training courses that feeds the community members with the required skills to make them ready for community participation. There is a great need to enhance the social capital and community trust on municipality council. This can be achieved by using the open-government concept in managing the local government. Another important issue is the political and economic challenges that the citizens of Gaza Strip are facing, therefore the municipality council is required to consider this issue in the laws and legislations managing the local government.

5.0   Conclusion and recommendations

This study concluded that there is a weak transparency (information disclosure) situation and community consultation in the Gaza Strip municipalities. This fact is true due to the lack of trust and confidentiality between citizens and municipality councils since as stated in the results. The internal performance assessment reports and major annual budget documents are not published to public, the absence of community in the final statements of budget discussion. Local municipalities did not use internet for creating a two way communications with the citizens, and the weak consideration of public feedback on the quality of services and fairness in distribution. It may be concluded that the municipalities of Gaza Strip face two groups of community participation barriers.

The first group of barriers hindering information disclosure approach was: the major barriers are due to legal challenges, public awareness, lack of community members' skills and

knowledge and social factors. Other barriers were due to community culture, municipality organizational structure and the difficulty to ensure authenticity and quality of information. Less effective barriers are due to the political and economic challenges, municipality council's awareness, and financially expensive strategies to be implemented.

The second group of barriers hindering community consultation approach was: the major barriers are mainly due to lack of community members' skills and knowledge, lack of social capital and trust of local people in their leaders, political, economic challenges, community culture and municipality council awareness. Other less effective barriers are due to administrative centralization, non-existence of obligatory community membership and the weakness of statutory agencies capacity to work in community-sensitive ways. Factors such as lack of incentives and promotions to the public, local governments' organizational structures, financially expensive strategies and programs to be implemented have an insignificant effect on community consultation development.

Based on the findings of this study it is recommended:
- Municipality councils meetings should be open to the public; this implicates community confidence and trust to the local councils.
- Each municipality should establish an updated website through which they can inform, interact with the public, and present its services and activities.
- Municipalities should discuss its plans and orientations with the public before adopting it in order to avoid legal challenges created between citizens and local governments. This in turn will stimulate the information disclosure approach and enhance confidentiality between citizens and municipality councils.
- The official budget should be published inside the municipality and to the public.
- It is recommended to apply training courses, awareness meetings and publications for citizens to encourage their participation in the municipal activities since the lack of public knowledge and skills is a common barrier for both information disclosure and community consultation approaches. Such courses should feed the community by the right and effective methods to express their opinions and ideas about municipality services and activities.
- Establishing a special division in each municipality that can facilitate the public participation process, in order to guide local government representatives and provide them with knowledge on how to promote public participation.
- It is essential for each municipality to ensure that technical and financial resources needed for community participation processes are in place.

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