This study is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this study are the sole responsibility of Beyond Group and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.
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I. INTRODUCTION

This report details the findings from the research that was conducted by Beyond Group between April and June 2019 in Lebanon; since then, the country has witnessed dramatic changes on the level of the economy and the political scene. Following an increase in taxes in October 2019, the Lebanese people started revolting against the sectarian power-sharing system that has led the country to chaos. Since the start of the revolution on October 17, 2019 there have been drastic changes in the country: Higher unemployment rates, increase in poverty rates, currency exchange challenges and fluctuations, and a general and overwhelming disbelief and trust in the government — including local governments. As such, the research team would like to highlight that the findings in this report support what is happening around the country and highlight key perceptions and expectations from local governments that still apply in our context today.

As the closest formal form of government to Lebanese citizens, municipalities play a major role in the country’s security, service delivery, and socioeconomic development. They also impact how citizens perceive their government and their own well-being. However, various political, sectarian, and familial dynamics influence how municipal councils are elected and then how they function throughout their 6-year term. Municipalities are heavily influenced by national dynamics yet each one still enjoys its own autonomy and must be responsive to local citizen needs and issues. This makes the municipal scene an interesting area of study to better understand how citizens interact with public authorities and how the authorities respond to citizen issues.

In March 2019, Counterpart International issued a request for quotations (RFQ) to conduct a qualitative assessment of municipal / community engagement in Lebanon to provide USAID and its implementing partners with insights into the pressing challenges and opportunities at the nexus of civil society and local governance in the Lebanese Context. The objective of the research was to gain greater strategic insight about the methods, motivations, and outcomes of citizen and government engagement at the municipal level in Lebanon. Additionally, we aimed to develop research-informed recommendations for USAID and other donors working on current and future local development and subnational governance strengthening programs.

Beyond Group SAL, in partnership with Counterpart International, conducted the research during the months of June, July and August 2019, and focused its research activities on identifying entry points for civil society to advance its contribution to local development through the engagement with constituencies and municipalities, and on evaluating and assessing the opportunities and challenges to municipal community engagement efforts.

A. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The focus of the research was to:

1. Generate evidence on how municipal council engagement efforts toward citizens have or have not contributed to more transparent, responsible, and accountable local government
2. Identify opportunities for increased and improved local development through expanded municipal outreach and civil society engagement

Both focus areas were tackled and researched through the following 6 main themes (detailed in the methodology section):

B. PROJECT PARTNERS

COUNTERPART INTERNATIONAL is a US-based global development organization that has worked in 75 countries during our 55-year existence, administering nearly 500 USG-funded programs valued at more than $800 million. From 2009 – 2016, Counterpart administered USAID’s Global Civil Society Strengthening Leader with Associates (GCSS-LWA) award. As USAID’s primary civil society strengthening partner, Counterpart managed a consortium of ten partners and implemented 36 associate programs valued at approximately $350 million in over 60 countries. Through the GCSS-LWA, Counterpart and our partner Management Systems International (MSI) were awarded the BALADI CAP program. Due to its long history in country, MSI assumed an in-country technical implementation role. The
program, which started in 2013, had three primary components: Capacity Building Component (CBC), Civic Engagement Initiative (CEI), and the Civic Engagement for Democratic Governance (CEDG) Component. The research, analysis, and reporting conducted through this assignment relates directly to the CEDG component and seeks to provide project partners with strategic insight, learning and recommendations through the completion of BALADI CAP and on future programs of a similar nature.

**BEYOND GROUP** is a mission-driven consulting firm specializing in policy research, public management, capacity development and partnership building. Beyond Group is renowned for its ability to bridge global knowledge with the Arab context, its partnership mindset, and its experiential methodologies. As part of our Policy Research service, Beyond Group undertakes interdisciplinary policy research using frameworks and methodologies tailored for each context and initiative to support policy makers and international agencies in finding viable, innovative and evidence-based solutions to socio-economic problems, and the challenges of governance and development. Using qualitative and quantitative research tools, we conduct policy analysis and evaluation, develop policy solutions, and implement perception studies and impact assessments. Through our Partnership Building services, Beyond Group offers support to design participatory and innovative strategies and tactics to engage stakeholders, be it governments, public institutions, civil society organizations, private sector corporations and communities. Through this engagement we help build partnerships with shared values and purpose, driven by service to lead political, policy and institutional transformations throughout the MENA region.
II. METHODOLOGY

The overall objective of this study was to assess the impact/effectiveness of the systems and activities that municipal council members used to engage and inform citizens in their jurisdictions (i.e. municipal outreach). We examined how they impacted transparency, responsiveness to citizen issues, and accountability for their governing and public service delivery responsibilities under the law. We also looked for opportunities to improve local development through expanded municipal outreach and civil society engagement. To that end, Beyond Group conducted an in-depth qualitative study of municipal-community engagement in Lebanon by selecting a nationwide sample of municipalities: a) Mount Lebanon, b) North Lebanon, c) the Beqaa (West, Central, and East), and d) South Lebanon and Nabatiyeh.

A. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Understand citizens’ perceptions and expectations of the municipal council for responding to the community’s needs and priorities, advancing local development and ensuring transparency, responsiveness and accountability.
- Understand citizens’ and municipal council leadership’s opinions on the role, impact and importance of civil society actors in their respective communities.
- Identify key determinants influencing citizen participation and engagement in local decision making and/or civil society.
- Identify recommendations and deduce lessons learned and strategic insights to increase and improve local development through expanded municipal outreach and civil society engagement.

B. SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

The research kicked-off with a plan to conduct 28 focus group discussions (FGDs) targeting selected villages across the country. These would be supplemented by 15 to 20 interviews of key “influencers” defined as formal or informal leaders within or that influence the municipality. In our sampling, influencers included:

- MAYORS
- PRESIDENTS OF UNIONS OF MUNICIPALITIES
- PRESIDENTS OF MUNICIPAL COMMITTEES
- NATIONAL NGOs
- NATIONAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS
- KEY CIVIC ACTIVISTS WITHIN COMMUNITIES

C. SELECTION OF MUNICIPALITIES

Lebanon was divided into 8 geographic clusters according to current governorate divisions (North Lebanon, Akkar, South Lebanon, Nabatiyeh, Mid & West Beqaa, Northern Beqaa, Northern Mount Lebanon and Southern Mount Lebanon). The municipalities were selected based on the following criteria:

- MUNICIPALITY SIZE: the sample included small (between 9 and 12 members in the board of municipality) and medium-size (between 15 and 18 members in the board of municipality) municipalities, while larger cities were excluded.
- REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION: research was to cover all the regions and governorates in Lebanon and their different dynamics.
- POPULATION DIVERSITY: the sample municipalities were to include some with homogeneous and others with heterogeneous demographics (religions, ethnicity, economic status, refugee populations, and political power).
D. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Based on a co-design session with national and international actors actively engaged in municipal strengthening and community engagement programs, Beyond Group then undertook a detailed desk review and conducted original research between June-August 2019. The research relied primarily on qualitative data collection tools: Focus Group Discussions and Key informant interviews. In addition to the qualitative data collection tools, the research team developed a short survey for focus group participants. A total of 28 focus group discussions were planned. One planned focus group did not have enough attendees, so it was canceled – resulting in a total of 27 focus group discussions. A total of 232 individuals participated in the research, either in focus groups or KIs. (The full list of selected villages and focus groups conducted can be found in Annex A, and the data collection tools in Annex B).

1. 3 FGDs were conducted in each cluster,
   - One with citizens aged between 21 – 35 years old.
   - One with citizens aged between of 35 – 60 years old.
   - One with active leaders or influencers (Elected Mokhtars, civic activists, previous or current municipal council members, family or individual business leaders, and heads of engagement committees, among others).
2. In addition to the 23 FGDs referenced above (16 with citizens and 8 with leaders / influencers), four additional focus groups were conducted with civil society organizations (South, North, Mount Lebanon, and Beqaa) yielding a total of 27 conducted focus groups.
3. The full list of municipalities in each cluster was compiled.
4. Two to three villages from each cluster were selected to be within the sample for selecting the above-mentioned participants (21 to 35 years of age, 35 to 60 years of age and influencers).

E. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The limitations and delimitations of this study can be divided among five primary factors:

- **Political Timing.** The study coincided with the three-year midterm in the mandate of the current municipal councils in Lebanon, allowing participants to discuss the current councils after years into their term. However, several villages were influenced by local dynamics related to the midterm. Per the Lebanese municipal code, Chapter 1 of the Executive Power, Article 21 of Law number 97/665, the council can either vote to renew its trust in the mayor or elect another mayor after three years. In some instances, councils use this practice as an opportunity to change leadership through informal power sharing deals between families and political groups. Several of the selected villages were influenced by this dynamic and replaced in the sample after changes in their council leadership may have affected the results and participants' perceptions.

- **Security.** The study also coincided with several political and security events that influenced the ease of transportation between regions and led to some delays in data collection.

- **National Mood.** The general sense of concern about the current economic situation and apathy and distrust for the political context influenced people’s willingness to participate and share their insights and feedback. This was exacerbated because of study took place during the summer season, when people have several other commitments and family occasions.

- **In-Person Method.** The scope of challenges citizens face when interacting with government (national or local) is immense, and participants thus tended to focus on sharing the challenges rather than suggesting solutions and recommendations.

- **Sample Size.** Because we used a qualitative method that relied on focus groups, we were only able to survey a small percentage of total municipalities and an even smaller percentage of citizens. The resources and time frame available

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7 The survey that was developed for this purpose was not mandatory and as such was filled by participants who voluntarily chose to participate. Accordingly, the findings from the survey (quantitative data) cannot be generalized and are not representative of the entire population in Lebanon. The findings do however complement and validate some key findings from the qualitative data.
for the study made going broader challenging. That being said, while our sample size is not representative, we believe that it is reflective of issues that the majority of municipalities face.

III. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

A. MUNICIPALITY DEFINITION AND MANDATE

After the civil war, Lebanon established a power sharing system among the different political parties which were divided by religion and sect so that the balance of power was not held by one party over another. Although the system does not specify in writing the sects of the heads of municipalities and seats distribution within councils (as it does for MPs for example), it does informally influence the composition of the municipal councils. The existing norm is that the headship of the municipality is granted to the religious sect that has the most registered voters in the municipality or city. Note, that in Lebanon you vote in the municipality you are from, not in the municipality where you currently reside; if the electoral law were to change thus allowing residents of a certain commune to elect the municipal board, then it would defy the norms of power-sharing that are specific to every commune and its history. For example, in a village in Akkar, all the families have an informal agreement that the president of the municipality should be a Christian Maronite, and the board members should be majority Christian Orthodox. As long as the national system relies on sectarian power-sharing, local governments will not be able to break from this system of dividing power based on the sect.

Municipalities in Lebanon are local bodies with administrative and fiscal autonomy. Article 1 of the Municipal Law defined a municipality as a local administration exercising, within the geographical scope, the powers entrusted thereto by the law. They are endowed with tasks that have a public character or utility within their area and they are entrusted to establish, manage, and help in the implementation of all projects in their jurisdiction. The following can be inferred about the definition and roles of municipalities:

- A municipality is a local administration whose work and powers are limited to a certain geographical area.
- A municipality is an elected administration, hence a form of administrative decentralization rather than a centrally appointed administration.
- A municipality has powers provided for by the law. The diversity of these establishes the municipality as a regional government exercising its authority within the limitations of the law.
- A municipality has legal personality and is administratively and financially autonomous.
- A municipality is an autonomous local administration operating under the central government’s supervision and control.
- Any community with more than 300 residents and over 10,000 pounds of income (LBP) can form a municipality.

B. THE MUNICIPAL CODE

A municipality is governed by Legislative Decree No. 118 of 30 June 1977, which has been amended several times, the last time being in 1997. Article 1 of this law states that “the municipality is a local authority exercising, within the limits of its territory, the powers conferred on it by law”. “The municipality has a legal personality, financial autonomy and the power of self-management of local interests”. The powers granted to municipalities reflect the level of application of administrative decentralization. The scope of municipal authority and responsibility includes public health, urban planning (including permits and licenses), construction, public services, safety and security, road building and repair, and garbage disposal among others. Their work encompasses the social, security, and economic sectors. The municipality has decision-making power, held by its council and executive power held by its president. The municipal council controls the executive authority and oversees the smooth running of the work within the municipality.

Its members, whose number can range between 8 and 24 (like Beirut), depending on the number of registered voters (not residents), are elected by direct universal suffrage and by majority vote. The city council’s term is six years and

2 Citizen and Municipality Handbook, Nahnou 2018
3 The Lebanese Municipal Law
after its first meeting, the council elects from among its members its president and its vice-president. The fact that the head of the municipality is not directly elected by the people puts this highly influential position in the hands of the council members who are influenced by a myriad of familial, sectarian and political factors and decreases his/her accountability to the mass.

A Municipality’s main source of revenue is the money transferred by the national government from the Independent Municipal Fund which is funded by a number of taxes on cellular phone calls, landlines, water, and electricity. The allocated amounts are calculated based on the number of registered residents in the municipality; in other words, if there is a commune with 3000 residents, but has 1000 registered voters (who are registered in that commune) then the municipality receives financial support from the government for 1000 registered voters. The national government transfers may be supplemented by municipal-level tax and fee collection and other sources including the yearly direct tax collected from citizens under the title of (cleaning and maintenance services) and its amount is fixed to be equal to 7.5% of the monthly rental value of the property.

The municipality also takes fees from the building permits under its jurisdiction. However, in Lebanon today, the percentage of municipal budgets that come from local tax and fee collection is only 6% (compared to 24% in France, and 56% in Finland)\(^5\). These numbers are indicative of both the lack of local administrative innovation, lack of municipal autonomy from the national government but most importantly it reflects people’s lack of trust in their local governments (as they refrain from paying taxes). The reality is a lot more complex than this, as there are different reasons why municipalities often face financial challenges, among which: Tax collection systems are inefficient, favoritism within the community which creates discrimination between all residents leading to some refraining from paying due taxes that others don’t, lack of strategic plans for the municipalities which makes residents feel less trusting of their money going into investments for the community, etc.

C. THE LEBANESE CONTEXT

Lebanon has 8 governorates, 16 qadas, 51 municipal unions, 1,550\(^6\) villages and 1108\(^7\) municipalities. Compared to other countries, Lebanon has a high number of municipalities, as according to the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), Finland, a country with a surface area of almost 340,000 km\(^2\) has 336 municipalities whereas Lebanon has 1,108 for a surface area of less than 11,000 km\(^2\). While Lebanon is one national country, it does not however escape the history of regional divisions as all institutions and governmental pillars in Lebanon today reflect the same power-sharing equation that is used on the national level. The Lebanese power-sharing structure relies heavily on sectarian division and is mirrored across institutions, organizations, municipalities, and communities throughout the country.

With a draft decentralization law still pending final adoption by the Lebanese government, local municipal councils are still constrained by the limited freedom to make decisions on the local level. Today, municipalities are still considered an executive body.

In 2012, only 43% of the municipalities in Lebanon had an administrative structure, 400 municipalities had only one employee and 75% lacked the financial means to hire new employees.\(^6\) The last municipal elections took place in May 2016, and despite the importance of these elections, the turnout was low. Lebanon had 3,624,885 registered voters (51% were women) but less than 1.8 million persons voted (48.54%). There were also considerable turnout gaps among the different geographies with Beirut voting as low as 20.1%, Zahle 41.6%, Saida 44.5%, Tripoli 25.8% and Baalbek 44%\(^9\).\(^10\)

Additionally, citizens lack knowledge, skills, and experience to engage in local governance. The government and international organizations have been increasingly supporting local council capacity development with more and more projects aiming at supporting local governments in resolving conflict and working on development projects, however, the question of whether there can be robust citizen engagement if political parties and sectarian groups almost wholly control municipalities through their majority on the councils, remains. Can there be real change and growth when candidates who run, are chosen based on their social and financial wealth, as opposed to their set of skills willingness to serve the public? How can we enable local communities to engage in their local municipalities with the aim of promoting prosperity, growth and opportunities?

A desk review of existing development projects turned up several initiatives to increase citizen-engagement on the municipal level. Donors and international organizations have adopted the model of forming municipal-community

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\(^7\) Central Administration of Statistics, Lebanon
\(^8\) About Administrative Decentralization in Lebanon, LCPS, 2015.
\(^9\) Monthly magazine, ‘The results of municipal elections Lebanon’ 2016
\(^10\) Lebanese Electoral Assistance Program, LEAP, 2016
committees that aim at nurturing and growing the conversation between both groups with the hope of reducing local tensions and increasing social stability. These projects have reached similar conclusions: Citizen engagement in municipal affairs can increase transparency, reduce corruption, and promote growth.

Yet, there are still no projects being implemented that tackle community engagement as an objective and not as a byproduct. As one participant (expert in public management) in this study explained: “The current ongoing projects have not been helpful in creating a sustained community engagement process because the engagement techniques and activities are promoted as a tool to reduce conflict or to ensure inclusivity, as opposed to them being promoted as a healthy ‘governance model where all citizens are informed, can participate and are consulted about local matters.” As such, the following report seeks to highlight the urgent need to tackle root causes from all levels (cultural, political and structural) in order ensure long-term solutions and the adoption of inclusion values on the local level.

D. DEFINITION OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Based on a review of different definitions of municipal-community engagement, (refer to Annex C) the research team adopted the following definition of municipal citizen engagement for this study:

Municipal citizen engagement is the process of actively involving community members in the decision making or implementation of policy options for local governance affairs. It empowers citizens through inclusive dialogue and other forms of interaction and enables them to influence the policy outcomes of issues that have impact on their lives.

The definition places emphasis on the following:

- **Active involvement**: This implies that citizens are not passive observers but rather partners and collaborators with their local authorities.
- **Decision-making**: This implies a substantive role for citizens to influence the actions of their local authorities and not only mere consultation.
- **Empowerment**: This suggests that any engagement which the objective of empowering citizens does not have, lacks legitimacy and does not meaningfully contribute to community development and good governance on the longer run.
- **Two-way dialogue**: This suggests that engagement is a two-way interaction between citizens and their local authorities where citizens can not only voice their views and opinions on the issues that affect them but also provide feedback that their local authorities take into serious consideration.
- **Inclusiveness**: The engagement efforts need to be inclusive and reach out to all different groups irrespective of their political affiliation, sect, family, gender and age.
IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The learning activity’s conceptual framework was developed to provide current analysis and inform future decisions in the area of citizen / government engagement at the municipal level. We used multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data to ensure a comprehensive and intersectional approach to our analysis and recommendations for change. The conceptual framework we used builds on existing literature that is a strong proponent of in-depth analysis of findings while cross-checking it with the different elements of a society (political, cultural, social, economic, political, religious, etc.). This school of analysis lobbies for reaching a comprehensive analysis by using Systems Analysis tools that allow researchers to link factors to one another and analyze their relationship to one another (how they influence each other), to better understand how these factors interact together. These tools are used with the aim of developing a set of recommendations that tackle root causes of problems and challenges.

With relevance to this research, the following conceptual framework was developed to read, document, and analyze findings:

CULTURAL

refers to the set of norms, values, perceptions and cultural beliefs in the community (stakeholders and citizens), that either promote or hinder citizen engagement in municipal affairs

STRUCTURAL

refers to the set of mechanisms, tools, structures, regulatory frameworks and legal material that either exist, are missing, or are structurally challenging within the Lebanese context; and that ultimately impact citizen’s engagement in municipal affairs

POLITICAL

Within the context of this research, ‘Political’ refers to the political dynamics between key stakeholders within a community (religious leaders, political parties, families, etc.) that influence and impact citizen engagement in municipal affairs

As such, the findings and recommendations were categorized under the following set of categories, and were analyzed across all three levels:

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V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS MUNICIPAL RESPONSIVENESS TO LOCAL NEEDS

This first section explores the current relationship dynamics between citizens and municipalities before focusing on engagement initiatives in the coming sections. The section includes findings on the reported level of general perceptions and attitudes of the citizens towards the municipality and vice-versa. It also reflects observations on the level of people’s understanding of the role of the municipality, their responsibilities towards it, their expectations from it and the municipality’s understanding of the role of citizens. Finally, it includes a review of the citizens’ level of satisfaction with municipal services and how they respond when they are not satisfied. The section is structured as follows:

A. Citizen Perceptions of the Municipalities
B. Expectations, Roles and Responsibilities of Citizens and Municipalities
C. Citizen Satisfaction with current services (Trust, Belief, Support, Reactions)

A. CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF THE MUNICIPALITY

Our research showed that citizen perceptions towards municipal authorities reflect what public polls show as the general perception towards public sector in Lebanon: skepticism, clientelism, and little belief in the power to hold local authorities accountable. The most obvious trend is that – in exchange for their vote - citizens expect direct services from the municipality and in particular, from the head of municipality. Those services primarily include specific municipal infrastructure related services but may also include individualized services from figures in authority.

Most participants expressed being suspicious of honest municipal efforts and less trustworthy of their intention to serve the community. This leads to an increase in rumors and speculation, which in turn demotivates council members and citizens from wanting to work to achieve change and champion local development efforts. Overall, most viewed the municipality as the individual council members and the mayor (i.e. personalities) rather than as an institution of local government. This reduces the likelihood of systemic engagement with the municipality and a lower likelihood of holding the municipal council accountable for public goods and services.

Many respondents noted that the general apathy of citizens to hold the municipality accountable or to engage in its activities was rooted in the country’s municipal election structure. The way in which elections are administered in the municipality – including how competitive they are and how divided the community is – shape people’s perception toward the municipality and determine who will or will not engage. The high political nature of the battle in most cities and the mix of family and political dynamics that play a major role in most municipalities was noted as a factor that demotivates people from running for the council, engaging with elected members, and even from voting in local elections.

As one participant suggested: The political parties choose for us, giving us the ‘illusion of choice’. Research participants explained that the council members and the mayor have a chance to change constituent attitudes and garner their involvement and support – based on how they reconcile and communicate with the opposition candidates and voters following the election. Unfortunately, this is a skill most mayors and council members lack.

CULTURAL OBSERVATIONS

Participants explained that voting in Lebanon is more akin to a transaction than to an exercise of rights. Individuals often vote along party or confessional lines. In homogeneous areas, they vote for the person who has the biggest national political party support, the biggest financial influence, and best connections. Participants explained that they do so with the hope of having someone in office who supports the group they belong to as well as those they think can “return the favor” by bringing more jobs or responding to their individual needs. People’s perception towards the municipality is often directly
correlated to whether their candidate won in the municipal elections.

People perceive the municipality as an institution to be weak, and continuously find excuses for its inability to fulfill the village needs, they blame the lack of resources, outside political interference, and lack of capacity of its members among others. At the same time, they perceive the mayor as more powerful since he usually has “connections”.

Municipalities in rural and disadvantaged areas act more as a link between the needs of the dominant political party in said area, and the duties mandated to them by the government. From a cultural perspective, this stems from the clientelist-like relationship between citizens and the government at large, and the historic accumulation of perceptions that the government is here to do ‘favors’ as opposed to managing the every-day-life of citizens. This is more prevalent in villages as compared to bigger cities.

There is a general perception that municipal boards should be primarily representative of families, and/or political parties, and/or sectarian groups, as opposed to being based on merit and qualifications needed in the village.

The absence of long-term plans and lack of access to municipal laws and decisions complicates perceptions towards the municipality, as people then judge based on characters and rumors and not based on data. This increases public frustration and influences attitudes towards the municipalities.

STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS

The concentration of executive power within the hands of the mayor has led citizens to believe that this position makes all the significant decisions for the municipality. This is demotivating to council members who said that they consider their role is to represent the interests and voice of their political party or family rather than contributing positively to the municipal development plan or other engage in other political issues.

Most municipalities have week internal structures in terms of decision making, transparency and engagement inside the council itself, which influences engagement efforts with the broader community and thus perceptions towards the municipality.

One common perception was that if you are elected to the municipal council or have a close friend or relative elected to the council, that will open the doors for personal gain in the form of easier access to permits, repairs on your street, better access to services as well as rent seeking from others.

Through our research, we asked several close-ended questions about how and why people visited the municipalities.

Most citizens visited the municipality to attend a meeting (70%) or participate in an activity (75%). Only 45% went to file a complaint. We also saw significant differences in how young and older citizens engage the municipality.
POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS

Political parties, religious figures or groups, sectarian groups, and/or other exclusive groups take their internal political battles to municipal elections. This allows citizens to vote for those who they believe can bring prosperity to the community. The challenge however is that with the lack of knowledge about the role of municipalities and the expectations from them, citizens become more vulnerable to political party (i.e. identity or other) influence, which eventually leads them to recreating the same exclusion that they are fighting against in their groups.

The more political parties have power (through municipal councils) on the local level, the less likely it is that other ‘non-aligned’ citizens run or participate, which gravely enlarges the (already present) separation between local governance and a normal citizen. This creates an illusion and ultimately a reality that local governance positions are kept for those who can pledge allegiance to a specific political party instead of to the general public.

Political parties and/or religious leaders play a big role in conflict resolution, and service provision which influences the perception about the authority of the municipality and its ability to solve local issues. With high levels of political party interference, people perceive the municipality as weak and start focusing their requests and demands to the party, further weakening the municipality’s authority.

Most existing engagement efforts were driven by donors or by mayors who used to live outside Lebanon and were exposed to similar experiences.

The municipality does not exist as a structure. It is the people who are in it that we react to.

FGD Participant - Mt. Lebanon

B. EXPECTATIONS, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS AND MUNICIPALITIES

Citizen expectations of the municipalities as well as their understanding of roles and responsibilities between municipalities and citizens stem from largely negative perceptions and attitudes towards the municipality.

It was widely observed among most participants that there is no clarity on the actual role of the municipality. Participants mainly shared expectations related to service provision and infrastructure but revealed a high degree of misunderstanding about the jurisdictions and capacity of municipalities and their role in local development versus other government entities. This further increases citizens’ expectations from the mayor as the key figure and the municipality in general to solve their personal needs and requests, and greatly undermines and threatens a municipal council’s ability to work on projects that benefit the entire community.

Additionally, the absence of proper capacity building for elected members creates a lot of uncertainty on the exact distribution of roles and responsibilities inside councils, which has negative implications for the community. To that end, most citizens and most elected members are misinformed about the roles and responsibilities of both parties in local government, which ends up leaving a lot of space for speculation, corruption, rumors, conflict and disunity of municipal efforts. With the lack of clarity on the role and responsibilities of the municipality, citizens find themselves unable to find innovative ways to participate in municipal affairs, especially if they feel their initiative will go unrecognized.

We found minimal differences between regions as the perceptions towards the municipalities were similar across governorates, but there was a significant difference between villages and cities, and between influencers and general citizens, and certainly between non-registered residents of the village versus original citizens. The relational dynamics in villages between families and relatives decrease the formal lines and increase expectations from the municipalities, while there is more structure in bigger cities. As expected, influencers have clearer and more realistic expectations from the municipality as compared to regular citizens and non-registered residents have lower expectations as they do not vote in the same area. The latter forms a major challenge as the percentage of non-

We know they do not decide. the political party does. Even the mayor has no voice so why complain to him?

FGD Participant - Akkar

From the total number of individuals who indicated that they often visit the municipality, 70% are stakeholders and 30% are citizens.

31% of the total number of citizens who participated in the survey indicated that they never visited the municipality, compared to 10% who indicated that they visited the municipality over a year ago.

10% of the citizens aged between 21 and 35, compared with 25% of those aged over 35, indicated that they often visit the municipality.
registered residents is high in villages with strategic locations and a wide portion of the population is left out of proper interaction with the local councils.

Despite the clear challenges noted in the area of citizens’ expectations from the municipality, the research, and through the various reactions of the citizens, stakeholders, activists and experts met, validated the importance of municipalities as the unit where you can foster better governance and influence how people perceive the public sector. It is after all the unit which is closest to people and that interacts with the highest number of citizens daily. As one governance expert framed it: “Get it right there and you enhance the perception and the image of the public sector… get it wrong there and you influence negatively and increase clientelism”. A healthier pattern of citizen and government relationship can spread from working with municipalities, on the level of people and government interaction.

On the flip side concerning municipalities’ expectations of the people and their responsibilities, there was a general complaint from municipal leaders, municipal members and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) about the low levels of engagement of citizens when opportunities were created. Plenty of examples across the country were shared about empty townhall meetings, citizens not signing up for committees or people not asking questions when budgets were shared. While an initial look at this does reflect a sense of apathy and absence of willingness to collaborate, a deeper dive shows that the invitation to engage was sporadic and was merely an attempt to share information rather than influence plans, explaining why people are not that enthusiastic to engage. Further sections of the research deal with this aspect in more detail.

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL**

There is a general misunderstanding and lack of clarity about the role of the municipality and the council itself. Most respondents reported that the role of the municipality is administrative and managerial. Additionally, residents most commonly felt that they should contact the mayor directly whenever they have a request because they feel that no one else in the municipality has the same power. This is even more evident in rural areas and villages.

Whenever the municipality organizes a community event, or secures funds for a project, service, or event, residents felt
appreciative rather than believing that these types of activities are the minimum of what the municipal councils should provide to the citizens.

Citizens generally feel that municipal councils lack freedom of choice and the ability to provide case-by-case solutions to problems, mainly because of power of political parties (and/or other groups such as families and religious institutions) to rule or manage through a municipal committee.

Participants responses showed that there is a majority of “traditional citizens” who expect services only from the municipality and then a minority who understand the full role and potential of a municipality and want to have a plan in place and are excited to engage more than others. Further probing revealed that the minority group have been exposed to more advanced governance forms through living outside Lebanon or having taken part in awareness-raising programs and/or trainings.

It was evident that people’s perceptions and expectations are highly influenced by their current needs, as there was always a group of participants that want their needs and priorities met, and all their perspective is built on meeting those urgent and pressing needs (can range from jobs to better roads to having access to water). This group is unlikely to engage in any form before meeting their basic needs.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL
Clear operational information about the municipal councils such as working hours, mandate, availability and existing services are not well disseminated to all residents in the community. In particular, women, youth, non-registered residents and other hard to reach populations have the least access to this information. Additionally, such information is not detailed and provided uniformly to all municipalities across the country and are subject to mayor and council member decisions and preferences.

Municipal candidates are generally not well-informed about the Municipal Code, and once elected, they are not prepared or well informed about the expectations both from citizens and the larger public administration about their role at the municipality.

The lack of a central planning structure, like a ministry of planning, adversely influences local plans and therefore engagement between citizens and among neighboring municipalities is lower than it should be.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL
The more the municipal council is influenced by political parties, family, and business interests - the less people have trust in the decisions that are taken. When people lack trust in their local government, then they will be less willing to abide by their responsibilities as citizens (pay taxes, vote based on merit and agendas, participate activities, etc.).

In several areas, citizen groups expressed fear of complaining or opposing municipal leaders. Probing further revealed that these groups have a fear of retaliation from the powerful party in the community (in the form of deprivation from services, jobs, pressure, etc.).
C. CITIZEN SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT SERVICES

When looking at citizen satisfaction, the research team included three areas: (1) the ability to file complaints, (2) government acknowledgement of complaint and (3) provision of response or suggestion to resolving a complaint. Interestingly, there was an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction from current municipal services and level of effort exerted by the municipalities across the country. Rather than solutions, municipalities predominantly provided excuses and justifications.

There is a general perception that municipal council members are volunteers and therefore cannot (and should not) be held accountable for example. Similarly, participants explained that the mayor is often busy and not reachable and cannot be blamed for not answering complaints. While some participants did explain that they have had challenging experiences with complaints before, in terms of clarity of procedures or fear of political and familial retaliation, but the majority do not actually try to complain.

Additionally, there was a general lack of awareness about the Lebanese government hierarchy and the accountability structures that can influence municipalities. There was a noticeable level of apathy among participants who shared experiences about complaints that did not lead to any change in other villages especially due to political interference to protect mayors. At the same time, participants explained that they worry that complaints will be taken personally especially in village contexts where people connect closely, highlighting a big cultural barrier to accountability. It was also found that at a structural level, there are no complaint-processes that allow citizens to discuss their needs and issues with municipal issues, nor are there guarantees of safety and anonymity for complaint-holders.

Similarly, just like with complaints, there are no suggestions box, or mechanisms/processes that also allow citizens to share opinions or ideas for future events, activities and/or projects. When citizens are not consulted, they feel less informed and less responsible for matters happening in their area, which in turn makes them feel less supportive of ongoing projects; which eventually leads to decreased if not abolished participation and trust.

Finally, about the municipal permits and direct quick services that do not require big resources, there was a general sense of satisfaction that most municipalities do provide paperwork and do fulfill their responsibilities in that regard.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL

While most participants were not satisfied with the services provided by the municipality, most however, were ready to explain and justify why the services did not meet their expectations (i.e. the mayor cannot decide; it is not the municipal council’s fault; the political party is very imposing; the municipal members are volunteers, etc.). Citizens felt they could not trust that complaints can be resolved. It was observed that citizens that reside in a community managed by a municipal council where there is a sectarian or political party representation, have less trust in the independent decision-making process within the council. Similarly, residents of such communities were the least likely to be informed about community engagement needs and responsibilities of the municipality.

The best thing we can do is to wait for the coming elections as this is when we can gain influence again.
FGD Participant – Mt. Lebanon

Whether we are satisfied or not will not make a difference, will it?
FGD Participant - Nabatiyeh
OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

Most current ‘complaints’ mechanisms rely mostly on the direct contact with the mayor. Data collection revealed that there were no examples of established mechanisms that properly guarantee anonymity, follow-up and professionalism.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of knowledge about the Lebanese structure and hierarchy, and the lack of support given or shown by the government to the citizens, creates a feeling a frustration among citizens who believe that there is no way to defy, oppose, challenge or engage with a politicized council of municipal members.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL

Political parties and other important stakeholders (religious or other) were believed to be the most powerful groups to solve community problems. Political parties’ increasing involvement and influence on local matters particularly municipal affairs has increased citizens’ distrust in municipal proceedings and the ability to object or commentate on them.

Finally, a key factor that strongly impacts continuity and feelings of responsibility from the municipal council towards the population is the ‘mixed-term agreement’. This agreement is common in rural areas where there are groups that strongly oppose one another (religious or political or familial) and under the claim of ‘maintaining proper representation for all groups’, they share the mandate of the mayor by agreeing, prior to the elections, that the council will be headed by two mayors, one for the first 3 years and another for the other 3 years. While this does guarantee better representation, it also creates a sense of discontinuity and reemphasizes the role of the mayor as a biased representative rather than a ‘public servant’.

D. KEY DETERMINING FACTORS

In summary, the following factors were deemed to have the highest influence on municipal-community engagement and how it relates to responsiveness to local needs.

1. The negative perception of the role and efficiency of the public sector, which filters down to the municipality, the municipal council, and the mayor. The negative perception is mainly driven by citizen experience with widespread clientelism as a prevalent practice when dealing with the public sector.
2. The perception that the role of the municipality is strictly related to service provision and administrative tasks, and the scarcity of resources among municipalities reduces its ability to fulfill needs.
3. The electoral culture favoring familial, religious and political criteria and leading to having incompetent profiles run for elections.
4. The high influence of political and familial tensions on local dynamics and development projects and the weak institutional structures of municipalities that are not fortified against such interferences.
5. The centralization of municipal executive power within the mandate of the mayor, and the vagueness created by municipal code on the levels of policies, procedures, and jurisdictions.
6. The scarcity of national programs that aim at building the capacity and networked learning of elected public servants on the skills and know-how for strategy-building, engaging citizens, etc.
7. Lack of knowledge about the public sector structure in Lebanon and the accountability mechanisms present.
VI. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Findings here focus on existing opportunities for citizen participation and engagement efforts by reflecting on how citizens participate in municipal affairs; existing examples; committees and the misconceptions around their role. The section looks at six different categories:

1. Citizen involvement in initiating, planning, designing and implementing projects
2. Accountability, transparency and clarity: the public engagement process
3. Existing types of community engagement
4. Municipal Committees’ effectiveness and inclusion
5. Channels of communication between the municipality and the community
6. Impact of municipal engagement

A. CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN INITIATING, PLANNING, DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS

When asked about citizen involvement in initiating, planning, designing and implementing municipal projects, reactions ranged from surprise, irony, and requests to repeat the question which says a lot about the status of citizen engagement in the country. People were divided between being surprised this is a possibility (especially involvement in planning and design) or joking about how far this is from the current context. In several villages there were positive reactions where participants confirmed that there are high levels of participation, but once probed, it became clear that engagement remained at the level of implementation of activities (tree planting campaign, street cleaning campaign, sports events, etc.) and not projects or plans.

Additionally, given that the nature of municipal work in Lebanon is based on familial and political competition and perceptions of representation of all families and parties, little effort is offered within the municipal council to build strategies and long-term plans based on citizen needs and priorities, making it harder to engage citizens in planning and design.

Participants in this research regularly expressed their feelings of being excluded from the entire municipal process, some even stated that they learn about events happening in their communities like everyone else in the country learns about them: through the media or word of mouth. This exclusion nurtures feelings of frustration and disappointment, as when citizens are not informed about municipal plans nor about how these decisions came to happen. They then tend to share feelings of frustration among each other, which in turn reemphasizes feelings of distrust and ultimately feelings of not ‘belonging’.

It was noticeable from the focus groups with the youth (aged 21-35) that they are less connected to the municipalities and the quantitative numbers validate this. Other groups that were clearly less engaged include women (as it was harder to find women stakeholders to invite in villages) and non-registered residents who come from other regions and are outside the familial fabric and dynamics controlling the local dynamics.
There are significant external factors noted behind weak levels of engagement, namely the presence of public spaces and the current pressing economic situation. Public spaces are an issue across Lebanon regardless of the community or region, and this marginalizes communal activities and decreases feelings of belonging, unity and participation. Even in the communities where public spaces are available, there are accessibility challenges influencing people’s momentum to meet, organize, and initiate outside the control and permission of the municipality and dominant groups. In addition, the general economic and political situation influences people’s participation as well in all voluntary activities whether related to municipalities or not. Time is a major factor and people feel they have more significant priorities nowadays including decreasing spending and securing income.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL

The most common type of participation shared by the participants was ‘implementation or attendance’, in other words, when there is an event or activity, most residents attend the events for different reasons (be it recreational, or to encourage support for the municipality, or social pressure to show up). However, other than for the influencers, participants did not mention any other type of participation during the design or planning phase of an event.

Citizens who do not support political parties do not trust plans or events that are supported by political parties, out of fear that they have hidden agendas or objectives, and refrain from taking part in it. Participants were more easily engaged in conversations about activities than they were about projects and plans as most felt that there is little to no planning, strategy building or budget planning happening within their municipalities. Citizens and public servants are equally uninformed about the importance of public engagement in municipal affairs and tend to reduce its priority and urgency.

The Syrian refugee population was noted to be more participative in public events in three regions in Lebanon as compared to citizens, indicating a big cultural aspect influencing decisions to engage. One NGO member noted that Syrians have a different culture of dealing with their government: they do show up when a government entity invites them.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

Absence of long-term strategic plans lead to challenges in engaging people as there is no framework for this engagement and most projects are reactive and short term. There is a misconception among stakeholders, municipal council members and citizens alike, that ‘engaging citizens in decision-making’ is not an option. Council members are unaware of the need and importance of engaging citizens, and they rarely reflect on it as being a root cause to a lot of tension in the community. Very few councils took the initiative to have planning meetings.

A study by LCPS indicated that only 43% of municipalities in Lebanon have an administrative structure, and 400 municipalities have only one employee while 87% have less than 6 employees. When looking at the structural challenges, we note that the way municipalities are formed and the lack of staff and financial resources to provide for the community, have direct contribution to the time, effort and amount of resources spent on engaging local communities.

Municipal board members in Lebanon generally are known to be absent from the community most days per week, while the head of the municipality is always overwhelmed with the number of things that need to be done. With that in mind, this leaves a lot less space for innovation and inclusivity in design and implementation; particularly because 1) there are no serious strategic plans developed in municipalities, 2) annual budgets are designed based on what every committee needs as opposed to what it inspires to do, and 3) engagement is still not seen as a necessity for growth in the community. And there is little knowledge about the tools and mechanisms to include citizens in implementing projects.
OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL

The increasing involvement of political parties in municipal affairs creates a feeling of bias in all events and projects. This increases once again the distrust in the neutrality and real objectives of a certain project, and ultimately leads to feelings of frustration and alienation among some citizens.

B. ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND CLARITY: THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Corruption is becoming more prevalent in Lebanon, as evidenced by the country’s ranking on global corruption indices. In 2019, Lebanon ranked 137 out of 180 countries, and scored 28/100 with 100 being very clean.11 Almost daily, news emerges about corruption that is happening at all levels of government, particularly on the local level given the nature of local politics and entrenched power dynamics. Most Lebanese citizens are skeptical that any national or local major initiatives are free from corruption. We heard significant reports of municipal-level corruption in almost all focus groups and interviews. Residents lack trust in most efforts, project or activity launched and/or designed by a municipality as they fear that it is often motivated by personal and political gains rather than the benefit of the community as a whole. Rumors (that sometimes can be true) prevail, telling of wasteful public spending and priority setting that is not in line with what the majority of local citizens want.

One positive observation was the growing knowledge about the importance of transparency and the right to access budgets and meetings. Several NGO efforts were noted in this regard, given the widespread number of accountability and transparency projects having created a sense of awareness and understanding about the possibility and importance of accountability, especially among youth. However, when it comes to translating this knowledge into actual practice, participants expressed frustration and lack of capacity. Participants shared stories about corrupt councils and shared that there is nothing they can do when the mayor is corrupt, primarily because they know that mayor would have immunity supported by the political party it represents.

Participants reflected that they are more motivated to engage in municipalities when they see credible, knowledgeable and competent community members engage. Unfortunately, more often than not, these people are on the sidelines and are not serving in the municipal council or in committees.

Even if we had access to the numbers and accounts of the municipality, this does not mean that they can’t still make deals behind closed doors.

FGD Participant - Akkar

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With the lack of trust in judicial processes, citizens feel that their opinions are the least of the worries of the political parties in general. When citizens do not trust their elected representative, then they will not feel ownership of the public affairs in their community, nor will they trust the decision-making processes within the municipality.

There is widespread fear of holding a public servant accountable to their actions; an important factor to tackle when trying to promote a culture of accountability and transparency. When asked about why citizens are hesitant about holding their elected members accountable, participants responded with reasons related to their safety, protection, and fear of being denied basic services. At the same time, participants did agree that municipalities are selective in the issues they wish to be transparent about (lack of funds, new projects underway, etc.) and how they develop the tools and means to do that when they want.

On the municipal council level, decisions are rarely shared with the public; not only is the public not included in the decision-making process, but they are also often not informed them in general. This may be due to the lack of knowledge and skills required to reflect on the importance of sharing decisions as a necessary tool to combat conflict, tensions, and resentment towards the municipality. But from another angle, it is also due to the lack of willingness to be questioned and held accountable. Most mayors who participated in the study explained that some information cannot be shared as it opens the door for criticism, increased conflict and vulnerability. It was observed that municipal members and mayors tend to have a negative perception of citizens and were skeptical about the reasons people ask for budgets and information.

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL**

Regardless of geography, our focus groups expressed a strong skepticism about the transparency and effectiveness of almost any public event or project organized by the municipality. This sense of skepticism surrounding government capabilities is an unstated but widely understood cultural trait that many people trace back to the early years of the civil war.

Participants in all focus groups had a general feeling that the mayor cannot be held accountable because they are protected by many powerful forces, including family, political parties and businesses. Participants also reported that past confrontations with the mayors often resulted in retribution to individuals and their families.

The concepts of transparency and accountability are becoming more well-known within communities, and this is largely due to the development projects focusing on awareness raising about laws, regulations and public management. However, it is not yet infused in Lebanon’s political culture.

Some reform minded and transparent mayors and municipalities, expressed that they do not feel they should share what they are doing as it is considered “bragging” or “political advertisement” and they prefer people see the projects and actions after they are implemented. This comes from the norms and previous experiences when mayors publish their “lists of achievements” as a prerequisite to run again for another round and to gain attention from political figures. Such barriers, while they seem easy, are core as they influence those who believe in the importance of sharing information but refrain from it.

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL**

At the municipal level, information is guarded and not readily available or accessible to the general public, including: balance sheets, invoices and monetary reports, contracts with service providers, etc. This creates a structural barrier to informed public participation in local development and political processes.

Council members and mayors are reluctant to publicly deliberate and declare key decisions because they feel that citizens will always be against any decision they make. This, while legitimate, should not be compromising of the right to have access to decisions made about the municipality.
Council members and mayors are equally unequipped with skills to handle opposing attitudes or arguments, or to manage conflict and tensions particularly because they have internal conflicts and dynamics, but also because their elected position puts pressure on them to pledge their allegiance to their party, or family first and foremost. In addition to their allegiance being secondarily for the wellbeing of the community, municipal board members and candidates are not expected to have any communication skills or know-how to serve the community. It may also be due to the fact that conflict management and mitigation in villages are often handled by the older members of the big families or by religious figures or the Mukhtar. Finally, the system of public budget transfers from the national level and the inability to generate significant funding locally is a structural challenge that adversely impacts both the perception and performance of the municipalities.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL
Political parties who have strong established power in a certain municipality tend to be the first to stand in the way between accusing a public servant of corruption and holding them accountable. When participants were asked about whether they can hold a public servant (particularly a mayor) accountable, they all shared experiences of families and individuals who were seeking options to punish corruption but were stopped (and in some cases threatened) by the powerful political party in the community.

C. EXISTING TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
The last few years witnessed an increase in international donor-funded community support programs that fulfill basic infrastructure needs through supporting the municipalities and local communities. Most of these programs focus on Lebanese communities that host significant Syrian refugee populations. The efforts are meant to mitigate the strains on social services and ensure social stability. The expansion of these community-level development projects has led to increased opportunities and technical support to increase citizen and municipal council engagement. Therefore, our researchers observed a significant amount of citizen and government engagement activities. More research is needed to measure the impact and influence of those projects on sustained citizen and government engagement.

Existing engagement projects can be divided into four categories:

1. **Engagement projects that are an annex to an infrastructure project** aiming at filling a community need. Those projects tend to ask the community to hold a townhall or form a committee to support the project implementation. While this helped spread awareness on the importance of community engagement, engagement intervention is linked to the presence of a “reward” or project rather than on engagement in and of itself. This has resulted in a “distorted image” about engagement as most engagement platforms created by those projects are usually temporary and end with the project.

2. **Engagement projects that aim at empowering marginalized groups**, like women and youth for example (i.e. forming shadow municipalities, committees and/or trainings). The primary objective of these projects is the actual empowerment and sensitization on the selected topic and while those objectives are usually achieved, they are seldomly linked to the municipalities’ structure and tend to become parallel structures that municipalities encourage as they do not have an actual influence on decision making and planning.

3. **Engagement projects initiated by international or local NGOs where engagement is the goal** and those tend to have more impact and include municipalities throughout the process. Such projects face challenges on the political level when engagement leads to questioning authority and control and on the structural level when mayors change for example.

4. **Engagement initiatives originated and managed by municipalities** and those can be divided into those intended for propaganda and marketing, and those which are genuine and adopt the right reform mindset. The latter face the cultural challenges related to people’s encouragement and enthusiasm.

Furthermore, it is important to differentiate the existence of the projects from their accessibility and outreach and in turn, their impact. Participants in villages that had engagement efforts frequently expressed that they did not know about them. The following is a table summarizing the tools that are commonly used in municipalities or that are rarely used:
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<th>TOOL</th>
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<th>FAIRLY USED</th>
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<td>Speeches in religious gatherings (Friday prayers or Sunday masses)</td>
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<td>Informal conversations with municipal members (cafes, dinners, etc.)</td>
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<td>Surveys</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to attend municipal meetings</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL**

The key driver for engaging in activities or committees is the support of the municipality and those behind it (the family, the group, the party) rather than the belief in the process or the responsibility as a citizen. Participants said that they joined committees based on the request of the mayor they support. They also claimed to help organize and attend local events and activities to demonstrate political support for the current municipal council.

The widespread number of so-called “engagement projects” has led to a negative perception on the effectiveness of such initiatives and discourages people to participate. In other words, most donor programs targeting municipalities include components or outputs related to citizen-engagement in municipal work; as opposed to that being the main focus of the program. As such, most donor programs result in designing committees between stakeholders, citizens and municipalities, to support them in identifying priority and applying for grants. These initiatives are rarely – if ever – sustainable, but they also lack the support needed from the community itself because of the community’s perception of these programs’ ineffectiveness and redundancy.

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL**

When participants who are public servants shared their opinions about public engagement, their definitions almost always included a reference to ‘sharing information’ and rarely did it include ‘consulting with citizens’. Elected public servants believe that engaging citizens is primarily limited to information sharing only.

Public servants lack the skills and knowledge to design and implement citizen engagement plans and mechanisms; they are not expected to hold such sets of skills or knowledge, and their perception of their work is that it is ‘political’ and not ‘developmental’ which would require them to have specific know-how.

INGOs and donors are becoming increasingly more interested in community engagement and municipalities. However, in their honest attempt to create mechanisms for inclusion and participation, they rarely offer capacity and...
skills building support on key issues for elected municipal members.

Townhall meetings are the most commonly used tool to engage the public, however, people feel that townhalls exist to help the municipality share successes and achievements, and not to consult citizens. This is clear to all participants in these townhalls where as one participant explained ‘you see banners with logos of NGOs and INGOs the municipality has worked with, and a seating arrangement with important guests sitting in the first row – indicating that we are not here to be heard but to clap’.

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL**

Parties through the councils tend to support and encourage efforts as long as they are not political (environment, sports, etc..) but they challenge and block initiatives related to spreading a new culture and form of governance.

If political parties use municipal elections as a way to nurture or reinforce their popularity, then they will always stand against any event or process that might allow citizens to question the power of said political party.

**D. MUNICIPAL COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS AND INCLUSION**

Municipal committees were noted among the most common an, likely because they are detailed in the municipal code and they have been a common practice for years. Our research revealed several interesting insights about the efficiency and impact of those committees.

The key municipal committees mandated by the law are: (1) Public works committee; (2) Procurement committee; (3) Tenders and bids committee; and (4) Receiving committee. These committees are often exclusive to the dominant group (party or family coalition) and are not open to other council members from opposing groups, not to mention the general public. Those committees are seen as an extension of the executive power of the mayor, where supportive council members can help in implementing tasks as compared to their usual legislative role.

The other committees which are less strategic (sports, environment, youth, women, culture, activities, peace building, etc..) are usually open to the broader public and chaired by council members. The major complaint about those committees is that members are primarily appointed by the municipality and are seldom elected. Furthermore, the committees create a major challenge inside the councils, especially when they include competent and specialized members. Unlike the elected council where many familial factors influence who is there, the committees are usually appointed to fill gaps and thus council members feel their authority is jeopardized and tend to attempt to control the committees and discourage their decisions through their voting power inside the council.

Whenever committees are formed, they are not declared to the public and as such, communities are not aware of who is working with which committee and this reinforces the centralization of power and consultations with the head of the municipality. With the public unaware of which committees are formed and who is participating in which committee, citizens are unable to offer support or participate. Similarly, committee members are unaware of the option of including community members in the committees. These committees are consultative which means that they do not have complete autonomy to design their own plans and implement activities, leading to discouragement of members to continue their membership.

Finally, it is important to note that committees at the minimum serve as a channel of communication to key citizens in the village and have positive impact on that level even when they don’t serve their full potential.

Forming committees requires a lot of work over a long period of time. Don’t do it if you can’t commit to that.

FGD Participant - Tripoli
OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL
Most participants stated that they didn’t know they had committees in the municipality. As referenced earlier, this is mainly due to the fact that there are no dissemination efforts designed or implemented to increase the exposure and knowledge about the committees in municipalities. Similarly, and as people perceive the municipality to have two main roles (service provision and administrative), they do not expect the municipality to have strategic committees working on development projects.

The general perception from most FGD participants when discussing this topic is that committees are used to create an illusion that the municipality is working for the people.

Generally, women were noted as the most active in committees as they have more time and because they are usually excluded from the actual council. Young individuals we interviewed also seemed more motivated and enthusiastic about participating in committees, than older men, but youth were referred to as “seasonal” and tend to leave their tasks unfinished as they get busy with university or work.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL
The names of the members of a municipal council-created committee, the name of the committee and its mandate are rarely announced to the public, prior to or even after its formation.

Approximately 80% of participants in FGDs dedicated for active members in municipal committees, were not aware of their role and responsibility in the committee. Most also reported that they would have benefitted from training or skills building that would have better equipped them to make their committee work effectively.

For committees to function well and be beneficial to the community, they must be supported by a determined mayor who can delegate tasks, allow space for innovation and ideas, and believe in their role. Otherwise, they either create tension in the council, or create a sense of being only for show in the community.

Regarding roles, there is a strong need to clarify the positions and work of committee members and how they interact with the council and the mayor. Their actual role is consultative, and the money and decision making are controlled by the council which discourages participation.

The absence of strategies and plans, complicates the work of the committees and creates the sense of competition with the council as they do not operate under a clear strategy and framework.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL
Committees are a major platform for engagement and inclusion of all groups, but can lead to political opposition as political groups aim at excluding opposition rather than giving them a platform. In other words, municipal committees can be used as a tool and platform to include all community members in general, and those who consider themselves to be ‘opposition’ in specific; allowing them the space and right platform to influence decision-making. As they cannot be members of the municipal board, they can however participate in the design and implementation of committee activities and strategies.
Lack of proper and efficient communication between the municipality and the citizens has been cited by most respondents as one of the core reasons for mistrust, which can be both a cause and a symptom of low levels of citizen engagement and formalizing channels of cooperation. The following observations emerged about this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEBSITE</td>
<td>• Good visibility for donors and international agencies</td>
<td>• Rarely updated; becoming obsolete in design and content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wealth of relevant information that can be updated as necessary</td>
<td>• Usually very costly, particularly because this is an activity that councils often outsource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creates a sense of pride for the village (people expressed their pride to have a website for the village)</td>
<td>• Requires a lot of maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creates a sense of pride for the village (people expressed their pride to have a website for the village)</td>
<td>• Might require the hiring of an employee to oversee it and keep it up to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creates a sense of pride for the village (people expressed their pride to have a website for the village)</td>
<td>• Generally, one-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL MEDIA (mostly Facebook and Twitter)</td>
<td>• Affordable</td>
<td>• There are rarely teams within municipalities who are experts or social media strategists. So, the pages end up being managed by the most junior staff member and serve as a de facto website rather than an interactive page (information from one side only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can allow municipalities to conduct polls, surveys, ask questions, identify patterns in people’s comments, etc.</td>
<td>• Limited to citizens with internet access and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Excellent data collection tool</td>
<td>• Hard to search the data, so it is good for onetime events but not for strategies and plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Open for people to comment and interact</td>
<td>• Privacy / data security concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Easy to update and send out news items or alerts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBILE APPLICATION</td>
<td>• Can offer instantaneous ability for citizens to report an issue or request a service</td>
<td>• Limited to mobile phone users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be used for polls, data collection, mapping, offering support, etc.</td>
<td>• Expensive and requires maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Needs effort and investment to get data and technical know-how to maintain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Municipalities that tried them, still believe Facebook is more efficient with better outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINTED DOCUMENT &amp; POSTERS</td>
<td>• Inclusive of all age groups and not dependent on technology</td>
<td>• Costly: financially and environmentally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be for illiterate citizens</td>
<td>• One-way communication, no interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Must take disability rights into consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT’S APP GROUPS</td>
<td>• Inclusive to most of the population</td>
<td>• Limited to mobile phone users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Quick and cost efficient</td>
<td>• Due to list limits, need to create several groups to cover the entire community (this is the current norm in communities now)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The most widely used form of communication nowadays</td>
<td>• Is not open to all public and many feel it is not a systematized approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Suitable for committees and small groups</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
When discussing communication channels, participants were asked to specify whether they feel the existing communication channels are effective. Nearly 80% of respondents explained that they are not effective at all, and only 13% indicated that they are effective. A more strategic approach to communication is needed, where there is better understanding of the needs of the community, the language to use, and thus selection of the best communication platform. Our research did not find any cases where there was a clear diversification of outreach and engagement channels that was responsive to citizen needs.

One of the key challenges that is hindering the communication is the lack of the genuine will on behalf of the council members to engage with the citizens. Mayors tend to prefer establishing websites because they do not allow space for conversations and comments. There must be a shift in mindset if communication channels are to succeed as real tools for engaging the community and understanding the needs and priorities of the citizens.

**F. IMPACT OF MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT**

As the research discussed existing levels of engagement, it collected information from the citizens, the stakeholders, the NGOs and the donors and experts about the impact achieved by existing initiatives. There was unanimous agreement that engagement when done properly has significant impact especially on the level of people’s ownership of the projects being implemented and the general perception towards the municipality. People knowing that they can access the budget, without trusting and having the empowerment to believe they can influence it is not enough. If they understand that they can influence the budget – they will be more aggressive in contributing ideas as to what the council should spend money.

A summary of engagement benefits of citizen / government engagement is represented below:

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"Facebook opens needless communication from both sides. We prefer a website because then only we can say what we want."

Mayor – South Lebanon

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**IMPACT**

- Asserts ownership and higher levels of success for projects
- It can guarantee general wellbeing and citizen satisfaction with municipal efforts
- Sharing data and information can reduces tensions and rumors
- Engagement leads to accountability and ultimately transparency
- Inclusion leads to proper representation of all groups and less tension
- Engagement increases trust in the municipality and support for its projects

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Facebook opens needless communication from both sides. We prefer a website because then only we can say what we want.

Mayor – South Lebanon
OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL

Modelling the behavior of engagement and participation on the municipal level helps change the culture of how to deal with public sector and the state. Interviews with committee members highlighted how the experience changed their perception towards the village, and their belonging and sense of identity to the space.

Several focus group participants from different regions described ‘committees’ that were established as a result of a development project are used for that same purpose. In other words, community residents feel that committees are a simple tool to attract more funding and projects to the community. This is problematic because 1) it undervalues and misinterprets what ‘engagement’ is, and how the committees can be a platform to promote it, and 2) because it encourages demotivation in community-work when the perception is that ‘fixing a problem’ can only be funded by donor agencies.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

The Lebanese Municipal Law grants a municipal board the right and legitimacy to establish committees, however, the Law does not encourage nor forbid having non-municipal members as members of municipal committees. This is one of the key factors that result in vague power-relationships developing between the municipality and the citizens, and it also demotivates citizens from engaging in these committees because they fear that decisions they make at the committee level can be disregarded by the municipal board. As such, a clear review and revision of the current municipal law, is one of the key areas for intervention to promote citizen engagement in municipal affairs. In this frame specifically, an immediate revisiting of the municipal law must be done to adapt the ‘committee related’ laws to the basics of community engagement.

Sharing all types of information – including planning, budgeting, and activity information as well as public service performance data – was cited as a way to decrease rumors and in turn, decrease negativity and local conflicts inside the village.

The different engagement projects changed perceptions of how municipalities think, but also introduced new concepts, like social stability becoming mainstreamed into the plans of municipalities and becoming part of their responsibility.

Citizen and municipal engagement increase the likelihood of funds being spent more effectively, increased likelihood of getting external donor funding, and a higher caliber of technical expertise on municipal issues. This helps overcome the challenges of councils having people elected based on familial and political factors rather than merit.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL

Engagement platforms shuffle the agreed upon power structures, as they involve and include people from different backgrounds, and empower the participants to gain knowledge and skills to hold authorities accountable.

G. KEY FACTORS HINDERING ENGAGEMENT

Based on the findings above, key factors impacting municipal-community engagement are:

1. **Scarcity of accessible public spaces**, to nurture community activities and decrease geographical separations that may have been the result of religious, sectarian or political divide or where municipal buildings are controlled by dominant sides. When there is little or no public space open to all community residents, then there is less of a chance for people to meet and engage in activities together. Also, the youth and elderly are the most affected by the lack of public space, especially given the Lebanese government’s scarcity of social services. **Open and accessible public spaces can become a great platform for bringing different groups from one community together.**
2. **Low levels of knowledge and capacity** among municipal members about the importance, requirements and tools to design, manage and implement municipal engagement interventions; the scarcity of formal training and lack of capacity building by the national government. Candidates and elected municipal members are not expected to have knowledge and skills in local development and local governance. Their role within the Lebanese context is centralized around their political, familial or social representation before anything else and they are not expected to work on self-development or acquire new skills. As such, the national government in general and Ministry of Interior in specific do not design programs that build the capacity of municipal members. In the last three years, a number of projects aimed at building the capacity of municipal police, which has also led to several recommendations on the legislative and practical levels. Similar projects supported by the government can have great impact on communities and local governments.

3. The uncertainty created by the **municipal law** on the level of jurisdictions, policies and procedures and the absence of targeted and efficient support platforms.

4. **Weak culture of public engagement** on the national and local level, and high levels of skepticism of any initiative to be used as a marketing and exposure tool for a mayor, a political group or an NGO. Needless to say, that people lack trust in the government and its institutions and feel that even through elections they cannot influence decisions in Lebanon. This lack of trust is reflected in the skepticism surrounding NGO/INGO programs, where citizens tend to feel that these programs, when they are implemented through the municipality, are used by the municipality to increase its outreach first and foremost.

5. The design of **engagement programs** by international organizations that usually have a different focus and lead to donor-dependency and non-sustainable engagement platforms, as well as the low level of exposure given to successful engagement initiatives.

6. The **political interference** to protect corrupt mayors leading to a general sense of apathy and loss of belief in the possibility and power of accountability.

7. The **scarce** of long-term plans and strategies leading to absence of engagement on the planning level, and orienting engagement efforts to focusing on sharing information and implementation levels.

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An interesting observation resulting from the different conversations relevant to this study was that participants would suggest infrastructure projects as a way to increase engagement. A further elaboration on that note highlighted that most participants had unidentical and most times misinterpretation of what ‘engagement in municipal affairs means’ or would look like. Hence the importance of working on civic education in schools and communities to reintroduce concepts about citizenship, engagement and democracy.
VII. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The third section focuses on the role of civil society in municipal engagement, focusing on the perception towards civil society and the factors influencing successful partnership between the sector and municipalities.

A. PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY

The role civil society can play in engagement programs depends on how it is perceived by the citizens and the municipalities. Historically, NGOs in Lebanon (and the MENA region) were notably charitable ones focusing on service delivery, and the perception related to their type and focus of work is highly influenced by that. Over the last ten years, influenced by several factors including higher prevalence of donor funding, the Syrian refugee crisis and the move towards specialization the perception towards NGOs started to shift, and they are now seen as capable of playing different roles.

While perceptions are indeed changing and shifting because of the increasing exposure of NGOs, there is still a hesitance and opposition in views about the work of NGOs. Municipal representatives who participated in this study explained that NGOs do not actively seek to engage the municipality in the design of a project, nor do they formally inform the municipality about their yearly plans and projects. In communities where there is coordination between the municipality and NGOs (meetings about projects, municipal support, etc.), there lacks a formal defined and clear coordination channel or tools that ensure proper partnership.

At the same time, NGO representatives that participated in the research explained that the lack of stability in municipal councils, and the lack of continuity in municipal plans (subject to the change in mayor-ship), pushes them to work independently from municipal councils. This is a conscious decision to avoid the prolongment of decisions, the potential interference of political parties or religious groups, the objection on the project idea for political reasons, or the insistence of the municipal mayor or members to choose the stakeholders to be involved in the project, among other factors.

The lack of formal coordination based on partnership-building and cooperation is increasing the misconceptions about the work that NGOs do, and equally increasing the resistance to work with municipalities. NGO representatives explained that municipalities are generally supportive of their work, but they tend to favor one NGO in specific, which encourages the monopoly of development projects and compromises diversity. Municipalities however feel that donor agencies fund duplicates of projects and are compromising the need for adaptability of projects at the expense of reporting on success stories. Generally, most findings were related to the issue of contextualizing projects, increasing the coordination between the municipality and NGOs, and unifying municipal plans and sharing them publicly.

Mayors and council members expressed frustration from NGOs who focus on budget line items, funding restrictions and procurement guidelines that they believe do not necessarily fit the community needs and interests. The municipality focuses on delicate village level dynamics while the NGO focuses on fixed donor guidelines, and in turn, both tend to communicate and operate on different wavelengths in many cases.

Important to note is that perceptions of NGOs differ as per the size and capacity of the NGO, i.e. a small local or regional NGO that expects funds from the municipality is different than that towards a bigger NGO that can attract resources.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL

The perception that NGOs have hidden agendas creates a feeling of distrust and increases rumors about NGO activity. Participants explained that they are becoming increasingly more suspicious of NGOs that might be platforms to gain money rather than actually being cause driven.

The Lebanese civil society code categorizes all non-governmental groups as NGOs including political parties, sports clubs, religious charity, etc. and a number of NGOs in Lebanon are affiliated with religious groups and political

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B. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN IMPROVING MUNICIPAL SERVICES AND ENGAGEMENT

In an ideal governance scenario, municipalities and NGOs can work together to plan, design, implement and sustain projects on the local level. However, in Lebanon, local governments are still not equipped with the appropriate set of tools, skills and knowledge to support them in conducting municipal affairs, such as: strategic planning, budgeting, identifying sources of funding, collecting data, etc. However, many NGOs are well trained on these topics, given the increase in donor-funded capacity building projects.

Participants in this study noted that there are many resources within a community, but the municipalities and NGOs sometimes resist working together for political, personal, familial and/or religious reasons. They reemphasized the need to capitalize on these resources in order to grow and develop the local government services. However, it was commonly stated that such possible collaborations are hindered by familial tensions, sectarian divide, or other political reasons. Additionally, the sense of competition that is growing between the 8,000 NGOs in Lebanon is
contributing to a decrease in trust about their objectives and intentions.

Finally, NGOs can be a part of the development process within a community as they are generally well-informed and have been trained on writing proposals, outsourcing funding opportunities, mobilizing volunteers, writing reports, and creating budgets; all of which can be very important to municipalities. If NGOs and municipalities can plan and design projects together, and exchange resources to ensure proper implementation, then NGOs and municipalities can become partners and resources to one another. This would allow the community more ownership over projects, increase trust in municipal efforts for development, decrease cultural and social divisions within the community, and be profitable and more efficient for all parties involved. For this to happen, NGOs must be invited and encouraged to share their plans and projects with the municipality, and the municipality must be able to include NGOs in the discussions over budget allocations, as well allocate a percentage for this support for NGOs. This would also lead to higher coordination between NGOs and municipal committees, and ultimately, more coordinated and unified plans for the community.

C. KEY DETERMINING FACTORS

With regards to this section of findings "ROLES AND IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY" the following key factors were analyzed and identified as of the ones with highest influence on municipal-community engagement:

1. The low level of coordination between municipalities and NGOs during the design stage of engagement programs leads to challenges and compromises in project implementation.

2. The challenges in accessing existing support material and tools developed by civil society to support NGOs and the focus of NGOs on donor funding cycles and regulations.

3. Lack of formal and sustainable coordination between NGOs and municipalities, outside the scope of funded programs and projects.

4. The frequent changes in the municipal council and staff (on the level of individuals) affects long term programming and relationships with NGOs.

5. The weak institutional structure on the side of civil society and municipalities leads to high dependency on donor funding and interference.
VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations developed here are based on an analytical reading of the findings (qualitative and quantitative) coupled with the literature review on municipalities and engagement in Lebanon.

A. SUMMARY OF KEY FACTORS

The above section that details the findings and elaborates on the analysis can be summarized in the following visualization of the “loops” which support the detailing of findings by highlighting the relationship between the factors and identifying the factors that influence the biggest number of loops or factors. These factors that are highlighted in red can be essential in the analysis of recommendations, as they are used as a starting point for understanding the causality of the problem or issue and designing a solution or intervention.

B. RATIONALE FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

An analytical read of the findings reveals that the different factors influencing engagement are interconnected and affect each other. The below “timeline” tries to connect the factors in order to pave the way for the different recommendations influencing those factors.

Municipalities in the Lebanese context need to fulfill several pre-requisites that would allow them to be ready to engage citizens. Those include establishing high levels of trust with the local community, which in itself is linked to two key factors: having a competent and well trusted council headed by an active and well-connected mayor and having proper communication between the municipality and the citizens.

Furthermore, there are several structural barriers on the level of legislative framework and the political context that
hinder municipalities and complicate engagement initiatives. Those start from the size, scope and jurisdictions of municipalities and continue on to include the resources available for municipalities as well as the ambiguity of how standards and procedures are followed.

Another prerequisite is having a well-planned strategy for the development of the village/city that itself is built on proper mapping of local resources and needs. This cannot be achieved without having good internal relationships and high levels of agreement inside the municipal board.

All the above cannot be achieved without a shift in the electoral culture that is influencing who is running for office and who people are voting for.

Once the prerequisites are fulfilled, the design phase of the engagement process requires the presence of well-established and trustworthy civil society organizations on the local or regional level, and requires the presence of a political decision at the level of the board to embark on the engagement process. The design phase should include full partnership between the implementing groups, be it the mayor, the municipal council, the donor, the local or international or regional NGO. This agreement needs to happen on the level of the project objectives, process and expected results and not only on the level of project activities.

The implementation phase of any engagement initiative is faced by several structural factors that showcase the weak institutional structure of the municipalities and thus requires the maintenance of technical support to the council and thorough and continuous communication with the people to overcome socio cultural and political barriers.

The sustainability of the engagement efforts counts on building the capacity of the local partners and on achieving a shift in culture, in addition to strengthening the core of the municipality as an institution to be able to sustain the effort needed.

If all those factors are well maintained, engagement efforts can lead to much needed impact on the level of project ownership, inclusion of all groups and success of plans (whether municipal or donor funded) and this has high impact on the level of social stability and local development. Finally, success of engagement on the local level can lead to influencing the culture of participation and perceptions to public sector on the national level.

### PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS

The data collection tools that were developed for this research included a section dedicated to collect the recommendations of participants to promote community-engagement in municipal affairs. The recommendations that were shared included:

**ON THE AWARENESS RAISING LEVEL**

1. Edit school curricula to include more material about citizenship and participation in public
2. Spread and disseminate knowledge about the concepts of citizenship, public ownership, conflict, etc.
3. Nurture and cultivate feelings of healthy opposition and constructive conversations
4. Awareness raising projects need to be long-term and uninterrupted
5. Promote the culture of fair representation of all groups

**ON THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL**

1. Build the capacity of council members on issues related to communication and public service
2. Provide the municipal council with knowledge about the municipal code
3. Support the municipality in conducting needs and resources assessment, and building on its results to engage the local talents and resources in municipal plans
4. Dedicate one day per week to listen to people's complaints and suggestions
5. Ensure sustainability between councils and successful transitions

**ON THE ENGAGEMENT LEVEL**

1. Include residents in the design phase of projects
2. Collect public opinions: conduct polls, surveys, door-to-door campaigns, etc. to make people feel like their opinions are heard and considered
3. Ensure a public space is dedicated to the public, to encourage conversations and planning
4. Tailor and adapt engagement plans to the context and socio-cultural dynamics in the community
C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above suggested engagement process, the set of recommendations below aims at increasing successful and efficient engagement between municipalities and citizens and are divided into three levels:

1. What needs to be changed on the level of the legislative framework
2. What can be done on the level of institutional strengthening of municipalities
3. Programmatic recommendations for donors and international and local organizations working on citizen municipal engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE-REQUISITES</th>
<th>CITIZENS &amp; CIVIL SOCIETY</th>
<th>MUNICIPAL COUNCIL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High levels of trust</td>
<td>Strategy and long-term plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proper communication</td>
<td>Mapped resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NGOs with minimal capacity</td>
<td>Good relationship dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electoral culture built on good governance principles</td>
<td>Right people in place</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Competent mayor and council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN</td>
<td>Partnership in design between all stakeholders</td>
<td>Political decision to engage across all board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good communication with the people</td>
<td>Agreement on initiative objectives and process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLEMENTATION</td>
<td>Exposure and communication for the initiative</td>
<td>Strong institutional structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible design</td>
<td>Smooth policies and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY</td>
<td>Local resources engaged Transfer of capacity</td>
<td>Technical support available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional culture prevalent and low dependency on individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEVEL 1: OWNERSHIP, INCLUSION, SUCCESS OF PROGRAMS**

**LEVEL 2: SOCIAL STABILITY, BETTER PROGRAMS, LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

**LEVEL 3: INFLUENCE ON NATIONAL LEVEL THROUGH SHIFT IN CULTURE**
1. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK:
As the challenges facing engagement are structural, a set of recommendations are oriented towards changing the legislative framework, including the municipal code, the municipal electoral law and the operating policies and procedures:

- Support initiatives seeking to clarify the municipal code, i.e. include a more detailed description of the role of each member and committee member within the municipal council (to reduce tensions and increase the space for external influence).
- Set a path to transition towards decentralization, with more authority given to municipalities (after revisiting the districting and municipal size).
- Update procedures and legislations related to accountability of municipalities and allow easier access for civil society and citizens to monitor municipal spending.
- Set clear timeframes for transfer of municipal funds from the Independent Municipal Fund and create a mechanism to allow municipalities to anticipate what is coming for better planning.
- Work on including articles requiring all municipal candidates are at least part-time residents of the community they wish to serve.
- Work on amending the articles related to the election of the municipal council to include provisions that necessitate all elected public servants attend proper national training on the municipal code, and the government structure in general.
- Assign an executive director for each municipality that assures sustainability of the efforts and plans irrespective of change in the municipal council that then acts as a consultative board responsible for overall strategy, maintaining the mayor as head of executive team, but in collaboration with executive director.
- Encourage role of unions as development and planning hubs and restructure unions so all municipalities are members as per geographic but also development needs and common interests.
- Link the funds allocated to municipalities from the Independent Municipal Fund to the strategic development plans they have to develop and structure the development offices with unions of municipalities and task them to develop the plans as a mandatory step over a timeline of six years. Strategic development plans should include an urban plan for the spatial distribution of the development plan and should be well coordinated between the villages of the union.
- Add women and youth quota to the municipal electoral law and enforce a list system rather than individual candidacy.

2. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

2.A. STANDARDIZE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:
- Support the council in designing and implementing internal bylaws and tools for processing complaints and ensuring the protection of the person who filed it.
- Facilitate the council’s design of long-term strategic plans and create a system of accountability inside the council (to monitor and follow-up on implementation).
- Promote the trust of the citizens in their municipal board, by ensuring that many tools and mechanisms are in place to guarantee the protection and inclusion of citizens in municipal affairs.
- Build trust between the council and constituencies through the development of a system of priorities, a tracker of complaints by order and priority, and spread a new culture of responsiveness, transparency, leading to better engagement overall.

2.B. DESIGN CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS
- Build the capacity of elected public servants in the areas of strategy building, mapping resources and needs, outsourcing funding opportunities, and building partnerships.
- Build the capacity of elected public servants on the basics and concepts related to community engagement in order to increase their understanding of the importance of engagement and provide tools to effectively engage residents in their work.
• Build the capacity of municipal staff on processing complaints and documenting recommendations and suggestions.
• Build the capacity of the municipal council members and committee members on how to outreach for funding opportunities and designing proposals.
• Provide capacity building workshops to committee members to increase their knowledge in funding opportunities, networking and alliance building, resource mobilization, etc.
• Offer technical support to committees to support them in partnering with local talents and resources (i.e. women and committee for women’s issues, schools and the committee of education, environmentalists and NGOs with the committee for the environment, etc.)
• Support the mayor in gaining access to knowledge and skills to enable their readiness to delegate tasks and ensure that proper mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency.

2.C. ENHANCE RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS INSIDE COUNCIL:
• Offer and organize team building exercises for municipal councils. Most projects seek to provide skills and tools to municipal councils. Whereas the real need would be the lack of synergy between council members, or the rise in tensions, etc.
• The relationship and uniformity between council members and president is a major issue that frequently hinders project implementation and sustainability, more focus should be given to that relationship during programs.
• Ensure an effective handover between old and new municipalities as it influences the level of knowledge and engagement and can decrease any negative influences as a broader group is involved.

2.D. ENHANCE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY:
• Support municipal councils in designing and implementing communication tools that could support the council in collecting data and opinions about community priorities and needs.
• Support municipalities in assigning community roles to individuals whose responsibility would be to fill the communication gap between citizens and the municipality.
• Assess the physical space in the municipality, and suggest design ideas that would make the building more inviting and accessible to all (i.e. kids area, complaints office in a safe space, signs that explain how to find what you are looking for, etc.)
• Plan before engagement in order to have a plan so everything falls in place.

3. PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS
As donors and international organizations play a major role in shaping existing engagement initiatives, the below set of programmatic recommendations are targeted to them to capitalize on these research findings as part of their future program designs. Recommendations are divided into program design principles, programmatic suggestions (activities) and some programmatic tips and lessons learned from this study.

3.A. PROGRAM DESIGN PRINCIPLES:
• Focus on prerequisites for engagement: Confirm readiness to engagement and increase chances of programmatic success through testing the key factors that have been proven to have high influence on the programs and that are usually disregarded in project design. Those include testing the current levels of trust between the municipality and the community, the internal dynamics and level of agreement among the municipal council, the interest of the council and mayor to embark on the process (and not only receive the project), etc. Similarly, efforts need to be exerted to prep the community for engagement by organizing a small campaign to explain the importance of the process and requirements.
• Early partnership at design phase: The implementer (local or international NGO or even donor) and the municipality need to collaborate in the design of the engagement process and not wait till the project is approved and bounded by timelines, line items and indicators that do not suit the local context. Those initial design meetings should aim to achieve agreement on the level of objectives and process of the engagement programs and not only the activities and outcomes of the expected project.
• **Encourage partnerships**: Fill the technical gap present by encouraging partnerships between municipalities and different local actors thus increasing chances of sustainability and success. Those might include partnerships with academia for developing local strategies, conducting local mapping, developing surveys etc., or partnership with media institutions to increase media exposure, and partnerships with Social Development Centers (SDCs) to engage in national development programs.

• **Capitalize on existing resources**: Several resources have been developed to help municipalities plan, engage, and overcome challenges; however, they are not easily accessible, nor user friendly, and cannot be found easily. Capitalize on those resources by facilitating access to them.

• **Model the behavior**: Model the need for planning by validating the plan and objectives with them and engaging them in the design phase, model inclusion by exerting time and effort to reach all groups rather than enforcing indicators for youth, women and refugee participation, etc. This is the biggest influence on the local partners, from municipalities to local NGOs, and can be achieved by having them experience a successful engagement model with the donors and INGOs.

• **Celebrate engagement, give credit and exposure**: Increase media exposure for successful initiatives to promote the culture of engagement and give credit for local partners who collaborate.

• **Focus on planning and mapping resources as a first step**: Support municipalities in mapping local resources (human resources, needs identification, and other) as a preluding step before starting engagement programs. This would increase chances of inclusivity, and promote a culture of setting criteria for selection. Based on the mapping, help the municipality develop a local strategic plan, that provides the framework for all engagement efforts, and clarifies the way forward, increasing the chances of sustainability and success. Development offices can form good partners for planning and strategy development.

• **Support municipal communication**: Municipal communication has been proven to be at the core of the engagement programs, but little focus is given to supporting municipalities in strategic communication (not only developing platforms, but supporting the management of those platforms).

• **Promote more complex levels of engagement**: Most existing levels of engagement are on the level of informing citizens, or involving them in implementation, programs need to be oriented towards more complex levels of engagement like planning and partnership. The above suggested recommendations (focusing on pre requisites, mapping and planning) will help achieve this but there also needs to be a programmatic decision to shift focus.

3.B. SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

• Promote simple levels of engagement that are not only focused on long term structures (committees and shadow municipalities), such as:
  - Building on local technical knowledge (engaging village graphic designers in designing material for the municipality, engaging local landscape designers in drawing plans for the public garden, etc.) This can slowly break communication barriers between the municipality and the community and encourage collaboration. The technical experts can then be consulted by committees (teachers to support local schools in cultural committee and engineers to support public works committee) and later capitalizing on this to structure the engagement in committee membership.
  - Holding quarterly sessions facilitated by a local NGO or an unbiased group, between the municipality and the community to discuss together the decisions of the municipality and document comments and opinions from interested people.
  - Developing a local calendar of events for all local partners and NGOs to facilitate coordination and collaboration and position the municipality as an umbrella, slowly moving to organizing common events.

• Develop a portal for municipal engagement combining all existing material and tools that are not easily accessible. The portal can include tools, procedures, experiences and cases, lessons learned, contextualized advice for Lebanese context and can be used to share experiences among municipalities. The same portal can offer institutional strengthening support for municipalities through sharing standard operating procedures, providing digital technical support and include opportunities and calls for proposals for municipalities, solving several challenges at the same time. The management and ownership of the portal should be coordinated with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.

• Support local communities in developing neighborhood committees that can act as the link between the municipality and the community. This committee would follow local values and principles, and fair representation to model a broader level of engagement. It can also be elected to help spread the culture of representation.

• Engage political party supporters and leadership (usually acting as spoilers to engagement processes) in activities that help them see the value of engagement.
• Work with local schools, libraries and academic institutions to offer workshops and trainings about innovation in public management and how technological tools can be used for development. This might also include a community competition and the winner is the person with the best idea for citizen engagement that is adapted and contextualized in the community. This is to be organized with the municipality (to guarantee sustainability and continuity).

• Develop and disseminate user friendly and well targeted promotion material on the definition of community engagement, its different types, its importance, etc.

• Include municipal engagement in school curricula as an act of citizenship, through coordination with the center for research and development (responsible for school curricula) to include examples and content about the topic.

• Develop partnerships with public sector entities working with municipalities, like the AFKAR community dialogue working group (at OMSAR) and others.

• Promote the concept and tools of participatory budgeting in few model municipalities as an ultimate level of partnership and participation.

• Develop toolkits and training material for municipal engagement that are tailored for the Lebanese contexts including ideas, activities, tips, process, visuals, etc.

• Mapping resources of the village through household survey achieves several objectives: it promotes trust with municipality (actually asking every household shows that it is serious in engagement) and then attracts non typical human resources (not the usual suspects) and then gives detailed picture on needs paving the way for development of strategy.

• Exchange experiences on engagement between municipalities through visits, meetings, documenting case studies, and the online portal.

• Develop a local competition for municipalities that engage people with support of ministry to promote engagement as a core success criterion for good governance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS OF A MAYOR WHO SUPPORTS ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is well acquainted with the law and structure of the government (municipal code and understands public sector structure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Has management experience, or experience working in teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Has good communication skills to absorb tension and create momentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is trustworthy and mindful of the contribution of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Has right set of values of inclusivity, honesty, commitment, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Has enough time to spend on public benefit without jeopardizing own projects and benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Financially independent of any interest with dominant political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Has experience working in the social sector (volunteer, scouts, Red cross, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lives in the village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.C. NOTES AND LESSONS LEARNED

• Diversify the type of NGOs, donors and INGOs that municipalities partner with in order to decrease the monopoly of development projects and nurture diversity.

• Promote the positive engagement of political parties and religious leaders in fighting corrupting, supporting the centralization of service-provision with the municipality and reduce interference on these groups in individual cases of citizen corruption and crimes.

• Increase trust with municipalities by first agreeing on development objectives.

• Engage the municipal council early on in the process and not only the mayor and have at least few supporters within the municipality.

• Repeat events so people get used to them, keep in mind that engagement is a new culture and will face challenges.

• Give people visibility when they participate and engage.

• Start with simple engagement that satisfies basic needs, like creation of a gathering space, then move on to more complex levels of engagement.

• There is no one formula that fits all, the programs need to be tailored to each village depending on context
• The village needs to build on its own virtues and context to develop a strategic plan built on its own resources and then be ready for engagement.

• Start from a small group of socially active people, this helps create the core group and then you grow your outreach.

• Invite people to a gathering and not a meeting as there is a higher chance of people showing up when it is less formal.

• Give projects enough time: project timelines should be longer to take into consideration local dynamics.

• Focus on small wins. People need to see a difference when they try something new or they shy away from long term engagement, give them something early in the process (exposure, success, celebration).

• Tailor engagement suggestions to the context, it does not have to be a new committee, it can be the same old club that has been in the village but that needs to be trained and structured to achieve the objectives.

• Make it easy for people to participate and make them engage on design level so they understand the actual challenges.
## ANNEX A- THE FULL LIST OF SELECTED VILLAGES AND FOCUS GROUPS CONDUCTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 West Beqaa</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Jib Janeen\ Mdoukha \ Ghazze \ Ameeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Northern Beqaa</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Yammouneh\ Baalbeck\ Youneen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 All of Beqaa</td>
<td>NGOs of the region</td>
<td>9 NGOs participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Mt Lebanon 1</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td>Kfardebian \ Beit Chaar \</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Mt Lebanon 2</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Sawfar\ Keyfoun\ Ain Anoub \ Aley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 All of Mt Lebanon</td>
<td>NGOs of the region</td>
<td>6 NGOs participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 South 1</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Baysariyeh \</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 South 2</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Nabatiyeh \ Kfarouman \ Ter Debba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 All of South</td>
<td>NGOs of the region</td>
<td>8 NGOs participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 North 1</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Tripoli \ Mina \ Minnieh \ Merkabta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 North 2</td>
<td>Citizens 21 – 35</td>
<td>Tal Abbass \ Heesa \ Tal Maayan \ Halba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Citizens 35 and above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 All of North</td>
<td>NGOs of the region</td>
<td>5 NGOs participating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewees:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads of Unions</td>
<td>Yehya Daher</td>
<td>Mayor of Qaroun and Head of Union Municipalities Around The Lake – West Beqaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kamal Shayya</td>
<td>Mayor of Sawfar and Head of Union of Al Jurd Municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mohammed Al Majzoub</td>
<td>Mayor of Ghazzeh Municipality and Head of Union of Sahl Municipalities – West Beqaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors (Heads of Municipalities)</td>
<td>Nazih Eid</td>
<td>Mayor of Baysariyeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rabih Ayoubi</td>
<td>Mayor of Deddeh Municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samah Zailaa</td>
<td>Mina Municipality member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts \ Practitioners</td>
<td>Bassel El Hajj</td>
<td>Activist and local development expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fatima Khalil</td>
<td>Head of MOSA Social Development Center - Baysariyeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rabih Omar</td>
<td>UNDP - Local Peace Building Coordinator – North Lebanon \ University Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rami Zoueini</td>
<td>World Vision - Beirut and Mt Lebanon Area Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sahar Tabaja</td>
<td>CSP – Governance and Stabilization Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Members</td>
<td>Talal Malaeb</td>
<td>Committee Member - Baysour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Petra Serhal</td>
<td>Committee member - Keyfoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ihssan Araji</td>
<td>Committee Member – Bar Elias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEX B – DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

KEY STAKEHOLDERS FGDS INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Introducing the project and objectives and signing consent form and asking if possible to record
- Introducing themselves, village and age and occupation and previous experience (mokhtar or municipal member, etc)
- Questions are in bold and supporting questions (probes) are below to use if needed depending on discussion and flow of focus group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On the relationship between the citizen and the municipality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A  1) When was your last visit to the municipality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not visit the municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A  1.1) Why did you visit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Correct Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Follow up on documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 To participate in a public activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 To file a complaint regarding services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 To participate in a meeting with the municipality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A  2) Did you accomplish the aim of the visit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A  2.1) If no, why?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

A  3) How did the municipality team respond to your needs?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very responsive</th>
<th>Responsive</th>
<th>Somewhat responsive</th>
<th>Not responsive</th>
<th>Not responsive at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 4) What was the level of satisfaction you felt? (From 1 to 5) (1 being the lowest)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 5) In case you needed to visit the municipality in the coming days, you would do so:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excitedly</th>
<th>Reluctantly</th>
<th>Avertedly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 6) What is the type of response you would like to receive upon your next visit?

A 7) In case you needed a service from the municipality, who do you contact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party member</th>
<th>Family representative</th>
<th>Concerned employee</th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Municipality member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 8) In case you were not comfortable with the treatment of the municipality representative's treatment, would you file a complaint?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
8.1) To whom


8.2) How?


B | Presenting problems and finding solutions

| B | 1) Whose main responsibility is it to solve problems on the local level, in your opinion? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organizations | Political parties | Municipalities | Citizens | Ministries | Religious figures | Political authorities |
| | | | | | | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>2) How do you find the solutions to these problems?</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1) To each their own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2) Every group finds their own solution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3) Complain to our political authority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4) Complain to the municipality and it finds the solution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5) Try to find a common solution with the municipality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B 3) What do you recommend to encourage citizen participation in presenting and finding solutions to these problems?

B 4) What or who helped solve these problems?

B 5) How effective was the organizations' impact on local development? (From 1 to 5) (1 being the lowest)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B 6) How can local communities (civil society) contribute to improving current conditions?

C | Citizen participation in local development

C 1) Do the citizens take the initiative to suggest activities to the municipality board?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C 1.1) Who are they?

C 1.2) How?

C 2) Do the citizens participate in the planning of the local community's activities?
C 2.1) Who are they?

C 2.2) How?

C 3 Is there a role for the citizen in implementing the municipality’s activities and projects?

C 3.1) Who are they?

C 3.2) How?

C 4 Which of these levels mostly represents a citizen’s participation in municipal work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry</th>
<th>Offering an opinion</th>
<th>Perform tasks</th>
<th>Placing strategies</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why?

C 5 What are the most prominent challenges facing active citizen participation in municipal work?
Citizen participation in municipal work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D</th>
<th>Citizen participation in municipal work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1   To what extent do the citizens cooperate with each other to improve the current reality? (From 1 to 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2   To what extent do the citizens believe in their right of participation in managing their common societal affairs? (From 1 to 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3   How effective are the communication methods between the citizens and the municipality? (From 1 to 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4   What is the level of municipal responsiveness to the citizens' right of access to data? (From 1 to 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>5   To what extent do the citizens feel the local development strategies address their needs?</td>
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To what extent are citizens’ capable of setting the priorities regarding local development? (From 1 to 5)

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To what extent can the citizen examine the municipal budget (has access to)? (From 1 to 5)

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How?

How clear is the process of citizen participation / contribution in local development projects? (From 1 to 5)

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What is the level of confidence given by the citizens to the municipal board? (From 1 to 5)

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To what extent are citizens participating in the municipal committees?
(From 1 to 5)

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D 11 How effective is the municipal committees’ influence on the decisions taken by the municipal board? (From 1 to 5)

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D 12 What do you suggest to encourage citizen participation in local development on the municipal level?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FGDS INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Introducing the project and objectives and signing consent form and asking if possible to record.
- Introducing themselves, their NGO and its objectives and activities.
- Questions are in bold and supporting questions (probes) are below to use if needed depending on discussion and flow of focus group.

1. What do people expect from the municipality?
   - 1.1 What shapes their opinion towards a municipality's efficiency?
   - 1.2 Do they care more about representation (of different families and groups) or efficiency in projects and meeting basic demands, or future, or promoting and advancing village identity?
   - 1.3 What is role of union of municipalities? (as perceived by people and in your opinion)

2. How is the relationship between municipalities and civil society organizations?
   - 2.1 What factors shape the relationships?
   - 2.2 How do you select which villages you operate in?

3. Tell us about your experience with municipal engagement?
   - 3.1 Whose decision was it?
   - 3.2 Was it funded?
   - 3.3 What were the objectives?
   - 3.4 What were the activities? (target)
     - 3.1 How long did it last (is it planned to last)?
   - 3.6 How was it governed (role distribution, decision making, membership ....)

4. What impact did it have on the village?
   - 4.1 What changed after it? (on the level of people’s perceptions, behaviors, knowledge, or municipalities plans, behaviors, approach, etc..)

5. What would you change in future activities
   - 5.1 Why?

6. What factors in general shape the design of engagement activities?
   - 6.1 What differs among villages contexts?
   - 6.2 How those differences influence design of interventions?

7. What are recommendations for enhanced and promoted coordination (and engagement) between all actors?
   - 7.1 Roles of different actors?
   - 7.2 Entry points for you as civil society organizations?
   - 7.3 Conditions for success for suggested interventions?
INTERVIEWS WITH HOMS AND HEADS OF UNIONS

- Introducing the project and objectives and signing consent form and asking if possible to record
- Briefly chatting about current term and previous municipal experience if present
- Questions are in bold and supporting questions (probes) are below to use if needed depending on discussion and flow of interview.

SECTION 1: ON YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE MUNICIPALITY AND PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS

1.1 How do you describe your experience in the municipality?
   • What are the key successes you achieved?
   • What are key challenges you are facing? (direct discussion to engagement related challenges, allow some general discussion to understand context and link to engagement)

1.2 How do you describe people’s perception towards the municipality?
   • In terms of clarity on its role?
   • What shapes their opinions mostly (work completed, rumors, familial or political tensions…)

1.3 What can help you succeed in your vision and plan?
   • Which actors can and should be involved?
   • How are civil society groups helping/not helping?

1.5 How do you describe the experience of the Union of municipalities?
   • What could be the role of the union in municipal engagement

SECTION 2: ON MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

2.1 Why do you think it is important to have more interaction and engagement?
   • What positive results can it bring?
   • What happens if it is absent?

2.2 Have you conducted any citizen engagement efforts?
   • Describe the process?
   • How was it decided upon?
   • What did it aim to achieve?
   • Who participated in it?
   • What was the role of the municipality versus other actors?
   • How do you ensure that marginalized population groups participate in these efforts?

2.3 What did you learn from the engagement initiative(s) that happened in your village:
• What worked and what didn’t work?
• Why?
• What would you change in its design?
• What would make other people who haven’t participated engage?
• Are there groups that need special attention to participate?

2.4 What Impact and influence did engagement initiatives leave on the village?
• What changed after the activities? (on the level of people’s perceptions, behaviors, knowledge, or municipalities plans, behaviors, approach, etc.)
• What would make such work more impactful?

2.5 What activity is more appealing for people in the village to participate in?
• Discussions and information about municipal budget?
• Discussions and information about municipal Plans and projects?
• Being part of activities organized by the municipality?
• Why do you think?

2.6 What factors influence the success of engagement initiatives?

SECTION 3: ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE CITIZENS

3.1 How does the municipality share information about its projects and updates?
• What information do you share (announcements, updates, projects, taxes, plans...)
• How do you share it? (Social media, announcements, banners, etc...)
• What would you change?

SECTION 4: ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

4.1 What are recommendations for enhanced and promoted coordination (and engagement) between all actors?
8 Roles of different actors
9 Entry points for civil society
10 Conditions for success

4.2 What engagement activity you wish to implement in your village?
• Have heard of it in other villages, or other countries, etc..
INTERVIEWS WITH PRESIDENTS OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEES AND ACTIVE MEMBERS IN LOCAL WORKING GROUPS WITH MUNICIPALITY

- Introducing the project and objectives and signing consent form and asking if possible to record
- Introducing themselves, village and age and occupation and previous experience (what committee were they in, and what their position)
- Questions are in bold and supporting questions (probes) are below to use if needed depending on discussion and flow of interview.

SECTION 1: ON PERCEPTION TOWARDS ROLES OF MUNICIPALITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

1.1 How do you describe people’s perception towards the municipality?
   - In terms of clarity on its role?
   - What shapes their opinions mostly (work completed, rumors, familial or political tensions...)

1.2 Are civil society groups fulfilling their role, what is missing?

1.3 Do you feel you can influence decisions in your village?
   - Why and why not?
   - How does your position (as a committee member) enhance\decrease your potential to influence?
   - What would help you have more influence?

1.7 What challenges do municipalities face?
   - How can citizens help them?
   - How can civil society help them?
   - Anything to add based on your personal experience as an active member of the community?

1.8 What are your duties and responsibilities towards the municipality?
   - As a citizen
   - As an active member in the community

SECTION 2: ON YOUR MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCE
2.1 Tell us about your experience with municipal engagement?
- Whose decision was it?
- Who initiated it?
- Was it funded?
- What were the objectives?
- How long did it last (is it planned to last)

2.2 How was the committee (governing structure of municipal engagement initiative) formed?
4 How were people selected to be part of the committee?
5 Did this create any tension? How did you solve it?
6 How were people invited to participate in activities?
7 How do you take decisions?
8 How often do you meet?

2.3 What activities have you conducted?
- What was the objective of the activity?
- Who participated in it?
- How were people invited?
- How did people react?

2.4 What impact did it have on the village?
- What changed after it? (on the level of people’s perceptions, behaviors, knowledge, or municipalities plans, behaviors, approach, etc.)

2.5 What challenges did you face?
- On the level of organization?
- On the level of committees resources and capacity?
- On the level of the culture of participation?
- How did you deal with the above challenges?

2.6 What would the committee need to become more active and impactful?
- Resources
- Capacity
- More engagement from the municipality

2.7 What would you change in future activities
- Why?
- What specific aspects in your village shape the design of your activities?

2.8 What factors in general shape the design of engagement activities?
- Think of other villages and other contexts?

SECTION 3: ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE MUNICIPALITY
3.1 How does the municipality share information about its projects and updates
   11 What information does it share (announcements, updates, projects, taxes, plans...)

3.2 Does it use Social media?
   12 What platform?
   13 Do you follow it
   14 Why?
   15 What do you prefer, which platform?

3.3 Did it differ between being inside and outside the committee?
   • What information you have access to now and you didn’t before?
   • How did this (having more information) influence you?
   • What channels are usually followed?
   • Who has access to them?

3.4 What would you like to see on such platforms?
   How do you know about funerals and activities and weddings

3.5 How can you and other citizens share complaints and feedback to the municipality?
   What would you like to use?
   What would work in your village context?

Section 4: On recommendations for municipal engagement

4.1 What are recommendations for enhanced and promoted coordination (and engagement) between all actors based on your experience?
   • Roles of different actors?
   • Entry points for civil society?
   • Conditions for success?

4.2 What are your suggestions for activities and projects to promote better engagement?
   • What do they need to be implemented?
ANNEX C- FRAMEWORKS FOR MUNICIPAL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Several frameworks discuss citizens participation in public affairs, a literature review of the most relevant conceptual frameworks for municipal-community engagement reveals two primary approaches:

1. **Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation**:
   The ladder is a demonstration of the different stages of the participation process. It consists of eight progressive steps or “rungs” which reveal increasing degrees of citizen participation, from non-participation to tokenism, to citizen power in decision-making.

   The eight steps can be summarized as follows:

   1. **Manipulation**: Non-participative step where citizens are educated on the proposed decisions which they have had no part in influencing and are coerced into supporting them. Public support, in this case, is often superficial and lacks legitimacy.

   2. **Therapy**: Non-participative step where citizens have no input or role in decision-making but are rather “cured” into supporting the proposed plan. Public support, in this case, is purely cosmetic and lacks substantive engagement.

   3. **Informing**: This is the first step of a participative approach, characterized by a one-way flow of information. This stage does not allow for constructive dialogue and therefore limits the channels for feedback.

   4. **Consultation**: This step transcends information sharing to more concrete citizen involvement but is still a form of citizen “tokenism.” Civic engagement in this step appears in the form of consultations (through surveys, meetings, public inquiries, etc.).

   5. **Placation**: This step includes citizens who are “passive activists” that advise those who hold power. Those in power are the ultimate decision-makers and can legitimize or discredit the advice from citizens who have participated, which also makes this step a form of citizen “tokenism.”

   6. **Partnership**: This step is where citizens gain a share of decision-making power. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and governed by transparent processes for planning and decision-making. One example of the partnership approach is forming joint committees, although it is worth noting that the committee might not necessarily be inclusive.

   7. **Delegation**: This step adds on to the decision-making power of citizens and introduces the concept of accountability. At this stage, citizens are involved and hold a clear majority to make decisions and are therefore held accountable for those decisions.

   8. **Citizen Control**: This step achieves the highest level of decision-making power for citizens, where they have absolute local control of planning, policy making, and managerial aspects.

   ![Diagram of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation]

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The International Association for Public Participation’s IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation

The IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation creates a distinction between five levels of engagement. The lowest level of participation and influence is ‘Inform’, followed by “Consult”, “Involve”, “Collaborate”, and finally “Empower,” which involves the highest level of public participation in decision-making processes.

The five levels can be summarized as follows:

- **Inform**: Share relevant information with citizens
- **Consult**: Obtain feedback from citizens
- **Involve**: Work directly with community members to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are accounted for
- **Collaborate**: Partner with citizens in each aspect of the decision-making process and facilitate discussions to reach agreement
- **Empower**: Place final decision-making power in the hands of citizens by creating an environment conducive to independent action from citizens

Defining Municipal Engagement

Defining engagement can be a complex exercise as the meaning varies based on context. It is worth noting that the terms “engagement” and “participation” are often used interchangeably in several definitions.

Below are some examples of definitions:

1. **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**: Engaging active participation is “a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in the policy-making process. It acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue — although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government.”

2. **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**: “Civic participation denotes diverse practices of active citizen engagement in the community and society, including engagement in policy-making that influences decisions on infrastructure and economic investments. This citizen engagement also includes self-help grassroots actions aiming at improvement to a variety of aspects of social life, advocacy, philanthropy and other similar activities that enable the better shaping of community and society in line citizen needs and interests.”

3. **The World Bank Group (WBG)**: 

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14 International Association For Public Participation, IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation


16 USAID, The Role of Community Development and Citizen Engagement Activities in USAID.GOV Strengthening Civic Engagement and Government Responsiveness in Serbia

17 Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement in World Bank Group Operations: Engaging with
“Citizen engagement is defined as the two-way interaction between citizens and governments or the private sector within the scope of WBG interventions—policy dialogue, programs, projects, and advisory services and analytics—that gives citizens a stake in decision-making with the objective of improving the intermediate and final development outcomes of the intervention.”

4. **United Nations International Conference on Engaging Communities (Brisbane Declaration):** 18
   “Community engagement is a two way process: by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment; and by which governments and other business and civil society organizations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes.”

5. **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2):** 19
   “Public participation means to involve those who are affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It promotes sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information they need to be involved in a meaningful way, and it communicates to participants how their input affects the decision.”

On the other hand, it is also worth noting that municipal engagement “refers to how local governments interact with the public beyond regular functions such as election cycles, tax collection, and service delivery.” 20 This means that municipal-citizen interaction for the delivery of services needs to be distinguished from local planning and policy-making. “The first requires engagement practices that are more immediate, providing effective feedback channels to residents as they interact with city services; the second occurs over longer periods of time and needs support for establishing relations, including building trust, and setting up effective channels that enable residents to participate in policy creation and implementation.” 21

**Core Principles for Municipal - Community Engagement**

In order to develop a definition aligned with the scope and objectives of the project, it is necessary to structure such a definition in line with clearly defined principles that are participatory and relevant to the Lebanese context. A review of the existing literature reveals a set of core principles for consideration, which serve as useful guidelines for our definition:

- **Inclusiveness:** All citizens of the community have the right to participate and engage in decisions relevant to them
- **Transparency:** Clear communication and timely feedback on how citizen input has been considered by decision makers
- **Accountability:** Commitment to bear responsibility for decision-making and for continuous evaluation and improvement
- **Responsiveness:** Flexibility and agile action planning to respond to dynamic local needs
- **Communication:** Assurance of a channel for feedback and dialogue. Note that communication is actually crosscutting the different elements as it is needed in each and can also be seen as a separate element due to its importance.

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Citizens for Improved Results, World Bank Group, 2014

18 Brisbane Declaration, International Conference on Engaging Communities, 2005

19 Core Values, Ethics, Spectrum – The 3 Pillars of Public Participation, International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

20 Civic Engagement Framework for the City of Pitt Meadows, Modus Planning Design and Engagement, 2018

21 The Problem of Community Engagement: Disentangling the Practices of Municipal Government, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2018