

Youth Local Councils



The capacity of local government to reach out to citizens and to involve them in identifying priorities, planning, and monitoring builds trust and solidifies the relationship between citizens and government officials. Over the past decade, Global Communities in Palestine has designed interventions to enhance awareness of good governance practices and the important role of the community in local government. Special emphasis has been placed on the role of youth through the **Youth Local Councils (YLCs)** initiative.

Although Palestinian youth constitute an overwhelming majority of the West Bank and Gaza population (65% are between the ages of 13-38 years old), there had previously been few opportunities for them to engage in community affairs and local governance. In response, Global Communities piloted what was then named the *Youth Shadow Local Councils (YSLCs)* initiative in 4 communities in 2008, with funding from USAID. After the success of the pilot, Global Communities expanded to an additional 9 communities in 2010 under the USAID-funded Local Democratic Reform (LDR) program. The initiative continues under the USAID-funded Local Government and Infrastructure (LGI) program and has expanded to a total of 20 communities in the West Bank.

The YLC Process

The initiative began as the Youth Shadow Local Councils because the councils, democratically elected bodies made up of 11-15 members aged 15-22, “shadowed” their local government leaders to learn about good governance practices. Each youth council mirrors the elected local government unit (LGU, or municipality) in size and formation. Working in partnership with the municipality, the purpose of the YSLCs has been to sensitize youth to good governance practices and to give them an opportunity to take a leadership role in their community. The YLC initiative has an impact on four levels: 1) *individuals* are becoming empowered, confident young leaders; 2) *youth* are viewed as proactive, hardworking, contributing members of society; 3) *communities* are building partnerships and implementing

Four Levels of YLC Impact



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initiatives that improve quality of life; and 4) *nationally*, the YLCs have created a platform for youth networking, hosting national youth summits, informing local governance and youth policy, and creating the next generation of Palestinian leaders. Through constant coaching and mentoring, Global Communities and local partners have supported the youth councils in the following phases:

- 1) Establishing general assemblies in each municipality
- 2) Campaigning and outreach to voters
- 3) Holding democratic elections and forming the council
- 4) Leadership and skills development
- 5) Establishing local partnerships and alliances
- 6) Youth-led local activities

YLC Initiatives/Campaigns

Literacy
Environment
Road Safety
Fire Safety
Employment
Local Tourism
Volunteerism
Persons with Disabilities
Emergency Responses
Fundraisers for the Needy

Youth Leaders

The YSLC initiative has gone beyond engaging youth in citizen participation activities and increasing awareness of local governance issues. YSLCs, with Global Communities support, empowered youth, helping to create strategic partnerships to improve communities and to provide a networking platform within and among Palestinian communities. In light of the youths' outstanding accomplishments and their determination, innovation, and independence, it became apparent that YSLCs were no longer "shadowing." In 2014, the Youth Shadow Local Councils became the *Youth Local Councils*.

The buy-in and support of the YLC concept by local government units and organizations has been instrumental in the success of the YLCs. Often taking the lead, the YLCs have cooperated with their municipalities, police, fire and rescue, and community-based organizations to respond to the needs of their respective communities.

The YLC initiative has also empowered young Palestinian leaders in the West Bank; many have gone on to receive impressive awards and to take on new positions. YLC presidents have served as acting mayors, acting police chiefs, and acting ministers. Former YLC president Mohammed Taqaqta was one of a handful of youth to receive the prestigious "Volunteer of the Year" award from the Palestinian Prime Minister in 2012. Perhaps most impressive, former YLC member Yaqoub Marouf was elected to his village's local council.

What began as a youth initiative in Palestine in 2008 – 4 pilot communities with 700 youth – has become a movement. In 2016, after only 8 years, Global Communities can boast that it has supported the establishment of 20 YLCs across the West Bank, with more than 17,000 youth involved. The YLCs have become an integral part of their communities, woven into the tapestry of their societies.

