

“Challenges facing local government in Jordan and strategies to address them”

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CHALLENGES FACING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN JORDAN AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEM

Abstract

Local governments play an important role in the economic and social development of local services provided to localities. In Jordan, local governments face problems and challenges that impede this development. The purpose of this descriptive study is to investigate the magnitude of challenges faced by local governments using a random sample (251) of mayors and heads of provincial governorates. Qualitative methods with a purposive sample employing twenty in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted to identify the major challenges. After analyzing data using the SPSS, the study pointed out that the lack of financial resources and the lack of independence of local government in managing local funding is another major challenge. The study revealed that environmental protection was the biggest challenge. Responsiveness and public participation are other challenges faced by local governments. Based on the study results, the recommendation and provision of centralized technical assistance are required to maintain environmental protection. However, capacity building for local employees is a must. The critical financial position of local governments needs to be addressed by re-evaluating the share of funds allocated to local units.

Keywords

challenges, local government, strategies, methods,
capacity building, environmental protection, Jordan

JEL Classification

M12, D22

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed increasing interest in local government. This concern arose in the context of the trend towards increased citizen participation and role in governance, a decrease in the state's role and an increase in the role of the private sector and civil society institutions in the development process. This concern can be seen in the World Bank reports on the development of the world addressed in many ways such as 'making the state closer to people', 'shifting to localization and decentralization' and 'reinventing government'. Therefore, local government occupies an important position in the internal government system, plays an active role in national development and is considered as grassroots government (Bomedian, 2010).

Much research by international institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program has clearly shown that local governments in developing countries face several challenges of which the most important are financial, administrative and technical ones (Cheema, 1993; Rawwash, 2020; Zenker, Eggers, & Farsky, 2013). Furthermore, a group of scholars agreed that local government units (LGUs) face a range of challenges, perhaps the most important of which are technical competence, financial viability, responsiveness to citizens' needs, public participation, ca-

capacity building and environmental protection (Holis & Fulton, 2002; Bingiston, Fletcher, & Kristen, 2004; Wong, Tang, & Horen, 2006).

Local governments in Jordan face a set of challenges represented by lack of training and development of their cadres, in addition to strict central control, alongside with low public participation. These challenges cannot be ignored if local governments want to advance their economic, social and developmental roles (Almeani, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to find out the level of these challenges, as well as methods and strategies to solve them, which will be used as guidelines to decision makers.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Local governments in developing countries face multiple problems and challenges, but they differ depending on the different political, economic and social conditions of each country. Recently, there has been an increase in the importance of local units in light of the development of the local government's function; it started to play a greater role in achieving comprehensive development and implementing some public policies of the state (Rodić & Wilson, 2017). The following is a review of main challenges and problems facing the local administration.

Nwankwo, Olabisi, and Onwuchekwa (2017) defined capacity as the ability of an individual or organization to perform a specific function effectively and efficiently on continuous bases with little dependence on external sources. The term 'capacity building' is used to focus on human potential in terms of providing employees with knowledge and skills and, beyond that, to include work, participation, management, motivation, morale, responsibility and accountability (Kim, Samiya, Kara, Gloria, Benjamin, & Healthier, 2017). According to the contemporary concept of capacity building, there are two levels: (a) Capacity building at the individual level, which refers to the process of changing the knowledge, behavior and attitudes of individuals through standardized training programs and, beyond that, to include individual procedures associated with increased performance through changes in management style, motivation and morale (Chakuanda & Chalp, 2015); and (b) Capacity building at the corporate level, which focuses on the overall performance of the organization (local unit), its ability to provide services to the community, development of the unit, improvement of its physical assets, and creation of an appropriate environment for its work in terms of

its organizational structures, clarification of functions and responsibilities. In a study of Kim et al. (2017), aimed at identifying models and methods used in public health interventions for capacity building, it was revealed that capacity building for health institutions requires attention to the following three levels in order to improve health: (a) Provision of knowledge and skills to practitioners; (b) Expansion and support of the infrastructure of health organizations; and (c) Development of genuine partnerships for community health. Labstone and Laverack (2001) pointed out that the goal of capacity building is to improve practices and infrastructure by creating structures or values.

The literature related to local government points to the importance of developing and maximizing the creative and development capacities of local authorities and focusing upon satisfying the citizen. The rule of the community requires local authorities to look outside; the way is no longer the experience itself but the value as seen by the citizen, whether these services are provided directly or through other bodies (Boomedian, 2010).

In 1993, a German scientific research institution called Foundation Bertelsmann initiated the establishment of the Democracy and Effectiveness Award in local administration to be granted to the local authority, which has the ability to innovate, develop, compete and has quality in service delivery (Bertelsmann, 1944).

The weakness and lack of financial resources is one of the most important obstacles to the development of local administrations (Raco, 2018). This weakness affects the independence of local councils, as local unit independence depends mainly upon the availability of their own resources to achieve the completion of required local projects. In Jordan, it was found that the financial position

varies from one local unit to another depending on the size of local intensity and the number of citizens (residents) being served in the locality. Apart from the fundamental differences between Amman and other localities, there is a clear imbalance between expenditure and revenue between cities and regions. While it can be seen that the budget allocated to the Greater Amman Municipality alone amounts to 350 million dinars, the budget of all the municipalities of the Kingdom is only about 200 million dinars (Taamneh, 2018; Almaaitah, 2017). Beyond the experience of the Greater Amman Municipality, the municipalities in Jordan face a critical financial situation that makes them unable to carry out their duties and basic duties (World Bank, 2005).

Local funding is one of the most important tools and mechanisms that contribute to the local development process. Local funding can be defined as all available financial resources that can be provided from various sources to finance local development in order to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the local community in such a way as to achieve the highest rates of development (Taamneh, 2018). The Decentralization Law No. 49 of 2015 did not clarify the sources of funding of the provincial councils except as stated in the text of Article 9B: The provincial council is allocated in the annual budget of the province enough to sustain its work. However, the municipalities in Municipal Law No. 41 of 2015 entail several sources of revenue that can be grouped into the following two categories: (1) Taxes and fees collected and transferred to municipalities by central government, such as fuel tax as the most important source of revenue; and (2) Land and building tax as a local tax on property that can be collected by the municipality or the Ministry of Finance on behalf of the municipalities (Taamneh, Nawafleh, Aladwan, & Alqurran, 2019).

The weakness of financial resources is one of the most important challenges facing the local units; this would affect the independence of local units as the financial independence depends on the availability of financial resources to ensure the completion of the local projects required. The dependence of local units on central government to finance their activities and projects through the fuel taxes and fees makes the local units captive to

the center, especially under the system of transfer that is not very transparent and controlled little by the localities (Kewo, 2017).

Historically, for the public sector to be responsive, the governmental executive agents must, in consistency with the public interest as identified in each case, meet citizens' demands in the democratic society (McCamy, 1954, cited in Aladwan, 2017). Responsiveness can be defined as a concept that refers to the role of elected local leaders in conveying popular demands to decision-making bodies. It also includes the work of those leaders in providing the services and goods needed and demanded by the local citizen. Responsiveness is synonymous with the term political accountability (Michel, 2012). Needless to say, the concept of response implicitly contains three interrelated and sequential dimensions: listening, advocacy and delivery. It is not possible to appropriately provide services or goods to the population without listening to the identification of their requests, and those requests cannot be implemented without a feeling of support towards these requests. Policy reformers have opted for decentralization to break the monopoly of central authority and to stop interfering in people's daily lives and affairs (Harison, 2008; Connerly & Smoke, 2010; Eneizan, 2019).

Michael (2012), assessing the level of responsiveness of local government councils to the demands and needs of the population from the point of view of citizens in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, revealed that there were mixed feelings amongst the African people. One third of the sample thinks that local councillors listen to them on a regular basis, and another third thinks that they only listen to them occasionally, while the last third made it clear that councillors do not listen to them at all (Aladwan, 2017).

Local units, although characterized by financial and administrative independence, are subject to the supervision of the central bodies. Perhaps most important in this regard is the supervision of the work of local councils through ratification, in the sense of monitoring the decisions of these councils and sometimes not allowing them to implement them without the approval of central government. This would make the response of the

local councils limited, especially if the previous forms of censorship were applied to the actions and decisions of these council (Taamneh, 2007). Local units in Jordan have close ties with central authorities such as the Ministry of Works, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Local Administration, and the alternative name of the Ministry of Municipalities after the last government formation in April 2019, the Audit Bureau and the Civil Service Bureau (Taamneh et al., 2019).

A number of factors play an important role in shaping individuals' perceptions of the government's responsiveness. Social characteristics such as poverty and place of residence determine the level of responsiveness. The logic that explains this is that the voice of the poor is rarely heard, while the voice of the urban population is more vocal in expressing demands than the rural population (Narayan, 2000).

The concept of public participation is linked to democracy. Participation makes the individual feel his importance and human dignity and his sense of being an effective component in the development of public policies of the local unit with the ability to influence decision-making related to local affairs (Alrasheed, 2008). The patterns and forms of public participation vary from the flow of information between local government councils and citizens (communication) to dialog between the two parties (consultation) and reaches the maximum limit of participation in production (co-production). The first type of participation (communication) aims to improve the relationship between the local government councillor as a service provider and the local user. Some community members can use IT such as websites, information points, and CD ROMS to provide free access to information. It may be useful to imagine that if real and serious information is provided by the local council through providing all communication requirements, this leads to more rich initiatives such as consultation. Consultation includes attempts to identify service deficiencies and conduct comprehensive reviews of public reaction to proposals in order to improve those services. The third type (co-production) represents an advanced state of public participation by which local citizens play

a strong role in formulating strategies and providing services. The citizens work side by side with local councilors to participate in the design and implementation of services of interest to different segments of the population according to their needs (Steve & Annette, 2000). The modern approach to good governance in public administration recommends that citizens should be considered real partners in governance, not just customers, because this will build effective democratic governance (O'Leary & Bingham, 2008; Kim, 2010).

Some researchers, such as Nagi (2008) and Crosby (2012), have tried to present suggestions on how to promote community participation such as encouraging citizens to submit complaints, holding public meetings of citizens or representatives of local elites to discuss issues and topics of common concern, and relying on the opinions of expert advisers to identify the needs of citizens. It is worth mentioning that the choice of strategies and methods to promote popular participation must be adapted to the context in which the local authority works, in the sense of compatibility with the social, demographic, political and technological environment (Crosby, 2012).

At present, environmental problems have varied and have become a real threat to human beings due to human activity that does not take into consideration the rules of environmental protection and protection. Human efforts have focused on the unfeasible exploitation of environmental resources and, thus, environmental problems have become one of the most important challenges facing local councils in all countries of the world (Ramadan, 2011).

The environment in Jordan faces threats stemming from an increase in the number of refugees, especially after the civil war in Syria since 2011. More than 1.4 million Syrians fled to Jordan amounting to 14 percent of the population of the Kingdom. It is worth mentioning that the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 caused the migration of about one million Iraqis to Jordan, in addition to large numbers of refugees from Egypt, Libya and Yemen after the start of the so called Arab Spring (Beni Salameh and Hyajneh, 2019). These waves of refugees have contributed to the pressure on

infrastructure and social services such as water, energy, transportation, schools, sanitation, hospitals and others.

Despite the establishment of many institutions for environmental protection in Jordan, as well as the various tasks and duties practiced by them, these institutions still suffer from many obstacles that limit their functionality in protecting the environment. The most prominent of these are the duplication of the work of environmental institutions, the lack of environmental planning, the lack of technical capacity in the absence of an environmental data bank and technical mechanisms for measuring and testing the environment and measuring emissions, and the lack of laboratory readiness in some environmental institutions. The objectives of the study were: To identify the level of challenges facing LGUs in the following dimensions – development and capacity building, the viability of self-sustaining financial resources, responsiveness, public participation, and protection of the environment; and the major strategies and means that can be adopted to meet the challenges and problems facing LGUs.

Research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of challenges facing local government in Jordan?

RQ2: What are the strategies and means that can be adopted to meet the challenges and problems facing local government in Jordan?

2. METHODOLOGY

The study comprised a sample from municipalities and governorate councils. The study sample included 350 mayors and municipal members, heads and members of governorate councils in the Northern region of the Kingdom. Out of 350 questionnaires, only 251 useful responses were received back.

The analytical descriptive approach was adopted due to its relevance to the nature of this study. The first part of this study attempts to assess the level of challenges and problems facing local governments, represented by the following five dimen-

sions: (1) development and capacity building; (2) financial viability; (3) responsiveness; (4) public participation; and (5) environment protection, as perceived by the sample. Secondly, a qualitative method employing in-depth, face to face interviews was conducted. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with the heads of the provincial councils, mayors and heads of local councils.

This study adopted a descriptive approach of the exploratory type in attempting to shed light on the level of challenges facing local governments in Jordan. The level of challenges was measured using a 31-paragraph questionnaire that represents five dimensions designed to measure the five dimensions of challenges. The five dimensions used to measure the challenges are: development and building capacity (6 items, $\alpha = 0.83$), financial viability (7 items, $\alpha = 0.76$), responsiveness (6 items, $\alpha = 0.78$), public participation (6 items, $\alpha = 0.84$), and environment protection (6 items, $\alpha = 0.84$). All of the tool measures used in this research showed appropriate levels of reliability (α ranged from 0.76-0.93). The survey used the five-point Likert scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

3. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1. Sample traits

The response rate was 71.7% (251 returned questionnaires), with the majority of men (61%) and women (39%). This is due to the nature of work in local government, especially in the municipalities, which are characterized by jobs of the field nature that do not appeal to females. With regard to the age distribution, the workforce seems to be relatively old with a percentage of 64.5% in the age class of 40 years and above, whereas the age bracket of less than 30 years amounted to 8.4%. Moreover, the majority of respondents are bachelor's degree holders (54%), while the percentage of postgraduate degrees was (16.3%). It appears that the nature of work for the respondents requires an academic level of bachelor's degree or above; however, this reflects a high level of education enjoyed by Jordanians.

3.2. The extent of challenges facing LGUs

The study used a descriptive approach to assessing data for survey responses in Jordan. To analyze the results and assess the level of the respondents' attitudes, the following criterion was adopted (see Table 1).

To answer the first main research question, Table 2 shows the means and SDs of the respondents' assessments towards the extent of challenges facing local governments in Jordan addressed in descending order.

Table 2 shows that respondents reported that environmental protection, financial viability, responsiveness, participation and capacity building are the major challenges facing local governments in Jordan. It is apparent that environmental protection is the most challenging dimension with a mean of 3.93, whilst capacity building was reported to be the lowest challenge (mean = 3.64). Pearson correlation values between the dimen-

sions of challenges facing local governments are significant and positive at the 0.01 level. However, the strongest correlation was between the institutional building dimension and the environmental protection dimension (0.23). The weakest correlation was between the responsiveness dimension and the financial viability dimension (0.15). To answer the sub-questions of the first research question, the following is an analysis of the results for each of the five dimensions depicted in Tables 3-7.

Table 3 shows that the respondents' assessment of environmental protection were found to be high with a mean value of 3.92. The order of environmental protection challenges was recognized as follows: Lack of an environmental control system, lack of urban planning, lack of deterrent penalties, lack of technical equipment, environmental legislation and lack of legislation. Each challenge was found to be assessed as high.

With regard to the financial viability challenge, Table 4 shows that the limited investment projects challenge is the biggest challenge within the finan-

Table 1. Level of the respondents' attitudes

Statistical level	Range
Low	1.00 – less than 2.33
Moderate	2.33 – less than 3.66
High	3.66 – 5.00

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of respondents' assessment of the level of five challenges facing local governments and correlation ($N = 251$)

No.	Dimensions	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Environmental protection	3.92	0.85				
2	Financial viability	3.72	0.82	0.22*			
3	Responsiveness	3.71	0.70	0.16*	0.15*		
4	Participation	3.67	0.60	0.19*	0.19*	0.22*	
5	Capacity building	3.64	0.65	0.23*	0.17*	0.21*	0.18*

Note: SD: standard deviation. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Respondents' assessment of environmental protection challenges facing local government

Rank	Items (challenges)	M	SD	Assessment level
1	Lack of an environmental control system	4.10	.956	High
2	Lack of urban planning	4.05	1.009	High
3	Lack of punitive sanctions	3.96	1.052	High
4	Lack of technical equipment and laboratories	3.93	.984	High
5	Shortcomings in environmental legislation	3.4	1.008	High
6	Scarcity of professional human resources	3.71	.992	High
Total		3.92	.746	High

Table 4. Respondents' assessment of the challenges of financial viability facing local government

Rank	Items (challenges)	M	SD	Assessment level
1	Limited investment projects	3.95	.982	High
2	Limited autonomy	3.85	1.055	High
3	High percentage of salaries	3.77	1.152	High
4	Critical financial position	3.76	1.155	High
5	Difficulty in collecting local revenues	3.69	1.083	High
6	Inefficient financial department	3.47	1.074	Moderate
Total		3.72	0.693	High

Table 5. Respondents' assessment of the level of responsiveness facing local government

Rank	Items (challenges)	M	SD	Assessment level
1	Limited responsiveness to citizens' needs due to financial reasons	3.84	.974	High
2	Financial and administrative routine	3.83	.969	High
3	Weak responsiveness capacity to citizens' demands	3.73	1.178	High
4	Government bureaucracy	3.71	1.081	High
5	Mechanisms of identifying needs and priorities of people	3.61	1.113	High
6	Strict central government control	3.51	1.154	High
7	Responsiveness	3.71	.728	High

Table 6. Respondents' assessment of the level of public participation challenges facing local government

Rank	Items (challenges)	M	SD	Assessment level
1	Citizens' trust in their local councils	3.88	1.010	High
2	Citizens' reluctance to participate in local decisions	3.75	.967	High
3	Appropriate mechanisms for interaction with local citizens	3.74	1.067	High
4	Citizens' reluctance to pay taxes due to their dissatisfaction with the quality of local services	3.64	1.142	High
5	Difficulty in holding public meetings	3.55	1.138	High
6	Consulting citizens in local decisions	3.48	1.181	Moderate
7	Public participation	3.67	.784	High

Table 7. Respondents' assessment of the level of capacity building challenges facing local government

Rank	Items (challenges)	M	SD	Assessment
1	Provision of financial allocations for the development of employees	3.84	1.015	High
2	Investment in knowledge and skills of HRs	3.74	1.036	High
3	Training and development	3.65	1.057	Moderate
4	Lack of accountability due to unclear duties and responsibilities	3.59	1.205	Moderate
5	Adequate human and material resources	3.55	1.275	Moderate
6	An appropriate working environment	3.49	1.21	Moderate
7	Capacity building	3.64	0.850	Moderate

cial viability dimension (mean = 3.95). All items received a high assessment level except item (7) regarding the ineffectiveness of the financial department (mean = 3.747) with a moderate assessment level.

The respondents reported that all items of the responsiveness challenges (Table 5) were found to have a high level of assessment with means that ranged from 3.75 to 3.84. The limited responsive-

ness to citizens' needs due to the financial reason, and the challenge of financial and administrative routine were reported to occupy the highest level of responsiveness dimension with the means of 3.84 and 3.83, respectively.

Table 6 shows that the items of 'Citizens' trust in local councils', 'Citizens' reluctance to participate in local decisions', and the 'Appropriate mechanisms for interaction with local citizens' are the

main three crucial challenges facing local governments (means = 3.58, 3.75, 3.74). The table also shows that the items of 'Difficulty holding public meetings' and 'Consulting citizens in local decisions' are the two least significant challenges facing local government (means = 3.55, 3.48).

Table 7 indicates that each of the following items, 'Provision of financial allocations for the development of employees' and 'Investment in knowledge and skills of the HRs' are the main two decisive challenges facing local government (mean = 3.84, 3.74) with high assessment levels. The least significant three challenges were 'Lack of accountability', 'Adequate human and material resources' and 'Working environment' (mean = 3.59, 3.55, 3.49) with a moderate assessment level.

3.3. Strategies and methods to address challenges

It is worth noting that the purposive sample was chosen for use in cases where special conceptual information was needed (Neuman, 2000). Respondents were asked to provide data relating to the effective strategies and methods that can help cope with the challenges facing their local units. The addressed recommended strategies and methods will be discussed below.

3.3.1. Environmental protection

The mayors of the main cities indicated that the challenges related to the environment are increasing, and their negative impacts on the environment have become visible due to the overwhelming numbers of refugees from Syria and Palestine. These waves of refugees have put additional pressure on infrastructure and social services such as energy, water, sanitation, transportation and schools. The heads of the provincial councils pointed out that, along with refugees, internal migration from the countryside to the city contributed to the pollution of the environment, and cities grew at the expense of the countryside and the spread of industrial areas created great concern over the quality of water and air in addition to the noise that had started to worry citizens. The majority of interviewees agreed that effective strategies, in particular, strategies to meet the challenges of the environment, are: the need to

establish special research centers for the major local units (the four cities in the North) and provide both vehicle inspection and emission measurement techniques. The respondents, namely, heads of local councils (mayors of sub-municipalities), pointed out the necessity to intensify awareness programs for citizens. The heads of local councils complained about the lack of environmental awareness of citizens, which exacerbates the environmental challenges by dealing negatively with the issue of waste collection and mixing them in an unacceptable manner in household containers.

3.3.2. Financial viability

The majority of the respondents indicated that the sources of funding for both the municipalities and the provincial councils are insufficient for the tasks and duties of local governments and for advancing their future plans or investment projects. All the interviewees have indicated the lack of central government support as the biggest challenge, making them unable to meet the basic needs of the local citizens. They complained that what was allocated to their local units from the national budget was insufficient.

The interview results showed the following agreed recommended strategies and methods: increase of government support through the development of tax assessment and collection methods, the increasing of customs' duties and the imposition of a tax on capital gains from land and real estate within the boundaries of local units. The respondents addressed the need to develop the sources of self-financing for local units such as renting or selling land and participating in investment projects with the private sector. Mayors unanimously noted that there was inefficient use of municipal sources. They pointed out that 50-80 percent of municipal spending represented wages and salaries. Some pointed out that the actual need for human resources was only half of what actually existed.

3.3.3. Responsiveness

The mayors indicated that the completion of municipal jobs is linked to several central government agencies such as the Ministry of Local Administration, the Ministry of Works, the Audit

Bureau and others. These central authorities often impede the work of their local units due to financial and administrative routines, resulting in delays in the completion of local transactions and projects. They complain of the bureaucratic routine and try their best to bypass the procedures imposed by those central authorities. About 80 percent of the interviewees suggested that the government should give up day to day control over local units. The other methods and strategies that have been recommended by interviewees are: The role of the government should be limited to monitoring legitimate aspects and leaving matters to the discretion of the local authorities as much as possible; and gradually moving towards e-government through the use of information technology and communication.

3.3.4. Public participation

There is no doubt that the issue of trust between citizens and their local units is the focal point in the extent of citizens' participation. In this context, some mayors pointed out that there is real contact with citizens. The mayors of Jerash and Irbid revealed that periodic meetings were held with citizens. The mayor of Jeresh indicated that the municipality formed a committee to combat indifference and corruption, but none of the respondents recommended any mechanisms for activating public participation. However, the following strategies and methods have received a moderate support from the interviewees: Relying on the opinions of expert advisers to identify citizens' needs, encouraging citizens to submit complaints, intensifying training courses for members of local councils and transparency and openness by the local units.

3.3.5. Capacity building

The majority of respondents agreed that improving the capacity of the local unit to attract human resources according to the system of job description and classification and the allocation of sufficient financial resources to train and develop local employees are at the top of the strategies and methods to address the challenges of individual capacity building. Some respondents pointed to the need to provide material and moral incentives for keeping human talent. In this context, the heads of the

provincial councils have not shown a clear interest in the development and capacity building of human resources. This can be explained by the fact that provincial councils, as a new tier of local government, do not have human resources except to the extent that the Governor provides for the administrative functioning of the provincial council. The importance of the last strategy is underscored by the fact that local administration employees do not feel stable and are waiting for any opportunity to leave the municipal job and join the government or private sector.

4. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that local government in Jordan is faced, to a high degree, with the following five challenges: capacity building, financial viability, responsiveness, public participation, and environmental protection. The results of the study on challenges of capacity building revealed that local government faces a major challenge in allocating financial resources to staff training and development. This can be explained by the limited financial resources in different localities and the lack of sufficient attention to training and development by the local unit management. Despite the existence of a central strategic plan for municipal work for the years 2015–2020 (Ministry of Municipalities Affairs Report of 2016), in which many workshops and training course were held for heads and members of municipal councils and municipal staff, this effort largely depends on external grants. These grants are neither stable nor durable and depend mainly on the interests and directions of the donors. The study also revealed the lack of interest of the local government management in investing in the ideas and skills of their employees. Unfortunately, this problem is widespread in the government sector either because of the lack of expertise and interest of local leaders or modest competencies among employees working in local governments. The results of the analysis show that this challenge (capacity building) has received the least of the five important challenges. Perhaps this is due to the government's seriousness in building institutional capacity through the 2014 Regional and Local Development Project, which aims to strengthen institutional capacity and develop municipalities to become local units

capable of providing efficient services in accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability. The results of the interviews revealed that one of the most important strategies proposed by the interviewees was to improve the ability of the local unit and to recruit human competencies according to the job description. However, the actual practices of leaders of local government indicate that recruitment and selection are not conducted according to the principle of merit but rather the factors of favoritism and tribalism. This is evident from the review of the annual reports of the Ministry of Municipalities, which showed their commitment to stop the random appointments of municipalities and transfer the powers of appointment from the local units to the Civil Service Bureau (Ministry of Municipalities Report, 2016). Participants reported a range of challenges related to financial viability challenges; the most important are limited investment projects and limited autonomy. This can be explained by the fact that local units in Jordan have been facing a critical financial situation since the inception of the local administration. Central government has the powers to impose levies, to distribute and transfer taxes and fees of fuel, to sort licenses for the acquisition of vehicles and violations of the Traffic Law and Health and Municipal Violations to local units in accordance with the criteria specified in Article 23a of the Municipalities Law No.41 of 2015. Another reason for the critical financial situation of local government, according to the results of the study, is the high percentage of expenditure on salaries relative to the size of the annual budget for the years 2014–2017 for each local unit, which comes to the range of 44%-62%. The government deals with the critical financial situation of the local units in a manner of intimidation and through occasional intervention. It provides the advantage of rescheduling the municipalities' debts and supporting them directly with trucks, loaders, rollers and waste bins without attempting to drastically restructure the financial resources. The findings showed that there was a clear challenge, namely the

failure of local units to collect their own revenues. The researchers believe that this is due to the unwillingness of the mayor and the members of the local council to force the taxpayers to pay their dues to ensure their re-election. This reason is consistent with the study by Ababneh and Rawabdeh (2018).

The findings of the research showed that local units face a high magnitude level of responsiveness challenges. The reasons for this, according to the respondents' answers, is that, due to the shortage of financial resources, local units cannot respond to the needs and demands of the citizens. One of the most important reasons for this is that the governmental bureaucracy hampers the work of local units. This results in the reluctance of citizens to participate in the actions and decisions of local councils. In an interview with some respondents, they explained that they pay the price of negative citizens' attitudes as a result of the behavior of some mayors who are biased towards a segment of the population through restrictions with regard to selective provision in respect to local services. It is striking that some local unit leaders still believe that they and members of local councils have the ability to know the needs of the local citizens without having to consult them. This reflects the philosophy of established patriarchy, not only in local governance but also in broad-based government administration.

The results of the study showed that local government faces high-level challenges in protecting the environment. The poor infrastructure of water scarcity in terms of quality and distribution schedule appears to be the result of refugees and internal migration from the countryside to the city. Local government suffers from the lack of environmental systems along with the low quality of environmental standards of public services. What makes matters worse is the absence of clear legislation to punish violators, weak control and the lack of awareness among employees in the local councils.

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed that the major challenges facing local governments are as follows: environmental protection, financial viability, responsiveness, public participation, and capacity building. All of these challenges were assessed as having high level magnitude; the most challenging dimension was environmental protection, while the lowest reported was the capacity building challenge.

The results of the study showed that there was a severe shortage of technical capacity in the local units to protect and monitor the environment. To address this, a recommendation should be made regarding the need to provide technical tools to measure emissions and control systems and the establishment of regional centers for studies and environmental research with the assistance of the central government. Rigorous law reinforcement is essential to protect the environment from any excesses by any party in society in accordance with high quality national standards. The results of the study revealed that the local units face a critical financial position that makes them unable to carry out their duties and basic functions. Here, it is recommended to re-evaluate the share of public funds allocated to local units from the public budget. However, improving the competence of the financial departments of the local units in collecting taxes and fees owed by citizens is also recommended. Although public participation practices vary among local units, it is also recommended to consider institutionalizing the relationship between citizens and local councils. This study provides a comprehensive framework for the most important challenges faced by local units. Future research must address the impact of each challenge on the performance of local units.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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