



Myers JDC
Brookdale

Empowering Municipalities

Review of the International Literature

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This study was part of a multifaceted research program for the Government of Israel's five-year plan to promote the well-being of the Bedouin in the Negev, carried out in cooperation with the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev



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About the research program of the five-year plan for the Bedouin in the Negev

The research program was jointly funded by the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute. It spanned 3.5 years and includes an array of topical studies, including education, children with disabilities, employment, and local government, as well as cross-cutting studies evaluating the five-year plan work programs; the values, strengths, and challenges of the Bedouin population and their leaders; key indicators of the health, economic, and social well-being of the Bedouin population; and an integrative assessment of the five-year plan.

The research program was carried out as a cooperative effort between the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB). The Department led the choice of issues to be studied and provided feedback on the research. MJB coordinated the research program and was responsible for the quality of the studies.

Abstract

Background

This review of the literature was commissioned by the Department for Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev, currently at the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs. The Department coordinates the Five-Year Plan for the Bedouin Population in the Negev, 2017-2021 (subject to Government Decision 2397). The Five-Year Plan includes a dedicated program for empowering the nine Bedouin municipalities in the Negev, improving their administrative and organizational capacities, and raising the overall level of services they provide. This is being done based on the recognition that municipalities are a key source of essential services for the inhabitants and that the Bedouin municipalities are among the poorest and weakest in Israel. This empowerment program is implemented and managed by the Ministry of the Interior and funded by a dedicated budget allocated by the government.

Objective

This literature review is part of a comprehensive research plan designed to inform and evaluate the Five-Year Plan and lay the groundwork for a follow-up plan. The review covers global models for municipality empowerment as well as insights in this area provided by the research literature, assuming such information can help formulate ideas and modes of action for the continued empowerment of the Bedouin municipalities. While preparing the review, the emphasis was placed on identifying models from developing countries that are as relevant as possible, as well as models of relatively weak municipalities in developed countries. This was designed to ensure maximal relevance to the Bedouin municipalities that lack funds and personnel, particularly skilled personnel, and are characterized by limited trust by the residents and disorganized and inefficient work processes.

Method

The relevant literature was identified using a keyword search on the internet and academic databases, as well as using references from previously identified sources. The information reviewed deals with countries in a wide geographic range, in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and Western Europe.

Findings

Programs for empowering municipalities have been initiated in several countries over the past four decades as part of a global trend of decentralizing government processes and redistributing resources. These programs have been driven by the understanding that locally-based decisions may meet public needs better than having most or nearly all decisions made by the central government – both by being better suited to the community's needs and given the potential for direct commitment of municipality personnel to the community they serve.

None of the programs identified in the global literature includes as broad a range of solutions for municipalities as does the program to empower Bedouin municipalities. In that sense, the Israeli program represents an unprecedented effort to address multiple challenges. The programs reviewed mostly deal with a single aspect, sometimes rather limited, of the municipal activity. Nevertheless, some of them engage deeply with the selected aspect, and we may therefore assume that it would be beneficial to learn from them and implement some of their elements even in a broad and comprehensive program, so long as certain adjustments to local needs and conditions are made.

Our reading of the literature suggests that a reform that decentralizes authorities and redirects resources to local government is not enough. In order to improve democratic processes of decision making and implementation, weaknesses in the municipality must be identified and carefully addressed. Among other things, there is a strong need for greater transparency and public involvement in municipal processes, as well as for activities designed to enhance trust and accountability – between local government and residents on the one hand, and the central government on the other. This is in order for the municipality to serve as a basis for demand-driven governance, namely, government processes motivated by the inhabitants' desires and demands.

The relevant literature reviewed deals mainly with ways of establishing municipal capabilities: strategies for human resource development and for improving professional and organizational processes in areas such as prioritization, improving budgeting processes, and promoting economic development projects. Another emphasis is on the appropriate balances between the central and local government in professional consulting, training and supervision processes. Researchers have also emphasized the need for developing monitoring and evaluation of capacity building in the municipalities, and on the need for the central government to identify their strengths and weaknesses and address the latter. Emphasis is also placed on the advantages of inter-sectoral partnerships. Such partnerships between the public, private, and third sectors can promote professional capabilities in local government systems as well as knowledge-sharing processes among municipalities. It is important however for sharing processes to be pursued with care, sensitivity and a clear division of authorities.

Finally, based on several programs examined, there is a clear need to define the relations between the levels of government in such a way that leaves considerable freedom of action to the municipalities. This is based on the view that relevant knowledge of needs and modes of action is largely located in the local space, whereas implementation is enabled by the provision of centralized resources and knowledge. Due to the variance in the municipalities' characteristics and needs, the need to adjust the empowerment processes to the needs of each has also been stressed.