Ministry of Local Government
Public Relations and Media Unit

General Directorate of Joint Services Councils for Planning and Development

The General Directorate for Joint Councils was established in accordance with article (15) of the Local Governments' Law of 1997, which authorizes the Minister to establish joint services councils for the purpose of managing and running the joint projects among the local units. These councils were seen as a necessity in order to address the status of the local units, which were suffering from increased number of staff, low quality of services, poor performance, and inability to realize the needed development. This Directorate can also be seen as a tool to amalgamate local units, as platform to plan and provide regional services, and a way to reinforce partnership and cooperation among the local government units in order to achieve better services with less costs and, as a result, to achieve local and regional sustainable development.

The General Directorate works towards the realization of effective joint councils that contribute to achieving sustainable local and regional development. It also seeks to present motivating conditions for the local units' amalgamation, in addition to improving the quality of the joint councils and providing the required support. In addition, it aims to reinforce cooperation among them so as to establish institutions that are capable of effectively contributing towards sustainable development. As well, it works on fostering an appropriate environment for the re-formation and amalgamation of Palestinian local units. Currently, there are 86 joint councils operating in Palestine, of which 70 are joint councils in the West Bank. However, and in accordance with the joint councils strategy it is envisaged to reduce this number to 39 or even fewer joint councils and service areas. Such action is expected to take place by re-organizing joint councils or amalgamating local units which are currently joint service councils into municipalities.

The Directorate comprises three departments: Joint Services Councils, Formations and Amalgamation, and Basic Services and Environment.

Values:

Integrity, transparency, accountability, fairness and community participation

Objectives:

1. Enhance the joint councils and prepare them for amalgamation, thus contributing to sustainable cooperation between local units.
2. Reinforce cooperation and integration among the joint councils within the framework of the Palestinian local government system.
3. Reinforce the capacities of the General Directorate of Joint Councils and enhance their role as a technical arm for the Ministry in the sector.
4. Support the joint councils to ensure their sustainability and enhance their capacities to help them perform their duties.

Duties:

a. Joint Services Councils Department

1. Conduct field visits in order to explain the goals of establishing joint services councils, and coordinate with relevant officials in the various areas.
2. Conduct initial studies for the areas in which the joint services councils are to be established.
3. Follow up the process of joint councils' establishment.
4. Define the proposed joint projects, and identify their priorities and costs in coordination with the joint councils.
5. Support the joint services councils in devising their budgets and having them approved. Identify the contributions of municipal or village councils in the joint council's budget.
6. Improve the capacities of the joint services councils' staff, and institutionalize all their work.
7. Support the councils in identifying funding for their projects. Identify the potential options: own budgets, loans, ministry aids or from other funding bodies.
8. Ensure completion of legal, administrative

and financial guidance and monitoring procedures.

9. Provide support in selecting the optimum locations for the projects with the relevant bodies such as Education, Health, Engineering, etc.
10. Provide support in running the projects through providing guidance and ensuring participatory approaches to maintain sustainability of projects.
11. Support the councils in ensuring the adequate administrative staff.
12. Conduct field visits to review the work of joint services councils and submit periodical reports for their activities.
13. Follow up on the financial matters of the joint services councils with relevant bodies as the Department of Finance in the ministry and the Municipal Development and Lending Fund and others.
14. Coordinate with other ministries and other institutions concerning the works related to the joint services councils.

b. Amalgamation and Formations Department

1. Propose elections dates for local bodies, and follow up all relevant legal procedures.
2. Provide recommendations concerning the establishment of new municipal and village councils. In addition, it submits recommendations for deactivating the troubled municipal councils and forming governmental committees instead.
3. Follow up the process of assigning new councils members where needed.
4. Participate in setting the standards for classifying the local government units and submit recommendations upon classifying local government units.
5. Collect, classify, analyze, save, restore and update the statistical data related to local government units and elected councils.
6. Design and conduct statistical surveys for the local government units and elected councils.
7. Develop an information system for the local government units and provide needed data to help decision making in all the fields of community development.
8. Coordinate with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics upon conducting the population census.
9. Conduct statistical analyses; define indicators and technical data to support the decision making process.

c. Basic Services and Environment Department

1. Follow up the water, environment, electricity, solid wastes and sewage lines projects that are provided by the local government units.
2. Monitor the implementation of the basic and environmental services.
3. Take part in developing general specifications for all basic and environmental services projects.
4. Contribute in preparing and reviewing the relevant studies. In addition, it proposes and follows up basic and environmental services and submits recommendations accordingly.
5. Design and conduct statistical surveys for the local government units and joint services councils so as to include the basic and environmental services.
6. Conduct statistical analyses; define indicators and technical data to support the decision making process.

In addition, the general directorate works through the following programs:

- Capacity Building in Solid Waste Management Program implemented by Japan International Cooperation

Agency (JICA) on behalf of the Japanese Government. It includes providing the joint councils for solid wastes management with the necessary machinery and equipment in addition to capacity building for the respective councils.

- Implementation of the Solid Waste Management National Strategy Program with support from the German International Cooperation (GIZ).
- Reinforcing the Joint Councils and Small Local Government Units with support from the Belgium Government. This Program aims at amalgamating local government units in several areas in the West Bank.

Achievements:

The achievements that have been made, in pursuance of accomplishing the overall directorate mission:" effective joint councils that are sustainable and contribute to local and regional sustainable development. And provide encouraging conditions for the amalgamation of local government units". To this end, the achievements are the following:

- Support and enhance joint work among the government units through joint councils.
- Organize the work of the joint councils in accordance with the article (2) of the law of local government.
- Follow up the implementation of developmental projects in many Palestinian areas throughout joint councils such as Jordan Valley development projects.
- Support the development of a national strategy and an integrated system for the solid waste management that depends on regional joint service councils fully capable of managing this sector.
- Coordinate with the donors to support the joint services councils projects and support their institutional and operational capacities.
- Contribute in implementing the ministry's policies related to amalgamation using joint services councils as effective tool to amalgamate local government units.
- Recruit specialized and qualified staff enabling the general directorate to perform its tasks.
- Updated the by-law of joint services councils for 2003 in accordance with the Palestinian local government law (no. 1) for 1997. Develop the joint services regulation for 2006.
- Strengthen a number of the joint services councils for planning and development so as to develop effective and sustainable institutions.

Challenges:

1. The geo-political challenges represented by the Apartheid Wall, closures obstructing internal communication and hindering elections.
2. Membership of some local government units in more than one council, some councils provide only one service, familial and tribal attitudes, lack of adequate guidance and monitoring in addition to scarcity of capacities and projects.