



Youth in Local Governments: “Realities and Prospects”

Roundtable III Report
July 26 – 27, 2011

Table of Contents

- I. Foreword
- II. Executive Summary
- III. Opening Speeches
- IV. Policy Papers Highlights
- V. Youth Shadow Local Councils: A Mechanism for Youth Engagement
- VI. Diagnostic Study on Youth Realities: Initial Findings Report
- VII. Expert Working Papers
- VIII. Youth and Decision-Makers: Face-to-Face
- IX. Working Group Sessions
- X. Recommendations
- XI. Closing Remarks

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the third roundtable report, entitled “Youth in Local Governments: Realities and Prospects”. This roundtable comes as the third of a series of meetings, gathering the main stakeholders in the local government sector to discuss and put forth recommendations on the core issues facing the local government sector.

With the nature of issues presented and the influence of the stakeholders in attendance, the roundtable has become a significant factor contributing to progress and reform in the whole local government sector. The first roundtable report, held in 2007, addressed the issue of decentralization in the local government sector. While the issue of decentralization was touched upon in each of the themes discussed, the major recommendation called for a unified vision upheld for all partners of the sector. In the second roundtable, this vision was already built through a participatory approach with the endorsement of the Ministry of Local Government, and the second roundtable accordingly focused on “Realizing the Vision of the Local Government and Administration Sector”.

The third roundtable, held in July 2010, came at a time of increasing emphasis on civic engagement and the role of citizens, particularly youth, in local governments and local community development. With over three years in systematically working with youth to institutionalize their participation in local governments, CHF held this third roundtable with enough understanding and conviction in the major role youth could play in local sustainable development. The Youth Shadow Local Councils (YSLCs), which over the last few years proved their potential and played a significant role in the sector, have immensely enriched the roundtable discussions. The YSLCs have also helped demonstrate to local councils the importance of involving the youth segment in facilitating their role as agents for positive change in their communities.

We are particularly grateful and enthused with the prospects of youth engaging with decision makers. The third roundtable was a special opportunity to bridge the gap between youth, ministers, local council mayors, and representatives of civil society. It is with this spirit that we can realize *“good local governance, capable of achieving sustainable development with effective community participation”*.

Lana Abu Hijleh
Country Director,
CHF International – West Bank and Gaza

Executive Summary

CHF International through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Local Democratic Reform (LDR) program and in cooperation with the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) organized the third Mayors' Roundtable meeting in the city of Jericho on July 26 - 27, 2011. The roundtable was held under the patronage of the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Dr. Salaam Fayyad, represented by the Minister of Local Government Dr. Khaled Qawasmī, and in the presence of the Deputy Mission Director of USAID, Ms. Sherry Carlin, and the Deputy Minister of Local Government, Mr. Mazen Ghuneim. The roundtable hosted nearly 20 mayors from the West Bank and Gaza, senior representatives of the MoLG, YSLC and youth representatives, USAID-West Bank/Gaza, local governance and administration sector specialists, and relevant stakeholders from civil society and the donor community.

The workshop aimed to explore the reality of youth participation in local government and develop recommendations that promote their representation, participation, and active role as agents for positive change in the local government sector. The Mayors' Roundtable is part of a series of meetings and workshops initiated by the Local Democratic Reform (LDR) program to facilitate consensus-building amongst relevant stakeholders on the important issues facing progress in the local government sector. This roundtable was preceded by two mayors' roundtables that were held in 2007 and 2010.

- First Roundtable Meeting: "Strengthening Decentralized Local Governance"
- Second Roundtable Meeting: "Realizing the Vision of the Local Government and Administration Sector"

The roundtable addressed four main themes that fell under the rubric of "Youth Participation in Local Government": youth representation, youth participation, youth as catalysts for positive change, and the youth shadow local council's model. In the opening session, the Minister of Local Government announced his ministry's full commitment to engage youth in local governments, officially announcing the Ministry's endorsement to the third phase of the Youth Shadow Local Councils. An ensuing session featured a comprehensive diagnostic study that explored the various aspects of youth engagement at the local government level. During this session, the Ministry also presented its two policies on "public participation" and "Guidance and Monitoring". The third session welcomed a number of experts well immersed in the Palestinian civil society sector, with the aim to give their insights and views on the various aspects of youth engagement.

The second day of the roundtable divided participants into four groups based on the key themes of the roundtable. Through these working groups, the participants worked together to identify the main opportunities and challenges facing youth representation, participation, and active role in local communities, while analyzing the Youth Shadow Local Council (YSLC) experience. Moreover, the groups discussed practical steps that aimed to broaden youth engagement in their local communities, with clear and straightforward roles and responsibilities for the key stakeholders in the sector.

The overall recommendations of the workshop are summarized below (specific recommendations and action plans are elaborated on later in the report):

- Adopt national policies and strategies that enhance youth role in their communities and facilitate their active engagement in local communities
- Sponsor programs and outreach mechanisms that empower youth and provide them with the platform to engage in community development and decision-making processes at the local level
- Raise awareness amongst the key decision makers and the general public on the significance of the role of youth in society through demonstrating real cases of their accomplishments and achievements
- Incorporate topics of local government, democratic processes, and civic engagement in the educational curriculum and non-formal education programs
- Continue support for the Youth Shadow Local Council (YSLC) model towards reaching sustainability, replicability, and institutionalization of YSLCs in the local government sector
- Create frameworks and national bodies that represent youth and advocate for their advanced representation, participation, and active role as catalysts for positive change.

Opening Speeches



Under the auspices of His Excellency Prime Minister, Dr. Salam Fayyad, the roundtable opened with official speeches from representatives of the Local Government Sector.

Ms. Sherry Carlin
Deputy Mission Director, United States Agency for
International Development (USAID)



In her speech, Ms. Carlin expressed USAID acknowledgement of the role of the Local Democratic Reform Program in encouraging citizen-government dialogue, through engaging an important sector of the population, Palestinian youth. Referring to the Youth Shadow Local Councils program, Ms. Carlin reflected on the achievements of this successful model, which is on its way to becoming nationalized beyond programs being implemented by USAID partners, and possibly regionalized as Palestinian youth share their experiences with other countries. She emphasized in her speech that the leaders of today should create an enabling environment to promote positive youth engagement in order to help shape the leaders of tomorrow.

Dr. Khalid Qawasmi Minister, Ministry of Local Government



Representing the central government on behalf of His Excellency the Prime Minister, Dr. Qawasmi affirmed that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) pays close attention to the youth sector. It strives to ensure an active role for Palestinian youth in the course of building Palestine's institutions and infrastructure. In his speech, Dr. Qawasmi stressed that the youth sector is the pillar for building an independent and democratic Palestinian state. As part of the PNA effort to bolster the local government sector, Dr. Qawasmi shared the objectives of his ministry in sustaining youth engagement in the sector in order to safeguard youth rights on the political, economic and social levels as well as enhance their active participation in the decision-making process within Local Government Units and civil society organizations. Finally, the Minister announced the full endorsement and partnership of the Ministry of Local Government in the forthcoming third phase of the Youth Shadow Local Councils.

Ms. Lana Abu Hijleh Country Director, CHF International/ West Bank –Gaza



Ms. Abu Hijleh opened her speech by introducing the goal of the CHF-implemented roundtable sessions, which aim to promote dialogue among partners in the local government sector towards achieving transparent, decentralized, participatory and democratic local governance. Ms. Abu Hijleh announced that this roundtable shall address the most important stakeholder in society, the pioneering Palestinian youth. The role of youth has been examined through the Youth Shadow Local Councils, which acted as a platform for the youth to exercise and practice their active engagement in a wide range of spectrums namely; dynamic participation, democratic representation, and good citizenship. During the past three years, youth, through the platform of the Youth Shadow Local Councils (YSLCs), succeeded in assessing their current realities as well as formulating practical steps towards broadening and institutionalizing an active role for youth in the development process.

Mr. Ahmad Dirieh Youth Shadow Local Councils (YSLCs) Representative



The local government sector is the closest to citizens as it represents and acts in their interest and to meet their needs. Mr. Dirieh, the former president of the Beit Fajjar Youth Shadow Local Council, underlined the significance of mobilizing active community participation in Local Government Units and community development. Youth represent the largest segment in society; they are the most influential and influenced segment among their local communities and they interact either negatively or positively to policies and strategies enforced by the various local government institutions. As such, Dirieh said it was imperative to foster youth aspirations as well as utilize their vast energies in serving and advancing their local communities. Mr. Dirieh reflected upon his experience in the Youth Shadow Local Council program, stressing the great impact the program had on youth in terms of defining their personalities. Mr. Dirieh concluded his speech with an appeal to the Ministry of Local Government and Local Government Units to resume an important role in empowering youth to ensure their active participation in sustaining local development.

Mr. Ahmad Dirieh

“Youth Shadow Local Councils transformed us from youth uninterested in the realities of their local communities to being youth fully aware of local issues and problems. Not only that, but Youth Shadow Local Councils contributed to the creation of local youth leaders capable of developing and galvanizing their local communities.”

Ministry of Local Government Policy Papers



Youth and the community in the “Guidance and Monitoring” Policy Paper

This presentation was made by the Deputy Minister of Local Government Eng. Mazen Ghunaim, who pointed out that youth represent more than 50% of Palestinian society, and therefore, it was very important to accentuate their role in the community. Eng. Ghunaim presented the newly adopted policy paper of “Guiding and Monitoring the work of Local Government Units”. One of the major policies that the Guidance and Monitoring policy paper adopted is the need to empower the public to practice "public oversight" on the work of Local Government Units. He stated that this is where the role of youth becomes key. They should participate as part of the community in monitoring the performance of Local Government Units through reviewing their financial reports, annual budgets, monthly complaints reports, and other relevant publications. Eng. Ghunaim emphasized that the policy paper proclaimed the “Youth Shadow Local Councils” as a mechanism to involve youth in municipal affairs. He clarified that the policy paper also encouraged youth to participate in various forms, including attending public hearing sessions, providing feedback on the quality of services and their fair distribution amongst the community, filling self-assessment questionnaire, in addition to a number of other mechanisms.

Eng. Mazen Guhneim

“Youth participation from both genders is highly encouraged and is one of the most effective tools to maintain a superior participatory local governance system”

Youth and the community in the policy paper on “Public Participation”

The policy paper, presented by Mr. Abdel Kareem Sider, Assistant Deputy Minister of Local Government, aims to establish a common framework for the promotion and institutionalization of effective public participation in planning and decision-making processes at the local level. The policy paper intends to contribute to creating an enabling environment that promotes citizen participation in the public discourse and decision making processes. Mr. Sider highlighted the major parts of the policy paper, clarifying the main policies as follows:

- Promoting sound public participation concepts and practices in the work of Local Government Units.
- Gradual implementation of public participation activities at different levels
- Institutionalizing oversight over the implementation of public participation practices

Mr. Abdel Kareem Sider

“Youth are encouraged to apply all mentioned policies and take an affective role in implementing those policies. As the largest sector of Palestinian society, youth should take an active role in their community and participate in local government discussions as well as contribute to local sustainable development.”



Youth Shadow Local Councils: A Mechanism for Youth Engagement

Youth Shadow Local Councils (YSLCs) are youth bodies democratically elected by their peers to emulate the actual Local Government Units in their communities with the long-term vision of emerging as future youth leaders. Through careful coaching, capacity building, and oversight, the YSLCs engage in democratic processes that expose them to the concepts of local governance, and give them an opportunity to demonstrate responsible citizenship and good governance practices. Currently implemented by Sharek Youth Forum, the program is an initiative that was started and continues to be supported by CHF International through the USAID -funded Local Democratic Reform Program – Tawasol.

As a mechanism to institutionalize youth participation in local government, the YSLC program fosters positive relationships between the local councils and their youth counterparts. Regulated by their own internal bylaws, the elected youth members serve a term of two years with the opportunity to enhance their skills, learn about local government, engage with local institutions, and ultimately serve their community. The YSLC program is distinct from other youth programs with its special emphasis on building youth local leaders. This is done through:

- Engaging youth in local democratic practices and enhancing their role in local democratic governance
- Building youth capacity and enhancing their leadership, communication, and management skills
- Integrating youth voices in issues facing their local communities and promote their participation in their local government
- Sponsoring youth-led initiatives that reach out to the marginalized and contribute to community development

The program targets ten communities in the West Bank (see below), which are administered by municipal and Local Government Units that consist of 9-15 members. Formed through democratic elections, the YSLCs boast a General Assembly of over 2000 youth that are represented among 132 members in the target communities. Women are well represented among the Youth Shadow Local Council members, with over 40 women youth representatives elected.

Target Municipalities

- Al Ram, Jerusalem Governorate
- Anabta, Tulkarem Governorate
- Beit Fajjar, Bethlehem Governorate
- Beit Sahour, Bethlehem Governorate
- Halhoul, Hebron Governorate
- Ithna, Hebron Governorate
- Qalqilia, Qalqilia Governorate
- Salfeet, Salfeet Governorate
- Taybeh, Ramallah Governorate
- Jericho, Jericho Governorate
- Illar, Tulkarem Governorate
- Abu Dies, Jerusalem Governorate
- Hebron, Hebron Governorate ¹

The YSLC Program primarily targets Palestinian youth between the ages of 15 and 22, both male and female. This wide target group encompasses various age subgroups, educational levels, and employment statuses. It includes school-aged children, university students, fresh graduates, as well as youth that have already entered the labor force. The exact focus of the target youth for the project depends on the specific youth demographics and circumstances in the different localities and thus is likely to vary somewhat from one municipality to another. However, the primary beneficiaries of the project can be estimated between 90-150 YSLC members, 90-150 Local Government Unit/Municipal Council members, and around 2000 Youth General Assembly members. Additionally, it is expected that the project will indirectly benefit all youth in the participating locales, local community members of all ages, and the broader youth sector in Palestine as a whole.

Throughout the past three years, the YSLC program has achieved remarkable accomplishments:

Youth actively engaged in the democratic process

One of the main pillars of the YSLC program is the principle of democratic elections and the peaceful transformation of power. Through the formation of thirteen YSLCs in the West Bank, over 2700 youth voted for their favored candidates. According to their internal bylaws, the elected-members serve for two years, after which a new round of elections is held to open the opportunity for new youth candidates and prospective leaders in their community. This peaceful and civil handover of power took place in March of 2011, where youth in the communities of Al-Ram, Beit Fajjar, and Salfeet turned out to vote for new representatives in their YSLCs.

Dynamic participation in Local Government

Mirroring their actual Local Government Units, the YSLC is a mechanism that aims to institutionalize youth participation in local government. Assuming positions parallel to those in the local council, each youth council internally selects their president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary who interact with their counterparts at the local council to better understand their roles and functions. Moreover, all elected members engage in trainings and information sessions to educate them on local government, democratic processes, good governance practices, and the critical role of local councils in local community development. Most YSLC members also engage in practical trainings, where they get an opportunity to get hands-on experience on how local council staff undertake their work. For instance, some YSLCs even ran the municipality for one day, after which they handed a list of recommendations for their local councils to adopt.

¹ The Local Democratic Reform program, as a pilot, initiated a Pioneer Council in Hebron which targeted a younger age group (13-15 years) but was based on the same model as the YSLC program. Hence we consider them as part of the YSLC program.

Actors of change in their communities

After elections, all YSLCs hold community service activities to demonstrate their service and solidify their presence in their local communities. These activities are models for volunteerism, where Youth Shadow Local Councils mobilize the community to carry out cleaning, planting, and organizing activities to improve the image and conditions of their towns and villages. After engaging in rigorous capacity building programs, new and more thorough forms of community mobilization took place, in the form of awareness and advocacy campaigns. Currently, the YSLCs are conducting vital campaigns that tackle issues facing their communities at large. The youth themselves are identifying these problems, designing their campaigns, and engaging important local and national partners towards attaining positive change in the various areas (a comprehensive list of campaigns is attached).

Effective participation of women

The participation of women is predominant in the YSLCs. Their participation crosses beyond symbolic, to break the common vision that Palestinian women participation is minimal and figurative. They were at the forefront during Youth Shadow Local Council elections, meetings, trainings, initiatives and community service activities. In an unprecedented occasion, the most recent elections in Abu Dies witnessed the election of 9 female members out of the 13 seats. The quota system in the bylaws had to be applied to ensure sufficient representation of both genders.

Initial Findings Report - Summary

Palestinian Youth Participation in Local Government: Realities and Prospects

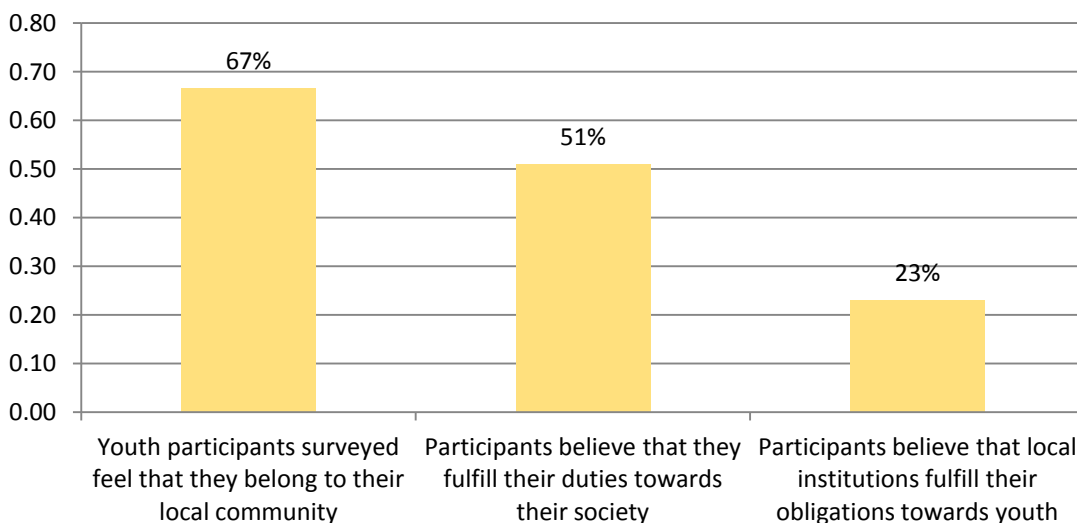
The second session of the roundtable featured a preliminary summary of a diagnostic study report conducted by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) on behalf of the Local Democratic Reform program. A team of qualified researchers conducted a field survey of 2,200 Palestinian youth in 80 localities in the West Bank, along with in-depth interviews, reviewing case studies and conducting focus group discussions.

Results:

With regards to understanding what local governance constituted and the role of Local Government Units in communities, youth exhibited a narrow understanding that focused on local councils as being mere service delivery agents with 56 percent having the same opinion. Only 5 percent of Palestinian youth surveyed considered local councils as developmental institutions with a socio-economic role.

In the context of participation, the youth surveyed reported a great desire to participate in local affairs and in the development of their community. In fact, 72 percent of young people surveyed declared their intention to vote in any forthcoming local elections. But, this was offset with a **negative evaluation of the role of local councils in promoting participation with 53 percent of youth stating that the local councils did not encourage youth participation.** This lack of encouragement by the local councils was reflected in the results related to youth participation in community planning exercises such as those that set the community development priorities. Only 16 percent of youth surveyed had participated in workshops to identify development priorities and 9 percent had participated in planning meetings organized by LGUs. Reflecting on the obstacles and challenges, two-thirds of the youth surveyed accorded familial or tribal culture as the major obstacle to participation of young people in local councils.

Belonging as a prerequisite for participation



“Young people are not interested in the affairs of their own community nowadays and each individual is only interested in himself/herself”. (Local Council leader, 52, Jenin area)

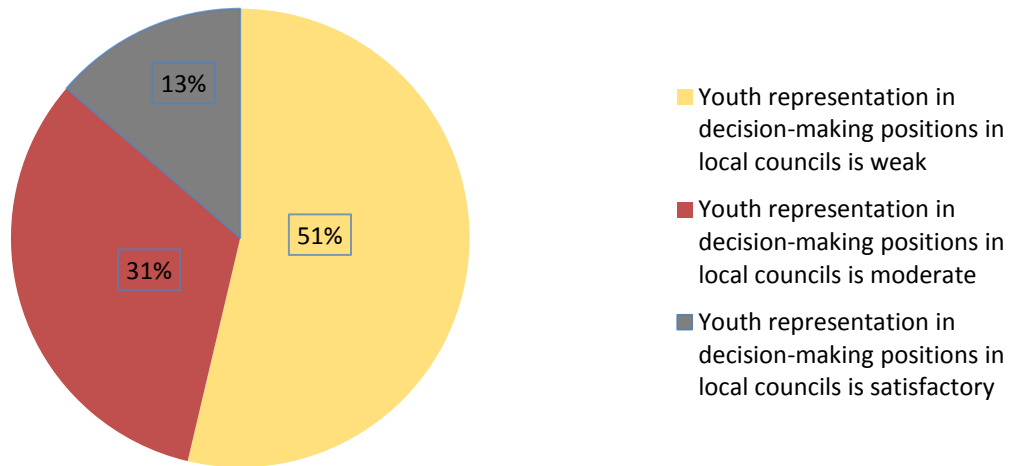
It is obvious that the issue of inclusion is not linked solely to youth, but also to the degree of outreach extended to them by local government institutions. While some blame youth for their apathy, others blame the local councils themselves.

“Both society and the Palestinian Authority still view local councils as institutions for community elders and young people are considered like children who have no right to make decisions”. (Female, 21, Qalqiliya area)

On the other hand, the level of volunteerism in community activities was high indicating a serious interest in participating in community affairs with 37 percent stating that they had participated in volunteer programs to serve their community. However, the interest in joining formalized institutions was low as the results showed, with only 16 percent of youth declaring themselves to be active members in student organizations, student councils, or affiliated to political parties.

And this to a large degree is also reflected in the composition of local councils, with 57 percent of them not having any youth representatives, thereby backing up the limited interest in engaging with youth at the local level. Another schism that is clear is in the results related to whether the priorities of the youth are reflected in local council projects. A higher percentage of local council members vis a vis youth felt this was true – 36 percent to 21 percent. This is also largely due to the fact that a large percentage of local council members do not feel confident in the capabilities of young people to participate in local council affairs. Only 26 percent of local council members expressed confidence in the capabilities of young people to run a local council.

Under-representation in decision making

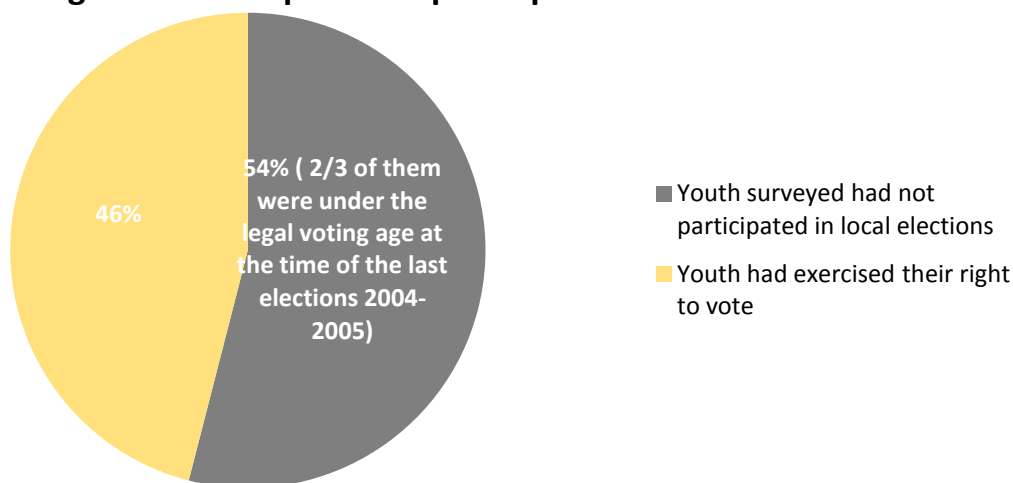


In addition, there was no clear understanding of the concept of representation among the majority of the participants in the study. Most of them thought that representation meant simply having young people as members in local councils. Although this is necessary, representation has a broader meaning that embraces the needs and priorities of youth, along with all other age groups, in the planning and implementation of development in terms of policies, laws and procedures.

“Representation means that we have an elected or appointed person in the local council”
(Male, 18, Bethlehem area)

The lack of representation and decision making power, however has not led youth into believing that they do not have the ability to influence the results of local elections, with 56 percent believing that they have this ability and 21 percent surveyed stated that they had taken an initiative to influence an issue that they considered to be important in the work of the local council and 17 percent said that they were part of a collective initiative to influence the work of the local council. And this belief is obvious in the number of youth that voted in the last local council elections (see below).

A generation deprived of participation in local elections

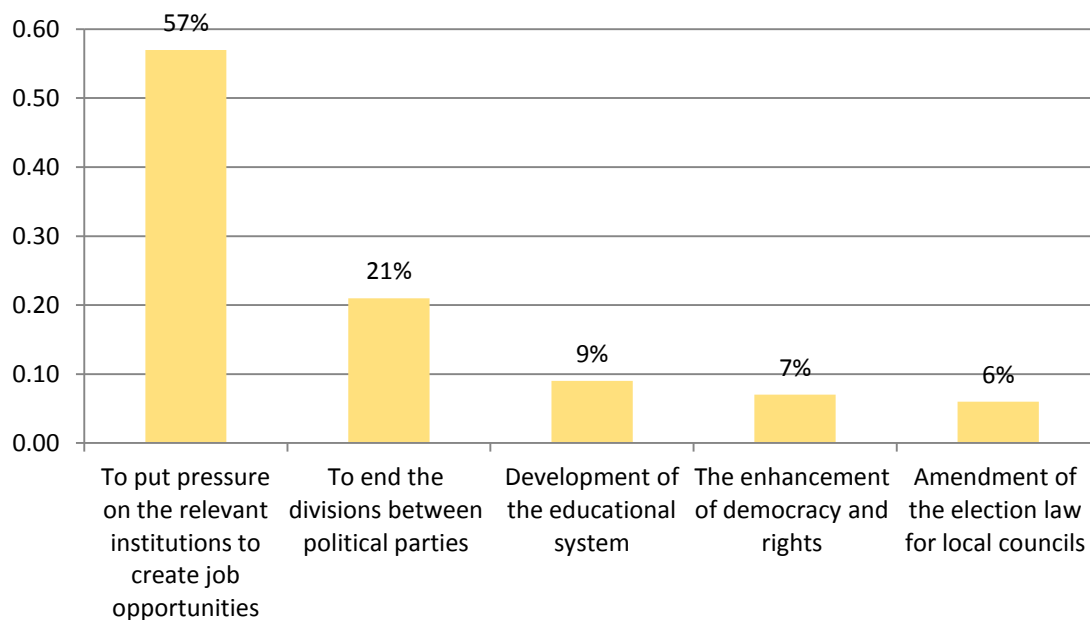


In principle, there was no disagreement on the importance of the participation of youth or with regards to the belief in the significant role of youth in change with over 90 percent of youth surveyed and representatives of local councils and institutions stating that youth participation would be valuable to the work of the LGUs. However, differences existed regarding the perceived ability of youth and their organizations to bring about this change. Also, age discrimination is common against young people.

“Young people are apathetic. They ask for their rights in everything but are not willing to bear their responsibilities. Where are the youth of today? Why have they not initiated change if they are unhappy with the situation?” (LGU member, 55, Nablus area)

The study reveals many issues that young people believe require further discussion in order to reach appropriate decisions and bring about positive change. For example, the perceived legal and cultural discrimination against young people, weak collaboration between relevant institutions, the failure to introduce technological advancements into work practices, and what is seen as insufficient community representation in local councils. Hence, over 85 percent of youth and representatives of institutions agree on the allocation of a quota for young people in positions within local councils. In addition, 77 percent of youth, 63 percent of institutional representatives and 46 percent of local council members support electoral lists comprised of young people.

What change do youth want?



Bringing about change: integrating youth into the democratic process

- Over 80 percent of youth surveyed believe that the following are important means to bring about change:
- Conduct a dialogue in the community to support youth participation.
- Organize community awareness campaigns to put pressure on relevant parties.
- Implement necessary legal reforms.
- Empower and raise the awareness of youth themselves.

Expert Working Papers

Three thematic papers were presented by three local experts, namely; youth representation paper, youth as catalysts for positive change, and youth participation.

Youth Representation

The first thematic paper was presented by Dr. Omar Rahal on youth representation. Dr. Rahal reaffirms in his paper that youth representation in local government is considered one of the basic forms of participatory governance, whereby representatives of youth assume leadership positions within the local council and engage in the decision-making process. This representation affects local community development, and particularly youth needs and aspirations.

Fair representation of youth elevates their role in oversight to ensure that the decisions and policies which advance the role of youth are effectively implemented. Politically, youth representation at the local level means a bigger advocating role and influential voice in political affairs which shapes the nature of the ruling system and establishes for local democracies.

The paper has addressed the surrounding environment that affects youth participation and illustrated the following factors:

First: Legal Environment (Legislative Framework for youth participation in local government)

The presidential decree (No. 9) of 2008 relating to amending the articles of the “Local Government Units Law No. 1 of 1997”, “Elections of Local Government Units Law No. 10 of 2005, and a number of other regulations and policies, constitute the legal framework that regulates the work and elections of local governments in Palestine.

In particular, the Law on “Elections of Local Government Units No. 10 of 2005” is considered the basis for conducting local elections. In the third chapter of the law, the articles tackle the issue of “right to vote”, whereas article (7) stipulates the age to vote clarifying that Palestinian who are over 18 years of age are allowed to cast their ballots. The sixth chapter of the same law titled “registration and nomination”, article (17) sets the minimum quota for women representation to constitute at least 20% of the elected members for local councils, provided that each list comprises at minimum:

- One female in the first three candidates in the list
- One female in the next four candidates of the same list
- One female in the remaining candidates of the list

Article (18) of the law sets the minimum age for nomination to be 25 years of age on Election Day.

Second: Social Environment (Social norms and values)

Youth representation in local councils is directly affected by the social norms and values prevailing in society. It reflects the Patriarchal structure in a conservative society that limits social and cultural change through the constraints it places on the foundational catalysts of change. The youth face notable exclusion and alienation from representing themselves in local councils, which is represented through many facets:

- The role of social norms and values in limiting youth representation in decision-making
- The dominance of the elderly on most electoral lists and parties
- Failure of candidate lists and parties to adapt their slogans and programs to fit with the occurring changes, and fulfill the needs of youth
- Unmet promises and pledges on part of the candidate lists to translate their candidate platforms to real programs that benefit the youth (employment, health, education, etc...)
- Despair and hopelessness among youth in inducing positive change
- Inequity and unfairness in the distribution of authority and resources
- Use of youth as observers on the candidate lists that are comprised mostly of elderly

Level of youth representation in local governments:

- The high participation of youth in local elections does not prove that they are effectively represented, especially in light of traditional social and political norms that dominate the election process
- Youth potentials, ideas, and energies are not well employed by local councils. Moreover, there is a prevalent lack of programs that are directed towards youth, and instead, the elderly who are dominating the decision-making process still look at youth through a traditional perspective.
- There is a general misconception that the participation process starts and ends during the elections. When asked about the definition of democracy, most Palestinian would be quick to answer that elections represents democracy to them.

Youth as Catalysts for Positive Change

The second thematic paper, presented by Mr. Bader Zamareh, focused on “youth as catalysts for positive change”. In his paper, Mr. Zamareh presented an overview about change, and explained that the social concept of change is a matter of dispute among intellectuals, politicians, political parties and even among the general public. There is no consensus among the various parties on what is the nature of the desired change, as a result of differing and conflicting interests of the different parties. Social change in the first instance requires a redistribution and reallocation of sources of power and control, which means that certain parties may lose part of their privileges to the other.

He continued that the process of change on the level of social cohesion requires articulation between three areas, economy, politics, and culture, which continuously interact with each other in order to bring about change. This implies that the attempt to bring about change in any of these areas will inevitably lead to changes in the other areas.

It is widely recognized that young people are the greatest contributors to the change process. They have two advantages that make their contribution essential to the achievement of the process of social change. These two advantages are the spirit of youth and the dynamics and energy they own. These constitute a self-motivation and a momentum to learn new skills and to gain different experiences and recover from failures. The second advantage is the fact that young people have accumulated experiences inherited from former generations, as well as having modern expertise and knowledge of the world around them due to the fact that they are engaged heavily in the world’s events and developments. This gives them a comparative advantage in relation to knowledge in terms of the latest methods and technologies that can be used in achieving the required change.

Mr. Zama’reh said that the future vision for youth participation at the local level departs from a hypothesis that “expanded public participation at the local level, especially for young people, benefits all classes and social strata, and results in higher levels of popular participation, representation and in the provision of local services, that are characterized by efficiency and effectiveness, and associated development plans at the national and local levels.”

This vision is underpinned by two main components: the experience of the Youth Shadow Local Councils (in 2009 and 2010), and the objectives and policies stated in the youth cross-sectoral strategy of 2011-2013.

The future vision for youth participation at the local level is summarized by the following: the promotion and activation of youth participation in local affairs, including their involvement in the institutional structures, and in the different programmatic interventions implemented at the local level, in an attempt to achieve the widest level of youth participation, including all bodies and local councils.

To achieve this vision, one must take into account the following principles:

- The deliberate and gradual expansion in the experience of the YSLCs.
- A continuous evaluation of the experiences of the YSLCs that currently exist.
- Enable elected YSLC members to exercise their roles successfully, by providing support, advice, and essential training in key areas.
- Strengthen the relationship, cooperation and integration between the local councils and their youth peer councils.
- Cooperate with local councils to support the local government sector as a whole, promote decentralization and strengthen the traditions of popular and community participation in local affairs.

Youth Participation

The third paper, presented by Dr. Varsen Shaheen, addressed the issue of youth participation at the local level. Dr. Shaheen shed light on youth participation and involvement of young people in Local Government Units. He considered it as one of the most important elements that enable youth to represent their interests and perform their roles and aspirations in policy-making and in creating anticipated change. It is their right to participate and contribute to decision-making related to their lives. Youth participation has its own returns in terms of its positive impact on good governance, sustainable development, expansion of human capital and preparing young people for the future and enhancing their confidence and their responsibilities as agents for change.

Dr. Shaheen stated that youth participation is being exercised in Palestine in one or more forms at the local government level and in varying degrees and for different reasons, formally and informally. However, Dr. Shaheen states that such participation remains relatively weak in Palestine, at all levels. The challenges facing youth participation are summarized in poor awareness and conviction of youth ability and contribution, scarcity of resources and the difficulties and obstacles to social change in general. In spite of the obstacles ahead, Palestinian youth still have opportunities to participate and contribute to community development, drawing on lessons learned and best practices in neighboring countries.

In her paper, Dr. Shaheen recommends to advance community awareness towards the concept of youth participation and its importance, benefits and significance, and also building awareness around youth duties, responsibilities and rights towards the local councils, and their roles in sustainable development.

In addition, it is also important not to ignore role of youth institutions in this regard. Capacity building initiatives should be directed to youth and their institutions in order to promote their abilities and benefit from successful experiences in Palestine. Youth participation should not remain a slogan but translated into reality. This guarantees the involvement of a large segment of society in determining the course of desired development in Palestine and in engaging in all structures and frameworks.

Youth and Decision Makers Session



In an informal session of the roundtable, youth participants had the opportunity to meet with decision makers, and engage with them in a lively discussion on issues of youth concern. Over 20 youth participated in a discussion with the Minister of Local Government, Dr. Khalid Qawasmi, the Deputy Minister Eng. Mazen Ghunaim, and the Palestinian Chief of Staff, Mr. Mousa Abu Zeid.

With broad and wide-ranging topics in mind, the participating youth clearly were focused on the issue of YSLC sustainability and their institutionalization within their communities. Some youth even went as far as asking the Minister of Local Government on his Ministry's preparedness to sponsor youth councils as a model of youth participation in local governments. The type of questions raised showed strong youth understanding of the nature of their involvement in local governments.

The Minister and Deputy Minister of Local Government responded to all questions and ideas raised by youth. In an earlier session, Dr. Khaled Qawasmi announced his Ministry's full support and endorsement to the third phase of the YSLC program. He also challenged the youth themselves to find answers to their own concerns, praising their achievements in the previous few years as evidence of their potential to tackle such concerns.

The Minister called the YSLC members to discuss among themselves potential ways to further YSLC sustainability, institutionalization, and replication to other local communities across the West Bank and Gaza. Responding to a question about the feasibility of creating a YSLC Association, the Minister hailed the idea as an advanced representation for all youth councils, but a step that needs further study and planning.

Mr. Mousa Abu Zeid, the Palestinian Chief of Staff, shared his experiences and provided his advice to the attending youth. As the former Deputy for the Ministry of Youth and Sports, he reiterated his belief of the significant role youth play in their societies.

Working Groups: Opportunities & Challenges

In the second day of the roundtable, the participants were divided into four groups to discuss and put forth recommendations on the main themes of the roundtable: youth representation, youth participation, youth as catalysts for positive change, and the YSLCs. The groups convened into two sessions, giving a brief presentation at the end of each. The first session, the groups discussed the challenges and opportunities surrounding each of the thematic areas. The aim was to analyze the current situation while identifying the precise problems and core issues in each theme. Following are the main results of the four thematic groups:

Youth Representation in Local Government:

Opportunities: The most important opportunity that the group pointed to was the high demographic percentage of youth in Palestinian communities. With their energy and creativity, the participants concurred that youth acquire the needed potential to serve in decision-making positions. They agreed that the legislative framework was supportive of youth representation at both national and local levels. Moreover, the group pointed to a rich Palestinian experience in placing youth in local decision-making outlets, such as university student councils, youth shadow local councils, and recent youth activism in social media.

Challenges: The group identified several challenges as limiting youth representation at the local government level. One problem was, despite having a favorable legislative framework; the youth are uninterested in running for important positions in their community (local council, cultural centers, youth and sports clubs, etc...). The group discussed that the main priority for youth at this age is their education. Another challenge facing youth representation is the prevalence of a tribal and patriarchal culture in Palestinian communities, favoring older men for decision-making positions. The unemployment and deteriorating economic situation was another problem identified by the group, which also ranks in the top of youth priorities. Finally, the group pointed to the inability of the youth themselves to practice their democratic right, thereby organizing themselves and advocating for enhanced youth representation in their local communities.

Youth Participation in Local Government:

Opportunities: The high percentage of youth was again cited as an opportunity to enhance their participation at the local government level, especially with a growing number of educated youth. With new experiences and mechanisms of youth engagement in local communities, the group pointed to a number of lessons learned that could be taken into account for future advanced youth participation. With recent developments across the Middle East, the participants revealed that decision-makers and the donor community are finding new ways of supporting youth participation. This interest is largely attributed to their enhanced confidence in youth as capable of contributing at the local level.

Challenges: Despite citing the decision makers' recent interest in youth participation, the group still identified social norms and culture as main factors restraining youth participation at the local level. Another factor is youth awareness of their democratic right to participate, and more importantly, of specific measures and mechanisms to participate. At the same time, the participants expressed that there is a lack of outreach and cooperation from local councils and community based organizations to involve youth in their decision-making process.

Youth as Catalysts for Positive Change:

Opportunities: The third group identified two major opportunities that enhanced youth role as catalysts for positive change in their local community. The first was the widespread prevalence of social media and increased youth capability of using these outlets for organizing and advocating for positive change. The second was the continued donor and civil society support to programs that empower youth and provide them with the space to effect change in their communities through special initiatives and awareness campaigns.

Challenges: The youth in the groups were especially vocal about the challenges facing their enhanced role as positive agents in their society. The participant youth expressed that the occupation of Palestinian land and the incessant political division are factors that depress youth activism and divert their attention to other important aspects in the community. The group also agreed that there is a general sense of exploitation of youth, gearing their energies towards personal interest and agendas. Furthermore, the youth themselves are still unaware of their essential role as positive catalysts of change, and some feel a weak sense of belonging to their communities.

Youth Shadow Local Councils:

Opportunities: There was a general agreement that the Youth Shadow Local Council model is an important mechanism that institutionalizes youth participation in local government and local community affairs. The YSLC provides youth with a platform to learn about local governments, enhance their skills and attitudes, and engage in democratic practices that further advance their role in society. Moreover, it is an opportunity for youth to network and communicate with decision makers, conveying their needs and priorities. The participants agreed that the YSLC model presents a unique opportunity to organize youth voices and energies in a structured, organized, and democratic way to advocate for positive change in local communities as well as on the national-level.

Challenges: With the notable success of the YSLC model, there are a number of challenges that stand in the way of it becoming an institutionalized mechanism that promotes youth participation in the local government sector. The participants cited the legislative and legal framework as a sticking issue, lacking solid measures that give YSLCs legitimacy and independence. Also, there are lingering doubts about the sustainability of YSLCs, especially considering the absence of a strategic plan that ensures continued support. Another challenge that the participants identified is the interference of political and tribal groups in the elections and activation of YSLCs.

Working Groups: Roles and Responsibilities

During the second session of the working groups, the participants further discussed the main points they identified in their first session. Each group put forth specific action steps which together aimed to create an enabling environment for active youth participation in local government. The groups subsequently identified roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in promoting each thematic area, based on a working sheet provided to each group:

The “Youth Representation” working group has identified the following central issues and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders:

Main Theme	Youth Representation			
Central Issue (1)	The socio-cultural dimension			
Problem	Unfavorable social and cultural environment that limits young people’s representation			
Required Intervention				
Central Government (MoLG)	Local Government Units	Youth (Individuals and Groups)	Civil Society Organizations	Donor Community
	Hold period public meetings to discuss cultural, social and educational dimensions	Advocate for more youth representation and opportunity to prove their potential	Implement awareness campaigns that change the unfavorable cultural and social barriers	Provide financial support for outreach and youth programs
	Include the issue of “unfavorable culture” within the municipalities’ strategic plans.	Take initiative to bring about change through different means and tools such as multi-media.	Create methods and tools that enable young people to create the required change.	
Central Issue (2)	Economic Situation			
Problem	Deteriorated economic conditions and high rate of youth unemployment			
Required Intervention				
Central Government (MoLG)	Local Government Units	Youth (Individuals and Groups)	Civil Society Organizations	Donor Community
Inform policies that guide youth in the areas of education and employment	Stimulate community development through job creation and driving investments	Seek diverse employment areas and new innovative approaches	Provision of innovative initiatives that support youth employability	
Provide incentives for professional and technical studies, and establish more vocational rehabilitation centers.				

The “**Youth Participation**” working group has identified the following central issues and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders:

Main Theme	Youth Participation			
Central Issue (1)	Policies and laws regulating youth participation (legal environment)			
Problem	Absence of regulatory framework on youth participation			
Required Intervention				
Central Government (MoLG)	Local Government Units	Youth (Individuals and Groups)	Civil Society Organizations	Donor Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower the voting age to 16 years Allocate budget items for youth participation in LGU budgets to enhance youth participation at the local level Activate “Youth Units” in LGU organizational structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt LGU decisions that encourage youth participation Develop strategic plans for youth participation Allow youth to participate and attend LGU meetings Form Youth Shadow Local Councils as one of the trends aiming at promoting youth participation 			
Central Issue (2)	Prevalent restrictive culture			
Problem	Lack of decision makers’ trust in young people’s potential and capacity			
Required Intervention				
Central Government (MoLG)	Local Government Units	Youth (Individuals and Groups)	Civil Society Organizations	Donor Community
Adopt policies that support (LGUs) in building programs that support young people	Implement policies that enable youth to assume their role in community	Support innovative mechanisms that demonstrate youth capabilities and potential	Adopt programs that support youth empowerment (knowledge, skills, attitudes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support youth empowerment programs Practice influence on decision makers

The “**Youth as Catalysts for Positive Change**” working group has identified the following central issues and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders:

Main Theme	Youth as catalysts for positive change			
Central Issue	Prevailing culture			
Problem	Lack of confidence of decision makers in young people initiatives and potential capacity.			
Required Intervention				
Central Government (MoLG)	Local Government Units	Youth (Individuals and Groups)	Civil Society Organizations	Donor Community
Adopt policies that support youth empowerment	Implementation of policies that enable youth to assume their role in community.	Implementation of innovative initiatives to assert their capabilities and their potential.	Adopt programs to support the development of the youth capacities and sponsor their potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Support youth activities. •practice influence on decision makers.
Central Issue	Prevailing culture			
Problem	Lack of youth awareness on the importance of youth participation			
Required Intervention				
Coordinate with line ministries (i.e. Education) to approve youth programs at both curricular and extracurricular levels	Hold awareness campaigns on the importance of youth role at the local level	Participate in awareness campaigns on youth role and influence	Design projects and interventions to address the prevailing culture that limits youth role in local communities	Support programs that help empower youth

The “YLSC” working group has identified the following central issues and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders:

Main Theme	“Youth Local Shadow Councils”			
Central Issue	Familiarity with the democratic experience and the concept of local governance			
Problem	Weakness in the understanding and knowledge of the concept of local governance and democracy			
Required Intervention				
Central Government (MoLG)	Local Government Units	Youth (Individuals and Groups)	Civil Society Organizations	Donor Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of concepts of local governance and democracy in the Palestinian education curriculum • Build a cadre of education professionals • Distribution of brochures and booklets on schools’ students incorporating democratic practices and good governance concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation and support as well as provide information and mechanisms for communication. • Encourage YSLCs to get more involved in local councils work. • Facilitate activities of the YLSC at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively involved in the YLSC model. • Lead the YLSC replication in different localities. • Increase support for the already existing YSLCs and for future ones. • Demand to create an institutionalized framework for the YSLCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on making the YLSC a sustainable model. • Build capacities of the YSLC members on various related issues. • Facilitate coordination and cooperation among YSLCs, local council and the local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activate the idea of exchange of experiences on democracy between young Palestinians and their peers form the world. • Support efforts of institutionalizing the YLSC model.

Recommendations

The representatives of the working groups each presented a focused review of the most important and practical recommendations, and actions that came out of the group discussions. These recommendations were discussed subsequent to the presentations. Following is a summary of recommendations.

Youth Representation

1. Taking into account opinions of young people and their potential for a broader role in their local communities
2. Educate young people about the importance of their role in decision-making
3. Direct energies of youth towards advocacy measures that enhance their needs, priorities, and representation towards positive change
4. Create an institutionalized youth body that can reflect vision of young people and their aspirations.
5. Promote the spirit of volunteerism among young people as a means of conveying their needs and priorities
6. Promote public trust and confidence in youth through displaying cases of youth accomplishments and achievements
7. Provide job creation and economic empowerment programs for youth, while promoting and stimulating the trend towards vocational and technical studies.

Youth Participation

1. Consider policies and laws necessary for activating and strengthening youth participation.
2. Incorporate topics on youth participation and decision-making processes in the educational curriculum.
3. Adopt public participation policies and strategies by Local Government Units.
4. Enhance youth and public awareness of the significance of their participation to community development.
5. Empower youth and enhance their capacities in mechanisms and approaches of effective participation at the local level.

Youth as Catalysts for Positive Change

1. Adopt policies that support Local Government Units in building programs that support youth and their empowerment
2. Enhance civil society support to youth empowerment including youth and community-based organizations, as well as the donor community
3. Improve coordination among organizations that raise awareness on the importance of youth role in making the desired change
4. Intensify awareness campaigns that promote the social importance of engaging youth in local governments and local community development

Youth Shadow Local Councils

1. Need to establish a legal framework that protects the sustainability and legitimacy of the YSLC model
2. Encourage young people to engage in youth engagement mechanisms such as the YSLC model and other youth advocacy programs
3. Establish a YSLC-representative body that advocates for their shared needs and concerns
4. Continue to build elected youth representatives in democratic practices and good governance processes
5. Facilitate the work of YSLCs at the local level and support their initiatives and campaigns
6. Provide continuous local council support as it is a crucial element for the success of YSLCs

Closing Remarks



The closing remarks were made by Mr. Abdel Kareem Sider, Deputy Minister Assistant from the Ministry of Local Government, and Mrs. Lana Abu Hijleh, CHF Country Director.

Mr. Abdel Kareem Sider started by mentioning that the Palestinian local government system has seen dramatic changes in the past few years, especially in the area of public participation. Based on the Ministry's strong belief in the importance of civic participation, Mr. Sider announced the plans to put the "Policy Paper on Public Participation" to effect. He stressed on two points during his closing speech; first that the progress achieved in youth participation in the last few years is important yet still challenging as transforming the cultural and social aspects in communities require a long-term change of attitudes. Secondly, that the youth demands should be logical and realistic, especially considering these same youth will soon be the ones leading the process of social change and community development. Mr. Sider closed his remarks by mentioning that youth in local government is only one part of the community, and the Ministry of Local Government may not have direct influence in changing youth participation like other organizations and Ministries; however the Ministry of Local Government will do its best to provide the best appropriate environment for youth in the sector.

In her closing speech, Ms. Lana Abu Hijleh pointed out that Local Government Units face many challenges, one of which is the barriers facing effective public participation. Ms. Abu Hijleh stated that it is not the intention to deal with youth as a marginalized sector, but rather it is the objective to reach out to youth as partners in community development. Ms. Abu Hijleh stressed the fact that CHF's interest in youth was not based on targeting this sector, and instead the purpose was to contribute to progress in the Palestinian agenda for development through reinforcing the role of youth. Consequently, she mentioned that the next meetings and roundtables will be mainly evaluating our current steps, as there will be a new program that will guarantee the sustainability of youth engagement in the local government sector.

Ms. Abu Hijleh concluded her speech by thanking the Minister, Dr. Khaled Qawasmi, and the Deputy Minister, Eng. Mazen Ghunaim for participating in the first day, and also Mr. Abdel Kareem Sider for his valuable participation and support for the Local Democratic Reform program. She also thanked the Youth Shadow Local Councils and stressed that their presence is now evident in local communities and nationally. The time is now for the Youth Shadow Local Councils to prove their proactive engagement and positive outputs to Palestinian development. Ms. Abu Hijleh also thanked the partner institutions, and mentioned that this work would not have been possible without their active cooperation and partnership.