

Local Partnerships: The Case of Integrated Provision of Access to Basic Services to Bethlehem City and Refugee Camps

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Abstract

Planning for development of the Palestinian communities as it stands today creates fearsomely Kafkaesque state of ambiguity and gradual decline for its meaningful role. The tactics of community-driven planning and development interventions in the occupied Palestinian territory have become akin to social experimentation out of the right to necessity amid a state of exception. This is more complicated when considering the governance challenge when it comes to refugee camps in the West Bank, who predominantly lack access to safe transport to education, job opportunities, proper water and sanitation infrastructure, and effective solid waste management. UNRWA since 1949 is mandated to provide a number of basic services. However, it is not mandated to manage or govern refugee camps, and thereby has no authority or jurisdiction in terms of governance or rule of law. It is also not mandated to provide water, electricity, transport or other such services in camps. The Palestinian Authority provides such services to refugees noting that there is no formal recognition of its responsibility to do so. This leaves the administration of refugee camps in a vacuum as municipalities have de-facto no jurisdiction either. This problem is further compounded by the fact that refugees currently do not pay for services such as electricity, water or sewage operations in the camps. This is now a very intricate and complex political issue out of the control of main actors to affect. This paper looks into the case of Bethlehem municipality and refugee camps of Aida and Beit Jibrin. It is argued that participatory development and community-driven planning initiatives are indeed of insurgent orthodoxy and contribute in contextualizing the resilience as a framework of programmatically bridging humanitarian and development interventions. While there is a strong evidence that local partnerships have co-produced new roles for both state and non-state actors, it remains important to comprehend in such a complex geo-political context and an emergent statehood project: how the 2030 Agenda and New Urban Agenda can successfully land in terms of sustainable spatial development; and wherefore the prevailing insurgent planning interventions are associated with high levels of uncertainty (for planning). The paper will provide evidence-based analysis from the case of integrated provision of access to basic services with focus on solid waste management to Bethlehem city and refugee camps that aims at integrating the efforts

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between the Municipality of Bethlehem and Camp Service Committees (CSCs)¹ of Aida and Beit Jibrin on the improvement of access to basic services to further stabilise the community and create job opportunities. This project avails financial assistance from the Government of Japan and is implemented jointly by UN-Habitat and UNRWA in partnership with Bethlehem Municipality. Reflections and insights on how this contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.4 on access to basic services; SDG 11.2 on access to convenient transport; SDG 11.6 on urban waste appropriate treatment and disposal, etc will be provided.

Biography

Ahmad El-Atrash is a Palestinian spatial planner and urban development specialist. He has extensive experience working with think-tanks, academic institutions, NGOs, and UN agencies in issues related to geo-political and strategic planning, governance reform, resilience, and sustainable development within the Palestinian context. Ahmad has a PhD in Spatial Planning from TU-Dortmund University in Germany.

¹ CSCs were created under the authority of the Palestinian Department of Refugee Affairs (DORA), itself a creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the last 60s and re-established in 1994. Important to note that in camps the CSCs represent the interest of refugees and are the main interlocutor with the UN, PA or municipalities around service provision.