

## **Challenges to Community Participation in Gaza Strip Municipalities**

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### **Abstract**

Community participation in municipalities' decisions and long planning processes ensures their full engagement in determining their own developmental needs. Therefore, identifying the challenges for community participation is considered as a crucial aspect for successful governance and service delivery in the local municipalities of governments. The aim of this paper is to identify and assess the challenges to community participation in Gaza Strip municipalities in Palestine. Ten groups of challenges, which comprise 44 factors for community participation in Gaza Strip municipalities were identified from the literature review and modified according to the pilot study. A structured questionnaire survey was employed in this study. Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to determine the ranks of the main groups of challenges and its corresponding factors, followed by a parametric test that is analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA) to test five developed hypotheses. The findings of this paper revealed that shortage of skills was the most significant challenge group to community participation.. The second most significant challenge group was the financial challenges. The third significant group of challenges to community participation was lack of interest and support due to limited support from city council and lack of transparency. The findings revealed agreement among all participants in the most significant challenges for community participation, with one exceptional, where there was disagreement on the rating the main groups of the challenges in terms of the population categories.

**Keywords:** *Challenges, Community, Municipalities, Participation, Planning*

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### **1. Introduction**

The idea of community participation in municipalities' long planning processes and decisions was supported in various legislative frameworks around the world. For example, the term of development local government was introduced by the local government of South Africa in 1981 [1]. This involved approaches that encourage the involvement of community members in local governance and policymaking. Such an approach enhances skills and capacity of community members by promoting participation in their own development processes. Thus, integrated development plan (IDP) provides opportunity to both the municipality and community to work together in local governance [1]. In addition, many researchers investigated community participation in municipalities at various levels, for example: community satisfaction with the government's services [2], sustainability development [3], municipalities' budget [4], health issues [5], and country urban planning [6]. It is widely argued that increased community participation in government decision- making brings many important benefits. Where with citizen participation, designed policies might be more realistically grounded in citizen needs and

demands. In addition, the public might become more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make [7].

The concept of community participation can have different meaning relating to a particular context. For example, the legislation relating to community engagement varies from state to state in Australia. Therefore, local government legislation generally involves both general commitments to community engagement principles and specific consultation requirements for a range of specific decision-making scenarios as per state [8]. On the other hand, the conception of community participation in South Africa is largely linked to the planning and management of development activities at the local sphere of government where local municipalities are regarded as the sphere of government [1]. Further, in their international comparative analysis of the Niagara Falls region's municipalities in the USA and Canada [9], examined the mechanisms used by municipalities to stimulate public participation. The study revealed that the techniques used by municipalities in the USA and Canada to incorporate public participation into local planning and community development processes vary in important ways. For instance, the findings from that research indicate that Canadian municipalities adopt a broader range of public participation techniques related to: voluntarism and public engagement, neighbourhood and strategic planning, and e-government. In contrast, US municipalities are more likely to promote public participation through mechanisms such as annual community meetings and referendums on public issues.

Community participation has motivated researchers to identify the challenges threatening its achievement and continuity. These challenges differ from one community to another. The aim of this paper is to identify and assess the challenges, which face community participation in Gaza Strip municipalities in Palestine. This paper starts with a review of related literature regarding community participation challenges. Then the methodology of this study is described, followed by reporting the research results and discuss it with relation to previous studies. Finally, the paper ends with some suggested recommendations.

## **2. Community participation challenges**

Adamson [10] identified major barriers to the achievement of community empowerment, which include low level of community capacity; lack of capacity of local authorities to work in community-sensitive ways; local authorities reported considerable human resource difficulties in supporting attendance at partnership board meetings; institutionalized resistance in relation to community empowerment; perception gap between community members and statutory service providers in the partnership context; authoritarian of the local government members. Khalifa, [11] studied the planning process with participation in some of the West Bank novelty municipalities, Palestine. He highlighted some challenges, which faced participation in planning process such as: political partisanship, lack of resources and efforts; tribalism dominance of the municipality administration, community's misunderstanding of the planning process, poor organizing and political affiliation.

Sabri and Jaber [12] examined whether the contribution of residents in local government aspects have been increased or not during the rule of the elected councils and mayors of Palestinian municipalities. They found that the efficiency of local government is still limited in the Palestinian

municipalities, due to several barriers, those were: the absence of an internal auditor, the absence of written job descriptions for municipality functions, and weakness participation of the public. They pointed out that the major-managerial problems are similar to other experiences of emerging countries such as undefined local-central relation, low participation, and involvement of citizens in municipalities' activities and plans, and lack of existing transparency aspects. Lee and Kwak [13] identified some of community participation challenges, which include: lack of public participation mechanisms, budgeting issues, creating and sustaining public interests and engagement, open government implementations often require significant financial and human resources, the organizational culture of government agencies (hierarchical, top-down), building trust with the public, legal, contractual, and policy issues, information quality, integrity, accuracy, consistency, and timeliness, lack of responsibility and finally increased complexity in implementing the participatory approach.

Petriwskyj *et al.* [14] added further challenges to community participation, namely cultural diversity and lack of knowledge in the community about opportunities to participate, which was often attributed to council's inappropriate or inadequate provision of information. They mentioned other challenges like: the level of sensitivity and respect shown in council processes, such as feedback from the council, and interest in ageing issues; limitations relating to access, and the resources available to older people, e.g. transport to the venue, event timing, safety and security, and accessibility to council staff; personal or attitudinal factors, such as lack of interest in either the issue or participation more generally, lack of confidence or willingness to speak up. Herriman [8] found that community engagement was object to creating a supportive organizational culture, ensuring legislative requirements are met in a meaningful way, measuring how policies are translating into practice, getting back to communities on how their inputs were used, and having adequate staff and support systems inside council to do this work.

Pinnington *et al.*, [15] concluded that the participation challenges include the limited support from city staff, lack of suitable funding, diversity within the community, the traditional hierarchical decision-making. Foot [16] mentioned community culture, organizational structures, lack of information, lack of respect for community representatives, time shortage; representatives of key services did not attend meetings, lack of obvious changes or learning and lack of skills in engagement of local governments' representatives as community participation challenges.

According to Shah [17], local authorities face different challenges in implementing the participatory approach. These challenges include lack of capacity, limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all actors, limited scope of participation, legislative constraints, inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems, lack of transparency and trust, breakdown in communication, insufficient financial resources, and political and social differences. Mathekgga and Buccus [18] reported some community participation challenges, which include: lack of technical skills and a lack of properly trained personnel at local government level, which had been commonly, labeled "lack of capacity" or "skills shortage"; financial constraints; lack of participation and limited inclusion in the system has had negative impacts on the functioning of the system. They commented that citizen's interests are cared for by elected representatives and organizational structures that are the preserve participation.

Yusuf [4] concluded that community participation challenges included a lack of capacity in terms of skills and logistics; further development and support of ward committees was needed; dealing with diversity within the community; insufficient time to make a meaningful input into the budget process; a lack of transport to meetings; improving monitoring and evaluation process; preventing people from using the ward system for political gain; funding for ward committees to operate effectively to ensure ongoing participation; safety of people attending meetings which are held at night; power dynamics within the community and between ward councilors and members; a lack of communication between councilors, ward committee members and the community and difficulty of keeping people interested in municipal issues.

### **3. Methodology**

To achieve the objectives of this paper, a qualitative research approach was used where a survey strategy was employed. In particular, a structured questionnaire was used to elect the participants' perceptions on the challenges for community participation in Gaza Strip Municipalities, which considered the most widely used data collection technique for conducting surveys [19]. Previous similar studies have also employed questionnaire survey, for example: [2, 11, 12, 20-24].

The questionnaire was design through three phases; the first phase is literature review, where the main groups of challenges and its corresponding factors were extracted from previous studies that related to the subject of this research such as: [4, 8, 11-18, 26].

The second phase was the pilot study by consulting experts. This phase was undertaken by inviting seven experts who have more than 10 years' experience in community participation, developing, and evaluating strategic and development plans for some municipalities of Gaza Strip. The pilot study helped in identifying ambiguous questions. This phase also involved conducting validity and reliability tests of the scales used in the questionnaire before committing to the complete sample population. The obtained experts' feedback and comments were carefully considered in modifying the final questionnaire. The third phase was distributing the final questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in both the arabic and english languages in order to let the concerned population sample understand its content.

#### **3.1 Questionnaire validity**

Two validity tests were used; the statistical and the structure validity tests. Statistical validity test refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to be measuring, where the Criterion related validity was employed [25]. Structure validity (Pearson correlation coefficients) refers to the validity of the questionnaire structure by testing the validity of each field and the validity of the whole questionnaire. It measures the correlation coefficient between one field and all the fields of the questionnaire that have the same level of liker scale. The results of the Criterion related validity indicated that the P-value was less than 0.05 or 0.01, which means that the correlation coefficients of community participation challenge were significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$  or  $\alpha = 0.05$ , so it could be said that the paragraphs of this field were consistent and valid to measure what it was set for. On the other hand, the structure validity P-value was less than 0.05 or 0.01, indicating that the correlation coefficients of community

participation challenge were significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$  or  $\alpha = 0.05$ . thus, it could be said that this fields were valid to be measured what it was set for to achieve the main aim of the study.

### ***Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for reliability***

Reliability test aims to examine the quality of measurement. The reliability of an instrument is the degree of consistency, which measures the attribute it was supposed to be measuring [26]. One of the most commonly used indicators of reliability analysis is Cronbach's alpha coefficient. According to advocates in research methods, the acceptable cronbach's alpha coefficient for a scale is above 0.6 as stated by Hair et al. and Pallant (cited in [27]). The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated and found to be 0.856, which is considered high; and suggesting a reliable questionnaire instrument.

## **3.2 Final Questionnaire Survey**

The questionnaire was divided into two main parts, the first part was seeking collecting data about the participants background. This part had two segments, the first segment was general for all respondent and the other segment was for local government respondents. The first segment included demographics such as age and gender, educational level, profession, working experience and governorates location and so on. The second segments seeked some information about the local governments; history of establishment and number of employees which were answered by local governments representatives. The second part aimed to explore the most significant challenges, which face community participation in Gaza Strip municipalities. Ten main groups of challenges and its corresponding 44 factors were represented to the participants (Table 1), where the participants were asked to rate each main group and its corresponding factors by using Likert scale.

**Table 1: Challenges for Community Participation in Gaza Strip**

No.	Challenges factors	References												
		[13]	[14]	[11]	[8]	[10]	[28]	[15]	[16]	[12]	[17]	[18]	[4]	[29]
<b>Lack of participation mechanisms</b>														
1.	Ineffective disclosing of information.	√			√	√			√	√				
2.	Difficulty of obtaining information at the local level.	√		√	√		√	√	√			√		
3.	Insufficient number of meetings attended by councilors and the community.	√			√						√	√	√	
4.	Limitations relating to access e.g. transport, event timing, safety, and accessibility to the location of meetings	√	√		√				√				√	
5.	Lack of both human and physical resources for neighborhood committees.	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√			√	
<b>Lack of trust and respect</b>														
6.	Incapacity of local governments to achieve the city needs in the perception of community members.	√	√	√	√		√		√		√	√	√	
7.	The community perception to local governments as just a tax collector.	√												
8.	Community participation outputs not be considered or respected.	√	√	√		√			√					√
9.	Difficulty of building meaningful citizen trust through the mechanisms of involvement.	√	√			√	√		√	√		√		
<b>Lack of interest and support</b>														
10.	Lack of support from city council on community participation due to complexity.	√	√			√		√	√					
11.	Lack of interest and confidence in supporting partnership.	√	√			√		√	√	√	√		√	√
12.	Lack of responsibility toward community participation in both community and local government.	√				√		√	√		√	√		√
13.	Lack of transparency	√			√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√
14.	Difficulty of keeping the community involvement.	√	√			√	√		√				√	√

**Table 1: (Continued)**

No.	Community participation challenges	References												
		[13]	[14]	[11]	[8]	[10]	[28]	[15]	[16]	[12]	[17]	[18]	[4]	[29]
<b>Legislative challenges</b>														
15.	Unsupportive administrative structure in local government to community participation.	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√
16.	Unsupportive organizational culture in local governments to community participation.	√		√	√			√	√		√	√		√
17.	Objection of some legal and policy issues within the local government.	√			√	√			√	√	√	√		√
18.	Insufficient decentralization level of local governments from the ministry of local governments.	√			√	√			√	√		√		√
<b>Shortage of skills</b>														
19.	Serious need of training on how to incorporate in participation mechanisms.		√		√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√
20.	Limited understanding of roles and responsibilities of participants.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	
21.	Difficulty to understand some technical terms and concepts used in participatory meetings.		√		√	√	√					√	√	
22.	Lack of knowledge about city needs and opportunities.	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√	√	√	
23.	Complexity of decision making process within the local government.	√	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	
24.	Lack of opportunity to build literacy skills regarding the municipal processes e.g. planning and budgeting.		√	√	√	√			√		√	√	√	
<b>Cultural constraints</b>														
25.	Inconsistency with community traditions e.g. tribalism.		√	√					√	√			√	√
26.	Diversity of backgrounds and cultures within the community.		√				√	√	√		√	√	√	√
27.	A common believe that local government works and initiated decisions can appropriately performed by just the councilors.	√	√			√		√			√	√	√	√
28.	Negligence of some public groups role e.g. women and youth		√			√	√	√	√			√		√

**Table 1: (Continued)**

No.	Community participation challenges	References												
		[13]	[14]	[11]	[8]	[10]	[28]	[15]	[16]	[12]	[17]	[18]	[4]	[29]
<b>Timing challenges</b>														
29.	Requirement of too long time to establish the participatory suggestions and results.	√		√	√			√	√		√		√	√
30.	Rushed time of grants which lead to individual decisions.			√			√		√				√	√
31.	Acceleration of participation process that weakens the community inputs and leads to ineffective outputs.			√		√			√		√	√	√	√
<b>Political challenges</b>														
32.	Misuse of ward committees			√							√		√	√
33.	Absence of election systems in selecting councilors and ward committees.			√				√			√	√	√	√
34.	Spread of poverty which weakens the community interest to participate.	√		√	√			√	√		√		√	√
<b>Financial challenges</b>														
35.	Limited financial resources.	√		√	√		√	√		√	√	√	√	√
36.	Low income of local governments that does not meet their basic needs.	√			√			√		√		√	√	√
37.	Insufficient fund for developing and sustaining new public engagement tools and programs.	√			√			√		√	√	√	√	√
38.	Hierarchical or top-down financial system of national government.	√		√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√
<b>Lack of communication channels</b>														
39.	Weakness in exchanging information between local government councilors and community members.	√		√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√	
40.	Insufficient monitoring strategy for continual upgrade of the participation process.			√	√		√				√	√	√	√
41.	Deficient access to updated information at the local level.	√			√		√		√		√		√	



### 3.3 Research population and sample

The research was carried out in Gaza Strip, which consists of five governorates: The northern governorate, Gaza governorate, the middle governorate, Khan Younis governorate and Rafah governorate. The research population includes three categories: (1) Municipality mayors, (2) Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and (3) Neighborhoods committees. In which, the first categories represents local government perspective and the last two categories represents the local community perspective. In total, the research population accounted for one thousand and forty-seven.

#### *a. First category: municipality mayors*

In Gaza Strip, there were 25 municipalities distributed through five governorates (Table 2): 3 municipalities in Northern governorate, 5 municipalities in Gaza, 7 municipalities in the central governorate, 7 in Khan Younis, and 3 municipalities in Rafah [32], [31]. Municipality's mayors were considered for the survey since they administrate the whole municipality processes and activities as well as they significantly can affect the municipal directions and trends toward community participation.

**Table 2:** Distribution municipalities (Source: MDLF, 2012; MoLGs, 2013)

District	No. of municipalities	Percent %
Northern governorate	3	16
Gaza governorate	5	16
Central governorate	7	28
Khan Younis governorate	7	28
Rafah governorate	3	12
Total	25	100

#### *b. Second category: neighborhoods committees*

There are about 148 neighborhoods located in Gaza Strip and distributed through the five governorates (Table 3): 28 neighborhoods in Northern governorate, 27 neighborhoods in Gaza, 31 neighborhoods in the central governorate, 41 in Khan Younis, and 21 in Rafah [31]. In this category, the neighborhood committees' managers were considered for the survey since they can present other members and lead the committees' activities.

**Table 3:** Distribution of neighborhood committees (Source: MoLGs, 2013)

District	Neighborhood committees	Percent %
Northern Governorate	28	19
Gaza Governorate	27	18
Deir Albalah Governorate	31	21

**Table 3:** (Continued)

District	Neighborhood committees	Percent %
Khan Younis Governorate	41	28
Rafah Governorate	21	14
Total	148	100

**c. Third category: non-governmental organizations (NGOs)**

The number of NGOs registered in the Ministry of Interior of Gaza is 874 associations (Table 4): 809 local associations and 65 foreign associations since the beginning of year 2013. NGOs in the Gaza Strip were distributed as the following: 481 associations registered in Gaza, 123 associations in northern governorate, 100 associations registered in Khan Younis, 95 associations in the central governorate, and 75 association registered in Rafah [32]. The managers or their representatives were considered for the survey. Managers administrate the organizations activities and they have a large experience in participatory activities with local governments. The most activated NGOs were given the priority to be included in the study.

**Table 4:** Distribution of NGOs [32]

District	No. of NGOs	Percent %
Northern Governorate	123	14
Gaza Governorate	481	55
Deir Albalah Governorate	95	11
Khan Younis Governorate	100	11
Rafah Governorate	75	9
Total	874	100

**3.4 Research sampling method**

The following statistical equation was used to determine the sample size [33].

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times P \times (1 - P)}{C^2} = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{0.08^2} = 150$$

Where:

SS: The sample size

Z: Z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence interval)

P: Percentage picking a choice, expressed as decimal, (0.50 used for sample size needed)

C: Confidence interval or margin of error expressed as decimal (assumed 8%)

Correction for finite population,

$$SS_{New} = \frac{SS}{1 + \frac{SS - 1}{Pop}} = \frac{150}{1 + \frac{150 - 1}{1047}} = 131$$

Where: pop is the total population=1047

Check margin of error value:

$$\text{Max. Margin of error at 95\% confidence} \approx \frac{0.98}{\sqrt{SS_{new}}} = \frac{0.98}{\sqrt{131}} = 0.085 > 0.08 \text{ OK}$$

From the previous section, the research population accounted for 25 municipalities, 148 neighborhoods committees and 874 NGOs, so that the total population was 1047. By applying the previous two equations, the research sample size equal 131.

The method of sampling followed in this research was stratified random sampling. The population was divided into different sub-populations or categories in order to obtain a sample that is representative of the population. The stratified sample was obtained by taking samples from each category which calculated by the following equation:

$$(SS)_i = \frac{(Pop)_i}{\text{Research Population}} \times \text{Research Sample size}$$

Where: (SS)<sub>i</sub>: The sample size of category I and (Pop)<sub>i</sub>: Population of category i

For municipalities' category, their sample size was calculated as following:

$$(SS)_{municipalities} = \frac{25}{1047} \times 131 = 3.13 \approx 4$$

The equation was applied for each category, and the results are presented in Table 5. Each category had a corresponding simple size that should be exceeded in order to get a representative samples.

**Table 5:** Sample size and the corresponding number of respondents

Category	Population (Pop) <sub>i</sub>	Sample size (SS) <sub>i</sub>	No. of respondents
Municipalities	25	4	8
Neighborhood committees	148	19	20
NGOs	874	109	120
Total	1047	132	148

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed by hand and 148 questionnaires were returned represented 74% response rate.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Methods

The collected data was analysed by using the IBM SPSS 21.0 statistical package. The analysis involved five distinct steps; (i ) data preparation, (ii) data examination for main assumptions, where One Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) Test was used to test the normality distribution, (iii) central tendency as descriptive analysis method was used to calculate the means

and frequencies for the demographic section of this questionnaire, (iv) Relative Importance Index (RII) to determine the ranks of the rates, and (v) inferential analysis to analyse the difference between the main groups of the participants, in particular One-Way ANOVA was employed.

### **One Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) Test**

One Sample K-S used to compare the research sample with a reference probability distribution. This test was used to identify if the data follow normal distribution or not, this test is considered necessary in case testing hypotheses as most parametric test stipulate data to be normality distributed and this test used when the size of the sample are greater than 50. P-value was found greater than the significant level which is equal 0.05 ( $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ), this in turn denoted that data follows normal distribution, and so parametric tests can be used.

### **Relative Importance Index (RII)**

The relative importance index method (RII) was used to determine the ranks of all performance factors. The relative importance index was computed as [36], [35], [38], and [37]:

$$RII = \frac{\sum W}{A \times N} \times 100\%$$

Where:

$W$  = the weighting given to each factor by the respondents (ranging from 1 to 5)

$A$  = the highest weight (i.e. 5 in this case)

$N$  = the total number of respondents

The RII value had a range from 0 to 1 (0 not inclusive), the higher the value of RII, the more impact of the attribute. However, RII does not reflect the relationship between the various attributes.

## **4. Results and discussion**

The following sections will discuss the findings of this study.

### **4.1 Shortage of skills group**

This group consists of 6 factors (See Table 6). Ranking 1<sup>st</sup>, with RII of "89%", the study showed that the shortage of skills group or "lack of building capacity" as suggested by some researchers, was the significant challenge group to community participation. The most significant factor in this group, ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, with RII of 95%, was "Lack of training on participation mechanisms". This factor played a meaningful and effective role in the participatory process, citizens and communities need to have knowledge, skills and a sense of empowerment, which would enable them to incorporate in the participatory process. The lack of training and the weak focusing on the participation process phases and its mechanisms especially for the participatory

budgeting, significantly, weakened the community involvement process. This finding is in agreement with the outcomes reported by [4, 8, 10, 14, 16].

**Table 6:** Challenges due to shortage of skills

Shortage of skills	Mean	SD	T test	P-value	RII	Rank
Participants is in a serious need for training on how to incorporate in participation mechanisms.	4.76	0.45	47.9	0.000	95%	1
Community members have not had the opportunity to build literacy skills regarding the municipal process e.g. planning and budgeting.	4.69	0.49	41.7	0.000	94%	2
There is a limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of participants.	4.67	0.53	38.5	0.000	93%	3
There is a lack of knowledge about city needs and opportunities.	4.48	0.58	31.2	0.000	90%	4
Some technical terms and concepts that are used in meetings are not understandable for participants.	4.09	0.64	20.7	0.000	82%	5
For community, the local government decision-making process is complex.	3.98	0.53	22.6	0.000	80%	6
All factors	4.44	0.41	42.7	0.000	89%	

"Lack of literacy skills regarding planning and budgeting" was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, with RII of 94%. The majority of citizens didn't have sufficient knowledge about the municipal processes especially the planning and budgeting processes, they need to know about process goals, objectives, benefits, tools, schedules, activities and how it affected their city and their life. Without this knowledge, it was so hard to guarantee successful participation from the public. This outcome corroborates the findings of [10, 16-18]. With RII of 93%, "limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the participatory process" was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>. This problem led to insufficient involvement and loses of time in answering questions and replying to inquiries. The findings agree with previous studies outcomes including: [8, 11, 13, 14, 17, 26].

"Limited knowledge about city needs and opportunities" was ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, with RII of 90%. The use of the local community to survey the city needs and expectations is considered one of the most preferred methods since it benefits in collecting huge amount of information in a short period of time and in the lowest cost possible. Lack of knowledge about the city needs and opportunities made LGs missed out such smart method, and as a result, it would challenge the community involvement in the LGs processes. The next factor, ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, with RII of 82%, was "Complexity of technical terms and concepts used in participatory meetings". Practically, the majority of community participants involved in the participatory process were not experts and they might not recognized some of the technical terms used in workshops, focus groups or any kind of open meetings. The use of such terms bothered the participants in the way that led them to lose their interest to participate or some of them might leave off since they felt confused and

embarrassed. The last factor in this group, with RII of 80%, was "Complexity of local government decision-making process from the community members' perspective". This kind of thought drives community members to lose the desire and interest to get involved in the participatory process, and consequently, it weakens their involvement in the LGs processes. This challenge was mentioned by [4, 18, 28].

## 4.2 Financial challenges group

This group of challenges consists of 4 sub-factors as shown in Table 7 and ordered from the most significant to the least. The financial challenges with RII of 85% were the second most significant challenge group of community participation approach. Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> with RII of 90%, was assigned to "Insufficient income of local governments for basic needs". For Gaza Strip LGs, funding is one of the most important challenges. The income, mostly from taxes and fees, especially for smaller, newly established ones, didn't meet their basic needs. LGs suffered meager budgets and insufficient tax revenue. Financial challenges might be attributed to the absence of steady support from the Ministries of Finance and Local Governments. The loss of fuel taxes (an important source of income) and a decrease in the number of citizens who paid their taxes further reduced revenues [29]. Insufficient income has a direct negative effect on the community participation process; it weakens the capability of LGs to fund participatory mechanisms and programs. The established effect of this factor corroborates the findings reported by [4, 8, 12, 17, 18, 29].

**Table 7: Financial challenges**

Financial challenges	Mean	SD	T test	P-value	RII	Rank
The income of local governments, mostly from taxes and fees, does not meet their basic needs.	4.52	0.64	28.7	0.000	90%	1
Financial resources for participatory budgeting are limited, which restricts the scope of community participation.	4.49	0.53	34.4	0.000	89%	2
Insufficient funding will be a tough challenge for developing and sustaining new public engagement tools and programs.	4.30	0.57	28.0	0.000	86%	3
Local government budgets are approved by the Ministry of Finance, and local officers of the ministry exercise significant control on it.	3.78	0.57	16.6	0.000	76%	4
All factors	4.27	0.43	35.7	0.000	85%	

The study showed that as a financial challenge, "limited financial resources for participatory budgeting" with RII of 89%, was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> which restricted the scope of community participation. Insufficient funding would be a tough challenge for developing and sustaining new public engagement tools and programs. The financial problem available for the participatory process was more crucial than it might seem. Although municipal governments

might want to reverse priorities spending on the cities' poorer areas into rights and not favors, they still cannot meet even a small fraction of either the needs of poor communities or the most compelling problems in their cities. This outcome supports the results obtained by [4, 13, 17].

The last factor, with RII of 76%, was "Centralized budgeting systems for LGs". Local officers of the ministry of finance exercised significant control on the LGs budgeting systems. According to [29], Article 22 of the local council's law defines three sources of revenues for local council income: taxes and fees determined in Palestinian laws, donations and grants, and the budget of the executive authority. However, local councils didn't have the authority to collect taxes and fees or determine spending; they were obligated to obtain Ministry approval to do so according to the law. Municipality budgets were also subject to the approval of the Minister of Local Government. Local councils, as per Article 2 of the law, were obliged to conform to general policy defined by the MOLG and to abide by its financial and administrative supervision.

### 4.3 Lack of interest and support group

The study showed that the third most significant challenge of community participation, with RII of 85%, were due to the lack of interest and support either from community members or from LGs. This group of challenges are consisted of 5 sub-factors as shown in Table 8 and ordered from the most significant to the least. With RII of 93%, ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, there is a limited support from city council on community participation since they think about the process complexity.

**Table 8:** Challenges due to lack of interest and support

<b>Lack of interest and support</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>RII</b>	<b>Rank</b>
There is a limited support from city council on community participation due to complexity.	4.67	0.53	38.5	0.000	93%	1
Lack of transparency is a significant challenge of community participation	4.41	0.59	28.8	0.000	88%	2
There is a lack of responsibility toward community participation in both community and local government.	4.22	0.52	28.7	0.000	84%	3
There are considerable lack of interest and confidence in supporting partnership.	4.02	0.58	21.5	0.000	80%	4
There are considerable difficulties in keeping the community involvement e.g. attending meetings continually.	3.89	0.49	22.1	0.000	78%	5
All factors	4.24	0.38	39.7	0.000	85%	

"The lack of transparency", with RII of 88%, was ranked 2nd which denoted that it is a significant challenge of community participation. Lack of transparency, which may further cause weak involvement of the public in the municipal processes, is a direct result of the lack of

communications, lack of training and legal challenges. The results showed that a "significant lack of responsibility toward community participation in both community and local government" with RII of 84%, was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>. Communities and LGs don't bear their responsibilities toward the public involvement, and this is might referred to two reasons. First, both groups weren't aware of the importance of their involvement and they underestimated the expected benefits. The other reason was that both groups weren't aware of their role in the participatory processes. The findings support the results reported by [12, 17, 38].

The next factor was ranked 4th, with RII of 80%, was "considerable lack of interest and confidence in supporting partnership". This result was caused by the lack of successful and sustainable communication strategies between the communities and LGs. The last factor in this group, with RII of 78%, showed that there were "considerable difficulties in keeping the community involvement" e.g. attending meetings continually. This might refer to the previous mentioned reasons including: lack of transparency and confident, responsibility, and interest. The outcomes agree with the findings of [4, 13, 14, 26].

#### **4.4 Lack of participation mechanisms group**

The findings showed that, with RII of 79%, the 4<sup>th</sup> most significant challenge of community participation was "lack of participation mechanisms". The results for this group are shown in descending order from the most significant to the least in Table 9. With RII of 89%, ranking 1st, Ward Committees suffers from "lack of both human and physical resources", which impeded their ability to communicate with LGs and organize meetings within their community, and consequently it hindered the successful implementation of the community participation approach. This finding corroborates the outcomes of [4, 8, 13, 16]. This mainly referred to the scarcity of financial resources.

**Table 9:** Lack of participation mechanisms factors

<b>Lack of participation mechanisms factors</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>RII</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Ward Committees suffers from lack of both human and physical resources, which impedes their ability to communicate issues and organize meetings within their community.	4.43	0.74	23.5	0.000	89%	1
Methods of disclosing information to public are ineffective and community members are not familiar with it.	4.26	0.77	19.7	0.000	85%	2
Information at the local level is not easily obtainable.	3.78	0.59	15.9	0.000	76%	3
There are insufficient number of meetings attended by councilors and the community.	3.72	0.60	14.6	0.000	74%	4
Limitations relating to access e.g. transport, event timing, safety, and accessibility to the	3.55	0.83	8.1	0.000	71%	5



location of meetings, weaken the involvement of people.						
All factors	3.95	0.57	20.2	0.000	79%	

"Ineffective methods of information disclosure" and "difficulty of obtaining information" with RII of 85% and 76%, were ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in this group, respectively. Information exchange is the initiative step in the participation ladder, which is also considered the bases of the participatory process, and it is one of the most effective methods for data collection. Unfortunately, the results showed that there were weak and ineffective information disclosure from both of community members and LGs. Similar findings were obtained by [8, 13, 15, 28].

With RII of 74% and 71%, ranking 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, "insufficient number of meetings attended by councilors and the community" and "limitations relating to access e.g. transport, event timing, safety, and accessibility to the location of meetings" were relatively significant challenges to community participation. Meetings are the most important strategies for community participation, and more meetings show the serious commitment of both, the community members and LGs to more involvement. Limitations in conducting meetings hindered one of the most used facilities to solve contradictions and make united vision for participants. The findings agree with the results obtained by [4, 8, 13].

#### 4.5 Lack of trust and respect group

Ranking 5<sup>th</sup>, with RII of 77%, "lack of trust and respect" is a significant challenge of community participation, which killed the desire of community members to share and cooperate. The findings of the group are shown in descending order from the most significant to the least in Table 10. "The community perception to local governments as just a tax collector", with RII of 83%, was ranked 1<sup>st</sup>. This indicated that this thought is the main reason that makes community members lose their trust and respect to their LGs. Ineffective information disclosure process, insufficient communications between LGs and their communities, and lack of transparency are the reasonable motivates for such negative perceptions.

**Table 10:** Lack of trust and respect

Lack of trust and respect group	Mean	SD	T test	P-value	RII	Rank
Community members look at local governments as just a tax collector.	4.16	0.74	19.2	0.000	83%	1
Building citizen trust in the meaningfulness of the mechanisms of engagement was difficult.	3.86	0.61	17.2	0.000	77%	2
Community members do not relay on local government ability to achieve their demands.	3.80	0.45	21.5	0.000	76%	3
Community participation outputs e.g. opinions and expectations are not considered or respected.	3.51	0.67	9.3	0.000	70%	4
All factors	3.83	0.53	19.2	0.000	77%	

With RII of 77%, 76% and 70, ranked 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, "failure to build trust through the mechanisms of involvement", "failure of local governments to achieve the city needs", and "ignorance of community participation outputs" were also effective elements in thinning the public trust and respect and consequently weakening the participatory outputs. This outcome is in agreement with the findings of [13, 14, 16].

#### **4.6 Lack of communication channels group**

With RII of 77%, ranked 6<sup>th</sup>, "lack of communication channels" was a significant challenge of community participation, since the communications between communities and LGs were essentially needed in all of the community participation levels from the information sharing phase to the empowerment phase. The findings of this group are shown in descending order from the most significant to the least in Table 11.

With RII of 78%, 77% and 75%, "deficient access to updated information"," weakness in exchanging information" and "insufficient monitoring on the continual upgrade of the participation process" was ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. The failing to implement successful and updated information disclosure strategies and the discontinuity of the participatory phases are proximate reasons for the fragility of community communications [29, 40].

**Table 11:** Lack of communications challenges

<b>Lack of communications challenges</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>RII</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Access to updated information at the local level remains deficient.	3.89	0.49	22.1	0.000	78%	1
There is a weak exchange of information between local government councilors and community members.	3.87	0.44	24.1	0.000	77%	2
There is insufficient monitoring strategy for continual upgrade of the participation process.	3.74	0.65	13.7	0.000	75%	3
All factors	3.83	0.42	24.1	0.000	77%	

Critical value of t at DF "147" and significance level 0.05 equal 1.98

#### **4.7 The legislative challenges group**

The results reported that ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, with RII of 72%, "legislative challenges" were touching challenges of community participation. The findings of the group are shown in descending order from the most significant to the least in Table 12. "Unsupportive organizational culture in LGs", with RII of 79%, was ranked 1<sup>st</sup>. This indicated the inhibiting potential impact of such challenge on the community participation process. The LGs employees' history, communications, norms and behaviors, valued skills, and valued traits should be adopted to cope

with the appropriate environment of implanting and keeping community participation. The results agree with the outcomes obtained by [8, 11, 13, 16].

Relatively having the same hindering impact, with RII of 78%, "unsupportive administrative structure in LGs" was ranked 2nd. Without defined policies and procedures that were consistently enforced throughout the LGs councils, the community participation approach could fail to achieve its desired goals. This challenge consisted of any structure that may inhibit access to public discourse opportunities or may systematically distort communication with communities. The results were asserted by [8, 11-13, 15, 16, 26, 29]. With RII of 67% and 64%, ranked 3rd and 4th, "Legal issues and policies", "Insufficient decentralization" has considered effects in restraining the participatory approach. The same outcomes were obtained by [8, 18, 38].

**Table 12:** The legislative challenges

<b>The legislative challenges</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>RII</b>	<b>Rank</b>
The current organizational cultures of the local government are unsupportive to community participation.	3.95	0.64	18.1	0.000	79%	1
The current administrative (hierarchical) structures within the local government are unsupportive to community participation.	3.91	0.39	28.8	0.000	78%	2
Some of the legal and policy issues within the local government hinders the development of participatory approach.	3.34	0.61	6.7	0.000	67%	3
There is insufficient decentralization level of local authority gained from the ministry of local governments.	3.22	0.54	5.0	0.000	64%	4
All factors	3.60	0.41	18.1	0.000	72%	

#### **4.8 Cultural constraints group**

The findings pointed out that, with RII of 66%, ranking 8<sup>th</sup>, "cultural challenges" worked to repel the applications of community participation in LGs. Table 13 shows the sub-factors contained in this group, which was ordered from the most significant to the least. Ranking 1st, with RII of 74%, councilors and the community members believe that local government work and initiated decisions can appropriately performed by just the councilors. This believe creates depressed atmosphere through participants, and it is one of the reasons that weakens the community interests to share in the participatory programs.

**Table 13:** The cultural constraints

<b>The cultural constraints</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>RII</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Councilors and the community believe that local government work and initiated decisions can appropriately performed by just the councilors.	3.71	0.51	16.9	0.000	74%	1
The role of women, youth and disadvantaged in local governments is neglected	3.52	0.51	12.3	0.000	70%	2
There are diverse backgrounds and cultures within the community.	2.97	0.46	-0.9	0.371	59%	3
Community participation is not consistent with the community traditions e.g. tribalism.	2.93	0.48	-1.9	0.063	58%	4
All factors	3.28	0.34	10.0	0.000	66%	

With RII of 70%, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup>, the results indicated that "negligence of some public groups' role, e.g. women and youth" had a senior impact on the community participation process. Limits the scope of the participatory process, and weakens the efficiency of its outputs, since it won't benefit some of the community groups within the city. "Inconsistency with community traditions" and "diversity of backgrounds and cultures within the community" ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, with RII of 59% and 58%, respectively. The results indicated the weak effect of such challenges on the community participation process. The findings were supported by [16, 26, 28, 29].

#### **4.9 Political challenges group**

The results presented that, ranking 9<sup>th</sup>, with RII of 67%, "political challenges" are relatively tangible challenges of community participation. The findings of this group are shown in descending order from the most significant to the least in Table 14. "Absence of election systems", with RII of 71%, ranking 1st, was one of the considerable challenges of community participation. Holding periodic local council elections in a free atmosphere was a basic requirement for achieving active community participation process. It was a great motivation for communities to share their representatives in the LGs. The findings agree the outcomes reported by [15, 17, 29].

With RII of 65% and 64%, "misuse of ward committees" and "spread of poverty", ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, respectively. Using ward committees for political gains made them lose their meaningful function of representing the whole community and made them lose trust and confidence from the public. Moreover, spread of poverty due to the blockade and the lack of resources kept most of people busy fending themselves and make them unable to pay dues to local governments, rather than participating in its processes.

**Table 14:** Political challenges

Political challenges	Mean	SD	T test	P-value	RII	Rank
Absence of election systems in selecting councilors and ward committees is a challenge of community participation.	3.58	0.74	9.6	0.000	72%	1
Participants use ward committees for political gain.	3.27	0.52	6.4	0.000	65%	2
The spread of poverty, which keeps most of people busy fending themselves and make them unable to pay dues to local governments.	3.20	0.58	4.1	0.000	64%	3
All factors	3.35	0.38	11.1	0.000	67%	

#### 4.10 Timing challenges group

Finally, it was found that "timing challenges", with total RII of 50%, were the least influential community participation challenges. As shown in Table 15, with RII of 61%, community participation process is too long to be established, so that participants might lose their interest or motivations reaching the final phases. In addition, the study showed that "the acceleration of participation process", with RII of 45% and "the rushed time of grants", with RII of 43% were weak challenges to community participation. The results might be justified by that the community participation process brings set of priorities and implementation plans usually for long period of time, at least one year, so that once the process outputs could be achieved, LGs could allocates their different financial resources, including external grants and foreign aids, to serve the community participation process outputs. This agrees the findings of [4, 16, 29].

**Table 15:** Timing challenges group factors

Timing challenges group factors	Mean	SD	T test	P-value	RII	Rank
Community participation is too long to establish suggestions to local governments on time.	3.05	0.47	1.2	0.224	61%	1
Acceleration of participation process is a challenge that weakens the community inputs and leads to ineffective outputs.	2.27	0.67	-13.3	0.000	45%	2
The rushed time of grants forced councilors to take individual decisions about proposed projects.	2.15	0.84	-12.3	0.000	43%	3
All factors	2.49	0.59	-10.5	0.000	50%	

Figure 1 depicts the ten community participation challenges groups with the most important barriers.

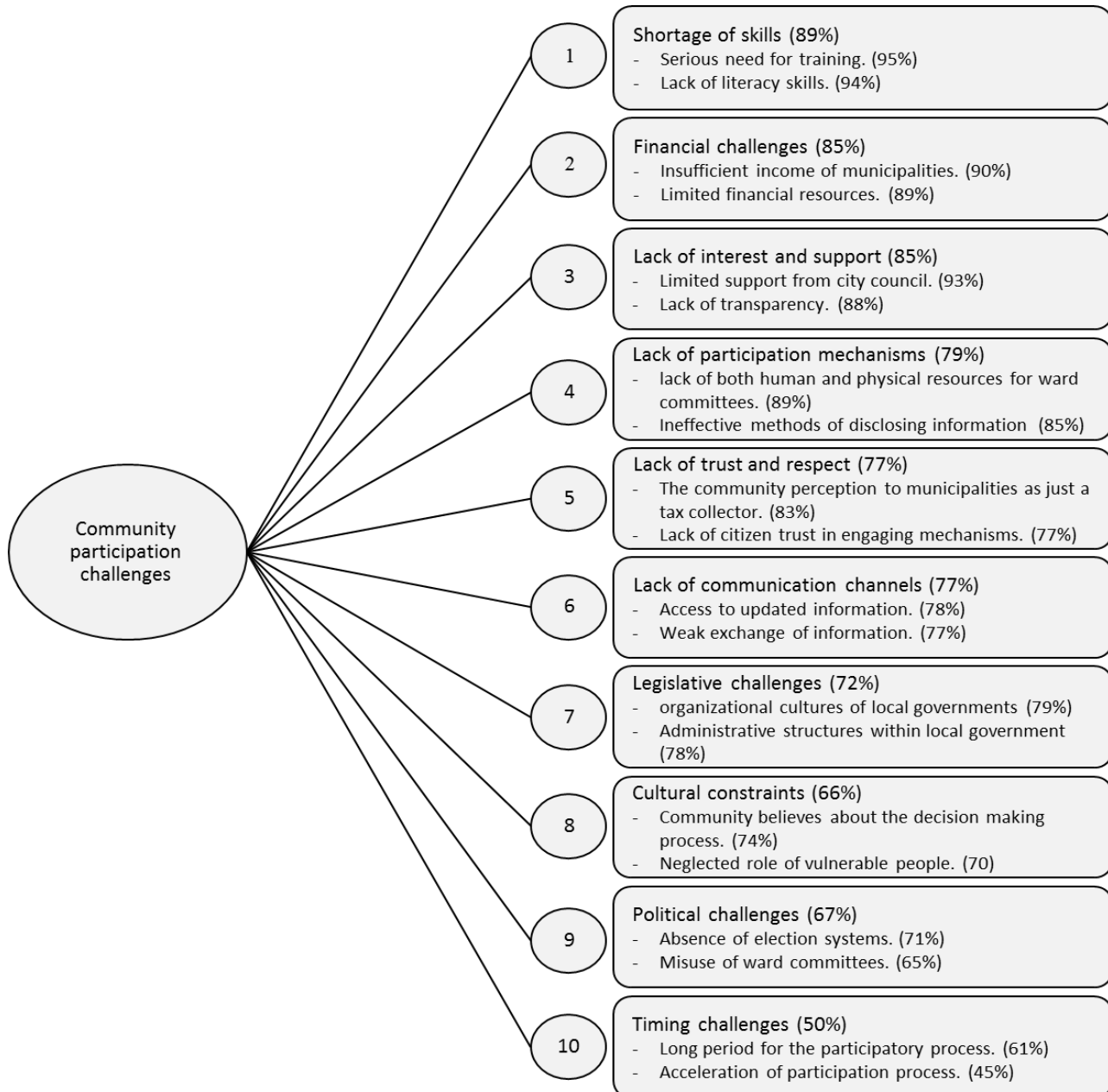


Figure 1: Community participation challenges groups

## 5. Study Hypotheses:

The t test and one way ANOVA were used to find out whether there were statistically significant differences in the community participation challenges between opinions of population with respect to gender, age, educational level, experience, and population category type.

**First Ho:** There were no significant differences in the community participation challenges, due to gender. Independent groups' t test results for gender are given in Table 15.

**Table 15:** Independent samples t test results for gender regarding community participation challenges

Gender	Frequency	Mean	SD	DF	T-value	Sig.
Male	103	3.91	0.62	146	1.374	0.086
Female	45	3.84	0.43			

The results showed that there were no significant differences in the community participation challenges, due to gender. This indicated that both males and females experienced common challenges for their community participation.

**Second Ho:** There were no significant differences in the community participation challenges, due to age. Results are shown in Table 16.

**Table 16:** ANOVA results for age regarding community participation challenges

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean of Square	F value	Sig.
Between Groups	0.567	3	0.189	1.084	0.358
Within Groups	25.100	144	0.174		
Total	25.667	147			

The results of ANOVA for the community participation challenges shown in Table 17 revealed that there were no significant differences in population opinions due to age [ $F(3-144)=1.084$ ;  $p>0,05$ ].

**Third Ho:** There were no significant differences in the community participation challenges, due to educational level. One Way ANOVA Test was used to test this hypothesis.

**Table 17:** ANOVA results for educational level regarding community participation challenges

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean of Square	F value	Sig.
Between Groups	1.014	4	0.254	1.767	0.139
Within Groups	20.521	143	0.144		
Total	21.535	147			

As shown in Table 18, ANOVA results indicated that there were no significant differences in the community participation challenges between the opinions of the population in terms of their educational level [ $F(4-143)=1.767$ ;  $p>0,05$ ].

**Four Ho:** There were no significant differences in the community participation challenges, due to experience. Table contained the summary of ANOVA test.

**Table 18:** ANOVA results for experience regarding community participation challenges

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean of Square	F value	Sig.
Between Groups	1.768	3	0.589	2.439	0.067
Within Groups	34.798	144	0.242		
Total	43.959	147			

The results indicated no significant differences in the community participation challenges between the opinions of the population in terms of experience [F(3-144)=2.439, p>0,05].

**Five Ho:** There were no significant differences in the community participation challenges, due to population categories (ward committee, NGOs, local governments). Results are shown in Table 19.

**Table 19:** ANOVA results for population categories regarding community participation challenges

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean of Square	F value	Sig.
Between Groups	1.768	2	0.884	15.227	0.000*
Within Groups	8.418	145	0.058		
Total	10.187	147			

\* Sig. at  $\alpha=0.05$

The results showed that there were significant differences in the community participation challenges between the opinions of the population in terms of the population category types [F(2-145)=15.227, p<0,05]. The findings indicated that as the least group benefited from community participation process, ward committees ( $\mu=4.09$ ) were the most category that experienced challenges in the community participation process, followed by NGOs ( $\mu=3.78$ ), and local governments ( $\mu=3.70$ ). This might refer to the weak support and motivation from local governments to ward committees. In addition, ward committees were appointed by city councils rather than elected by citizens, which weakened their role in presenting the local community.

## 6. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to identify of the challenges of community participation in Gaza Strip municipalities. The findings of this paper revealed that shortage of skills was the most significant challenge group to community participation, This was due to the lack of training on how to incorporate in participation mechanisms, inadequate skills regarding the municipal process, limited understanding of participants' roles and responsibilities in the participatory process, limited knowledge about city needs and opportunities, and the weak understanding of some of technical terms and concepts that were used in meetings.



The second most significant challenge group was the financial challenges, which influenced the community participation process through low income of local governments, limited financial resources for participatory budgeting, insufficient funding for developing and sustaining new public engagement tools and programs, and centralization of the local government budgeting system. The third most significant challenge was lack of interest and support, which hinders the success of community participation process through various ways including: limited support from city council on community participation, lack of transparency, lack of responsibility toward community participation in both community and local government, lack of interest and confidence in supporting partnership, and difficulties in keeping the community involvement. The study also revealed that there was a considerable lack of participation mechanisms, which impedes community participation process. This challenge appeared through the lack of both human and physical resources for ward committees, ineffective strategies for disclosing information, insufficient number of meetings attended by councilors and the community, and limitations relating to access e.g. transport, event timing, safety, and accessibility to the location of meetings.

According to the study findings, the lack of trust and respect between LGs and communities, the lack of communication channels, and legislative challenges were significant challenges to community participation. Those challenges leads to: failure to build trust through the mechanisms of involvement, failure of local governments to achieve the city needs, limited access to updated information, weakness in exchanging information, insufficient monitoring on the participation process. Legislative challenges included unsupportive organizational culture and administrative structure in LGs, insufficient policies and insufficient decentralization from the ministry of local governments (MoLG).

In addition, cultural and political challenges were found as high to average challenges to community participation process in Gaza Strip municipalities. Those challenges included municipal processes and initiated decisions were preferable to be performed by councilors, the role of women and youth were neglected, election system for councilors was not activated, ward committees were misused for political gains, and political blockade led to spread of poverty which kept most of people busy fending themselves and made them unable to pay dues to LGs. Moreover, the timing challenges were found the least challenges of community participation process. The following recommendations are suggested in order to eliminate the barriers to community participation in Gaza Strip municipalities:

- Trainings for councilors, ward committee members, and the community, should be held and practically focusing on the participation strategies in municipal planning and budgeting processes
- Launching training programs or workshops may help motivate the interest of councilors for holding and maintaining the community participation process.
- Allocating enough time and resources to sustain communication channels, between different community groups.
- It is important to include the development of a communication strategy in any capacity building programme.
- Related laws and regulations regarding the community participation process in the municipal processes and services should be issued.

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