

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Municipality councils and local media study on the right of access to information in Jordan

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The purpose of this study is to shed light on the status of the right of access to information in the actions of municipality councils in Jordan, to identify the definite policy municipalities adopted to communicate with citizens, local media, and establishments in their geographical areas, and finally to find out if that policy is sufficiently transparent. The study aims to reach a comprehensive assessment of the state of awareness and the exercise of this right through the elected local government institutions which represent the first line of contact with local communities. The study addresses the research problem through a survey of practices in 93 municipalities spread over four categories and examines their relations with local media from the perspective of the right of access to information. By way of concluding, the study highlights the development of information systems in the municipalities and emphasizes the need to increase the capacity of municipal workers in dealing with media. The study moreover recommends that local journalists should be trained on the best practices in the right of access to information in the areas of municipalities work and media coverage for local communities should be improved.

**Key words:** Access to information, local media, municipality councils in Jordan.

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## INTRODUCTION

The right of access to information, freedom of information or the right to knowledge is considered one of the basic human rights included in international covenants. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a wide increase in awareness and in exercising this right all around the world, where the demand for exercising this right has increased not only in the media, but also in empowering all citizens (particularly those who are less fortunate, the poor and local communities) to access information. This constitutes a suitable approach to launch democracy and development through transparency and accountability.

Jordan is the first Arab country to enact a law in this respect (Law No. 47 for the year 2007), which ensured the right of access to information. In spite of the fact that

this law is considered a real achievement on the way to democracy, it does not meet the aspirations of opinion leaders, civil organizations and media community. Additionally, its practice has not witnessed an increase in the requests for exercising the right of access to information outside the sphere of media community.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the status of the right of access to information in the actions of municipality councils in Jordan, to identify the definite policy municipalities adopt to communicate with citizens, local media, and establishments in their geographical areas, and finally to find out if that policy is sufficiently transparent. The study aims to reach a comprehensive assessment of the state of awareness and the exercise of this right through the elected local government institutions

**Table 1.** Representative samples.

Category	Population	Respondents	Percentage (100%)
First category	11	7	63
Second category	48	20	41
Third category	27	10	37
Fourth category	7	3	43
Total	93	40	43

which represent the first line of contact with local communities.

The study aims to explore the definite policy of Jordanian municipalities that enable citizens and journalists to access municipal information. It furthermore aims to identify the common sources of the flow of municipal information to the citizens and media.

On the other hand, the study attempts at identifying the characteristics of the information gap between international standards and the actual legislation and practices according to municipalities. It further attempts at identifying the capacities and the infrastructure of information and its management systems in Jordanian municipalities and the capability of this infrastructure to meet the requirements of accessing information.

Jordan is a model of quiet democratic transformations amid the Arab Spring. This highlights the importance of deepening democratic practices in local communities and entrenching democracy in a society where media plays an important role in the local field. Absence of democratic practices in local communities makes democratic transformations in some Middle Eastern countries threaten relapse or political monopoly. This requires other practices that link democratic practices to individuals' everyday life.

The study recommends that municipalities should develop information systems management and train the mayors and staff to deal with media. This indicates that the level of media coverage for local communities and civil society should be improved in order to adopt initiatives that enhance increasing the capacity of municipalities in the areas of the right to access to information and increasing community's awareness of practicing the right of access to information.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive and analytical survey method to obtain representative data that provide answers to the study's questions, using two tools for the collection of information:

1. Questionnaire: This tool was developed for the collection of field data and included 40 basic statements. Its validity and reliability was tested. It was reviewed by three experts specialized in media and local administration, in addition to an expert in information

management. This tool was also tested on a pilot sample from the study's population, which included five municipalities.

2. In-depth interviews: These included eight interviews with mayors and six interviews with opinion leaders from three governorates.

## The sample

Municipalities in Jordan are divided into four categories according to the number of residents and municipal center site. Municipalities of governorate centers represent the first category, municipalities of the centers of districts represent the second category, municipalities of towns represent the third category, and municipalities of the villages represent the fourth category. Due to the similarity of conditions within the same category, representative samples were taken as shown in Table 1. Out of 93 municipalities, 46 municipalities were chosen. Only 40 municipalities responded. The questionnaire was distributed in a representative manner in line with the categories of municipalities as follows.

Data extracted from interviews with mayors, municipal managers and secretaries of municipal councils were collected in the field during April and May of 2012. Questionnaire data were entered into SPSS. A descriptive analysis was adopted in extracting frequencies and percentages that reflect the reality of actual practices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Local media and local democracy

The empowerment of local community to access information is connected to facilitating the building of local democracy through community media to be transparent, accountable and to combat corruption in local government institutions. Significant research has addressed the role of media in development and community building around the world. Due to varying levels of access to technology in developed, developing, and least developed countries, the types of media addressed by this research are numerous in some countries and limited in others. In developed countries, with more widely available and diverse types of media, research has explored differences in the social effects of distinct media types (Beaudoin and Thorson, 2004) as well as the specific roles of individual media types (Arthurs and Zacharias, 2007; Baade 2007; Feldman, 2007). In developing and least developed countries, however, research heavily focused on community radio (Bosch, 2007; Bresnahan,

2007; Gatua, 2006; Jallof, 2004; Vinod and Malik, 2007; Madamonde, 2005).

Since the second half of the 20th century community media and communication technology (ICTs) have played a major role in development and political change (Rhinesmith, 2010). Using information community technology (ICTs) can foster participation and two-way communication and facilitate community transformation (i.e. social change among the most marginalized and vulnerable population groups (Chitnis, 2008). As local governments become more transparent in making data more available, communities need access to information and communication infrastructure (Rhinesmith, 2010).

### **Access to information and democratic participation**

The right of access to information at the international level dates back to 1776, when the Kingdom of Sweden passed the press law, which gave citizens the right of obtaining information kept in government institutions (Abdulbarr, 2006:10). The emergence of the modern concept of the right of access to information at the international level goes back to 1946, when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted in its first session resolution number 59, which states that the freedom of access to information is a basic human right and the cornerstone of all freedoms advocated by the United Nations (Al Hasan, 2006). This right was consolidated in the international covenant for political and civil rights which was pronounced in 1966 (Human Rights Library, 1966).

This right began to gain momentum in the early 1990s and started to be treated as an independent right after decades of being expressed through the right of speech and the freedoms of media. Since 1997, the reports of the United Nations Council on Human Rights began dealing with this right as an independent right (Al Hasan, 2006). These reports started to point clearly to governments and institutions that prevent citizens from obtaining information that they have the right to access, and countries commenced to draft independent legislations that secure the right of citizens and media to access governmental information. The number of countries that had passed independent legislations reached 70 countries by the end of 2009<sup>1</sup>.

Several studies emphasized that enabling societies to access government information and to build a competent and professional local media is a foundation of democratic development at the local level. It is also an important approach to achieving a political reform at the national level. Further, it is tied to institutionalizing democracy at the level of enhancing this right in accordance with the criteria of local democracy, the most

important of which are participation, representation, accountability, transparency and social solidarity (Jaeger, 2007).

Democratic participation in decision making does not exist without the ability to access information. A secretive government is rarely efficient, because freedom of access to information is essential for identifying and solving problems. Additionally, the culture of a secretive government promotes suspicion and rumors, where suspicion becomes the dominant aspect of the public's stance towards all information issued by the government, even medial campaigns designed to inform the public such as public education campaigns (Beatham et al., 2008).

The goals that make the right of access to information a solid platform for the building of democracy are obvious at the level of local societies and their relations with the institutions of local government, represented in municipalities. The importance of that is exemplified in three basic dimensions (Bodevat, 2006).

1. The availability of assurances for building a democratic society begins from the primary representative institutions, namely the local councils which are elected directly by citizens (i.e. the assurance of a competent local democracy).
2. Reducing poverty and stimulating growth as empowering of poor local communities in the field of information contribute to their presence on the political scene through escalating their demands, protection of development projects, and prevention of poverty, through making accurate information available to the public.
3. Confronting corruption and increasing transparency, as the legislations for the right of access to information, are essential in combating corruption, which requires facilitating access to government information at national level, and to information of local institutions.

Local institutions of towns and villages in developing countries, administered by elected town or village councils, are usually marked by a lower standard in the quality of life and services, compared with the large urban centers. Moreover, the poor and threatened classes lack the essential information about human rights and basic requirements of living, and about public services, health, education, employment opportunities and the budgets of public institutions, especially the municipalities and the taxes levied by them. This stresses the importance of making the best of information technology in development and makes information a tool for change and charges institutions and countries with the basic responsibility of employing information in the service of development (UNDP, 2003).

These communities lack proper representation and a voice that enables them to participate in determining the priorities of policy-making, influencing them or accessing

<sup>1</sup> [www.accessinitiative.org](http://www.accessinitiative.org).

resources. Additionally, gender is of interest when it comes to accessing information in local communities. The discrepancy in the need for completed information between the two genders represents a challenge for development (Bhatnagar, 2004).

### **Municipalities and information: Good practices**

Three sets of good and promising practices that represent stable democracies, new democracies and societies in the process of transitioning to democracy will be presented.

Anderson (1995) presents the experience of the state of Alberta in passing advanced legislations for empowering citizens and the media to access information and taking advantage of the experiences of other states to arrive at high quality legislations and practices in the transparency of information due to the fact that Nova Scotia was the first Canadian province to pass a law securing the right of access to information in 1978 (Anderson, 1995).

In 1994, the legislative council in the municipality of the state of Alberta passed the right of access to information law, and thus became the ninth experience which presented one of the best legislations that secure a balance between the right of the individual to access information and his individual privacy (Anderson, 1995). Since the municipality represents all local government institutions, they are considered valid for accessing government information in several areas such as services, infrastructure, judiciary, education, health and economic activities (Anderson, 1995).

One of the other good practices implemented by the municipality of Alberta was the formation of a local council for information and appointing a special commissioner for information and publishing periodic guides showing the areas that citizens can obtain information about (Anderson, 1995). The study points out that these practices had a positive effect on the role of local media and improving the performance of local democracy, as reflected by elections (Anderson, 1995).

Bhatnagar (2003)'s study titled "electronic government and access to information" presents the experience of the Korean municipality of Seoul as one of the best practices in the world in the use of information technology applications to improve influence of accessing information. This represents one of the most efficient examples in fighting corruption through the empowerment of the right of access to information (Bhatnagar, 2003).

The large and diverse bureaucratic activities witnessed by the city of Seoul created new opportunities for corruption as a result of the extensive investments during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the wide growth witnessed by the city's economy. This forced the municipality council to initiate a comprehensive plan to combat

corruption that provided a series of initiatives and plans to improve the performance of the municipality in transparency and access to information (Bhatnagar, 2003).

The study dealt with most important practices like the development of the direct access to information by citizens, investors and media, through local computers, the internet and public electronic gateways (Bhatnagar, 2003) The municipality specified five sets of basic information services that can be accessed directly. In 2001 these services were made available through cellular phones (Bhatnagar, 2003).

Krediman's study (2009) on the "right of knowledge in Bulgaria" presents a model of the evolutions witnessed by new democracies in motivating citizens and media to access information, through continuous awareness campaigns and the efforts of about 50 local and national media outlets participating in these campaigns, especially with municipalities and local communities<sup>1</sup>.

The annual awards presented for the best practices in accessing information represent illustrate the motivational environment in the Bulgarian experience, where a prize is awarded to the citizen who most exercises his right in accessing information<sup>2</sup>. In 2009 the award was given to a student at the New Bulgarian University, who put in the highest number of requests to obtain information about the violations in safety systems in the public transportation system in Sofia. Another award was given to an architect from the city of Varna who raised the matter of an illegal building in the city's park. The municipality of "Buldeve" received the award for best municipality in providing information and services through the internet in great detail, in addition to documents and registers, while the award for worst municipality for obstructing the right of citizens to access information went to "Raz Grad" in 2009, and "Varna" in 2008<sup>(3)</sup>

### **Legislative organizational framework in Jordan**

This section deals with the legislative and organizational determinants in the relationship of municipalities with the right of accessing information in Jordan, through reviewing the pertinent laws and highlighting the current situation of municipal organizational structure and their relationship with facilitating access to information.

<sup>1</sup> [http://s-c-bhatnagar-iima.blogspot.com/searchMonika Krediman, The Right of Knowledge in bulgaria,AIP \(Access to Information program\) www.aip-bg.org](http://s-c-bhatnagar-iima.blogspot.com/searchMonika%20Krediman,%20The%20Right%20of%20Knowledge%20in%20bulgaria,AIP%20(Access%20to%20Information%20program)%20www.aip-bg.org)

<sup>2</sup> [http://s-c-bhatnagar-iima.blogspot.com/searchMonika Krediman, The Right of Knowledge in bulgaria,AIP \(Access to Information program\) www.aip-bg.org](http://s-c-bhatnagar-iima.blogspot.com/searchMonika%20Krediman,%20The%20Right%20of%20Knowledge%20in%20bulgaria,AIP%20(Access%20to%20Information%20program)%20www.aip-bg.org)

<sup>3</sup> [http://s-c-bhatnagar-iima.blogspot.com/searchMonika Krediman, The Right of Knowledge in bulgaria,AIP \(Access to Information program\) www.aip-bg.org](http://s-c-bhatnagar-iima.blogspot.com/searchMonika%20Krediman,%20The%20Right%20of%20Knowledge%20in%20bulgaria,AIP%20(Access%20to%20Information%20program)%20www.aip-bg.org)

## Legislative framework

The nationalization of the right of access to information requires three basic determinants:

First: Constitutional cover: there are countries that have clear references to the right of access to information in their constitutions, while in other cases, the constitution only refers to the right of speech, and the right of access to information is inferred from that.

Second: Existence of a legislation pertaining to the right of access to information and the legal assurances provided for this right.

Third: The bounds of this legislation: The existence of a law pertaining to the right of access to information is a significant achievement. A law must be implemented in order to be effective and there are many factors that influence the effectiveness of its implementation, the most important of which are the building of citizens' legal awareness such as the right of access to information; promoting cultural and social change towards the realization that government information is the property of citizens; and developing effective systems for managing and organizing government information.

Article (15) of the Jordanian constitution refers to the assurance of the right of speech, which provides the general constitutional right for accessing information<sup>1</sup>, while the "Jordanian law securing the right of access to information," issued in 2007, provides an open wording in identifying government or semi government information sources, but it does not refer to municipalities or institutions in particular.

Although this law constituted a qualitative step in the area of the right of the citizen and journalist to access information, the law was criticized by media community and civil organizations. Reservations, pointed out by the Jordanian Center for Human Rights in 2007, are:

- a. Lack of independence for the Information Council, as most council members are members of the executive.
- b. Absence of clear mechanisms for the classification of government documents that can be excluded from the list.

In order to affect the right of citizens to access information, the Center for Human Rights stressed the need to conduct an essential amendment on "the law for the protection of the state's documents and secrets" number (50) for the year 1971. While at the same time, pointing to the fact that international standards allow for the restriction of free speech in order to protect national security, it still needs, what is called, "triple test" when imposing any

restriction<sup>2</sup>.

In spite of the fact that municipal legislations are employed in Jordan, particularly the municipality law number (14) for the year 2007 and regulations, issued accordingly, did not deal with the right of citizens to access municipal information directly, there are other references pertaining to the general philosophy of this right or its regulating procedures and pertinent issues. Some of these references are:

1. Article (3/a) of the municipality law number (14) for the year 2007 defined "municipality" as a civil establishment with financial and administrative independence, which tries to achieve its goals in participation with local communities. It also stressed the concept of participation with the private sector and civil society organizations<sup>3</sup>.
2. Guarantee of the citizens right to be up to date with electoral procedures through the announcement of the official voters lists in a public place in city hall and in one of the local news paper, as specified in article (10/b) of the law and objection to the voters lists, article (13/a). Every candidate has the right to obtain a copy of the final voters' lists article (15/d)<sup>4</sup>.
3. Participation of the candidates or their agents in voting for committees, article (21/a), and counting committees, article (23)<sup>5</sup>.
4. Municipality sessions are public in accordance with article (39/e) and each citizen, who has a direct stake in any subject on the agenda, has the right to participate in the discussion of that subject, providing that decisions are taken in a secret meeting. Furthermore, the agendas of the council sessions are announced in a prominent place at city hall, at least one day before the meeting, in accordance with article (35/c)<sup>6</sup>.
5. The municipality regulations and directives are issued in accordance with the law, deal with the issues of logistics, tenders and contracts, and stress the openness and proclamation of procedures for bids, contracts and municipality works (AL salah, 1985:355).

## Organizational environment

The establishment of the first municipality in Jordan dates back to 1880, and its development went through four phases –of which are the Ottoman period, the Trans-Jordan period, the two-level system of local government and finally the phase of integration.

The Jordanian local administration adopted the two-level system until 1999. This included municipalities and

<sup>1</sup>The law for the right of access to information # 47 for the year 2007, official newspaper, Amman, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> General municipality law # 14 for the year 2007, article (3/a)

<sup>3</sup> General municipality law # 14 for the year 2007, articles 15/d) & (13/a)

<sup>4</sup> General municipality law # 14 for the year 2007, articles (31/a) & (23)

<sup>5</sup> General municipality law # 14 for the year 2007, articles (35/c) & (39/e)

<sup>6</sup> Set of administrative and financial regulations and instructions issued in accordance with the general municipality law # 14 for the year 2007.

village councils which were 338 (Abu Faris and Al Ma'ani, 2006). In 2001 the state nevertheless adopted a project where adjacent municipalities were integrated into larger municipalities. This reduced the number to 99 (AL salah, 1985). Later on, the number was reduced to 93 after six municipalities joined the municipality of greater Amman (the municipality of the capital).

In accordance with municipality law number (14) for the year 2007, municipalities in Jordan are divided into four categories according to the number of residents and municipal center site. Municipalities of governorate centers represent the first category, municipalities of the centers of districts represent the second category, municipalities of towns represent the third category, and municipalities of the villages represent the fourth category. Due to the similarity of conditions within the same category, representative samples were taken as shown in the table below.

The Jordanian experience in determining the functions of municipalities through their history differs in accordance with the development of legislations and the determinants of political and administrative framework in the country. The jurisdiction and functions of municipalities were extensive and included the affairs of local administration, security, health and others, in accordance with the municipality affairs law which was issued in Trans-Jordan in 1925, the municipalities committee consultative law and the municipalities law # 9 for the year 1938, which considered the municipality a civil institution, established and charged by a resolution from the executive council and the approval of the Emir (Abu Faris and Al Ma'ani, 2006).

However, the functions of municipalities began to decline since the passing of the municipality law # 29 for the year 1955 and also the current law # 14 for the year 2007. In theory, the jurisdiction of municipality councils covers many areas, but many of its functions are performed by other ministries, departments and public institutions.

The municipalities actually carry out only 24 functions out of the 39 defined by the law (Al Ouamleh and Al Hunaiti, 1995). In 2008, the ministry of municipal affairs started a project to qualify the municipalities to perform a developmental role in the fields of productivity and investment, and established local development units for this purpose.

The municipality councils in Jordan suffer from several problems and challenges that restrict the development of their organizational structure and expanding the base of their activity. The most significant of these challenges is the debt due to extensive borrowing to fulfill the need of infrastructure. Furthermore, municipalities suffer from a high percentage of administrative expenses such as salaries, wages and allowances. There is also the lack of sufficient cooperation and coordination between municipalities and government institutions and departments

relevant to services and infrastructure. Another problem faced by municipalities is the inflated size of their staff and their inefficiency in addition to their inability to obtain their personal revenues and the lack of community awareness with the exercise of local democracy in transparency and accountability (Abu Faris and Al Ma'ani, 2006).

### **Exercising the right of access to information in Jordanian municipalities**

The results of the survey on the right of access to information was divided into six categories dealing with the information infrastructure, types of information interaction flow with citizens, information and relations with civil society, municipalities and information technology applications, direct practices of accessing information and finally municipalities and local media. Through these topics, the status of relevant practices was assessed in accordance with 20 main indicators and 58 secondary indicators as follows.

#### **Information infrastructure**

##### **Basic information applications**

The status of information infrastructure relevant to the right of access to information was assessed according to four basic indicators. The results, according to Table 2, show that (65%) of municipalities in the kingdom do have information sections, while (45%) do not have such sections. These sections are mostly concentrated in the municipalities of the first category, and to a lesser degree in the second category (60%), while the interviews indicated that most sections do not have the basic minimum administrative and scientific infrastructure, and most of them for the use of public relations, divans and file management. Most of these information sections suffer from the low quality and insufficiency of available information. Furthermore, most information is not updated.

The results depict the lack of transformation towards electronic archiving, which is found only in 17% of Jordanian municipalities (Table 3). This infrastructure is in the first and second category municipalities, while 73% of municipalities still depend on traditional paper archives. Furthermore, interviews indicate that electronic archiving operations that have been implemented are still undependable and used side by side with paper archiving in most fields.

The existence of a basic document for municipality policies or a public strategic plan is considered an indicator on the presence of a public policy for information. The survey showed that 47% of Jordanian municipalities have such a document, which was found in all category 1

**Table 2.** Municipalities that have an information section.

Categories (information section)	C 1 (100%)		C 2 (100%)		C 3 (100%)		C 4 (100%)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Present	7	100	12	60	6	60	12	-	26	65
Not present	-	-	8	40	4	40	8	100	14	45
Total	7	100	20	100	10	100	20	100	40	100

**Table 3.** Electronic archiving in Jordanian municipalities.

Categories Archives	C 1(100%)		C 2 (100%)		C 3 (100%)		C 4 (100%)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Present	2	28	4	20	1	10	-	--	7	17
Not present	5	72	16	80	9	90	3	100	33	73
Total	7	100	20	100	10	100	3	100	40	100

**Table 4.** General meetings with citizens.

Categories meetings with citizens	C 1 (100%)		C 2 (100%)		C 3 (100%)		C 4 (100%)		Total %	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Quarterly	3	43	9	45	2	20	2	66	40	40
Semi annually	4	57	4	20	4	40	1	34	13	32
Annually	-	-	5	25	2	20	-	-	7	17
No meetings	-	-	2	10	2	20	-	-	4	10

municipalities and 40% of second category municipalities. It is available and announced for the public in about 32% of them.

### Public assembly hall

"City Hall" represents an infrastructure facility that has a direct relationship with the information interaction with the community of the city. This facility which is known traditionally in Jordan as "Public Meeting Hall" is available in 65% of Jordanian municipalities. It is found in all categories 1 municipality, 60% of second category municipalities and only 26% of fourth category municipalities. They are divided into large halls of more than 200 seats (54%), medium size halls of around 100 seats (27%) and small halls of less than 60 seats (19%).

The use of these halls varies between different municipalities. While most interviews indicated that the use of the hall requires the approval of the municipality which needs authorization from the governor, other municipalities, especially in Ma'an, exercise wider freedom in making city hall available for public meetings, without obtaining prior permission from the governor.

### Types of information interaction with citizens

Types of interaction pertinent to the right of access to information were measured in accordance with five main indicators, which contained 17 secondary indicators, as follows.

### General meetings with citizens

Table 4 depicts the practice of general meetings with citizens according to the categories of municipalities. We find that 40% of municipalities conduct a meeting every three months; 32% of municipalities, every six months; 17%, once a year while 10% of municipalities do not hold any meetings with citizens. The interviews results also revealed other types of disorganized meetings in tribal divans that join council members with different categories of citizens.

### Attendance of council sessions by citizens

Table 5 depicts the patterns of dealings by municipalities

**Table 5.** Attendance of council sessions by citizens.

Attendance	C 1 (100%)		C 2 (100%)		C 3 (100%)		C 4 (100%)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Any person	2	18.5	1	5	1	10	-	--	4	11
Anyone having an issue on the agenda	2	28.5	7	35	1	10	1	33	11	28
Allows attendance but no one ever came forward	2	28.5	9	45	5	50	1	33	16	40
Does not allow attendance	1	14	3	15	3	30	1	33	8	21

**Table 6.** Right of awareness of access to information.

Types of awareness		C1		C2		C3		C4		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Announcing session agenda	Yes	2	18.5	7	35	2	20	-	--	11	27.5
	No	5	81.5	13	65	8	80	3	100	29	72.5
Awareness of council decisions	permitted	5	81.5	5	35	4	40	1	10	15	37.5
	Not permitted	2	28	15	75	6	60	2	20	25	62.5
Publishing council decisions	Yes	5	81.5	5	35	1	10	-	--	11	27.5
	No	2	28	15	75	9	90	3	30	29	72.5

with attendance of council sessions by citizens. 11% of municipalities permit any person to attend sessions, 28% of municipalities allow attendance to those who have an interest in an item on the agenda, 40% of municipalities permit attendance but no one has ever come forward and finally 21% of municipalities do not allow attendance of any citizens

### Right of awareness

Table 6 depicts the types of awareness pertinent to the right of access to information. 27.5% of municipalities announce the agenda of the council sessions in advance, 37.5% of municipalities permit citizens to get acquainted with the decisions of the council and 27.5% of municipalities publish the decisions of councils directly to citizens. Additionally, interviews results indicated that municipalities generally permit anyone who has an issue on the agenda to follow it and be aware of its developments.

### Discussion of the budget and getting acquainted with its details

The results illustrate the extent of the possibilities of acquainting citizens with the budget of the municipality and discussing it. The results show that 12.5% of municipi-

palities hold public meetings to discuss the budget, 20% of municipalities publish a summary of the budget in the municipality building and 67% of municipalities publish reports about the budget in media sources after its confirmation. The results also illustrate the lack of general awareness with the importance of the public discussion of the budget due to the fact that it is considered an actual plan of action for the municipality for a whole year.

### Special record of complaints

About citizens' complaints the survey results indicate that 45% of all municipalities have well kept records to document citizens' complaints and following up on them, but this percentage goes up to 86% in category 1 municipalities. Yet daily work administration depends on collecting demands from citizens, which come in the form of complaints. The interviews also indicate that about half of municipalities have not developed a system for information management and dealing with citizens on this subject.

### Verification of information and the relationship with civil society

This section reviews the types of relationships between municipalities and civil society institutions and local



**Table 7.** Information services.

<b>Municipality website services</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
General introductory information	12	30
News services	9	22.5
Municipality announcements	4	10
Publication of the council's agenda	1	2.5
Councils designs	2	5
Public services	1	2.5

**Table 8.** Use of computers and ICT in municipalities.

<b>Use of ICT in municipalities</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Printing and correspondence	32	80
Archiving constituents	7	17.5
Transfer of information via the Internet	11	27.5
Financial system applications	5	12.5
Sketches and maps	11	5

opinion leaders which pertain to the right of access to information, in accordance with two basic indicators and five secondary indicators.

### **Types of relationship with civil society**

There are multiple types of relationship with civil society that pertains to the right of access to information. It could be concluded that there are CSOs in municipality areas of about 67% of municipalities. These institutions are spread un-evenly according to the categories of municipalities. Municipality councils meet with these institutions routinely or more than once every three months in about 17% of municipalities and once a year in about 37% of municipalities. Additionally 12% of municipalities have relations with these civil institutions in the form of agreements and memorandums of understanding.

### **Presence of a consultative council for the municipality from the local society**

The results illustrate that 45% of municipalities have consultative councils from local communities, most of which are found in category one municipalities while the least number is found in second category municipalities. Additionally municipality district committees are found in large cities and first and second category municipalities. These are local committees formed in cooperation between the citizens and municipality for the regulation of the relationship between them.

## **Municipalities and the applications of information technology**

### **Municipality web sites**

The survey results revealed that 30% of municipalities, on the whole, have sites on the internet, where it is found that the highest percentage is located in municipalities of the first category by 36%, in the second category municipalities 25%. In the municipalities of the third category 10%, while there are no Web sites of municipalities in the fourth category.

Table 7 shows that the most widespread service provided by municipality websites is general introductory information. Additionally, 30% of the sites provide news services about the municipality and 22.5% of sites provide municipality announcements. Meanwhile, these sites are not used for the publication of the council's agenda, decisions and municipality electronic services except in limited cases.

There are 37.5% of municipalities that use e-mail in their official transactions, 22% of municipalities use e-mail in dealing with other institutions and 10% use it in dealing with citizens, while 5% of municipalities revealed that they use SMS service for notification of services or invitations for meetings.

### **ITC general use of the ICT**

Table 8 illustrates the wide spread uses of computers in municipalities. The results show that traditional uses such as printing and correspondence are the most common, while archiving constitutes 17.5% and financial system applications (12.5%). in spite of the importance of electronic systems in the area of sketches and maps, as they facilitate the operations of municipalities and access of citizens to information, they are still in limited use (5% of municipalities).

### **Direct practices of accessing information**

The results illustrate the lack of direct practices by citizens, media sources, business men and other interested parties in the area of obtaining information. Official requests for obtaining information from municipalities using the official form of the information council constitute only 1% and municipalities pointed out that none of them received any complaints regarding the withholding of information received through the information commissioner. Furthermore none of the municipalities had a code of conduct for dealing with citizens.

We also note that 35% of municipalities published the basis and criteria for employing staff and (40%) of municipalities conducted surveys and public opinion polls

**Table 9.** Type and percentage of municipality media.

Type	F	%
Informative publications and general information	9	22
Magazine or periodical publication	6	15
Electronic publication	5	12.5
Presence of a media center in the municipality	6	15
Presence of a media spokesman	3	7
Presence of a public service office	18	45
Presence of a local community media	6	15

in their areas, most of them conducted by international organizations. The phenomenon of conducting surveys and public opinion polls which was not known before 2005 seems to be, in many mayors' point of view, growing very fast. This practice contributes to providing useful feedback in assessing the performance of municipalities and their relations with citizens.

### Municipalities and the local media

Local media constitutes an important link in the local society's exercise of their right of access to information from government and local government institutions.

### Municipality media

Table 9 indicates that 22% of municipalities issue informative publications about themselves, 15% have a magazine or periodical publication, while 12.5% of municipalities have electronic publications. Furthermore, 15% of municipalities have a media section, 7% have a media spokesman, 45% have a public service office, while 15% of municipalities have a local media source in their area. Interviews indicate the first priority of developing the local media is the building of institutional capacities for local media, training and the establishment of local media institutions.

### Dealing with journalists

The results illustrate the patterns of municipal interaction with journalists in obtaining information. There are 55% of municipalities allow journalists to attend council sessions while less than 1% of them issues a Press release after every session. 1 0% provide general information about the meeting .

### Presence (coverage) in media sources

Table 10 depicts another type of the patterns of

information gap in the relationship between municipalities and citizens, illustrated by the low coverage of municipalities in local and national media. At the level of coverage in interactive programs on radio and TV, frequent coverage, which means coverage for more than three times a month, constitutes only 0.5%, while moderate coverage, which means once a month, constitutes 25 and 50% of municipalities rarely have an active presence in this type of media coverage. Furthermore, this gap is even wider at the level of radio, TV and press news.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### The main conclusion

It could be concluded from the survey results that there is an absence of a clear policy followed by municipalities in the area of information management and the right of citizens to access this information. This is evident from the following:

1. The infrastructure, in accordance with the summary of municipality infrastructure indicators is mediocre. According to the categories, there is good infrastructure in first category municipalities represented in having special sections for information, beginning of a transformation towards electronic information management, presence of basic documents for municipality policy and availability of major halls for meetings with citizens. The results also indicate presence of mediocre infrastructure in accordance with the same indicators in the second category municipalities which form the largest category. However, the information infrastructure in the third and fourth category municipalities is poor.
2. Interaction in the flow of information between municipalities and citizens varies between moderate and poor. The results show that municipality openness towards citizens is moderate, while the exercising of the right to attend council sessions is still modest. The right of being acquainted with council session agendas and decisions and making them available to the public, discussing the budget and getting acquainted with its details are still poor.
3. In spite of the presence of civil institutions in most of Jordanian municipality areas, the mutual interaction between them which usually helps in facilitating access to information is still poor.
4. Furthermore, in spite of the availability of information technology infrastructure in most municipalities, yet their use in information management applications is still not available in two thirds of municipalities.
5. There are no direct practices by citizens relating to the right of accessing information, when dealing with municipalities, in spite of the existence of a legislation that

**Table 10.** Presence in media sources.

Level of coverage	Coverage in interactive programs on radio and TV (%)		Radio and TV news (%)		Press news (%)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Frequent	2	0.5	2	0.5	4	10
Moderate	10	25	10	25	11	27
Rare	20	50	15	37	17	42
Non existent	8	20	13	32	8	20

ensures this right, which means that there is a lack of general awareness with this issue.

6. First category municipalities have good domestic media infrastructure, but the other three categories of municipalities lack the essential components of a domestic media.

7. Municipalities on the whole suffer from the lack of coverage in national media sources and most municipalities do not have any local media sources in their areas (local social radios, local social newspapers).

#### Recommendations related to municipalities

1. Inviting municipalities to develop their information management systems, including archiving, indexing and categorizing of municipality information and records.
2. Training mayors, senior staff and elected municipality officials in order to upgrade their performance in the area of providing information and enabling citizens, media sources and businessmen to access it.
3. Developing municipalities' guidance plans to facilitate the transformation towards empowering target groups to access municipal information without difficulty.
4. Inviting municipalities to effect a transformation towards practical models of electronic municipalities which provide basic municipal services and information through the internet.
5. Inviting municipalities to provide direct telephone lines for receiving citizens' complaints, documenting them on a daily basis and following up on them.
6. Developing municipalities' transparency and integrity measures in their standing operating procedures and linking them with facilitating access to information.
7. Developing municipalities' codes of conduct to regulate their relations with citizens.
8. Developing municipalities' local domestic media through the publication of local newspapers, periodicals and the establishment of a local society radio.

#### Recommendations related to the media

1. National media sources have the duty of participating in spreading awareness in the good practices in the area

of the right of access to information at municipalities.

2. National media sources have the duty of spreading awareness in the importance of the right of access to information in general, and in the practices relating to municipalities in particular, in addition to spreading awareness in the important role of this practice in participation, securing of universal rights, prevention and exposing of corruption.

3. Media sources need to increase the media coverage of municipalities, as this coverage is considered an easy source of obtaining municipality information.

4. There is an urgent need to build a national network for local community journalism, through the establishment of local society radio stations, local press and local society television, which are considered main sources of modern community journalism and a tool to facilitate access of information by citizens.

#### Recommendations related to civil society

1. Enhancing initiatives by civil society organizations to launch programs and projects related to the development of municipality capabilities in the area of the freedom of information and improving its access.
2. Enhancing initiatives by civil society organizations for the spread of community awareness in practicing the right of obtaining information from municipalities
3. Inviting civil society organizations in the capital and governorates to establish local and national monitoring stations to monitor and follow up on the practices of municipalities relating to the right of accessing information.
4. Encouraging the development of specialized guidelines for improving the nature of the relationship between the community and municipalities in the area of obtaining information, such as "The citizens and media guide for accessing information in municipalities"
5. Inviting civil and community institutions to take the initiative of entering into development partnerships with municipalities.

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