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PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NGOS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES: THREE CASES FROM THE REGION

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Partnership between NGOs and local authorities: Three cases from the region

Roundtable discussion on partnership between governments and civil society
In the follow-up to the global conferences
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I. <u>Introduction</u>

The notion of partnership between state and non-state actors has been extensively addressed in all major global conferences of the 1990s. It is widely acknowledged that development entails change in the economic, institutional, political, social and physical environment, which no single actor can manage on its own. As such, partnership is hailed as sine qua non for a sustainable and democratic process of development. However, as appealing as it may seem on moral and intellectual grounds, partnership remains an elusive concept once development objectives and policy orientations are translated into specific actions, particularly when partners have different developmental agendas, and are unequal in their access to political, institutional, economic and technical resources. Such differences are underscored when local actors, including municipal authorities or community groups, have to negotiate, as "partners", with central government agencies, donors or international NGOs in the planning and execution of development activities.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand what partnership really means to different social actors; and as such what are the institutional, legislative and technical conditions which can facilitate partnership in development. While prospective

partners perceive comparative advantages in engaging in a negotiation process with other social actors, it remains to be seen how the different actors articulate their demands and devise strategies for achieving them. More so, the concern is to investigate whether such endeavors can be institutionalized and consolidated into sustainable modes of partnership between the state, NGOs and the private sector, particularly at the local level.

Hence, this paper focuses on the complexities and challenges of translating the notion of partnership to the local level. Within the scope of international support for partnership, the paper discusses the redefined role of the state and NGOs in development, and the modalities for their interaction and cooperation. It raises a series of questions concerning the technical, institutional and legislative resources accessible to different "partners" prior to entering the negotiation process. One important issue addressed in this regard is whether and how the bargaining power of partners change as a result (or as a by-product) of the negotiation process.

Finally, in discussing how partnership has different meanings to different actors, the debate is contextualized in terms of negotiations over access to housing and public services between local authorities, NGOs and the community. Some examples based on field observations are discussed to illustrate this debate, drawing sets of indicators on both the planning process and the policy environment, which are conducive to fostering viable forms of partnership between local authorities and NGOs. The paper concludes with options for developing the technical, managerial and institutional capacity of both local authorities and NGOs, which would underline their compatible

and complementary roles, rather then attempt to empower one social actor on the account of the other.

II. Partnership and the development agendas of the 1990s: an expanded political and institutional space for NGOs[1]

The need for partnership in development is linked with important socio-political and economic changes happening at global, national and local scales. The crisis of the welfare state has affected every nation in the world, since the early 1980s, inciting many governments to adopt structural adjustment policies. Consequently the state is no longer expected to be the direct provider of all goods and services, notably housing and physical and social infrastructure; but rather monitor the provision of such services by the private sector and NGOs or community groups. The development agendas of the 1990s consolidate the new role of the state around a strategic form of intervention, i.e. fostering an enabling environment conducive for the private sector to function efficiently. This consists mainly in streamlining overgrown bureaucracies, freeing financial markets and insuring an independent and reliable legal system.

Under these conditions, partnership provides a cost-effective option for public service delivery. In recent years, the private sector and community-groups, are increasingly solicited to fund components of upgrading and urban development projects, on cost-recovery or cost-sharing basis, as the users (hence direct beneficiaries) of such services. Resource mobilization, accessibility and affordability of public services to

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[1] This section is summarized from a paper submitted to the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Arab Conference on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences, 24 –27 November 1998, entitled: "Role of NGOs in the Follow-up to Habitat II: Some Examples from the Region".

local communities is a complimentary process of partnership and as such necessitate financial and political decentralization of urban management functions.

Hence, NGOs activists contend that NGOs are best placed to mobilize large constituencies, and ensure access to resources and their affordability to local communities. While some empirical research support this optimistic outlook on NGOs, in many instances it remains a matter of perception, or wishful thinking about an "ideal type" of NGOs intervening in public life. As it will be argued throughout the paper, the characteristics of NGOs and the prevailing socio-political environment are crucial variables determining the scope of NGOs intervention and their effectiveness in influencing the policy-making process.

In principle, partnership provides plausible policy options for the different partners: it allows them to maximize their comparative advantage, build alliances among themselves or with other types of social actors. It also allows the pooling of resources, exchange knowledge and expertise and opens the scope for continuous dialogue. Accordingly, the development agendas of the major global conferences elaborate the range of functions NGOs could undertake as partners.

The role of advocacy emerges as a preferred mode of intervention for NGOs. Advocacy ranges from raising awareness to development issues, such as the environment, public health, literacy, etc., to more direct political mobilization addressing issues of human rights, including rights to housing, land tenure or safe drinking water. Mobilization takes various forms of information dissemination to the beneficiaries on their rights and means of achieving their objectives and aspirations,

as well as informing donors and public authorities about needs and problems facing local communities, which cannot usually be covered by large quantitative surveys or censuses (Arrossi, 1994, p.50).

The Habitat agenda calls in particular, for an advisory and consultative role of NGOs to assist local authorities in reviewing social, economic and environmental policies and set priorities for their local communities. They should also set standards for services such as basic education, child-care, public health and public safety (Habitat Agenda, 1997, p.106)[2].

In their technical capacity, some NGOs can monitor or advise on the monitoring of development projects, advise on project identification, participate in research teams, through action research projects, such as participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) exercises. They can also train local communities in needs assessment, and in monitoring and evaluating projects funded by international donors (Ibid., p. 49). NGOs are also considered as an optimal agent capable of linking local communities with donors, government agencies, and international NGOs. This has enhanced their role as "mediators" and "facilitators", particularly the community-based organizations, which can ensure that local communities have access to credit facilities, technical advice and legislative backstopping. Thus, grass-root NGOs can function as a pivotal player in the housing sector, in which the participation of the local community and organizations becomes a process of community building[3].

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[2] It should be noted however, that the Istanbul Declaration, like all other plans of action of the major global conferences, remain non-committal with respect to the institutional and contractual status of NGOs, which in actual terms weakens their advocacy and activist functions. This will be elaborated further through the case studies.

[3] John Turner (1976, 1982, 1986) in Freedom to Build and his other writings is one of the pioneers in

In sum, the Habitat Agenda, in line with other global conferences, has set out an ambitious role for NGOs. Under such apparently favorable international and regional policy environment allowing NGOs to proliferate, at an aggregate level, the sector has indeed experienced a spectacular expansion both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Quantitatively, NGOs have increased in numbers, budget, effective personnel/ volunteers working for them; while qualitatively they have expanded their agendas or scope of operations, changed their fund raising strategies; they also recruit or attract more professional staff and volunteers on board, adopt functional specialization and address more diversified constituencies[4]. It should be noted however, that at a disaggregate level, NGOs are characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity, in their organizational structure, technical capacity, agendas, type of intervention and access to resources.

Hence, whether NGOs can perform their expanded role efficiently depends mainly on the socio-political environment in which the different partners operate. The prevailing political system and the state's ideology determine which sectors or type of development NGOs are called upon and in which capacity they perform their role as partners, i.e. at the level of policy decisions, implementation, undertaking awareness campaigns, etc.. By the same logic, the terms of partnership also depends on the size of the different partners, their mode of operations, their power base and source of legitimacy, as well as the financial and technical resources they command. This

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advocating this role to community-based organization. This participatory approach to housing provision, later evolved into the core of the enabling strategy adopted by Habitat and other international agencies.

[4] See "Role of NGOs in the Follow-up to Habitat II" op. Cit. for details on changing role of NGOs over the past two decades. Paper highlights debate on definitions, typologies of NGOs, discrepancy in

debate is illustrated in the following section, based on three cases of NGOs - state partnership in urban development projects.

III.   Three case studies of partnership in local urban development

Three cases of partnership have been selected from cities in the region (Aqaba in Jordan, Ismailia in Egypt and Nablus in the West Bank), to discuss how partnership is translated into specific actions and local development plans and the likelihood of its institutionalization beyond the project life cycle. The cases are all based in secondary cities, which serve as regional centers in their respective national contexts. They present interesting mixed results in terms of a participatory process of development, indicating that partnership is not only a function of project design, but is also determined by the policy environment and the timing at which partnership is introduced. More importantly, the cases illustrate how development agendas revolving around the notion of "partnership" affect differently actors at different institutional scale, notably central government agencies, local government and community organizations and their ability to negotiate and build alliances with donors and international NGOs[5].

A.   Urban development projects in Ismailia

(i)   The planning process

Located on a central axis between the cities of Port Said and Suez, Ismailia is the capital of the Governorate and covers a total area of approximately 1,441.6 km^2. It

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information and statistics on their numbers, budgets and effective personnel.

[5]   The three case studies are presented in details in UN-ESCWA Community participation in Urban Development in the ESCWA Region (E/ESCWA/HS/1997/4) 1997.

has an estimated population of 740,000. Ismailia also has historical and political significance, as its inhabitants have endured the hardship of two wars (1967 and 1973) and displacement. The return of its original inhabitants, compounded by the influx of migrants from other governorates, accounts for the high rate of population growth, as it increased by 50% between 1976 and 1986, and by an estimated 37% over the last 10 years (ibid.). Given these conditions, Ismailia urgently needed to reconstruct destroyed homes and upgrade dilapidated neighborhoods, as well as addressing mounting environmental degradation.

Ismailia has been the target of a number of urban development activities spanning more than 20 years. At different stages, these have included the (IMP) Ismailia Master Plan (1974 - 1982), the upgrading of informal settlements (1978 –1983), and the Sustainable Ismailia Project, initiated in 1990 and effectively starting in1993; upgrading activities were maintained as an on-going and parallel process of SIP. Each of these planning activities has addressed different sets of needs and presents variations in scale and planning approaches. What they all have in common is a commitment, as a clear policy objective, to a participatory urban development process.

The planning process in both the IMP and upgrading activities provided for land development, construction of housing, roads, mosques, schools, health and youth centers. The novelty however was in the different attempts at institutional development and decentralized planning. Thus a District Planning Board was established at the Governorate level, to deal with technical and financial issues emerging from the planning process. The board was responsible for managing land

transaction and liaising with the neighborhood agencies; these agencies were located on the project site and were made up of residents working closely with Municipality personnel and consultants. The other aspect consisted in secondment of experts to the Governorate and the Municipality, and the training of local government personnel, as measures of institutional development and capacity building.

The Sustainable Ismailia Project (SIP), much larger in scope than the previous projects, in terms of planning activities, funds allocated and contributors and stakeholders, attempted to instigate a participatory process, at the initial stages of the project. The project has a strong environmental component, and addresses issues of agricultural and tourist development within the perspective of sustainability, which includes cleaning up the lakes, treating sewage and expanding green areas; while upgrading remains an ongoing parallel activity to SIP.

SIP attempted to institutionalize a participatory planning process at the early stages of project planning. Thus, Working Groups (WG) were established, made up of stakeholders, resident representatives and Municipality and Governorate officials (UNDP, 1995, p. 8). The WG first identify and discuss priority urban and environmental issues; they then agree on strategies and alternative scenarios for implementation, identifying who are the partners and what would be their contribution. Hence, the WG would perform as a monitoring body to ensure that plans are coordinated between public, private and community sectors.

(ii)   Participating actors and the institutional framework

From the public sector, the central government remains the dominant actor shaping in policy decisions and outcomes. In spite of the government's commitment to adopting a decentralization policy in mid 1980s, the central government remains in control of finance, land and the planning process in Egypt. Thus, what is observed in the various planning activities in Ismailia, is devolution of power rather than decentralization, i.e. some funding is disbursed to local authorities, along with responsibility for the implementation of basic services (Zaki Khoury, 1996, p. 195). The local government in Egypt has generally a poor record in mobilizing resources; however Ismailia is one of the few exceptions in the country where the governor (in office between 1986-1993) was able to activate the planning process. Some observers explain the uniqueness and success of the Ismailia case as a function of effective leadership (i.e. the Governor) and good coordination between Governorate and project personnel (see Khoury (1996) and UNDP/ Habitat progress reports). Other public institutions include the University of Suez Canal, the Arab Contractor Company and the Suez Canal Authority, which are the largest employers in Ismailia. However, their role in SIP has been secondary.

NGOs and community-based organization in Ismailia, have traditionally been less active than in other cities in Egypt, e.g. Cairo or Alexandria, and have mainly been involved in welfare. However, the planning process in Ismailia has generated some important qualitative and quantitative changes in the NGOs scene in the city. The working groups and neighborhood associations, gave a boost to the proliferation of community based organizations and NGOs. Funds from donors and through the projects, training activities, material and equipment were allocated for NGOs

operations. A number of NGOs engaged in environmental awareness campaign, targeting school children, low-income neighborhoods, women groups, as well as businesses, industrial plants and tourist establishments. LIFE (a UNDP project built on partnership between municipalities and NGOs), was recently initiated in Ismailia, addressing issues of solid waste management and garbage recycling as income generating projects, geared towards environmental sustainability. The Egyptian Environmental NGOs steering Committee, with headquarters in Cairo, provided backstopping support, including training in environmental awareness campaigns, to local NGOs and CBOs in Ismailia.

Investors in the Ismailia industrial zone and the tourism sector mainly dominate the private sector. It is only recently, which the private sector has taken interest in environmental issues, with increasing deterioration in of environmental conditions in the city and limited capacity of the government to take action. For the first time, the business sector decided to act collectively, by setting up the Ismailia Services and Industrial Committee. The committee acts as a pressure group, negotiating and lobbying with other social actors in Ismailia, with the aim of halting further environmental damages which impair their businesses.

(iii)   Modes of partnership observed

The Working Groups and neighborhood associations became the institutional channels for discussions with different social actors of all planning, financial and legislative issues related to the upgrading process as well as on-going and proposed urban development plans and policies. This "culture" of negotiation among the different partners, debate and flow of information has produced positive impact on the

various planning projects. The projects were capable of generating considerable local resources for funding land servicing and communal activities; which indicate the acceptance, satisfaction and hence willingness to participate of the beneficiaries. Visible physical improvements were noted in the housing stock and open public spaces. More significantly, the project registered a low level of default on payments, an increase in public awareness as indicated by a more rational use of water, and a sense of residents commitment to the project (Davidson, 1991, p. 123).

However, the working groups and neighborhood associations, which provided seeds for partnership at the project level could not be absorbed into the institutional structure, i.e. replicate this participatory mode within the Governorate. In fact, the participation observed in the earlier demonstration projects, was an incentive to expand the scope of the project, attract more funding, and as such, more monitoring agencies and donors to report to. One unexpected by-product of the multiplicity of stakeholders in the planning activities was the restricted operational flexibility and complicated accounting and bureaucratic procedures, which resulted. Furthermore, the scale of funding and, consequently, the implications for resource management were beyond the institutional and technical capacity of the Governorate to manage. As a result, the management of the project remained outside the formal institutional structures, consequently, making participatory process dependent on external resources rather than a process generated internally.

While mobilization at the local level, broad-based representation, and dedication and commitment of project personnel are a *sine qua non* for the success of partnership in development, the continuity and sustainability of the process remains dependent on

the policy environment. Public sector restructuring initiated in 1989-1990 resulted in a more centralized pattern of decision-making. The nine planning boards established at the Governorate level in the early 1980s, with citizen representation, were amalgamated into one board under the total control of the Governor. This has affected the mood and even the confidence of the inhabitants in the participatory process established in the earlier stages, undermining the efficiency of the working groups set up under SIP in the early 1990s.

B.   Urban upgrading projects in Aqaba

(i)   The planning process

Aqaba is an expanding city, with facilities for shipping, tourism, industry and trade. The peace process and consequently, the prospects of expanding the tourism sector have turned the Aqaba region into a national focus of interest and therefore have made it more likely to receive institutional, economic and technical support from central Government and donor agencies. The city of Aqaba covers an area of 80 km^2 with 26 km of coastline; and 68,500 inhabitants, according to the 1997 Statistical Yearbook. Its original inhabitants were Bedouin tribes, yet over the years Aqaba has witnessed an influx of migrants from surrounding governorates and other regions, as well as Palestinian refugees and returnees after the Gulf war. The rapid urbanization process registered in the city has aggravated the problem of informal settlements, in terms of illegal housing, substandard public service delivery and an overall poor quality of life.

Upgrading and sites and services projects were initiated by HUDC (Housing and urban Development Corporation) to improve living conditions in the settlements and

incorporate them physically, economically and socially into the urban fabric. Upgrading included land development and regularization of titles as well as provision of clean water, sanitation and drainage to designated sites, road servicing and site allocation for social facilities and open spaces. Since 1989, public sector restructuring in Jordan has opened an expanded institutional space for NGOs participation in development, particularly in housing, which has traditionally been the sole responsibility of the public sector, in terms of planning, implementation and distribution.

As such, HUDC facilitated a community participation project (1992-1994), funded by the Konrad Adenhauer Foundation in collaboration with Jordan University. The main focus was on encouraging NGOs and grass roots organizations to initiate upgrading and income-generation activities in their neighborhoods. Community involvement was solicited in the planning and management of open spaces and public services, taking into consideration the special needs of children and women. At the institutional level, a committee was established, made up of 27 local NGOs and representatives from the Municipality, the Aqaba Region Authority and HUDC. The committee provided a forum for discussing needs for services and open space (playgrounds), plan income generating activities, lobby with the Municipality and ARA for improving municipal services (road maintenance, garbage collection, tree planting, etc.). Series of training workshops were organized for committee members on negotiation skills, project formulation and monitoring and gender development. Training packages also involved capacity building for local NGOs, in terms of building awareness about legal rights for women, and engaging in advocacy work.

(ii)   Participating actors and the institutional framework

The fact that Aqaba has three levels of Government in operation (Aqaba Regional Authority [ARA], the Municipality and the newly established Governorate) has been a mixed blessing with respect to the upgrading activities. The ARA represents a special case in the Kingdom where planning and decision-making are effectively decentralized to the regional level. ARA therefore commands sufficient institutional leverage to mobilize resources and translate policies into actions. This has proved to be particularly effective for supporting upgrading with investments in infrastructure, enacting legislation and facilitating access to land under ARA jurisdiction. But this structure is also vulnerable to problems of administrative overlap between the different levels of government, particularly with respect to allocating income generated from land transactions and various municipal taxes for the region, including Aqaba city. HUDC remains in operation in Aqaba following-up on upgrading projects, yet increasingly undertaking housing projects for public sector employees, (acting as consultants on cost-recovery basis).

NGOs involvement in Aqaba is a replica of the NGOs scene prevailing in Jordan. The predominant majority is involved in welfare, ad hoc service delivery (health care, primary and adult education, children playgrounds, etc.) and income generation activities undertaken on a limited scale. Their role as partners is defined at a centralized level i.e. set by ARA, HUDC and donors in co-ordination with relevant Jordanian authorities. The General Union for Voluntary Societies (GUVS) as a national coordinating body among NGOs and CBOs in Jordan, is also involved in negotiating NGOs activities and hence the scope of their participation in development projects initiated by external donors. Thus, NGOs remain in many ways reactive

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(rather than pro-active) in their mode of operation, the scope of their activities and service delivered.

(iii)   Modes of partnership observed

Partnership between the three different layers of government and NGOs in service delivery has taken a special dimension since the early 1990s. As the project was undertaken at a time of institutional restructuring of HUDC, it opened the way for an expanded role of NGOs, including an international NGO (Konrad Adenhauer) and the 27 local NGOs mentioned above, enabling them to plan and organize urban service delivery, functions traditionally undertaken by HUDC.

However, in terms of institutionalizing partnership, the outcome has been more problematic. During the life span of the project, the committee established to follow-up on the community participation project, displayed good collaborative efforts in surveying existing open spaces in upgrading sites and in identifying the environmentally hazardous ones, including those used as dumping sites for solid waste, open marshes and wasteland. In the follow-up stage, plans for establishing appropriate playgrounds on selected sites were undertaken at the level of the working group. Public sector representatives who were at a decision-making level were able to commit some resources, such as water connection by the Municipality, and site clearance and fencing by the Aqaba Region Authority. Members of the working groups generated clean-up campaigns, information exchange and contribution of labor by some of the households. Nonetheless, while this activity corresponded to the stated objectives and resulted in visible physical improvements of the selected open spaces, it did not generate much development activity beyond the project. A number of

development initiatives such as clean-up campaigns were undertaken by the members of the working group on an individual basis through local NGOs. Options for reactivating the working group are being considered by the project coordinators. One of the negative aspects noted at the level of the working group was the discrepancy in technical capacity identified among the participants. This made the working group prone to control by the more influential or vocal members, or those having more seniority in public service or enjoying political clout.

Another factor lies in the difference in scale between the physical upgrading activities and the community participation project in terms of the size of the projects and budget allocated for each. The physical upgrading projects commanded considerable technical, administrative and financial resources, and as such was given priority attention and political support from policy makers. While the community participation project was smaller in scope and in resources, and funded by an NGO, i.e. with less political and institutional clout than a major donor like the World Bank. This difference affected the institutional and political priorities each project could generate, and therefore the effort deployed to make it succeed. In addition, the element of voluntarism in the community participation project was important in terms of securing commitment of the participants. Yet, this voluntarism could not be realistically sustained in terms of retaining qualified members and technical resource persons at a time and in a region where employment opportunities are limited.

C. Urban development in Nablus

(i) The planning process

Nablus District has witnessed intensive upgrading and urban development activities in the city and surrounding communities, executed through a diversity of donors, the Municipality, PNA (through PECDAR) and local and international NGOs. During the *intifadah*, funding targeted relief assistance and provision of social services, particularly medical and educational facilities. After the initiation of the peace process, funds were channeled to large construction projects and rehabilitation of the infrastructure. These projects vary markedly in size, budget, and methodology. They also differ in the application of standards and procedures for cost sharing by the beneficiaries, which often reflects the divergent agendas of donors or implementing agencies. For example cost sharing by the beneficiaries or the municipality can range between 10 and 50 per cent of total costs, depending on the donor involved. Such variations render monitoring and coordination by Municipality a problematic task.

Notwithstanding the complexity of dealing with multi lateral donors, in this case the focus is on a project involving one particular NGO relation with municipal authorities (namely Save the Children Federation). The SCF project initiated in 1995 as a pilot scheme, adopted a community-based participatory approach; it was small in scale, and covered sewage and solid waste disposal for four densely populated neighborhoods, coupled with environmental health awareness activities. The physical component of the project consisted of providing sub-surface drainage facilities and garbage containers, as well as transforming garbage dumps into multi-purpose playing fields in refugee camps. However the implementation of physical upgrading was

discontinued in 1996 following restructuring in the Municipality; as a result, previous agreements with SCF had to be re-negotiated, particularly over questions of fund administration.

The environmental component of the project targeted schools, children in the 9-13 age group as well as their parents, local NGOs and the Municipality, through the child-to-child program. The program supported clean-up campaigns and environmental awareness competitions and fairs. Joint committees, which included children in the 9-13 age group, were set up to act as a pressure group on policy makers. The initial budget of US$ 54,000 was earmarked for workshops and advocacy campaigns. Part of the budget was set aside for grants for small sanitation projects in schools, provided on a 50-50 to 70-30 (SCF/beneficiaries) share basis, depending on the level of affordability, with additional financial and material support from the Municipality. However, It was expected that operational activities would generate a continuous source of funding, which so far has not materialized. A joint public/private planning committee was set up to oversee existing and planned projects, with 50% of its management board drawn from formal institutions. Although the committee was active in the initial stages, the spirit of voluntarism decreased over time and funding prospects became uncertain.

(ii) Modes of partnership observed

Owing to a lack of adequate resources, the initial motivation of committee members could not be sustained. The spirit of voluntarism decreased over time. There seems to be a point of saturation with committees, as people need jobs. It is questionable how

much time can be given to unremunerated activities, given the overall economic hardship increasingly felt in the occupied territories.

Children were effective in their campaign role, especially with the clean-up campaigns in the selected neighborhoods, integrating an environmental perspective in school activities and marked physical improvements in the schools' sanitation. They also succeeded in securing financial support and equipment from the Municipality. a matter of policy, the Municipality, the Government and the donor organizations prefer NGOs to serve as advocates rather as service providers, particularly in the case of large-scale infrastructure work.

Upgrading activities in Nablus, carried out by a multiplicity of actors, reveal a wide diversity of agendas, standards for services delivered, approaches adopted and modes of cost recovery, with planning undertaken on a piecemeal, ad hoc basis. While this was inevitable, seeming to be the best possible arrangement prior to self-rule, its continuation at present can only perpetuate the fragmentation of the urban space, further constraining public institutions in their already difficult task of developing technical, managerial and financial resources, particularly at the municipal level.

The uniqueness of the Nablus case brings a new dimension to this study, as it reveals that willingness to participate is not only a function of affordability, but also has a clear political dimension at this juncture of time in the process of State-building. The history of occupation has made the Palestinian people more resilient and therefore able to endure hardship, which in the context of the upgrading projects takes the form of mobilizing locally generated resources and outside assistance to sustain basic

services, even if provided inconsistently. The role played by civil society in mobilizing resources collectively has also been important. This has translated into a greater capacity of the people to tolerate hardship.

The challenge facing Nablus municipality and other social actors is redefining their roles in an environment where services are provided by multiple institutional sources. This is representative of the debate taking place between the Palestinian Authority and different levels of government on the one hand, and NGOs and other organizations of civil society on the other hand. Questions of partnership, overlap of functions and conflict of interest are being addressed through different forums, workshops, planned legislation and donor funding methods.

It is increasingly popular to set up joint committees to participate in the planning and implementation of physical upgrading projects, not only in Nablus, but also in other areas. These committees seem to be more active and efficient in rural areas, in the absence of solid municipal structures. In contrast, Nablus Municipality, which commands financial, technical and political backing, can play more effectively the roles of regulator and central broker/coordinator of upgrading and development activities initiated by donors and NGOs.

In the occupied territories, NGOs, like other organizations of civil society, seem to draw on technical expertise and are actively networking among themselves and with donors and international NGOs. This is understandable in light of their active involvement in facing up to the Israeli occupation and in maintaining the social fabric of the community as well as providing essential public services. Alternatively, there

seems to be a more crucial need for building up the technical, managerial and financial capacity of public institutions in the emerging Palestinian Authority, particularly at the local/municipal level.

IV. Factors leading to an optimal policy environment for partnership

The above cases illustrate a range of successful and less successful attempts at institutionalizing partnership at the local level. A common denominator to the three cases, is that participatory development, resulted in multiple social actors interacting and negotiating over their role and jurisdictions. Thus, partnership was translated (or redefined) for dominant partners (donors, central government) to contract out specific tasks and junior partners (community-based organizations and municipality in the case of Aqaba) executing these tasks, such as organizing awareness campaigns, implementing a recycling project, clean-up campaigns, etc.). However, this cannot be termed as partnership (as stated in project objectives, or as defined in development agendas); i.e. partnership as sharing in decision-making over planning and policy issues.

Although these projects initiated discussions through the working groups, tasks forces, joint committees, as an institutional forum for partnership at the project level, no strategy is devised for replicating successful experiences, sustaining them and most importantly transferring the managerial set-up to local authorities. As evident in the Ismailia and Aqaba cases, participation seems to engender new sets of demands from the beneficiaries for expanding the scope of their involvement in public life. Thus, as

participation spills over into policy issues, or beyond the locality of the project, it backfires, generating a shift to a more restrictive stand from higher authorities.

It should be noted that at the project level, the stage at which partnership is introduced has a direct bearing on the success of the project. The earlier in the process participation is introduced, the larger it's potential to generate popular support, and the greater the willingness of participants to share in the costs and voluntary activities. However, there are limits to the extent participants can afford to share in the costs, or carry out voluntary work, while maintaining their income-earning activities or their reproductive activities, particularly in the case of women. The initial enthusiasm generated by the success of participation often leads project personnel to scale-up the participatory experience. They then expect the beneficiaries to share accordingly, but overlook the physical, economic and psychological constraints they endure as a result. Consequently, the effectiveness of a participatory approach decreases over time, with people unable to cope with the pressure of more unremunerated work, even though it indirectly contributes to improving their living conditions.

Furthermore, the three cases are representative of development trends in the region, whereby projects which in principle are presented as integrated and multi-disciplinary, physical upgrading takes precedence over social development and capacity building. This is due to various factors: the planning process is clearly spelled-out with respect to infrastructure development, i.e. site preparation, infrastructure work, housing prototypes, costing and loan disbursement are well-articulated in detailed plans and designs. Conversely, community development and participation are usually introduced as ad hoc; seemingly like a measure to ensure

cost-recovery or popular support to the project and not as end in itself, or as a dimension of empowering local communities. There is also a discrepancy in resource allocation between the physical and the social components, in terms of staffing, funding and administrative support allocated to each aspect.. This can be explained as a dimension of political expediency, as physical improvements have the propensity to make a visible impact in upgrading projects, turning them into political showcases. However, it is the less visible elements, such as a sense of identity with the place and a commitment to cooperate, which are a *sine qua non* for sustaining improvements in physical conditions beyond the initial phase.

Hence, the range of experiences presented above illustrate some success stories in participation and the type of changes they engender. The message is clear: they are feasible and viable. However, the paradox that they rarely evolve into an institutionalized participatory process remains unresolved. As indicated above, many of these projects are planned, executed and monitored <u>outside</u> the institutional structure, particularly at the level of local governments. Municipality staff are underpaid and badly trained in comparison with project personnel, and resource allocations for projects remain beyond the capacity of local governments to manage. Furthermore, the interest and commitment that a new project generates take precedence over the routine and possibly dull, yet necessary work of local governments, such as ongoing maintenance work, license provisions or follow-up on planning breaches.

The project management set-up is, in almost all of the experiences reviewed above, dependent on the project life cycle, without advance preparations for transferring the

follow-up to local institutions. This accounts for the institutional gap that project completion leaves behind. In attempting to remedy this situation, new projects are designed to follow up, which repeat the same cycle. More importantly development work becomes highly dependent on the availability of foreign funding from donors or investors in a situation where planning and implementation of public services need a relatively high degree of continuity.

Considering the interplay of actors at local, national and international levels, there is a need to be well aware of the limitations of local action, or a grass-roots approach to development taking place in isolation from national and international support for local initiatives. This concerns the ability of the State to effectively monitor the intervention of other social actors and co-ordinate among them. In particular, it is the ability of local authorities to absorb local NGOs, support them and have a clear vision of how best they can contribute to managing and maintaining the local environment, which is stake. This poses a real challenge, as it will be argued in the following section, considering the emphasis and high expectations placed on NGOs, as partners in development.

V.   Rethinking the partnership debate

The debate on partnership can be conceptualized around three inter-related issues. First, there is a need to address the contractual status of partners and the terms of reference governing partnership. The legal framework governing NGOs operations in the different countries of the region has so far proved to be a reigning factor. Existing legislation elaborate all the "does and don'ts" for NGOs, the leverage that the state

has in monitoring their activities, their governing boards, their accounts and bookkeeping procedures, the profiles of their members and NGOs relations with external organizations/ donors. While some of these aspects can be justified within the monitoring and strategic planning functions of the state, in real terms however, the legal system has often been misused. It has become a tool of control rather then an institutional mechanism for ensuring transparency and accountability of all social actors involved in the public domain.

At present, a number of countries are revising their Laws concerning voluntary/ non-profit organizations, as many of these have become obsolete to deal with the rapidly changing sector. It is worth noting here Law 153 of 1999 in Egypt, which generated considerable controversy among the Egyptian as well as international NGOs, donors, and advocates of civil society. While the new Law attempts to streamline registration procedures, simplify monitoring and allow an expanded role for NGOs in development, Kandil warns of loopholes in this Law, which opens scope for misuse or abuse[6]. This particularly concerns the restriction imposed on NGOs involvement in political affairs (elections, relations with political parties, etc.). These restrictions are comparable to NGOs regulations in a cross-cultural perspective, however they should be further clarified, addressing in particular what the role of advocacy entails, and what are its implications on the political scene. Indeed there is a thin line between advocacy and politics, which posits careful deliberation for all parties concerned, before they sign international agreements and adopt and endorse "blanket" global agendas.

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[6] See Dr. Kandil in Al-mezalla, Issue No. 3 and 4, June 1999, pp. 4-7 for a discussion of Law 153 of 1999. Full text of the Law can be accessed on Internet (http://www.dfn.org/Voices/Mideast/egypt/ngolaw/law02.htm

Furthermore, the on-going debate on reforming legislation addresses NGOs relations with central government authorities, ministries of social affairs, the interior, health, etc. However very little is discussed in terms of how could the municipalities expand and reform their role as partners of NGOs. Much ground work remains to be done in terms of developing criteria for NGOs accreditation, monitoring and backstopping social services provided by NGOs, developing joint advisory boards involving citizen groups, municipality personnel and NGOs. In fact there is so much scope for expanding and exploring the areas of partnership between municipalities and NGOs in light of the global conferences agendas, which call for supporting municipalities to assume greater planning and decision-making power and financial autonomy.

Secondly, partnership needs to be discussed in terms of the resources required to initiate negotiations and conflict resolution as an on-going process of development. Indeed negotiations should reflect the diversity of views and alternative approaches to addressing planning issues. One of the major challenges in this respect is ensuring that partners interact on a par, rather than end up with fora whereby the more powerful social actors monopolize the negotiation process, and as such, set the terms of partnership and tilt its outcome to their advantage. Unequal relations in partnership concern not only the state dealing with NGOs; it is also reflected in situations where NGOs have different economic and political weight, or between local and central government. This would preempt an effective participatory process, and above all such a façade of negotiation (often void of content) legitimizes what could be an undemocratic process at the core.

Parity in negotiations underscores another important challenge facing partners, specifically when talking about an expanded role of NGOs and notably those operating at the local level. Neither NGOs nor the State has experienced the winds of change uniformly across the sector. In fact the expanded role of NGOs has highlighted their diversity and even polarization among them. A handful of NGOs, with access to resources and political power have managed to scale-up their activities, expand their budgets, employ professional staff, while the overwhelming majority of NGOs still suffer from limited resources and undertake small-scale service provision or welfare functions. Similarly, as the cases of Aqaba and Ismailia have shown, local governments are often marginalized and have some of their functions taken over by higher level authorities, (by central governments or specialized public agencies).

Thirdly, the implications of voluntarism and resources mobilization through self-funding or self-help approaches should be carefully addressed, baring in mind the financial burden such measures may impose on local communities. This is one paradox observed in three cases discussed above, as well as other cases, which have been nominated or earmarked as "best practices" in the region. The fact that pilot, experimental projects generate popular support and resource mobilization at a point in time, and in a limited scale, does not necessarily mean that voluntarism can be maintained over a long period of time, or for that matter expanded in terms of extra time spent in non-remunerated jobs.

VI.   Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has attempted to highlight the challenges and pitfalls of notions of partnership and participatory development, when policies are translated into development strategies and specific actions; and in particular when the process affects unequally social actors at the local level. Three case studies were discussed to illustrate the complexities involved in development projects, which build on or claim to revolve around a participatory approach. The scale of the projects, the time of their various phases and the policy environment under which such projects are conceived and implemented are crucial factors which can undermine, obstruct or on the contrary reinforce partnership in development.

What the paper has also tried to show is that partnership is not only about alliance building, but (and one may argue it is often the case), partnership is also about negotiation and conflict resolution. As such it is important to address the framework (or forum) in which partnership takes place; more importantly, there is need to understand who is benefiting or not benefiting from a "partnership" set -up and why? This in particular affects both municipalities and NGOs operating at a local level, considering that concepts such as participatory development or empowerment can sometimes be elusive, and therefore open for different interpretations (or misinterpretations) when translated to local level. To conclude, following are some recommendations for strengthening the local institutional framework and building up capacity,   highlighting priority areas for further action for both NGOs and local authorities in the region.

Trust building among different partners is an important dimension, which has not taken its due consideration. This could be accomplished by lessening external over-regulation (by donors, central government agencies) and increasing self-regulation (jointly between NGOs and local authorities). Scope for self-regulation should be explored, in light of codes of conducts (and ethics) which NGOs themselves need to actively work on. Thus governments and NGOs need to agree on a common framework for working together and establish the underlying principles governing their collaboration and partnership. Contractual arrangement needs to be agreed to by all partners so that their respective roles are clear and expectations are realistic. More important, it would contribute to program accountability on all sides (UNFPA, 1998).

Municipalities and local authorities should be equipped to provide accreditation to NGOs based on agreed-upon and transparent standards and regulate NGO operations within their jurisdictions. Regulations should be simplified to ensure better co-ordination and trust between NGOs and public authorities. In countries where this does not exist, NGOs could assist in establishing independent bodies to set standards and criteria for selection, accreditation and monitoring functions. Donors should stress the complementarity, rather then competition among the different actors. As such donors should as much as possible work with joint teams rather that with one actor in isolation. This is part of an on-going process of institution and capacity building.

Capacity building, which has recently received more attention from donors and policy-makers, particularly in the area of training, still has other dimensions, which have not yet been fully explored. Training is sine qua non for capacity building; however institutional development should proceed in parallel, i.e. capacity building is

both for people and institutions. While individuals get exposed to training, they often find it difficult to assume their original functions, or return to their organizations, which do not necessarily upgrade their operations in tandem. Thus, NGOs, particularly those operating at the grassroots level, still lag behind in terms of access to resources: information, legislation, institutional backing, technical support and most of all funding. These issues should be explored in the context of municipal development, particularly as the agendas of all major global conferences emphatically argue for participatory local development as the only path for ensuring sustainability.

There should be a formal mechanism between NGO, local authorities and the concerned communities to ensure exchange of information on program activities and financing, and to participate in decisions on resource mobilization and allocation, planning future development and building-up a knowledge base on successful or problematic experiences in partnership. There should be periodic internal and external program, management and financial auditing. Governments and NGOs need to be mutually accountable. Program monitoring and evaluation mechanisms would assist this process.

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