



Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP)

Recommendations Paper : Strengthening the Role of Mukhtars in Supporting Local Communities



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I- INTRODUCTION

The Directorate General of Local Administration and Councils (DGLAC) plays a crucial role in supporting the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) to provide administrative oversight, capacity-building, and evidence-based planning support for mukhtars, Lebanese municipalities, and unions of municipalities (UoMs). As part of this mandate, and with support from the Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP), DGLAC initiated a talk show series for mukhtars, municipalities and unions of municipalities, to discuss key topics of local concern. The overall objectives of the talk-show series are to:



On 31 March 2022, DGLAC organized a talk-show on “Strengthening the role of mukhtars in supporting local communities” with the participation of UoMs, municipal stakeholders, development partners, NGOs, CSOs, community representatives, and media.

II- BACKGROUND

Mukhtars/mukhtaras are locally elected leaders of a given community (district or village). The role of the mukhtar was created in 1861 by the Ottoman administration for each village or neighbourhood with at least 500 residents. Under the Ottomans, mukhtars primarily managed taxation and oversaw the financial affairs of a village or neighbourhood. A “Mukhtar Law” was issued in 1928 under the French Mandate and updated in 1947. It outlined the duties of the mukhtar in the realms of public administration, finance, real-estate management, general security and justice as well as agriculture and public health. Today, mukhtars facilitate, process and countersign administrative procedures related to the Registry Office such as granting birth, death and marriage certificates; residency certificates; preparing ID cards and passports, and; authenticating photos. As such, it plays a key role in supporting local communities. The institution now falls under the remit of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM).

The proximity to communities and trust mukhtars gather from their work make them crucial for citizens, whom they have sometimes known from one generation to the next. In a broader sense, mukhtars safeguard social relations in the community and represent their constituency vis-à-vis other state institutions. As such, mukhtars are the ‘lowest’ but also closest tier of the Lebanese state structure to citizens. Mukhtars also traditionally play a key role in resolving conflicts and represent centralized administration – crucial for far-away villages.

Mukhtars are part of DGLAC’s capacity-building mandate. The Cooperative Fund of Mukhtars in Lebanon (CFML) – a public institution under MoIM – is concerned with supporting mukhtars, mainly by providing various social services, including end of service compensation, death assistance, marriage grant, and birth grant. As required by law, mukhtars do not receive remuneration from the government, but they are allowed to receive a reasonable fee from citizens for their services such as the certification of passports, inheritances, and real-estate transactions, for example.

Mukhtars face many challenges, however. In practice, they only exercise a small proportion of their de jure roles and responsibilities. The absence of a dedicated workspace, weak coordination with municipalities and development partners, legal and capacity gaps, coupled with gender challenges for female mukhtars add to the complexity of the issue.

III- PANELISTS & MAIN DISCUSSION

The 3rd episode of the DGLAC talk-show series included key speakers and subject-matter experts who shared their views and concerns and discussed best practices and lessons learned around the role of mukhtars. Panelists included:

- Ms. Faten Abou Hassan, Director General, DGLAC
- Mr. Jalal Mohamad Kibrit, Director General, CFML
- Ms. Josiane Khalil, Mukhtara of Zouk Mikaël
- Dr. Andre Sleiman, Country Representative, Democracy Reporting International

Main points of discussion included:

- Possible ways and means to streamline the roles, responsibilities, and relationships between mukhtars, the association of mukhtars, DGLAC, and MoIM, including through the DGLAC Hotline and website that are currently under development.
- The role of mukhtars/mukhtar

The discussion touched upon the various challenges mukhtars face. Challenges and related recommendations flowing from the discussion are outlined in the table below. The detailed list of questions to panellists is annexed to this paper.

Watch the full episode on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8APkrEUOuWY>

Challenge	Recommendation	Timeline	Supported by
ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES			
• Need to introduce the new Code of Ethics for mukhtars	• Introduce and train mukhtars on the newly drafted Code of Ethics.	• Short term (2022-2023)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
• Gaps in communications between mukhtars, municipalities, and DGLAC	• Include mukhtars in DGLAC’s communication and visibility strategy; leveraging DGLAC’s online presence (website, hotline, etc.) to increase visibility of mukhtar’s mandate.	• Short term (2022-2023)	• Donors • DGLAC
• Capacity gaps, particularly around the roles and responsibilities of mukhtars	• Formulate and implement a capacity-building programme for mukhtars, starting with priority themes and associated training materials; to be complemented by partnerships with specialized continued education centres and by updating existing materials. • Foreseen DGLAC Municipal Observatory to include modules on mukhtars, to enable the collection and analysis of trends and needs in terms of capacity development/other.	• Medium term (2023-2024)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
• Absence of a dedicated workspace for mukhtars	• Provide a dedicated office space for mukhtars at municipal offices, including internet connectivity and room for archives.	• Medium term (2023-2024)	• Municipalities • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
• Limited coordination with donors	• Include mukhtars in national and local donor coordination meetings to share information and allow follow-up on initiatives and projects implemented by development partners.	• Medium term (2023-2024)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
• Gender challenges	• Implement training programmes for mukhtars that mainstream gender equality and advocate for more female mukhtar	• Medium term (2023-2024)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
LEGAL CHALLENGES			
• Mukhtars law requires that every inhabited place such as a town, village or neighbourhood with a population of more than 500 residents shall be managed by a mukhtar assisted by a board of local representatives- resulting in a very high number of mukhtars per capita.	• Update and amend the “Mukhtar Law” to increase the number of residents covered by a mukhtar.	• Long term (2024-2026)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
• Lack of detail and delineation in the role of mukhtars as per law.	• Update and amend laws related to the role of mukhtars, and provide training on amended laws.	• Long term (2024-2026)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
FINANCIAL CHALLENGES			
• Mukhtars don’t receive remuneration from the government for their services. • Fees for services that mukhtars provide are not standardized.	• Update and amend related laws, including amending the draft decree which defines compensation for mukhtars. • Set standardized fees and ensure transparency and community awareness around this.	• Long term (2024-2026)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES			
• Mukhtar workflows and transactions are paper based. • Limited digital knowledge among mukhtars.	• Launch the already developed mobile application for mukhtars and CFML website, including contact details of mukhtars to facilitate citizens communication with mukhtars. • Target mukhtars for training around digitization. • Add training components around digitization to existing capacity building programmes. • Create a digitized internal management system for CFML, which would facilitate and fasten transactions while reducing errors.	• Short term (2022-2023) • Medium term (2023-2024)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate of Personal Status
• In remote areas, citizens struggle to reach mukhtars and have their documents processed in a timely manner.	• Enable mukhtars to use e-signatures, thus avoiding long distance travels for citizens in need of processing formal documents.	• Medium term (2023-2024)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate
• Absence of archiving system to facilitate the delivery of services by mukhtars and safeguards mukhtars institutional memory.	• Archive and centralize mukhtar files.	• Medium term (2023-2024)	• Donors/Civil Society/Think Tanks • DGLAC/CFML/Directorate