

## Learning in Partnership

## Learning from Peers

## Reflections on the Peer Support Approach Applied in Jordan



The Jordan Municipal Support Project (JMSP) is a 6-year project (2017-2023) funded by Global Affairs Canada, implemented by FCM with the support of Canadian municipal partners. The project primarily focuses on improving municipal governance and service delivery (solid waste management) in municipalities across the Central and Southern regions of Jordan, with a lens on community engagement, gender, and social inclusion.

This is one of a series of stories that highlight the contributions of the Canadian municipalities. The reflections come from partners in Colchester, Nova Scotia, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, the Capital Regional District, British Columbia, Sylvan Lake, Alberta, the City of Edmonton, Alberta, the District of Squamish, British Columbia, and Kym McCulley, formerly from the City of Calgary, Alberta.

## Shared Experience

Municipalities around the world face similar challenges. As such, they are well placed to support each other. The Jordan Municipal Support Project (JMSP) was designed around this idea, bringing together municipal partners from Canada and Jordan to contribute to the development of Jordanian communities.

The project applies a peer-to-peer capacity building approach that connects municipal practitioners with their counterparts abroad – elected officials, managers, or technical staff. Canadian technical advisors were mobilized to provide technical support in their area of expertise, such as strategic planning, solid waste management, and inclusive community engagement. They shared the experience from their municipalities, provided coaching or training to the Jordanian partners, hosted study tours, and helped develop guides and tools. The following story summarizes some of their reflections on the value of the peer-to-peer approach to international development.

## Keys to Success

This type of capacity building approach is not common in Jordan. **“Usually in Jordan, financial incentives come first, then capacity building,”** explained Hadeel



Khasawneh, Acting Director of JMSP. The JMSP team, however, had a solid vision of how the Canadian expertise would be used to stimulate a process that the Jordanian municipalities would then carry out themselves. They wanted to ensure that the Jordanian municipalities gained the skills to do the work on their own and to share their knowledge with others.

The peer-to-peer approach has been successful. The Jordanian partners applying new skills, mentoring other municipalities, implementing initiatives that benefit the community and ensuring these continue beyond the project.

Reflecting on the process, the Canadian municipal partners identified several key factors that contributed to its success.

1. **Relatability:** By bringing together municipalities of similar size and characteristics, the partners were able to easily identify common challenges. The Canadian municipal partners shared their experiences and approach to address the challenges.

**"We were very relatable. Our community is of 20,000 people. It is similar there, with rural activity, and agricultural products. So, they did have a lot of questions."** – Aron Hershmillier, Yorkton, SK.

2. **Problem solving:** The Canadian technical advisors did not prescribe solutions to their Jordanian peers, but rather offered new ideas and helped to identify opportunities that would work in their context.

**"When we went to communities we listened to their stories, and they listened quite intently to our stories on how we deal with solid waste management and recycling. They felt more comfortable around us, knowing we weren't telling them how to do it. We are here to resolve issues together."** – Michael Buchholzer, Yorkton, SK.

3. **Troubleshooting:** The project engaged technical municipal staff, not just leaders and managers. The technical staff not only provided practical training and tools but were also able to troubleshoot problems based on their experience.

**"In terms of day-to-day training you send the person doing the day-to-day work. We've been there too. We are able to help them with troubleshooting. That peer-to-peer is powerful."** – Kym McCulley, formerly of City of Calgary, AB.

4. **A talented team:** The Canadian municipal partners agreed that having an experienced team in Jordan was a key to success. Their knowledge of the Jordanian municipalities helped to prepare the Canadian partners, to contextualize the training and tools, and to transform ideas into actions that suit the context.

**"What stuck out was the model of having an on-the-ground project team in Jordan. The broader group – that team in Jordan linked with the people in FCM in Ottawa – was able to drive things forward in a productive way."** – Russ Smith, Capital Regional District, BC.



5. **Sounding board:** When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Canadian municipal partners were able to quickly adapt to and offer a different type of support online, providing feedback on products and technical advice. Through the on-going virtual support, they became sounding boards for the JMSP team who in turn worked more effectively with the Jordanian municipalities.

**"Working remotely, I found that helping the JMSP team, backing up what they're saying, and brainstorming with them so they can go back out to the communities and do what we were doing before, that has a lot of value."** – Darcy McLeod, Yorkton, SK.

6. **Pairing:** In most cases, Canadians from two different municipalities were sent to work in Jordan in pairs. They were able to share more perspectives, demonstrate different ways of addressing challenges, and feed off each other. There was comradery and collaboration, and they learned from each other as well.

**"I never consider myself as being an expert. The only way to be experts is if we work in groups. Working with Darlyne [from Colchester, NS], just gave me that much more confidence that we can approach this."** – Michael Buchholzer, Yorkton, SK.



## Model Behaviour

Kym McCulley knows very well the value of peer support between municipalities. She worked for more than two decades in the City of Calgary, Alberta (AB) and has participated in several of FCM's international programs. She knows that it all comes down to behaviour change, both within the municipality and the community.

As Director of Environmental Services in Calgary, Kym was responsible for environmental education and used the Fostering Sustainable Behaviour (FSB) method to promote good environmental practices. She immediately saw the relevance of the FSB method for JMSP, particularly relating to the solid waste management component. The method follows six steps, starting with identifying the behaviour that you want to change.



Kym helped build interest and capacity in FSB among the JMSP staff and municipal partners. She helped develop a training manual in Arabic and a series of instructional videos. She stayed in Jordan for an extended period of time to provide individualized support to the municipalities and guide them through the first phase to identify behaviours through community walks and focus group discussions.

**"The municipalities had never done focus groups discussions. Kym did a session on how to carry out a focus group. The first time Kym did the focus group. The next time, it was the engineer leading, and Kym was in the room, supporting,"** explained Bana Abu Yousef, Solid Waste Management Specialist for JMSP.



Through the research process, the Jordanian municipal partners identified the improper disposal of garbage as the main problem they would address. During the community walks they observed negative behaviours such as throwing garbage out of the car window, discarding plastic bottles and trash in side streets, and littering in the schoolyards. In most municipalities they found that leftover bread was left beside or hanging off the trash bin. Bread is considered blessed and is not thrown in with other trash, but rather left out for someone else to eat or feed to livestock. When these issues were discussed in the focus groups, community members came up with the solution of installing breadboxes near the bins to have a clean place to leave or take bread.

Kym helped instill the idea in the municipalities that you need to model the behaviour you want changed. The municipalities led by example, organizing clean-up activities, banning plastic in the offices, and using reusable garbage bags in their vehicles.

**"You can't be developing processes and programs around solid waste without understanding the importance of role modeling among the entire council and staff. You can't have your solid waste management staff doing one thing and your mayor and councillors doing another,"** Kym explained.



## Takeaways

The Canadian municipal partners contributed their time and expertise with the objective of helping the Jordanian municipalities advance. However, they all noted that it was a significant learning experience for them as well. There were three common takeaways from their participation in the project.

**There are more similarities than differences.** The Canadian municipal partners were most struck by how similar they were to their counterparts in Jordan, both the people and the municipalities.

**"Learning a whole new culture was amazing and recognizing the challenges and barriers in the communities are very similar to what we have in our own communities. You have leaders, you have pessimists, and you have optimists, and then you have people who will go ahead and do good work."** – Darlyne Proctor, Colchester, NS.

**Technology provides new opportunities, but relationship building is fundamental.** The Canadian municipal partners found advantages of providing ongoing virtual support. However, it worked better because relationships were already established.

**"Once we had connected with the individuals, I thought [the virtual support] was useful. But so much of it is relationship-based. Without the connection to the people, it is hard."** – Russ Smith, Capital Regional District, BC.

**The Canadian municipal partners take home as much or more than they share.** The Canadian municipal partners are recruited to share their knowledge and experiences. However, they also gain learning and perspective that they bring back to their own work and life.

**"It has really made me very aware of my responsibility as town councillor with regards to our staff. It has made me aware and appreciative of the opportunity and honour to serve and work with communities."** – Teresa Rilling, Councillor, Sylvan Lake, AB.

**"It is the best professional development for the Canadians. I think that every Canadian that participates is a stronger municipal employee when they are done. It helps us dealing with a mix of cultures in Canada and ensure that everyone is included."**

– Kym McCulley, formerly City of Calgary, AB.

FCM would like to thank Global Affairs Canada and the Canadian municipal partners for their contributions to the Jordan Municipal Support Program.

For more information, please contact:

[international@fcm.ca](mailto:international@fcm.ca)