



## SUCCESS STORY

### Eliminating Rumors with Facts



*“USAID CITIES’ ongoing recommendations and consultative meetings opened our eyes and guided us to the importance of activating our presence on and through social media to restore the community’s trust in the municipality,”*

*H.E. Nidal Al-Awadat, Mayor of Al-Dhulail Municipality.*

As with many communities in the Kingdom of Jordan, the community of Al Dhulail suffered from the spread of rumors that challenged and weakened the bond between the municipality and its community. The bonds of trust and confidence in the municipality’s abilities to provide proper services are often some of the first ties to be weakened/strained by rumors. Al Dhulail Municipality dealt with the dangers of unchallenged rumors by turning to the communication skills of its own Ahmad Abu Hakmeh, Head of Public Relations at Al Dhulail Municipality who leveraged social media and mass media to rebuild and strengthen community-municipal ties.

The successful “Al Dhulail Gathers Us” Initiative held in October 2017 with the support of USAID Cities Implementing Transparent, Innovative and Effective Solutions (USAID CITIES) was the turning point where Al Dhulail Municipality realized the importance of direct interaction with the community and the positive potential of community engagement. As part of this realization, Ahmad and his municipal colleagues sought out USAID CITIES’ support to refine and strengthen their communication skills. They recognized that sustaining any changes that emerged as a result of USAID CITIES’ assistance, would need to become part of a “culture of trust” between the Al-Dhulail municipality and its community before changes could become truly meaningful and long-lasting.

USAID CITIES worked closely with the municipality to not only empower its dedicated staff with the necessary knowledge - and the skills to use that knowledge; it also institutionalized a process that enabled the municipality to identify, prioritize, and address threats to community cohesion and resilience by leveraging existing and easily developed outreach tools (i.e., Facebook, YouTube and locally-developed and strategically-focused promotional materials) to implement a robust communications outreach strategy developed through the assistance of USAID CITIES. Ahmad and the municipal leadership knew that institutionalizing this process and maintaining steady progress - regardless of assigned staff or leadership turnover – would ensure its sustainability.

And so, it began. In less than a year, as evidence through the community’s engagement on the municipality’s Facebook, word-of-mouth information dissemination, and the steady participation of the community in municipal-led meetings and events; the municipality of Al-Dhulail managed to reduce rumors and promote the progress of Al Dhulail Municipality’s services. This was perhaps best illustrated when technical



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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



*“Al Dhulail community is growing rapidly, we as a municipality need to make a significant effort to bring it all together under the umbrella of the municipality by enhancing community engagement and public outreach.”*

**Ahmad Abu Hakmeh, Head of Public Relations at Al Dhulail Municipality**

complications caused by a contractor commissioned by the Water Authority to change major water pipes in the main roads caused significant concerns within the community who blamed the municipality for the resultant damage to its streets. Using social media, Ahmad brought out the actual story of what happened and mobilized public opinion in support of the municipality in addressing their collective concerns with the Water Authority.

Updates and information on the municipality's work is now routinely shared through the municipality's social media. As a result, community members are more aware and play their role in the creation of a credible and vibrant communication channel between the municipality and its community members that facilitates sharing complaints, promotes awareness campaigns, serves as a means of announcing local celebrations and events, and is even used as a platform for posting pictures of the Al Dhulail region.

The municipality went even further to highlight its achievements through different social media outlets (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube). Ahmad designed brochures for use in the mass media to announce festivals, public meetings, highlight municipal achievements, and raise community awareness on topics that were identified as negatively affecting community cohesion (i.e., cleanliness, maintenance of public property, and citizens' responsibilities).

In the end, the municipality's effective and responsible use of social media, word-of-mouth dissemination of now-accurate information, and the nurturing of their staff's skills and passion transformed their once-inactive channels of communications to one of the municipality's strongest tools for addressing threats to their community.

*“With persistence and guidance, Al Dhulail municipality was able to enhance community's trust back through its conscious, responsive, and informative use of communications and social media tools”, H.E. Nidal Al-Awadat, Mayor of al-Dhulail Municipality.*

USAID CITIES focuses on local governance to improve prosperity, accountability, and equality for a stable, democratic Jordan by strengthening democratic accountability. Awarded in September 2016, USAID Cities Implementing Transparent, Innovative and Effective Solutions (CITIES) seeks to increase the effectiveness of its targeted 33 municipalities and support decentralization in all 12 governorates in Jordan through four sub-goals: improved service delivery, increased sustainability of municipal and decentralized government operations, increased responsiveness to citizen priorities, and enhanced capacity to promote community cohesion and resilience.