25th April 2019

IGC-GAM Workshop Report

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Summary

On the 17th of April 2019, the IGC co-hosted a workshop with the Greater Amman Municipality. The workshop explored opportunities for first step reforms in the areas of: (i) options to enhance the use of data in urban policymaking and (ii) options to improve the calculation, issuance and collection of development levies. Each theme was the subject of a half-day workshop – recognising that the performance of theme (i) is closely related to the performance of theme (ii).

The workshop brought together approximately 40 participants across several government departments – such as the Comprehensive Planning, Zoning, GIS, Finance, Transport, and Statistics departments, among others – as well as speakers from the IGC network. The aim was to provide a forum for discussion on how to commence reforms using evidence from international research and cross-country experience.

In this context, at the start of the first half day workshop on data, several representatives from GAM presented on their departments' data collection efforts and any opportunities for improvement. These presentations highlighted fundamental challenges in the areas of data sharing and departmental coordination. Dr. Nick Tsivanidis, Professor of Economics at the University of California Berkeley, then gave a presentation emphasising the value of data in driving urban policy decisions and he showcased a variety of new data sources that he has used in his own research and can be applied to traditional urban policy questions such as housing and transport. Sebastian Kriticos, Economist at the IGC Cities that Work initiative, then focused on the barriers to leveraging data in Amman and practical next steps that the city could take to improve data sharing. These ideas framed subsequent group discussions where GAM policymakers identified key next step reforms to be: (i) improving frameworks for departmental data sharing, (ii) undertaking a data inventory, (iii) empowering the urban observatory, and (iv) fostering collaborations with external partners.

The second half day workshop focused on the subject of development levies and Amman's compensation charge. Representatives of the planning department presented on the different use cases in which the compensation charge is applied and the challenges that they face in issuing and collecting these charges in each case. Astrid Haas, Manager of the IGC Cities that Work initiate then responded with a presentation that focused on clarifying the definitions and best practices for different land financing tools. This presentation highlighted that the challenges of the compensation charge owe largely to the lack of simplicity and transparency around the charge's calculation and where its revenues are spent. In the group discussions, stakeholders identified: (i) terminology clarification, (ii) public communication, and (iii) increasing the use of exactions as key next step reforms.

We provide more detail on the outcomes of the workshop below:

Next steps for reform in the Greater Amman Municipality
Based on discussions at the IGC-GAM workshop, 17ᵗʰ April 2019

Data for decision making

The half day workshop first highlighted several key challenges with regard to data and urban policy in GAM which include:

Lack of appropriate data governance frameworks:
- There are few protocols for the production, management, utilization and sharing of data. This exacerbates the issues of institutional siloes and causes issues of duplication, inaccuracy and ambiguous data custodianship between GAM departments.
- Data sharing is currently highly personalised, you either have to know the departmental head well or undertake extremely cumbersome application processes – involving specific written applications for every dataset – in order to acquire data.
- There is a lack of strategic leadership to communicate research strategies across employees in the civil service.
- When data is given out to outside partners, GAM rarely hears about the results.

Absence of an integrated data platform
- to upload, access and utilise data for spatial planning, resulting in fragmented urban planning and services delivery.

Lack of good quality spatial data
- Data can often have issues of granularity, timeliness, representativeness and standards for collection. This leads to an inadequate application of spatial issues to policy outreach.

Insufficient technical and human resource capacity
- can be a roadblock to the effective collection and analysis of data as organisations are unable to keep up with latest advances in technology and methodology.

1) Improving departmental coordination and frameworks for data

1. Communicate strategies from the high-levels of GAM to the whole organisation so each department is aware of the agenda to improve data sharing.

2. Identify lead point people in each department who can drive forwards inter-departmental coordination and efforts to improve data sharing.

3. Create a simple and centralised application form (or agreement) that all GAM departments can use to submit data requests to other departments.

    a. Prototype the project and find opportunities to improve: e.g. (i) consistently improving the ease of the application process, (ii) enhancing the capacity to submit multiple data requests for different departments at once, (iii) ensuring there is follow up between departments on how data was used and how it relates to policy decisions.

4. Create a broader data sharing policy that is consistent throughout GAM. This should outline what data should be shared and how as well as the intention to set-up a centralised data unit from which all urban data can be gathered and disseminated.

2) Identifying what data GAM has and key information on those datasets

1. Identify lead point people in each department who can coordinate the cataloguing of departmental datasets as well as a centralised authority (such as the urban observatory) that will lead consolidation of data catalogues from each department.

2. Create a catalogue of all spatial datasets that currently exist within GAM. This is simply starting with a list. This catalogue should provide full metadata around each dataset such as: the name, description, format, creator and access policy of the dataset.

    a. The planning and development department mentioned in the workshop that their department has already done this, however, the work was not approved and published by management. A useful starting point would be to identify why this was not approved and what changes can be made to the way in which the list was catalogued that would permit its authorisation.

    b. Once a full list of acceptable metadata indicators is collected, then this can be scaled up to all departments.

3. Seek official approval of this process from the highest levels of GAM such as the City Manager or Mayor and communicate these approvals through GAM.

4. Once the data inventory is complete, identify which datasets can be shared both between departments within GAM and publicly. Complement this process with the new frameworks for submitting data requests and seek to increase and document data sharing within GAM.

3) Improving the Urban Observatory

1. Link the operational plans of the Urban Observatory with the operational plans of other departments within GAM.

    a. The Urban Observatory must work more closely with GAM departments to identify what data they can provide that will be useful to assist urban policy decisions.

    b. Likewise, departments of GAM should work with the Urban Observatory to detail the data needs they have.

2. Urban observatory must coordinate data collection and communicate the outputs of their data collection to planners on a quarterly basis.

    a. Focus areas for data collection and analysis that were discussed include: (i) comparisons of urban indicators with international benchmarks, and (ii) measuring demographic and urban trends in GAM.

3. GAM and the Urban Observatory should collectively work together to support regulatory change that can improve data sharing protocols.

    a. This should start by communicating the outcomes of this workshop to the higher levels of management in GAM as a persuasion tool to increase awareness of data sharing and its importance for urban policymaking.

4. Initiate efforts to set-up an intranet website for GAM officials where changes to datasets or data protocols can be communicated.

4) Foster collaborations with external stakeholders

1) Establish regular meetings with connected stakeholders to discuss new opportunities to share data and use data for policy analysis.

2) Seek new collaborations with other stakeholders such as telecoms.

3) Identify applications for new and freely available data sources that can be used for complementary evidence on urban challenges.

Improving the calculation, issuance and collection of development levies

1) GAM must first establish a clear clarification on what type of tax the compensation charge constitutes and therefore who should pay and when the charge should be applied.

   a. IGC will assist by providing a international definitions for a wide array of different land financing tools as well as case studies on international best practice for their use.

   b. IGC will also provide evidence on the number and types of different taxes that other cities use and the revenue performance of these taxes.

   c. GAM can then work with the IGC to internalise these concepts and unbundle the compensation charge into a separate set of taxes that are appropriate for the different cases in which it is applied.

2) Communicate more clearly with developers and landowners to highlight where these taxes and fees are spent and therefore why these taxes are applied.

3) GAM must consider setting up specific infrastructure accounts for which these revenues can be earmarked.

4) GAM should consider how to include exactions in their portfolio of charges as this could be more applicable in cases where it is necessary to communicate the gains from taxation more clearly.

5) GAM should use the outcomes of this workshop to persuade higher management that the rates and calculation of the charge need to be amended to improve simplification and transparency.

6) GAM should seek to have a plan of action in place for how the law should be amended to improve the compensation charge. The IGC can play a role in assisting this process.

Appendix

List of attendants

Name	Affiliation	Contact
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Nisreen Al-Araj	GAM	-
Rama Al-Azzez	GAM	-
Tareq Al-Dala'ah	Building licensing	-
Tala Al-Hanbali	GAM	-
Jane Al-Raqqad	Public Transport	-
Shorouq Al-Shamayleh	Planning	-
Ansam Alhyari	Building licencing	-
Bayan Alqaisi	Planning	
Omar Alsteikh	Lands and surveying	-
Deyala Altarawneh	University of Jordan	-
Omar Arabyiat	GAM	-
Kawbab Badawi	Planning	-
Reham Bataineh	Planning	-
Anas Gharaibeh	GAM	-
Ali Hadeedi	Professions licensing	-
Ibrahim Hashem	Communications	-
Ahmad Hellwah	Building licencing	-
Rula Khashman	Public Transport	-
Akram Khriesat	Urban Obseratory	-
Nidal Marji	GIS	-
Ala'a Matar	Planning	-

Asem Mattar	Expropriation	-
Hani Milhem	Building licencing	-
Rima Odeh	Comprehensive Planning	-
Raed Qaraqesh	GAM	-
Nemeh Qatanani	GAM	-
Mhanna Qattan	Building Licensing	-
Nuha Qtiesh	Planning	-
Firas Rabadi	Heritage	-
Adam Samara	IGC Local Researcher	-
Shatha Shamayeh	GAM Press Center	-
Alia Tahboub	Masterplan department	-
Mohammed Thyabat	GAM	-
Samer Vasin	Finance	-
Ahmad Zeyad	Planning	-