

# Municipal Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic - MENA region



Partner with Connective Cities

On behalf of

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The impact of the COVID19- pandemic in the MENA region is far from over. The earliest provision of vaccines to the general public was made in March 2021. Even when vaccines were made available, vaccination campaigns were disrupted by fake news spread by antivaxxers. Beyond the topic of vaccination, the pandemic has deepened the entrenched challenges faced by municipalities. Response to the pandemic required a significant dislocation in municipal revenues, expenditure burdens and reprioritization, leaving the majority of the municipalities in the region trapped in the grip of uncertainty. Additionally, in some parts of the MENA region, political instability, fragility and conflict are exacerbating challenges that local governments face while maintaining public services and mitigating the impact of the pandemic with the limited available resources.

In the wake of the Pandemic, municipalities in the MENA region in both urban and rural areas need to rethink their modes of operation and accelerate their shift towards building resilience during the recovery process. In an effort to support municipalities that are members of the Connective Cities network in the MENA region, four thematic working groups were established as part of Connective Cities program ‘Municipal Recovery from the Pandemic.’ Objectives of this working group include promoting practice-oriented knowledge exchange between municipal and urban practitioners, facilitating peer learning on sustainable and innovative approaches to build resilience in cities through biodiversity and environmental protection, digitalisation of municipal services, and promoting social entrepreneurship for circularity. The program has resulted in the development of concrete urban solutions. Another outcome was the creation of partnerships between municipalities as well as with private sector actors to articulate the proposed solutions and scale up the impact.

Overall, more than 75 network members have participated in the four working groups. The participants included municipal representatives and urban practitioners from Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Germany. Municipal representatives from both political and technical levels were invited to analyse and discuss practical examples in the above-mentioned thematic fields and challenges related to sustainable recovery from the COVID19- pandemic. In total, 15 project ideas and urban solutions were developed, in addition to three prototypes. Furthermore, 13 good practices were showcased and published as blogs and videos. This report provides an overview of the process and its outcomes. It also showcases the achievements of an intensive and fruitful program.

● ● ● ● **Dr. Ing. Muna Shalan**

Coordinator of Connective Cities network in the MENA region

# Foreword

## • • • ● Table of Content

### **Working Groups**

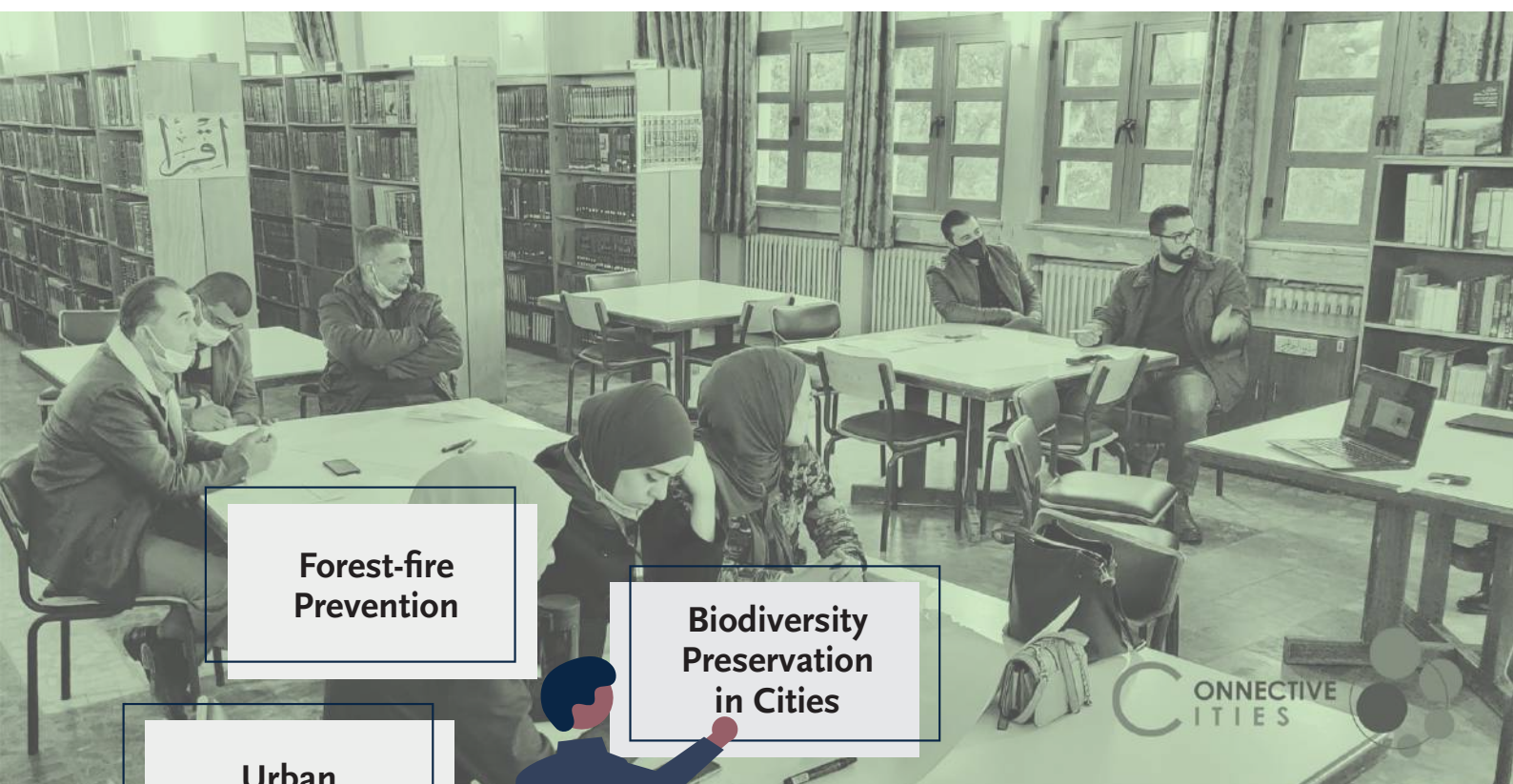
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# Content

# insights

## Biodiversity and Environmental Protection

The working group “Biodiversity and Environmental Protection” was the first group to be established as part of Connective Cities program ‘municipal recovery to the Covid 19 pandemic’. An initiative by Menjez municipality to develop a project proposal has kick-started a series of fruitful exchanges and peer learning activities.



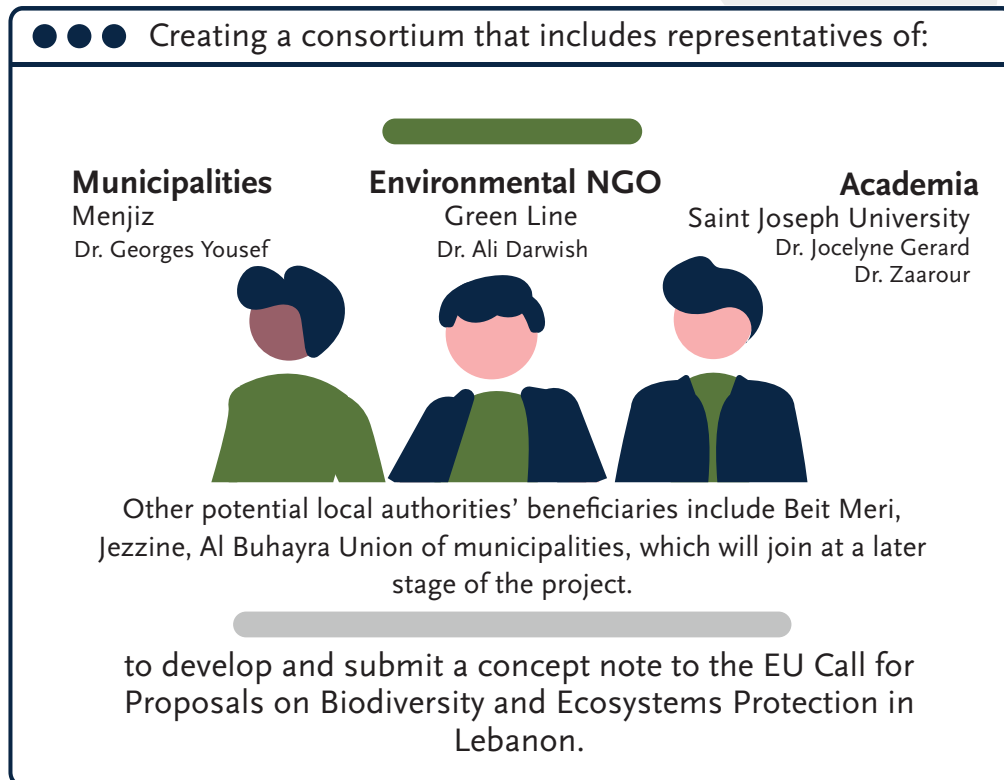
Forest-fire  
Prevention

Biodiversity  
Preservation  
in Cities

Urban  
Gardening

Thematic Focus ●

## ● ● ● ● Peer learning and good practices



Good practice examples on forest fires prevention in **Shouf Biosphere Reserve- Lebanon** and early warning system of forest fires in **Lower Saxony-Germany** were presented.

Local plans for the preservation of biosphere in the urban areas and countryside in Hannover as well as local projects and plans implemented by Menjiz municipality to protect the environment and mitigate the impacts of climate change were showcased.





**Minecraft- Block by block tool**  
Implementing  
community gardens in  
Jordan  
-UN Habitat-



**Amman Micro lungs**  
Role of community building  
and the use of the Miyawaki  
technology to grow  
micro-forests in the capital  
Amman



**Cash for Work**  
Supporting organic  
gardening in different  
cities in Jordan  
-GIZ-

QQ The 10 participating municipalities represented different regions in Jordan. This variety facilitated peer learning among the participants

Haneen Hassouneh  
Sahab Municipality, Jordan



Filed visit



Workshop

## Capacity Building

### Urban Gardening and Permaculture

Municipal representatives were introduced to the concept of permaculture via a field visit and a workshop held in Amman

A capacity building lecture on the utilisation of geographic information system in planning for biodiversity and environmental protection was conducted

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**Participating municipalities**  
developed project ideas to establish community gardens

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**Good practices**  
from which 6 published posts



Brainstorm together with all participants on ways to utilize vacant lands

Increase knowledge and raise awareness to the importance of urban gardening and the potential benefits behind utilizing urban gardening activities in vacant lands within municipalities

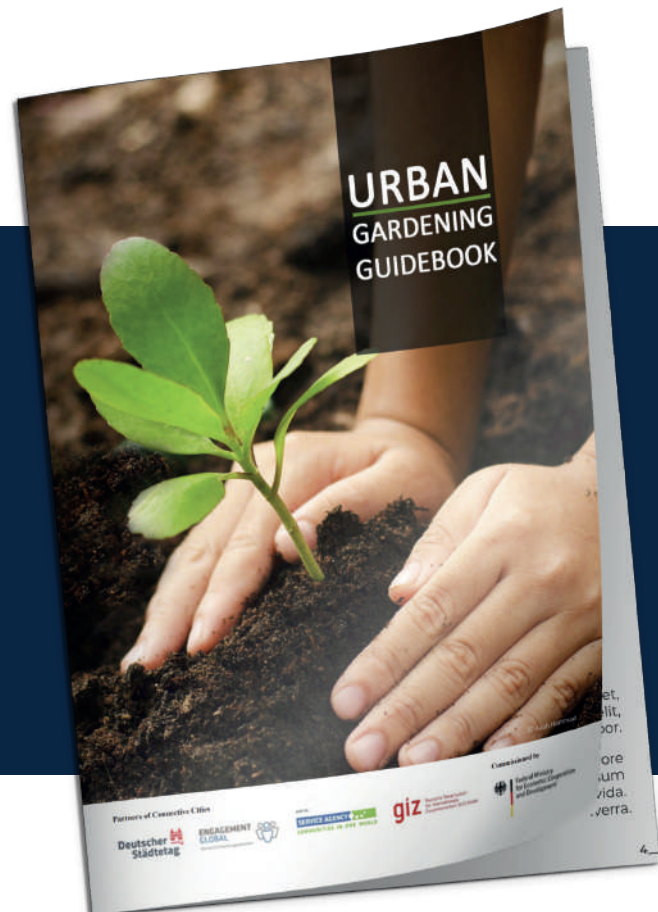
Provide participating municipalities with the opportunity to present the challenges within their area, the opportunities available

**Urban gardening and permaculture workshop objectives**



## Knowledge Product

A municipal urban gardening guide was developed to serve both as a knowledge product and a prototype for municipal and urban practitioners engaged in urban gardening projects



## Project Development

This diverse program has opened up the opportunity for the municipal representatives to benefit from success stories and learn about the new techniques in the field of biodiversity and environmental protection.

### Bankable proposals

- ✓ Madaba Municipality - Jordan
- ✓ Sahab Municipality - Jordan
- ✓ Maghazi Municipality - Palestine



Harvesting vacant land can help us overcome the challenges during a lockdown or siege. This entails achieving self-sufficiency in terms of food security

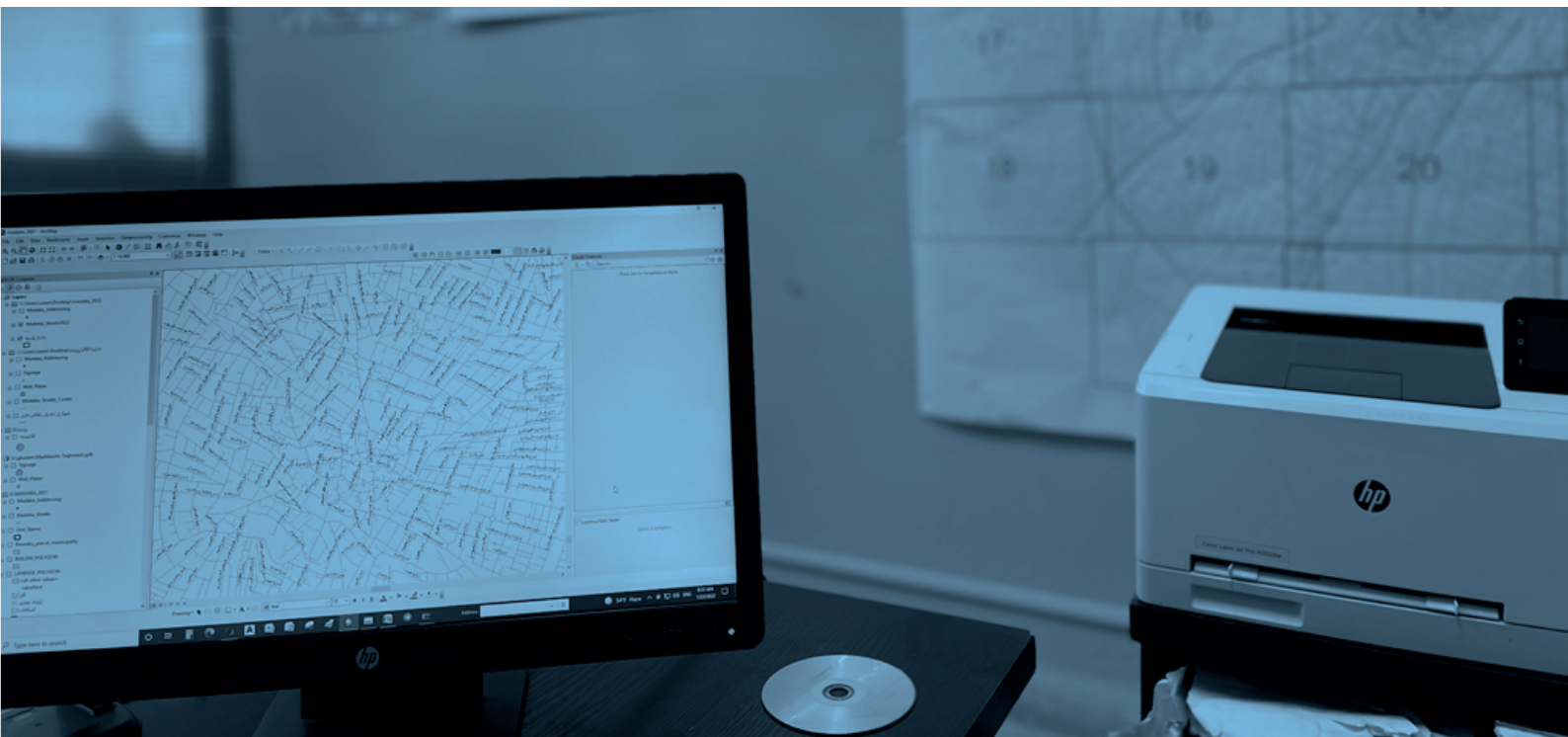
Amani Ismail  
Al Maghazi Municipality, Palestine



# insights

## Digitalisation of Municipal Services

Digitalization is the path for improving service delivery to citizens, and is key in the municipal recovery from the impacts of the pandemic. Connective Cities program on municipal recovery from the pandemic has thus supported the establishment of the working group ‘digitalizing public devices in the MENA region’. **The working group has been very active and has involved the participation of representatives of more than 55 municipalities in the MENA region.**



## Peer learning and good practices



Accurate data is directly transferred from the field thus there is no need for data entry officers. Data is automatically transferred to a municipal database.

Rawan Abu Aisheh- Hebron municipality, Palestine



### A lighthouse for good urban politics

A city of social inclusion and investment

- Hazmieh municipality, Lebanon-  
-UN Habitat-



Digitization in  
Hebron  
Municipality  
Palestine



GIS applications in  
municipal management

### Digitization in Madaba, Jordan

A vision for sustainable  
recovery and fair  
growth

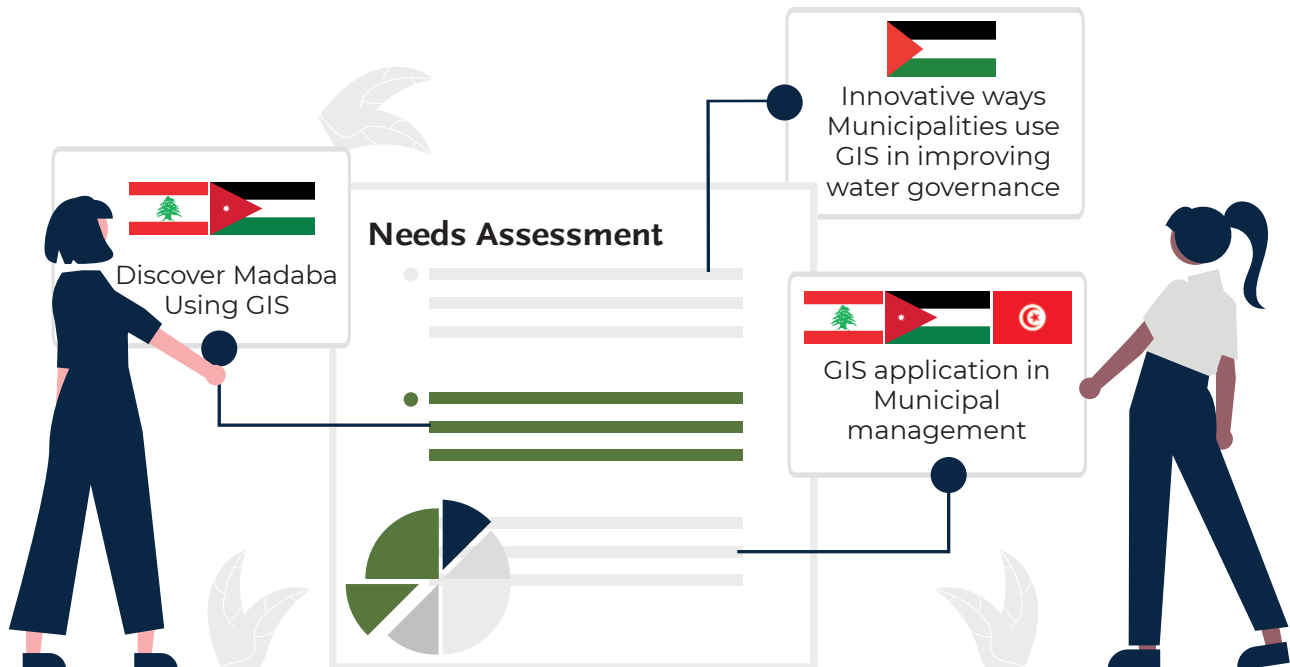


Digital tools for  
environmental planning

Full end-to-end digital  
transformation solution  
Zgharta municipality in  
Lebanon



## Needs Assessment and Development of Solutions



Needs assessment was conducted with members of the working group to gain a clear overview on current challenges and identify priorities to design and develop digital solutions. Furthermore, the assessment revealed important information about existing municipal capacities and relevant recent or ongoing projects. Based on the assessment, customized solutions were designed and developed, mainly focusing on creating GIS solutions that are user-friendly and open source at the same time.

### 3

**Project Ideas**  
developed into mobile applications



**A prototype was developed as a digital solution in municipal management**, mapping of assets and spatial database inventory creation. Connective Cities conducted a round of intensive capacity building to train the relevant municipal staff on using the apps. The municipalities of Bizerte- Tunisia, Abasan-Palestine, Menjez, Qaraoun, Matan al-Alaa-Lebanon, Jerash and Madaba-Jordan have benefited from the capacity building and thus have progressed in the realization of their projects using the GIS application.

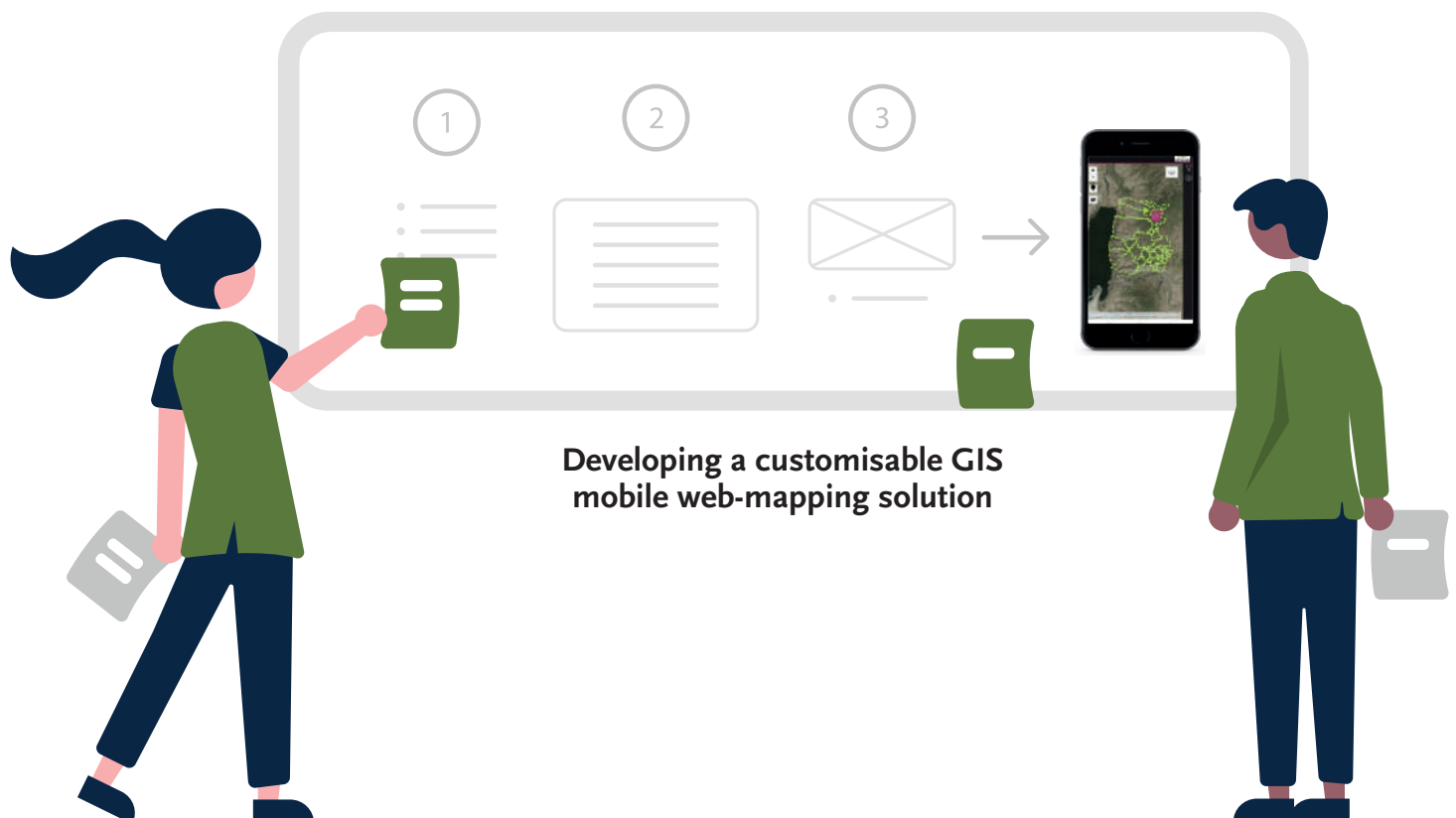
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**Municipalities**  
benefited from the  
developed prototype



This is among the most important projects that I am working on since a year. I personally believe that Hebron and Hazmieh municipalities are role models in this field (digitalisation)

Wiem Amri, Bizerte  
Tunisia







A platform for the digitalisation of municipal services as well as the digitalisation of the internal management system with the possibility of utilising geospatial features. Citizens will have access to specific part of the platform via their user accounts

Rami Kanaan  
Accumapping, Lebanon



## Capacity Building

The first virtual workshop for the working group was held on the 26th October 2021. The workshop incorporated a capacity building component focusing on the use of GIS for the collection, mapping and monitoring of geospatial data. The working group's members were introduced to the Geographic Information System (GIS) and its various applications in municipal roles and services.

Workshop

PROCESS



### Contribution of employing GIS

- Municipal service provision
- Strategic planning
- Tax management
- Decision making at a municipal level



# insights

## Social Entrepreneurship and Circularity

Social entrepreneurship enables achieving equitable growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth. Embarking on a recovery path, municipalities in the MENA region should rethink their modes of operation and act as incubators for social enterprise. To support these efforts, Connective Cities has established the working group “Social entrepreneurship in the MENA region” that aims at enhancing the cooperation between municipalities and social enterprises particularly in the field of recycling and circular economy.



## Peer learning and good practices

Through this project, we were able to achieve three accomplishments. First, we were able to capacitate citizens on waste sorting techniques. Citizens of Bikfaya became able to distinguish between the different recyclables

Elie Madi- Bikfaya municipality, Lebanon



**The role of municipality in promoting social entrepreneurs**  
- Hebron municipality, Palestine -



**A model for promoting municipal circular economy.**  
- Jerash, Jordan -



**The municipality as an incubator of circular economy**



**Promoting circular economy and improved waste management using digital tools**

Members of the working group have benefited from peer learning and capacity building on the topics of circular economy and plastic recycling. The learning process included technical training on developing business models, proposal writing, and public private partnerships.

**Innovations for the environment**  
Digital solutions for sustainable waste management  
- Bikfaya Municipality, Lebanon -



QQ We will focus on environmental awareness raising and establishing a facility for waste sorting, recycling and reuse

Malak Osily  
Hebron municipality, Palestine



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Project Ideas

## Project Development

At the end of the workshop, three project ideas were formulated by these teams based on the Theory of Change and including a vision for a business model. These teams have received further support after the workshop to develop fully-fledged proposals that will be presented to donors. The proposals are:

### Bankable proposals



#### Plastijerash

Jerash municipality and their partner start-up 'Plasticity' that aims at increasing community engagement and awareness raising on recycling plastic. Other objectives of the proposed project include job creation, contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as upcycling of plastic waste for urban furniture.



#### Recycling for a better Hebron

Hebron municipality and Greenworld, which aims at establishing a plastic recycling strategy in the municipality, raising awareness amongst the citizens regarding plastic waste, as well as upcycling and marketing of recycled plastic products.



#### An Integrated Approach for Circular Economy in Ras El Maten and Neighboring Villages

Ras el Maten municipality and Green Mount Recycling. The objectives of the proposed project include upgrading the recycling plant's capacity, conducting awareness campaigns and creating a secure and theft-free work process by the induction of eco-police and surveillance.