



The impact of decentralization in reducing the spatial development gap (Social Fund for Development projects) In Babylon Governorate

Prof .Dr. Kareem Hassan Alwan

kareem.h@iurp.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Ahmed Mohammed Al Shamari

Ahmed.Naji2200m@iurp.uobaghdad.edu.iq

University of Baghdad/Center for Urban and Regional Planning

Abstract:

The research aims to give decentralised planning a more influential role for economic life and social development by enhancing the participation of the local community in the development process and achieving the exploitation of the local population in making development decisions and identifying priorities and needs according to the development gap.

The Social Fund for Development is one of the decentralisation methods adopted by the Ministry of Planning through which development projects are prioritised according to the spatial gap with the participation of the local community. The aim is to promote rural settlements and improve the quality of life for the population by reducing the development gap and achieving a spatial balance of development to enhance the stability of rural communities.

The research found that spatial decentralisation is critical for prioritising development projects according to the spatial gap of development and enhancing the confidence of local communities, especially in the remote rural settlements of Babylon Governorate. The SFD experience succeeded in prioritising development projects for areas that suffer from a spatial gap but did not meet the requirements of the development process due to low allocations.

The study recommended that this experience should be reflected in various development projects that directly affect the population and meet their service needs and life aspirations by using technology to prioritise projects and elect members of community committees.

Keywords: Development, spatial development gap, decentralisation, social fund

أثر اللامركزية في تقليص فجوة التنمية المكانية (مشاريع الصندوق الاجتماعي للتنمية) في محافظة بابل

أ.د. كريم حسن علوان

kareem.h@iurp.uobaghdad.edu.iq

احمد محمد ناجي الشمري

Ahmed.Naji2200m@iurp.uobaghdad.edu.iq

جامعة بغداد / مركز التخطيط الحضري والاقليمي للدراسات العليا

المستخلص:

يهدف البحث الى اعطاء التخطيط اللامركزي دورا أكثر تأثيراً للحياة الاقتصادية والتطور الاجتماعي بتعزيز مشاركة المجتمع المحلي في عملية التنمية وتحقيق استغلالية السكان المحليين في اتخاذ القرارات التنموية وتحديد الاولويات والاحتياجات وفق الفجوة التنموية, ويُعد الصندوق الاجتماعي للتنمية أحد أساليب اللامركزية التي تبنتها وزارة التخطيط ل يتم من خلالها تحديد أولويات المشروعات التنموية وفقاً للفجوة المكانية بمشاركة المجتمع المحلي. والهدف من ذلك هو النهوض بالمستوطنات الريفية وتحسين نوعية الحياة للسكان من خلال تقليل الفجوة التنموية وتحقيق التوازن المكاني للتنمية لتعزيز الاستقرار للمجتمعات الريفية.

وتوصل البحث إلى أن اللامركزية المكانية أمر بالغ الأهمية لتحديد أولويات مشاريع التنمية وفقاً للفجوة المكانية للتنمية وتعزيز ثقة المجتمعات المحلية وخاصة في المستقرات الريفية النائية لمحافظة بابل، ونجحت تجربة الصندوق الاجتماعي للتنمية في تحديد أولويات المشاريع التنموية للمناطق التي تعاني فجوة المكانية ولكنها لم تلب متطلبات عملية التنمية بسبب انخفاض مخصصاتها.



وأوصت الدراسة بأن تنعكس هذه التجربة في مشاريع تنمية مختلفة على السكان مباشرة وتلبية احتياجاتهم الخدمية وتطلعاتهم الحياتية باستخدام التكنولوجيا لتحديد أولويات المشاريع وانتخاب أعضاء اللجان المجتمعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التنمية وفجوة التنمية المكانية واللامركزية والصندوق الاجتماعي للتنمية.

Research problem:

Rural settlements in Babylon governorate suffer from a clear development gap compared to urban areas, which negatively impacts the level of services and investment opportunities. The research raises a central question about the effectiveness of development efforts through social funds for development interventions and one of the Decentralization development policies in reducing this gap and achieving spatial balance for rural settlements.

The importance of research

The research contributes to achieve equitable spatial development to enhance the stability of rural communities and reduce migration to cities. It also provides a scientific framework to evaluate the role of development programmes such as the Social Fund for Development in improving living conditions and infrastructure in rural areas.

Research objective: The research aims to:

1. Identifying the social fund and its role in the development of rural settlements.



2. Assessing the impact of Social Fund for Development projects in reducing the spatial development gap in the rural settlements of Babylon governorate.
3. Demonstrating the impact of development decentralisation (community participation) in development plans.

Research methodology :

Adopting a descriptive analytical approach to describe the work of the social fund for development, one of the Decentralization spatial development policies, and to analyze the development data of rural settlements to provide conclusions and recommendations to evaluate the work of development Decentralization.

Research hypothesis:

The intervention of the Social Fund for Development effectively contributes to reducing the spatial development gap between rural and urban areas in Babylon governorate by participating in local decision-making to improve basic services and promote local investments.

1. Introduction

Development is the process of conscious and programmed management of the most appropriate exploitation of material , human resources to achieve the desired economic and social change in order to bring about social change for the better, as the human being is the end and means of development, the desire in this sense must be determined by society in the light of spatial policies. It is then formulated by the planner and implemented by the executive bodies by the economic, social and environmental concepts , in a way that ensures balance , justice between different regions, which leads to reducing economic, social , urban disparities ,





focuses on the efficient use and investment of the capacities , comparative advantages available in each region.

The Social Fund for Development is one of the policies followed by the concerned development authorities at the Ministry of Planning to bring about spatial development. It is implemented by decentralised spatial development policies through the selection of development projects by members of the local communities in the targeted areas to achieve a democratic atmosphere in the selection, implementation, and monitoring process.

2. Development concept

Development is defined as an integrated process involving quantitative , qualitative change in society's economic, social, environmental and cultural levels (Al-Jawari,2024,p123). Any development's essence is obtaining a style corresponding to the spatial space and its characteristics and attributes. The spatial dimension impacts development processes through the diagnosis of reality. Better investment and distribution of activities and services in appropriate ways that aim to eliminate economic , social problems such as poverty , unemployment; if either of them spreads, there will be no development (Al-Wardi.(2017). p. 12). Development does not stop at economic aspects only but extends to social and cultural aspects as well as the environmental aspect (Alwan.K.H.(2023).P678). "It is necessary to develop the capabilities of individuals , their multiple potentials, and this is represented by attention to the level of education, health, housing, facilities and clean environment" (Tala, (2020) p. 275).

3. The concept of spatial development gap:

The spatial development gap is defined in developmental terms as the difference between the actual development requirements of the economy , society





on the one side, on the other side, the actual balance achieved for the declared development projects. In other words, the development gap represents the distance between the potential, capabilities and resources available to the economy on the one hand and the life needs and aspirations of the general public on the other hand. The process of measuring the level of development and, thus, the development gap is a necessity stemming from the concept and objectives of the development process itself (Rashk, N,(2016). p. 36). The danger of the gap is exacerbated if it extends for a longer period without any radical remedies and reforms to its causes (Spatial development gap for Babylon governorate, 2022, p. 1.) The gap is exacerbated if it extends longer without any radical remedies , reforms to its causes (Spatial development gap for Babylon governorate. (2022). p. 1).

4. The role of decentralization in-To achieve development-Spatial

Decentralisation is delegating or transferring power from the centre to the administrative hierarchy's lower bodies (local organisations) or departments. At the same time, the right of control and direction remains with the centre or the head of the organisational hierarchy. Decentralisation has different types , dimensions. There is political, administrative, financial and economic decentralisation (Abdul Wahab, S.(2007) p. 1).

Decentralisation 'easily adapts development programmes to the needs and requirements of the local population, as it allows local people to prepare , implement development plans for their areas , provides the necessary support to mobilise energies , resources. This creates opportunities for the success of national development plans in achieving their objectives in a balanced manner that ensures a suitable life for the entire population and contributes to achieving regional balance and reducing economic , social disparities in urban and rural development





(Al-Shadidi.H.(2024). p491) Because the distribution and control of investments , resources in society is closely related to the distribution of decision-making power in it, and this depends primarily on the distribution of decision-making power between the centre and the periphery (Al-Khazraji.A.(2020) p. 12), to give decentralised planning a more influential role in economic life , social development when the community bears the burden of this responsibility (Al-Zarfi, S.(2008) p. 105).

Despite attempts in recent decades to implement spatial development policies, many developing countries still suffer from severe underdevelopment. They are not integrated into their countries' economic mainstream, let alone the increasingly influential global economy (Al-Shadidi, H.(2008), p. 4).

Community participation in development decision-making has major implications for all local stakeholders. Decentralisation of development means working and partnering with different areas of the planning authorities to respond to citizens' needs to achieve development, make development decisions, identify priorities and needs.

5. Social Fund for Development

The Social Fund for Development (SFD), launched by the Ministry of Planning in collaboration with the World Bank, seeks to improve the living conditions and opportunities for people with low incomes in Iraq by improving their access to basic services , creating short-term employment opportunities at the local level. The Social Fund for Development aims to promote stabilisation efforts, restore trust between citizens and the state, establish institutional procedures that promote social cohesion and attention to local development priorities. The community sub-projects are expected to have a positive social





impact by increasing the level of empowerment and social cohesion by engaging different components of society to think together about identifying common priorities , needs in their communities. The project targets communities within centrally selected districts, and the target communities within the Social Fund for Development project are selected according to the total population, poverty rate, and the level of services available to community members (Ministry of Planning / Social Fund for Development, 2024).

The Social Fund for Development are projects that aim to improve the living conditions of the less fortunate and promote balanced development, especially in rural areas. Its main objectives include the following:

1. Reducing poverty by providing sustainable development projects and programmes to improve income and employment opportunities for underprivileged communities.
2. Improving infrastructure by implementing projects to improve basic services such as water, sanitation, roads, electricity and education in deprived areas.
3. Empowering local communities by enhancing the role of the local community in planning and decision-making related to development.
4. Achieving balanced spatial development by reducing the development gaps between rural and urban areas through the equitable distribution of investments.
5. Strengthening local capacities to provide training and capacity-building programmes to improve individuals' and communities' skills is essential to sustainable development.





6. Encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises by providing funding ,technical support to encourage entrepreneurship , develop small projects that boost the local economy.

Among the most important indicators summarised from the previous concepts:

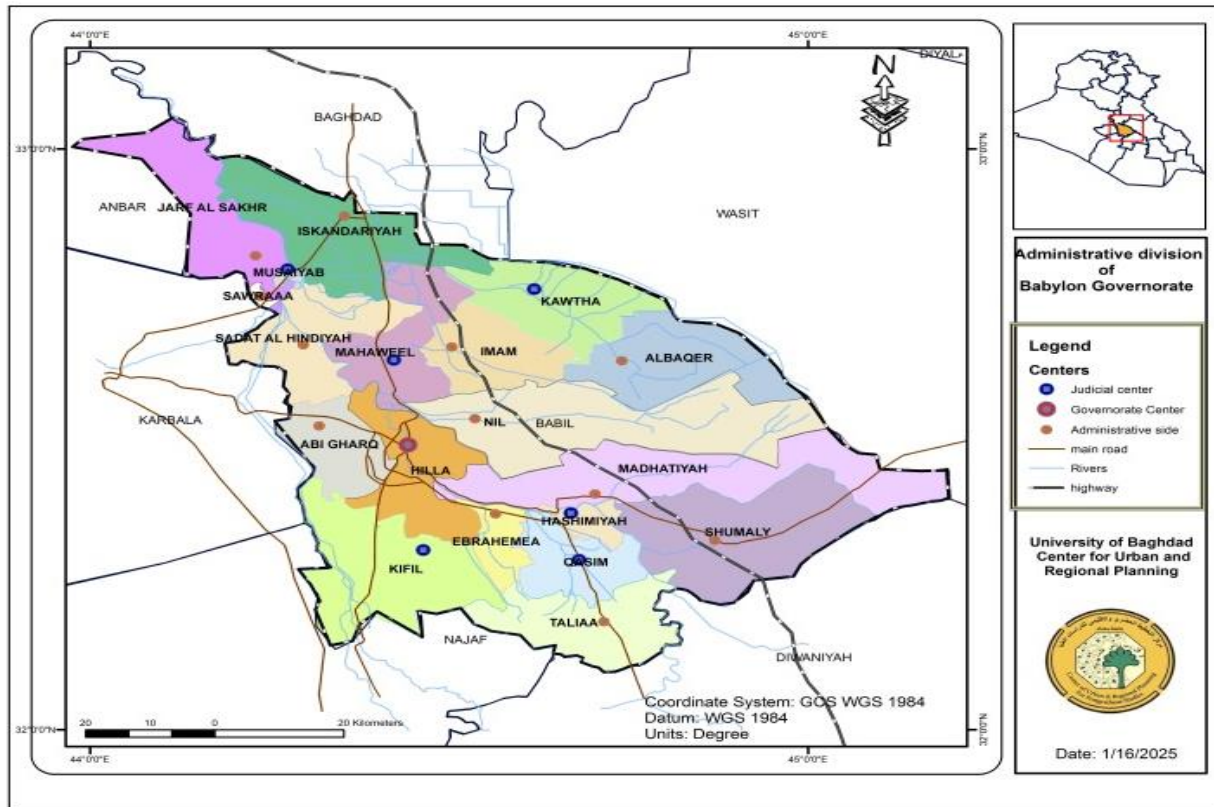
- 1- Decentralisation is a relatively recent method in Iraq, especially in the field of development through the delegation of local authorities and community participation in the various development process from planning, implementation, follow-up and evaluation.
- 2- The (SFD) is one of the means of decentralised development that directly targets the population in rural settlements for various projects to empower them and improve their quality of life, especially in providing services and improving their income level with small projects.
- 3- Rural settlements often suffer from a development gap compared to urban settlements, often in services such as schools, drinking water, roads, paved roads, electricity supply, etc. etc.
- 4- SFD projects minimise the spatial development gap for services in rural areas because they rely on data and participation of the local population in making development decisions.

6. The experience of the Social Fund for Development in Babylon Governorate, the first phase

Babylon governorate extends between the longitudes ($44^{\circ} 00' 00''$), ($45^{\circ} 13' 00''$), my circles of latitude($32^{\circ} 5' 00''$) , ($33^{\circ} 3' 00''$). The governorate's



distinguished location in the heart of the Middle Euphrates region and its sharing of administrative borders with six governorates, namely the capital Baghdad, Wasit, Diwaniyah, Najaf, Karbala , Anbar, Babylon Governorate consists of (7) districts distributed over (19) A district as shown in the map (2),with a total area estimated at (5308) km², representing 1.2% of Iraq's area of(435052)km²



Map 1. Location and administrative division of Babylon Governorate

Source: Researcher's work based on the program GIS.

7. Agricultural components

Babylon province has great agricultural potential in terms of fertile land, water resources and workforce, which makes the province the most important region in productive and intensive agriculture due to its location in the sedimentary plain, the passage of the euphrates river and its main branch, the Shatt Al Hilla, which cuts through the province in the middle, its main branches,



irrigation canals , sewage network, these features made Babylon province an agricultural advantage compared to other provinces. The most important agricultural products in the province are:

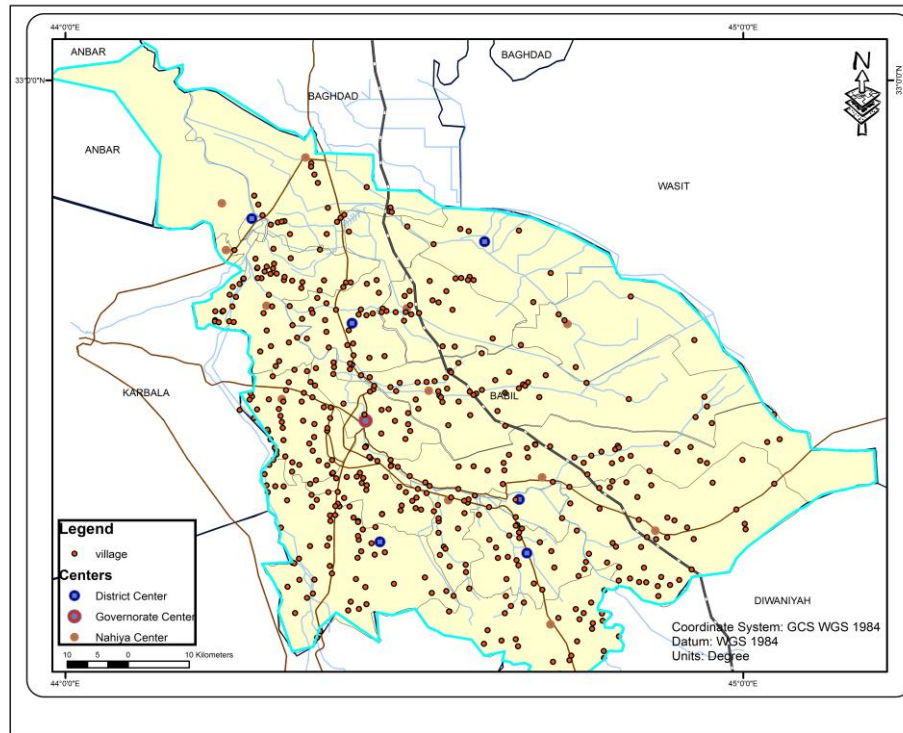
- A. Strategic cereal crops / wheat / barley / yellow corn / rice.
- B. Winter and summer vegetable crops.
- C. Industrial crops such as cotton, sesame and sunflower.
- D. Fodder crops.
- E. Palm and fruit orchards.

The spatial structure of the agricultural environment of the governorate is characterised by the emergence of a strip of palm trees surrounding it from every side and its branching channels that feed the dating industry and the areas that consume it differently and form a green ring in the area connecting the main cities in the governorate when it has a high environmental value for the governorate. The irrigation network divides , spreads across these amazing areas to form an agricultural patch in which harvest fields , vegetables grow, fish ponds grow, and animals are raised (Babylon governorate spatial development Plan. (2022). p. 12).

8. General structure of rural settlements

The number of villages in Babylon governorate reached (463) villages distributed across all administrative units; Hilla district recorded the highest number of surveyed villages with (191) villages, followed by Hashimiyah district with (122) villages and Mahawil , Musayyib districts with (150) villages, as shown in the map (2).





Map 2. Spatial distribution of urban and rural settlements in Babylon Governorate.

Source: Researcher based on the GIS program.

Rural villages were divided into four levels, including the first level, which is the most important, rural villages with a population of more than (3000) inhabitants (33), non-essential service villages (197), daily service villages (150) and individual villages with less than 500 inhabitants (124), according to Table (1), which shows the structure of villages in Babylon governorate.

Table 1. Classification of rural villages according to basic service levels

Village level	Service Type	population	Number of villages	ratio
1	Primary service villages	More than 3000 people	33	6
2	Non-essential service villages	1001-3000	197	39
3	Daily service villages	501- 1000	150	30
4	Individual villages	less than 500 people	124	25

Source: Babylon Planning Directorate, Rural Development Strategy in Babylon governorate 2017

9. Targeted villages in the first phase

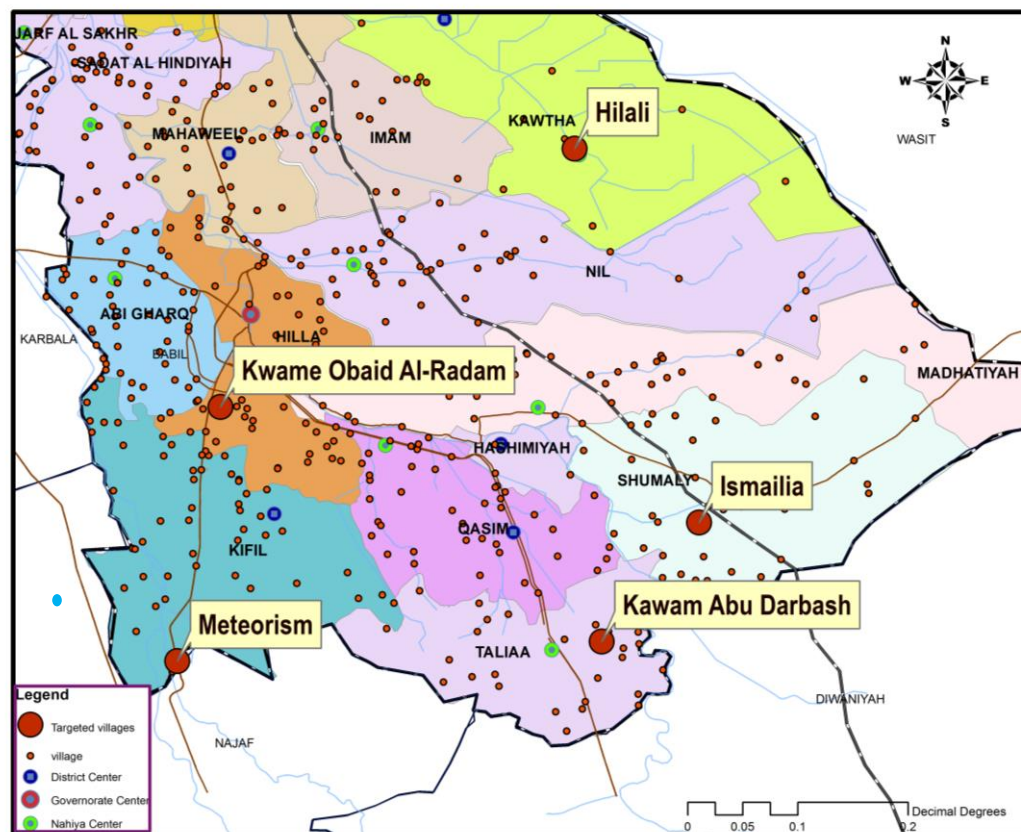
Five villages in the Babylon governorate, as shown in Table (2), were included in the first phase of the Social Fund for Development programs in the Babylon governorate based on a number of criteria, including deprivation of services and population size. Villages located within a distance of (2 km) from the original target villages were also included to benefit from the services that will be provided to the original villages, where the number of villages reached (9) villages, bringing the total number of villages that will benefit from Social Fund for Development projects to (14) villages. In contrast, the population that will benefit from these services reached (37,886) individuals. As shown map 3.

Table 2. Names of villages targeted by the Social Fund for Development in Babylon Governorate

T	Administrative unit	Village name	population	Standard (points)	Village type	Far from the original villages (km*)
1	Vanguard	Kwam Abu Darbash	1748	120	Original	
		handsomeness	1551		Adjacent	1.8
		Kwam Abu Abdullah	3524		Adjacent	1.1
2	Al-Shomali	Ismailia	3408	110	Original	
		Abu Tarnan	411		Adjacent	1.4
3	The Baqir	Hilali	10047	110	Original	
		The Baqir	3278		Adjacent	1.4
4	The sponsor	Meteorism	3014	100	Original	
		Partnership	2633		Adjacent	1.1

					nt	
5	The solution	Kwame Obaid Al-Radam	3203	95	Original	
		Imam Bakr	1630		Adjacent	1.5
		Barham Al-Mansour	1304		Adjacent	1.9
		Mohammed Sakb	2135		Adjacent	1.4
Total			37886			

Source: Researcher based on The Fund Social For development branch Babylon For the year2022



Map 3. Villages covered by the Social Fund for Development for the first phase
Source: Researcher based on the GIS program

According to the Social Fund for Development, the targeted villages' planned activities include agriculture, provision of services (gas, electricity, and water),



building and construction, public administration, defence, social security, education, and health.

10. Work mechanisms in the Social Fund for Development

The Social Fund for Development is one of the means of decentralisation to bring about spatial development in deprived areas and those most in need of activities , services and reduce the gap in activities , services in direct contact with the community that aims to improve living conditions by improving their ability to access services and employment opportunities at the local level , by promoting community participation of individuals , groups development process that aims to increase the level of empowerment and social cohesion by involving the various components of society in identifying priorities , needs in their communities and from these processes:

10.1. Election of members of community committees:

The work is carried out by electing representatives of the villagers, the number of (12) members and not less than (2) women, and the participation of all members of the village who have the right to nominate and determine the election conditions that those who have the right to participate in the election must not be less than 18 years old, in representing the local community according to special forms provided to the residents of the original target villages under the supervision of the Social Fund for Development team for follow-up, supervision and coordination. Picture (1) shows the participation in the electoral process of representatives of the local population.



Picture 1. the process of electing members of community committees and determining development priorities for the targeted villages

Source: Social Fund for Development / Babylon Branch 2024.

10.2. Project selection and prioritization stage

Selection of project priorities the people of the targeted villages participated in the process of selecting the priorities of the projects that reflect the need of the villages for services for different strata of society, including men, women and youth, through the special form under the supervision of the Social Fund for Development team and the election method, which includes prioritisation according to the choice of the local population of the targeted villages, the summary of the selected projects was included in the elections of the targeted villages as in table (3).

Table 3. Proposed project priorities

Administrative unit	Priority	Vanguard area	Al-Shomali District	Al-Baqir District	Al-Kifl District	Hillah Center District
The Village		Kwam Abu Darbash	Ismailia	Hilali	Meteorism	Obaid Al-Radam
Project priority	1	Establish a school	Water complex	Establish a health center	Water complex	Water complex
	2	Water complex	Road network construction	Water complex	Electricity network maintenance	Establish a health center
	3	Establish a health center	Establish a health center	Establish a high school	Road network construction	Establish a high school
	4	Road network construction	Electricity network maintenance	Create a communications tower	Establish a high school	Electricity network maintenance
	5	Electricity network maintenance	Establish a school	Road network construction	Establish a health center	Create a stadium
	6	Create a stadium	Create a stadium	Electricity network maintenance	Create mGames city	

Source: Researcher based on the first phase report of the Social Fund for Development 2022.

We note from Table 3 that the local community has selected a set of projects according to their vision and aspirations that will bring spatial development to the targeted villages according to the scope of service for rural settlements (5) with a population of 21,429 in addition to the rural settlements (8) neighbouring settlements that can benefit from these services with a population of (16,466), The projects that have been approved for inclusion in these villages within the first phase according to the degree of priority in the table () according to the amounts allocated to the villages in the balance of the Fund's Babylon branch and as in the table 4.

Table 4. projects approved and under implementation within the Social Fund for Development for 2023

Administrative unit	Vanguard area	Al-Shomali District	Al-Baqir District	Al-Kifl District	Hillah Center District
The Village	Kwam Abu Darbash	Ismailia	Hilali	Meteorism	Obaid Al-Radam
Project	Establish a school	Road network construction	Water complex	Water complex	Establish a school
	Road network construction	-	-	-	-

Source: Researcher based on the Social Fund for Development 2025.

11. The impact of the Social Fund for Development projects.

There is no doubt that the decentralised system has provided an opportunity to apply and implement the laws issued in the exercise of the governorate's and regions' role in the development, decision-making, implementation of all projects plans that they wish to implement, expressing the aspirations and goals of their residents , that achieving their desires is done through the materialisation of development goals in plans that express the population's orientations. Through these developmental directives, we reach the developmental planning ideas to achieve natural and functional integration between humans and the environment, which includes directives for the development of natural , environmental resources, developmental directives are set in determining the criteria for use in order to achieve optimal utilisation of these resources.

The impact of the Social Fund for Development in the process of spatial development and minimising development disparities:

1. Community participation in the development process is one of the principles of democracy in urban and regional planning. Participation can empower

decision-making that affects the population's needs and aspirations , minimises the development gap.

2. Representation of different cultures and social groups to obtain comprehensive and fair visions to meet residents' wishes in choosing their development priorities.
3. Contribute to enhancing communication and interaction between residents , stakeholders in the planning process helps build strong bonds.
4. They can improve the quality of decisions and needs , implement them more effectively because they have accurate insights into their needs , desires for development.
5. A decentralised planning policy can strengthen support for development projects , plans, contributing to their long-term sustainability and success.
6. Contribute to increasing the transparency of planning processes, thus increasing the trust between the planning authorities and the local population.
7. Prioritise service projects that will reduce the spatial development gap identified by the local population and available statistical data.

The Social Fund contributed to providing various population directives for activities and services in deprived rural areas that suffer from a development gap for the most basic services , by identifying them through community participation in a democratic manner by decentralised planning decision-making to prioritise the projects needed by the population to achieve spatial development.



12. Conclusions and recommendations

The research included a set of conclusions and recommendations:

Conclusions

1. The spatial development process is an integrated and conscious process that brings about development at all levels of development, including social, economic, urban changes, including rural settlements.
2. The decentralised development policy is one of the balanced spatial development strategies followed by the Ministry of Planning to promote development at various urban and rural levels.
3. Decentralisation allows development programmes to be easily adapted to the needs , requirements of the local population. It allows the population to participate in preparing and implementing development plans for their areas and provides the necessary support for their success.
4. The Social Fund for Development is one of the formations of the Ministry of Planning, which is concerned with short-term development for human empowerment, especially in rural areas.
5. Modern approaches to planning tend to involve the local population, which is directly related to the changes that occur during development and planning projects.
6. The idea of establishing the Fund based on spatial decentralisation in democratically making planning decisions to promote community participation and enhance individual confidence in planning institutions to identify development requirements and needs, especially in areas with a large development gap.





7. The Social Fund for Development programmes responded to the deteriorating services in the targeted villages, especially drinking water, health and education, electric power networks, and rural roads.
8. Considering the small number of targeted villages, this project does not fill the spatial development gap needed by the local community.

Recommendations

1. Follow the decentralised policy in making development decisions to identify the needs and desires of the local population , ensure the success , continuity of the planning process.
2. The Social Fund for Development should be one of the decentralised ideas that promote community participation in decision-making and setting development priorities.
3. Providing support , expanding the work of the Social Fund for Development with modern technological methods to enhance community participation due to the cost of time , effort during the participation process.
4. Focusing on the role of decentralisation in providing basic services and development projects through a holistic , balanced approach aimed at achieving social justice , reducing poverty and unemployment.
5. Strengthening spatial decentralisation through other more extensive development programmes to accommodate the actual need for development by enhancing community participation, exchanging opinions and ideas, identifying the spatial gap for development and determining its planning priorities.



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