

The Role of Municipalities in Controlling Epidemics: A Case Study on COVID-19 in Lebanon

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Rational

- Municipalities constitute the bridge that connects the government with the population.
- They translate national policies and regulations into action at local level.
- Their role during crisis should divert from traditional work to emergency support
- Unfortunately, in the absence of clear and well-rehearsed guidelines, municipalities' response in case of epidemics in Lebanon may range from the felt presence to the virtually absent.

Objectives

The **objectives** of this study are:

1. To document the level of preparedness/reactivity of municipalities in Lebanon during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To identify the barriers that impeded taking public health initiatives during emergency operations, and facilitators supporting innovative initiatives.

Aim: To develop a strategic “road map” to optimize the response to future crises at local levels in Lebanon.

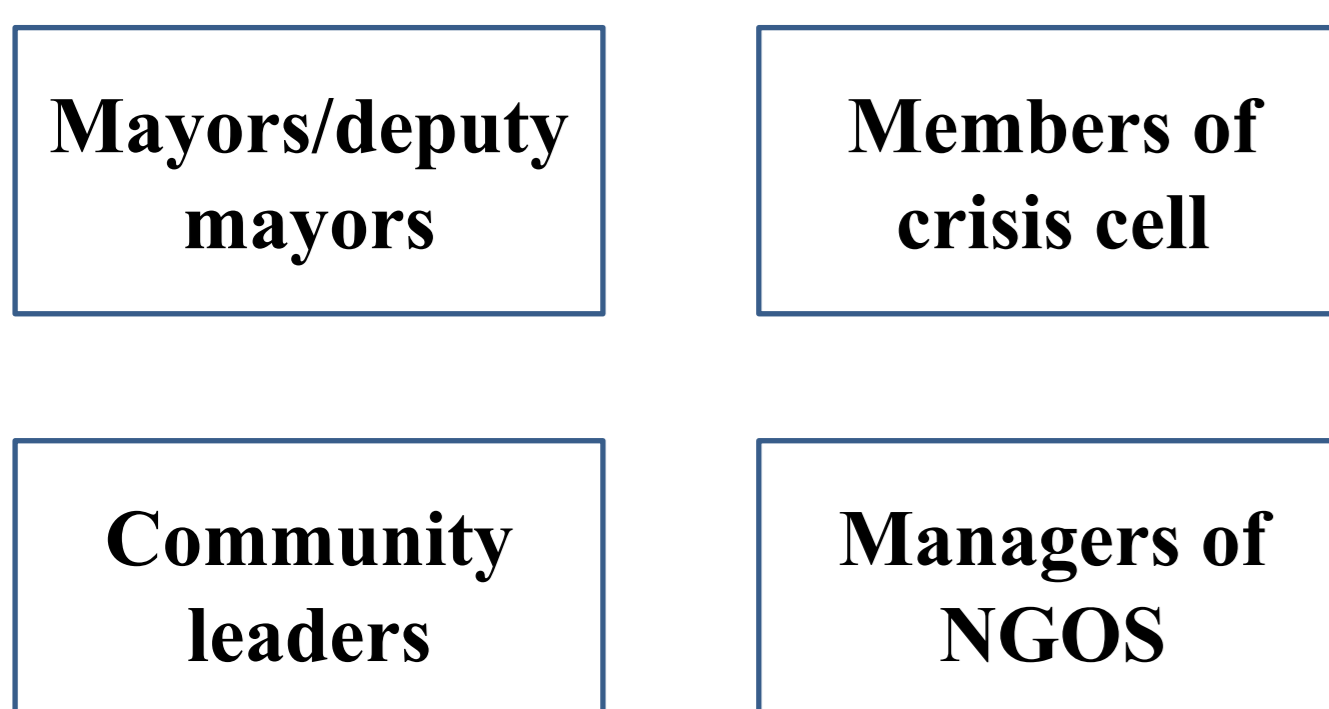
Methods

Study Design

A qualitative case study using in-depth semi structured interviews with key-informant was conducted.

Selection of Municipalities

“Purposive selection” was used to select municipalities taking in account geographical, socio-cultural, and demographic characteristics as well as perceived activity profiles. Target population included:

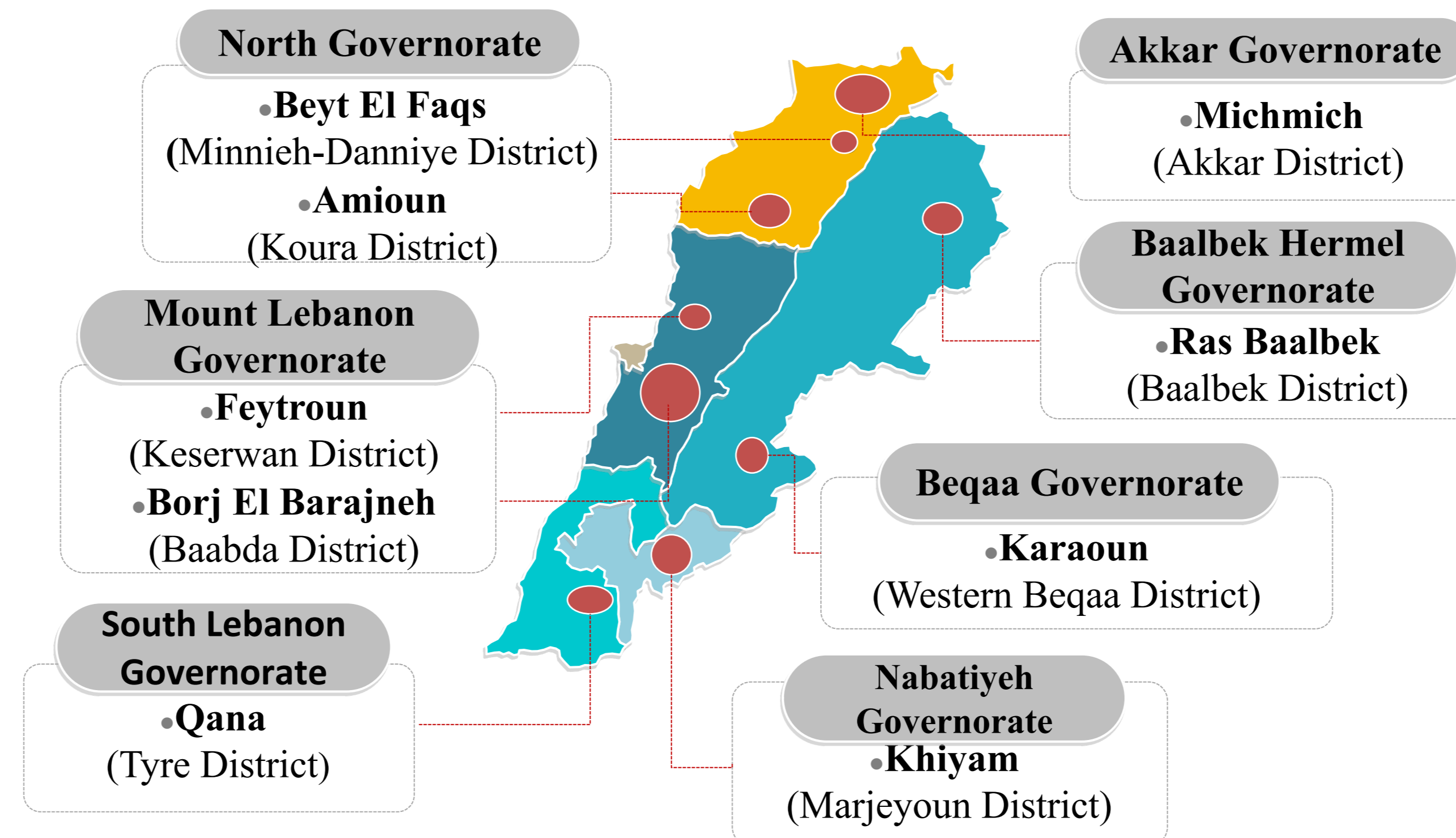


Data Analysis

Themes and subthemes were generated. Constant comparative analysis was adopted to explore and identify recurrent themes. Data saturation principle was attained.

⇒ A total of **27-indepth interviews** from nine municipalities in Lebanon were conducted.

Distribution of Selected Municipalities per Governorates and Population Density



Findings

Outcomes	Partial/Inadequate Response				Adequate Response				
	Beyt El-Faqs	Michmich	Feytroun	Ras-Baalbek	Amioun	Borj El-Barajneh	Karaoun	Khiyam	Qana
Infection control and prevention	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Isolation site				■		■			■
Free PCR testing					■		■		■
Relief assistance	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Free COVID-19 medication	■				■	■	■	■	■
Homecare management of cases	■				■		■	■	
Supply of medical equipment	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Providing 24/24 electricity								■	
Overcoming reporting flaws						■		■	
Psychologic support							■	■	■
Vaccination					■				

Conclusion

- Successful municipalities were able to overcome the scant resources and the absence of governmental support through good governance, community engagement, and resource sharing.
- The socioecological model revealed several loopholes at all levels which impeded some municipalities from responding effectively.
- Decentralized and fragmented decisions during crisis yield heterogeneous and unfavorable outcomes.
- The pandemic widened the inequity gaps in the society with rural areas being more impacted.
- The national preparedness plan should consider the capacity gaps among regions.

Public health Implications: Roadmap

Individual

- ✓ Strengthen the capacity of municipalities through appointing competent and qualified members
- ✓ Foster cooperation across municipalities to promote coherent response
- ✓ Invest in capacity building for municipal police, community workers, and professionals

Organizational

- ✓ Optimize health system functions (active surveillance, lab capacities, risk communication)
- ✓ Establish primary care access points in rural areas
- ✓ Provide supportive environment and employ retention strategies to HCPs
- ✓ Foster coordination between the public and private healthcare sectors

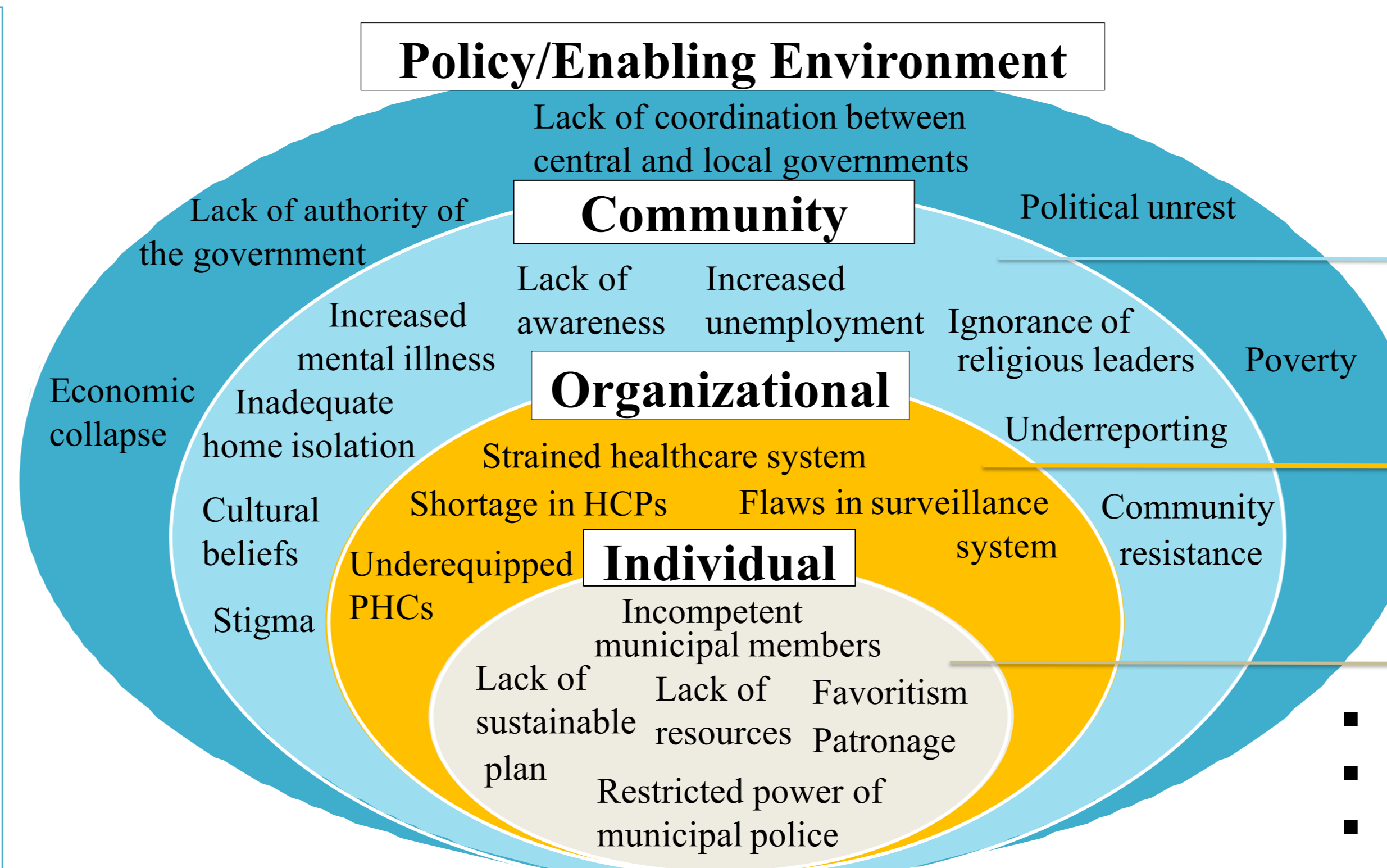
Community

- ✓ Adopt a “**Whole-of -society**” approach
- ✓ Proactively communicate timely and accurate information using the right channels without increasing fear
- ✓ Encounter stigma through raising awareness and addressing the discriminatory behaviors

Policy

- ✓ Enforce coordination between national and subnational governments
- ✓ Set allocation criteria for resource distribution guided by regional priorities
- ✓ Advocate for decentralization law to grant municipalities wider authorities
- ✓ Allocate special grant schemes for municipalities during crisis

Ecological Model: Barriers and Facilitators



Community

- Social support and empathy

Organizational

- Effective role of PHCs

Individual

- Increased donations
- “Whole of society approach”
- Sufficient human resources
- Credible source of information
- Competent municipal members
- Employing unique epidemiological skills