



FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU REGIONAL TRUST FUND 'MADAD'

"مدد": الصندوق الائتماني الأوروبي



Supporting Governance from Below

Effective local engagement of and within communities in northern municipalities in Jordan and the role for local civil society.

Implemented by



July
2019

This research was produced with the financial support of the European Union Regional Trust Fund 'Madad' and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its contents are the sole responsibility of ARDD and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commissioning Parties.



ARDD

النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development

Supporting Governance from Below -

Effective local engagement of and within communities in northern municipalities in Jordan and the role for local civil society.

July, 2019

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About Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development - ARDD

The Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) is a civil society organization that seeks to foster transformative change towards an empowered, resilient and just society in Jordan and the Middle East. The organization supports marginalized individuals and communities in acquiring and enjoying their social, political and economic rights. Since 2008, ARDD's fight against inequity has evolved from legal empowerment to reflect the interconnected structural issues facing the Arab world. Our vision is to empower the Arab World to create a democratic society where all have access to justice, regardless of gender, creed or status.

About Qudra Programme

The EU Madad-funded Qudra Programme has been implemented since 2016. The programme works with refugees, displaced persons and host communities in four countries bordering Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

As a whole, the programme seeks to strengthen the resilience of Syrian refugees, IDPs and host communities in response to the Syrian and Iraqi crises by working in five key areas:

- Improving school infrastructure and access to extracurricular activities;
- Expanding and improving basic vocational skills;
- Strengthening social cohesion through community-based services;
- Strengthening the capacities of local administrations;
- Promoting dialogue and exchange of experience among the key stakeholders of the action.

In all these areas, the programme draws on the experience of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Spanish Cooperation, Expertise France (EF) and Hungarian Interchurch Aid (Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet/HIA) to develop and implement shared European solutions.

The Programme is implemented through the following four Modules:

- SO1 "Education Infrastructure" is mainly addressing the insufficient education infrastructure to achieve better schooling conditions and improves access to extracurricular activities (e.g. sports) for host communities and refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey;
- SO2 "Skills Training" is addressing the insufficient preparation of the target group for a better occupational future to achieve better skills and qualifications and to contribute to better livelihood and broader perspectives for the future in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey;
- SO3 "Social Cohesion" is tackling the social tension among the host communities and refugees to enable less competition for resources and services, and allow for a better coexistence. Thus, it strengthens social cohesion through access to information and community-based services in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey;
- SO4 "Supporting Local Administration" tries to assist overwhelmed local state administrations with resources and capacity development to achieve better service delivery and also contributing to reduce the pressure for the target group on resources and services in Jordan and North Iraq;
- SO5 "Facilitating Dialogue and Dissemination" concentrates on creating platforms for dialogue on international, regional and local levels to induce dialogue on disputed and/or unaddressed relevant issues to use the regional potential for a better comprehension and to enable mutually acceptable regional and local solutions.

The Programme has a total budget of EUR 82.4 million, financed by the EU Madad Fund (EUR 74.6 million) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (EUR 7.8 million).

Supporting Local Administrations in Jordan

The Module SO4 “Supporting Local Administration” is implemented in Jordan by the two leading institutions of the Spanish Cooperation, the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and International Development (AECID) and the International and Ibero-America Foundation for Administration and Public Policies (FIAPP).

The Spanish Cooperation has been present in Jordan for more than twenty-five years joining efforts with national actors and civil society in support of Jordan’s socioeconomic development and particularly in the construction of strong national institutions.

The extent of the Syrian crisis has seriously impacted not only the capacities of Jordan to address the humanitarian crisis but also to continue to advance in the path to development of the country and its people.

Jordan is hosting approximately 1.2 million Syrians, of which 659,593 are registered as refugees. Around 79% of registered Syrian refugees live in host communities (96% of whom live in northern and central Jordan), while around 141,000 live in camp settings.

The massive influx of refugees continues to present the Government of Jordan and public authorities and adds enormous pressure on national service delivery with significant challenges in the quality provision of public services, particularly in critical sectors such as health, education, water and municipal services.

Despite the limited financial capacities of local authorities, municipalities in the north of Jordan are hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees who outnumber residents in certain locations. Providing for their needs has heavily affected local finances, increasing government expenditure for public services.

In Jordan the Spanish Cooperation supports the improvement of the financial sustainability of the municipalities of Mafraq, Sarhan and Ramtha. With this support the three municipalities are better equipped and able to provide good quality public services to host communities and refugees alike that are in line with implementation of Jordan’s decentralization law. More specifically, the support is focused on organizational development, financial management and fiscal autonomy, as well as the reduction of energy expenditure. By fostering greater interaction and participation in budget issues among public entities, civil society and communities, the measures aim to strengthen social cohesion. The overall goal is to enable municipalities to efficiently manage their budgets, excel in operational management, and to put in place participatory decision-making features involving both local authorities and local populations.

The Spanish cooperation is fostering the capacities and resources of local authorities in the following key areas:

- Developing and implementing tools and methodologies to reduce energy expenditure in the municipalities;
- Improving the skills of managerial and technical staff from municipalities for municipal financial management;
- Strengthening social cohesion and local population participation for the provision of municipal public services;
- Improving coordination between municipalities, governorates and the Ministry of Interior in line with the impact of the decentralization law in local governance.

Executive summary

Governance from below – listening to and representing the voices of people through local participation in decision making and ensuring accountability towards local communities - is crucial for sustaining peace and security, for ensuring sustainable development and for fostering social cohesion. This report explores how local civil society can contribute to local participation and engagement of local communities, in response to and in accordance with the 2015 Decentralization Law and the Municipality Law.¹ ARDD (2016) understands civic participation as the engagement and active awareness of people in ongoing development of and by their communities. This differs from other conceptualizations of civic participation which tend to frame it in terms of wider political participation through more formal structures.

In this report, ARDD draws upon lessons learned from two years of continuous work with local civil society and local communities in three municipalities in the north of Jordan (Mafraq, Sarhan and Ramtha) – including women, youth, and refugees – with the goal to increase their participation and local engagement. This project, Ma'an Lenabne: Empowering Communities through Political Engagement is part of Qudra, an EU-funded regional initiative for strengthening the resilience of displaced persons and their host communities in response to the Syria and Iraq crises. The primary activity consisted of community initiatives which started with carefully selecting, partnering with and training 7 CBOs that were working with youth, women, and refugees and were strongly rooted in local networks. Tools were provided to support their engagement with communities and in developing roles, relationships and responsibilities that underpinned the formulation and development of bottom-up initiatives to address local communities' concerns and needs.

The report explores the many challenges and opportunities that exist for local engagement and participation by community members - including youth, women and refugees - within their communities and the municipalities. It contributes to understanding the potential roles civil society can play to further support effective local engagement by and of communities. The research draws upon:

- 1) Lessons learned from community-based initiatives, supported throughout this project;
- 2) Focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries of the participating CBOs (local community members including Jordanian nationals and Syrian refugees, including youth and women);
- 3) Formal consultations with main stakeholders;
- 4) In-depth interviews with people working within Jordan's local civil society.

Key findings

One of the main challenges for participation identified within the FGDs, interviews, and consultations was the weak institutional capacity of local government officials and the lack of trust community members have in them. Beneficiaries said it was difficult to communicate with local government officials and associated this with a complex bureaucratic culture and lack of responsiveness to community members. Consultations with stakeholders reinforced this finding.

There is a lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of elected government officials among community members. This relates, in part, to the recent implementation of the Decentralization Law and points to the need for long-term efforts to build up trust and increase experience on the part of local officials, as well as communities. From this experience, ARDD concludes that local CBOs and local media should have an important bridging role, helping

¹ The latter only refers to the role of civil society once, in Article 5A3.

to clarify and disseminate information about roles and responsibilities regarding local governance.

Participants in FGDs who had not taken part in the community-initiatives had little understanding of the decentralization law itself - including what the law means and what the roles of elected members are - and were unclear about how the law could be used to address their local needs and concerns, both as individuals and community members.

By contrast, participants with former experience in the community-initiatives had gained a more comprehensive understanding of decentralization and the ways of making their local needs and concerns heard and acted upon. They had, in particular, explored the ways that CBOs can amplify the voices of local communities. For instance, they shared experiences of networking with local partner organizations, local councils and other government officials. Programs for young people and women provided participants with opportunities to contribute and to develop innovative projects according to their priorities in a safe space, which enabled them to engage in bottom-up governance activities.

Ultimately, twelve community initiatives were organized with the support of ARDD and the Qudra Program. They provide ample evidence that local community organizations can play key roles and take on significant responsibilities:

- In developing and planning community mobilization and raising communities' awareness of their rights;
- In enabling individual community members to voice their concerns and needs and take steps to address them;
- In building better understanding and facilitating more constructive engagement between government officials and community members.

Our experience however shows that these gains can only be made if the right support is provided and CBOs have access to the necessary tools and guidance.

Main conclusions:

The report argues for ongoing support for CBOs to work within their communities in voicing and addressing their needs, in enhancing their credibility and in building up the trust of their stakeholders. Enduring institutional support is required to build and maintain local engagement, trust and civic participation, beyond often short term electoral gains, in order to sustain governance from below

Secondly, there is a need for clarity in Jordanian laws and regulations regarding the roles of CBOs, or which little mention is made. ARDD argues for including and stipulating the roles and responsibilities for local Civil Society in legislation to address this deficit. The experience of this project over the last 2 years has shown the considerable potential of CBOs for addressing and responding to the needs of their communities, including host populations and refugees.

In regard to the latter, refugee community members have specific local needs, for instance regarding difficulties accessing affordable housing, transportation, health and education services. Based upon consultation with stakeholders, the research team is aware of and respectful towards the sensitivities around including refugee voices in formally addressing their concerns. Local CBOs therefore need to be supported with the right advice, information and guidance regarding refugee needs and how to articulate these effectively with local authorities on their behalf. CBOs clearly have a crucial role to play in developing a comprehensive, transparent and accountable social protection system that serves all community members well.

1. Introduction

Governance from below is the process of encouraging participation and representation of all people living in communities. Inclusive local decision making and accountability towards local communities are crucial for sustaining peace and security and to ensure sustainable development.¹ Two years of working with CBOs (Community Based Organizations) and local communities – women, youth and refugees - have enabled us to formulate recommendations regarding their participation in local decision making processes. Further, this has allowed us to better comprehend if and how local civil society can play an active role towards encouraging inclusivity. The research considers local practices and perspectives – in relation to decentralization reforms – in order to increase knowledge in how inhabitants, CBOs and municipalities can be supported in being aware of and addressing the needs of local communities.

The research discussed in this report was conducted as part of the project “Ma’an Lenabne: Empowering Communities through Political Engagement.” This project is part of an EU-funded regional initiative, Qudra, aimed to strengthening the resilience of displaced persons and their host communities in response to the Syria and Iraq crises. In Jordan, the project is supervised by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and focuses specifically on regional development, with the aim to strengthen social cohesion through increased cooperation between public entities, civil society and the private sector and participation of community members. The municipalities Mafraq (governorate Mafraq), Sahran and Ramtha (governorate Irbid) are significantly affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. For instance, in 2015, 52% of the total population of Mafraq was Syrian refugees.²

The Municipalities of Mafraq, Sarhan and Ramtha are directly impacted, as hosting communities to Syrian refugees, and many services - such as water, education and health services - now need to be shared with their new community members. If not properly addressed, this can result in potential tensions. Moreover, at the beginning of the project, the three identified municipalities were identified as being in need of technical and budgeting support regarding local governance. ARDD’s role in this project has been to further promote civic participation through partnerships with, and among, Community Based Organizations that are already working in these areas.

The primary activity consisted of supporting community initiatives which started with carefully selecting, partnering with and training 7 CBOs (Community Based Organizations, see Table 1.1) working within the municipalities of Sarhan, Mafraq and Ramtha. These organizations were carefully selected for their work with youth and women and were strongly rooted in local networks, and based on their legal status, financial capacity, experience with local communities, and outreach capacity. Tools were provided to support their engagement with communities and in developing roles, relationships and responsibilities that underpinned the formulation and development of bottom-up initiatives to address local communities’ concerns and needs.

1 Ilcan, Suzan & Rygiel, Kim. (2015). “Resiliency Humanitarianism”: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp. *International Political Sociology*. 9. n/a-n/a. 10.1111/ips.12101.

2 Stave, Svein Erich and Hillesund, Solveig (2015). *Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market. International Labour Organisation and FAFO*. Retrieved June 15, 2019, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_364162.pdf

Table 1:

Municipality	Name of local Community Based Organization
Ramtha	Women 's Empowerment Association
	Khatwat Amal Charity Association
	Youth Without Borders Association
Mafraq	Al-Kiram Association for Families and Orphans
	Jordan Association for the Care of Orphans
Sarhan	Tawasel Association for Family and Childhood Development
	Child Welfare Association

The concept of decentralization has a central role in this report. The 2015 Decentralization Law was established to further support local engagement and participatory decision making. Yet the role of civil society in this process was only mentioned once within the related Municipality Law. However, coordination, networking and cooperation between governmental bodies, the private sector and civil society is a necessary prerequisite towards inclusive governance. Civil society organizations – as grounded in and therefore deeply aware of the communities they are based in – are essential partners in local development, in the promotion of human rights and in social protection.

In the spirit of fostering partnerships among CBOs, the Jordan National NGO Forum (JONAF) has been established by ARDD and valuable partners. JONAF is a coalition of national non-governmental civil society and community based organizations working in tandem with national and local governmental actors and decision-makers – including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Planning, Senate and Municipalities. JONAF facilitates coordination among members and provides a joint platform to facilitate our members' work and help members to efficiently and effectively address key issues of common interest.

Essentially, this report also looks beyond decentralization, as the project enables us to draw upon best practices and lessons learned through working with these communities. The research considers how and why particular community members (youth, women and refugees) might not be fully included and what opportunities there are - on behalf of local civil society - to more effectively include them through effective local engagement of and within communities.

2. Objectives of the study

The goal of this research is to comprehend how social cohesion can be improved and how the provision of municipal services can become more bottom-up, participatory and transparent. It aims to further comprehend how dialogue between community members (Jordanian nationals and Syrian refugees), civil society organizations, and local government bodies can be encouraged to increase opportunities to raise concerns and to establish a better life for all. The main objective of the research is to explore how local CSOs can be supported and what reforms might be necessary for the further implementation of bottom-up governance.

In line with previous research on women's leadership, ARDD³ understands civic participation as

³ ARDD (2016) *Civic Engagement: the Key for Women's Political Participation*

engagement and awareness of people from where they are situated in the ongoing development of and by their communities. This differs from other conceptualizations of civic participation which tend to frame it in terms of wider political participation through more formal structures. Civil society is understood as community-based organizations and institutions, distinct from government and the private sector that are able to express and represent the will of community members.

ARDD understands decentralization as the “the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, area-wide, regional or functional authorities, or non-governmental private or voluntary organizations.”⁴ This concept is important considering recent changes in Jordan’s governmental structure.

Jordan’s 2015 Decentralization Law introduced governorate councils as largely locally elected advisory bodies and increased their executive role. Closely linked to this is the Municipality Law which oversees municipal councils and “delegates similar limited legislative powers to local authorities.”⁵ Paradoxically, whereas the 2015 Decentralization Law and the Municipality Law were established to reinforce local involvement, there has not yet been in-depth research that further explores the experiences of citizens, other community-members and communities at large on behalf of whom these laws have been established.

Prior analysis on these reforms did find a discrepancy between the administrative and financial power of the governorate and local councils – reinforcing persistent financial dependency on the centralized government.⁶ The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) points to the importance of including local CSOs and the participation of women and youth through the establishment of “institutional mechanisms [that] can play a constructive role in the identification of needs and priorities in their community”.⁷

Essentially, the role of civil society in reference to decentralization is only mentioned once, Article 5.A.3 of the Municipality Law states:

“Draft programs and follow-up on their implementation to achieve sustainable development with the participation of local communities. Managing all local services, facilities and projects it is mandated with through its staff and contractors, or jointly with other municipalities or any other competent entity or through setting up companies owned by the municipalities, either alone or in cooperation with the private sector, along with local community organizations on condition of the Minister’s prior approval of this” (translation by the International Election Commission of Jordan).⁸

Municipalities might and/or might not work in cooperation with the private sector and civil society, on the condition of being approved by the designated Minister, suggesting that much of the deci-

in Karak. ARDD - Legal Aid Research Report. February, 2016. https://ardd-jo.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/study_research.pdf

4 A. Rondinelli, Dennis & R. Nellis, John. (2008). Assessing Decentralization Policies in Developing Countries: The Case for Cautious Optimism. *Development Policy Review*. 4. 3 - 23. 10.1111/j.1467-7679.1986.tb00494.x

5 Sowell, Kirk (2017, August 24). Jordan’s Quest for Decentralization. Retrieved July 16, 2019, from <https://carnegie-mec.org/sada/72905>

6 MENA SELECT (Middle East North Africa Sustainable Electricity Trajectories) Energy Pathways for Sustainable Development in the MENA Region. Background Paper: Country Fact Sheet, Jordan Energy and Development at a Glance. Retrieved from https://menaselect.info/uploads/countries/jordan/Country_Fact_Sheet_Jordan.pdf

7 OECD (2017) *Open Government Review: Jordan. Towards a New Partnership with Citizens: Jordan’s Decentralization Reform*, p. 17.

8 International Election Committee Jordan (2019) [https://iec.jo/sites/default/files/5MunicipalitiesLaw-2015EN.doc%20\(1\)_0.pdf](https://iec.jo/sites/default/files/5MunicipalitiesLaw-2015EN.doc%20(1)_0.pdf)

sion-making power regarding this matter is still based in Amman.

The experience of this project over the last 2 years has shown the considerable potential of CBOs for addressing and responding to local needs of their communities, including host populations and refugees. The research draws upon the knowledge that this engagement brought about on how citizens, CSOs and municipalities can be supported in voicing concerns in favor of further implementation of bottom-up governance.

For ARDD, bottom-up governance is best understood in terms of governance from below and citizenship from below. The concept of governance from below is an attempt to analyze the way that local political dynamics are the outputs of national decentralization efforts. This theory argues that rather than dictate changes at the local level, macro-level decentralization is the catalyst for various, "independent local processes."⁹

Therefore, in order to effectively conceptualize and implement decentralization, it is important to "understand how local government works - and in particular when it works well and when badly." This includes careful consideration of civic and political participation at the local, and for this project, the municipal level. Citizenship from below adds a layer of analysis to this theory that also incorporates understanding the potential for inclusion of excluded groups in a certain locality. Social exclusion is connected to disenfranchisement and contributes to growing inequality. Essentially, the theory of citizenship from below is an attempt to address the ways that all people residing in a specific place can play a role within its growth and development.¹⁰

Accordingly, the primary objectives of this research are the following:

- 1) To further explore challenges and opportunities for engagement and participation by local community members, including youth, women and refugees within their communities and the municipalities they are residing in;
- 2) To further comprehend the role and potential for CSOs in supporting effective local engagement of and within communities.

3. Research Methodology

This report is based upon a mixed research-approach, drawing mostly upon qualitative and data collection and analysis. A desk review was conducted, exploring academic inquiries and reporting conducted on this area. Furthermore the research draws upon:

- 1) Lessons learned from community-initiatives supported throughout this project;
- 2) Focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries of the participating CBOs (local community members including Jordanian nationals and Syrian refugees, including youth and women);
- 3) Formal consultations with main stakeholders;
- 4) In-depth interviews with people working for Jordan's local civil society.

The four main frameworks through which local governance structures and community based organizations are analyzed throughout this project are the following:

9 Faguet, Jean-Paul, 2005. "Governance from below: a theory of local government with two empirical tests," LSE Research Online Documents on Economics 475, London School of Economics and Political Science, LSE Library.

10 Kim Rygiel and Ilker Ataç and Anna Köster-Eiserfunke and Helge Schwiertz, 2015. "Governing through Citizenship and Citizenship from Below. An Interview with Kim Rygiel," *Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies*

- 1) Direct accountability v. indirect accountability: For example, “indirect” accountability can be envisaged through re-election or non-election of community members to their representatives depending on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the overall performance of these representatives, while “direct” accountability is practiced through the official legal mechanisms to file a complaint or initiate action against any irregularities, excesses, violations or damages before the competent official, supervisory or judicial authority.
- 2) Direct participation v. indirect participation: Here, indirect participation can be seen “through the participation of local community members who have the right to vote and to participate in the electoral process and to select representatives on their behalf, and to participate directly in their own participation in public debates on the various developmental and service aspects of their communities.
- 3) Inclusion v. exclusion: Citizen v. Resident: Herein lays a differentiation between the concepts of “resident” and “citizen.” This project focuses on all social groups within the communities covered by the project, including refugees, as part of the service and development reality that must be taken into account in the planning and decision-making process. This is without claiming that these refugees have any political rights or claim such that are limited only to Jordanian citizens who hold Jordanian nationality and who have the right to vote.
- 4) Civic engagement v. political participation: This is an important distinction between the concepts of “civil participation” and “political participation.” The first refers to the improvement of the services, social and economic reality of a community for all its inhabitants, while the concept of “political development” refers to the involvement of citizens exclusively in the political process, whether through voting, political parties, or other forms of political action.

3.1 Community-based initiatives

Between March and June 2019, seven local Jordanian CSOs launched 12 community initiatives with the support of ARDD. The participating associations, based in the municipalities of Ramtha, Mafraq and Sarhan, targeted all community members – including Jordanian nationals and Syrian refugees - with a specific focus on women and youth.

Intensive training sessions included components regarding decentralization and the potential roles of civil society towards local, sustainable development, strategic planning, and effective communication and towards accountability and governance. Tools were provided to support their engagement with communities through the development of bottom-up initiatives to address local communities’ concerns and needs.

The initiatives engaged with a wide range of topics: community cohesion, decentralization, governance from below, transparency and accountability, information sharing, public participation of women and youth (young men and women). They provided tools to make communication with local officials easier, such as lobbying and campaigning for social causes and assessing the needs of local communities. The following table presents more detailed insight into these initiatives:

Table 2:

Organization	Description of Initiatives
1. Al-Kareem Association for Families and Orphans	A. Exploring the potentials for decentralization to bring about local change, the role and potentials for women and young people and how to further involve young people and women in development.
2. Jordan Association for the Care of Orphans	<p>A. Highlighting the role of communities in support of the decentralization law and their participation in advocacy. This initiative consisted of introducing their beneficiaries to an advanced understanding of lobbying and organizing campaigns to address and gain wider support for amending local issues.</p> <p>B. ‘Pioneers in my community’ came forth out of the organizations’ experience with the challenges that their female beneficiaries face regarding participation in local governance. Success stories of women leaders’ involvement were shared in order to inspire other women and to foster a strong support network, to further coordinate and establish local change.</p> <p>C. ‘Community awareness campaign on community participation, participatory budgeting and the work of the Greater Mafrqa Municipality’ dealt with community participation and participatory budgeting, also to stimulate the involvement of community member in contributing to discussions regarding local budget priorities.</p>
3. The Tawasel Association for Family and Childhood Development	A. Found that one of the most important factors hindering the participation of their community members – Syrian refugees and Jordanian nationals – was the lack of awareness within their community on how to set their needs as priority. The initiative included information campaigns including the distribution of brochures, as well as sessions about decentralization, participatory budgeting, Jordan’s electoral process and the role of different councils regarding local change
4. Child Welfare Association	A. To inform community members about decentralization and community engagement this initiative consisted of awareness campaigns, for instance regarding participating, through social media outreach.

<p>5. Women’s Empowerment Association</p>	<p>A. Identified low voters turn-out among the women in their community as well as their limited trust in local and municipal councils. For this reason they established two initiatives to raise awareness about the necessity for these women to voice their concerns and the available ways for doing this. The initiative targeted young men, young women and housewives, all entitled to vote.</p>
<p>6. Youth-without-Borders association</p>	<p>A. Identified their young communities’ lack of knowledge about civic rights to participate in decision-making. The initiative that followed was focused on raising awareness about the importance of participation for societal change as well as young people’s ability to influence local decision-makers.</p>
<p>7. Khatwat Amal Charity Association</p>	<p>A. Establishing a network that is linked with members of the municipal council. A dialogue session was organized with the president of the municipal council, in which the women could submit their most pressing needs and recommendation for change including the necessity for paving streets, maintaining health facilities and public transport.</p> <p>B. Mobilized young people to set up a survey, mapping community priorities of young people.</p> <p>C. In cooperation between Youth Without Borders Association and the Khatwat Amal Charity Association a platform was created which serves as link between local community members and the local councils, and aims to enable community members to address problems, needs and service priorities.</p>

3.2 Focus Group Discussions

After the evaluation of a pilot FGD, a total of six focus group discussions were conducted. Per municipality (Sarhan, Ramtha and Mafraq), ARDD conducted 2 focus groups, one with 7 Jordanian community members and one with Syrian refugee community members. This focus on national background, relates to two factors:

- 1) In the pilot FGD that was attended by Jordanian and Syrian nationals, it was noted that the Syrian refugee community members were reluctant to speak up, perhaps also since they believed that civic participation did not apply to them.
- 2) As will become further evident in the results sections, refugee community members often not only have local needs that differ from those of Jordanian nationals, but also other challenges regarding civic participation.

In each FGD, there were two participants younger than 25, two participants in between 25 and 45 years old, and 3 participants 45 years or older. The project team aimed for at least 4 women out of each 7 participants.

In the beginning of each FGD, participants were given a detailed explanation of what the topic and reason for the group interview was, as well as their rights (informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality) in contributing or not to the research.

The themes by which the FGDs were guided were as follows:

- 1) General challenges within their community regarding addressing local needs and concerns;
- 2) Personal experiences regarding addressing local needs and concerns;
- 3) The capacities of CBOs to represent their needs and concerns;
- 4) Recommendations regarding coordination between individuals, CBOs, and municipalities;
- 5) Decentralization - understanding and potentials for civic participation;
- 6) Evaluation and sustainability.

3.3 In-depth Interviews:

A total of 6 in-depth interviews were conducted with people working with the participating civil society organizations to further explore the challenges they had encountered prior, during, and after the project and how these were addressed or mitigated. The themes by which the in-depth interviews were guided were as follows:

- 1) General challenges facing the people of this region in communicating their concerns and make themselves heard to the municipality;
- 2) General challenges faced by municipality in responding to community needs;
- 3) CSO capacity, experience or attempt to address the problems in the region;
- 4) The role that informal groups (clan elder, mukhtar) can play in improving municipal performance in community service;
- 5) Decentralization - understanding and potentials for civic participation;
- 6) Strengthening the coordination and cooperation between citizens and residents
- 7) Evaluation and;
- 8) Sustainability.

3.4 Formal Consultation:

In April 2019, a formal consultation was held with representatives of the community based initiatives, members of the three Municipalities in the project, and representatives of relevant ministries. The project's initial findings were validated by interventions on behalf of the stakeholders, and pointed to the following main conclusions:

- 1) Projects like Qudra are very relevant and needed in order to increase the efficacy of implementation of decentralization;
- 2) Local councils should, and are ready and willing to, have a significant role in decentralization – however, municipalities are in need of support and resources in order to continue decentralization efforts;
- 3) Civil society, especially local CBOs, are in need of proper awareness raising and empowerment in relation to their role in decentralization;
- 4) Various stakeholders share sentiments that there is a lack of clarity on their roles within decentralization;
- 5) Youth and women have a great deal of potential in engaging with local governance and development, and should be empowered to do so;

- 6) Civil society is the link between citizens (and all individuals residing in Jordan, including refugees) and the government – especially considering the sensitivity of the inclusion of refugees in decision making processes, it is proposed that this inclusion is done directly through CBOs and civil society;
- 7) It is important to clarify how to structure the relationship between elected officials, government structures, and civil society;

4. Results

In the following section the research team will first draw upon analysis of the FGDs, in-depth interviews, and consultations with stakeholders. The experiences of the participants who had not taken part in the community-initiatives provide an interesting contrast to the findings and lessons learned by those who had prior involvement, as becomes clear in the second section of this chapter.

4.1 General challenges faced by local communities in effective community participation:

4.1.1 Institutional Capacity of the Municipalities

In all focus groups, community members mentioned the lack of speed by which the municipality responded to the community's needs. This sometimes meant that members of the community would resort of other informal procedures to address local issues.

A practical example was provided in one Focus Group (Jordanian community members in Sarhan): Several participants mentioned that they had reached out to the municipality to complain about the presence of stray dogs and to ask the local government to take actions in order to protect them. However, the municipality only took action when a member of the community was wounded.

Participants also highlighted how the busy schedules of local leadership - for instance because of external meetings and field visits - would further hinder the access of community members to local officials. This was also related to the role of the mayor.

All participants - Syrian and Jordanian men and women from all age groups - made mention of what they believed as the mayor's power regarding local decision making and the unresponsiveness towards addressing the community's needs. Moreover, the lack of administrative authority delegated to the rest of the staff further impedes the progress towards local change and increased bureaucracy.

This is a symptom of the lack of community outreach mechanisms within municipalities, which prevents municipalities from accepting feedback from the local community and engaging effectively with the communities' needs and recommendations.

4.1.2 Trust between municipality and community

FGD-participants of both nationalities highlighted that they believed that clearly communicating with the community was a key role and responsibility of the municipality. They stated that this

communication requires significant improvement. Moreover, organization and communication between different local government departments is perceived as inefficient. Addressing this requires the development of awareness on the community level and the individual level, which includes strengthening communication and building trust between the municipality and its constituents.

Many participants believed that some government officials were prioritizing personal gains over public interest, as they perceived that there was a difference in the municipalities' response to the implementation of services (such as lighting problems) and the immediacy or rapidness of action.

Limited trust is in part also to be explained in reference to the implementation of the Decentralization Law that has been taking place since 2015. Results of the FGDs point to the need to build up trust and increase experience, on the part of local officials as well as communities, over time. This also becomes evident in remarks relating to the electoral process during the first local elections in 2016: in casting their votes, people would have based their votes upon tribalism and affiliation rather than on merit. This is perceived to have had negative effects on the functionality and accountability of the municipalities.

Many participants also made remarks regarding the budget of the municipality. This includes lack of clarity regarding the local budget and the mechanisms behind distribution, bureaucracy and administrative and financial corruption and avoidance of presumed responsibilities by local leadership.

4.1.3 Community Awareness regarding decentralization

Participants in FGDs who had not taken part in the community-initiatives had little awareness regarding the roles and responsibility of the municipality for addressing their needs and serving the public interest. There was also little understanding of the purposes of the decentralization law: this includes what the role of elected government officials is and lack of clarity about how the law can be of practical use for addressing local needs and concerns, both in terms of individuals and community members.

4.2 Specific challenges faced by women, youth and refugee communities in terms of civic engagement:

4.2.1 Women within municipalities: challenges and opportunities

Many of the challenges mentioned around female participation in the FGD were related to restrictions on daily life. These were often associated with conservative values and customs and restricted what, at first glance, might seem to be relatively simple procedures such as approaching an official entity to file a complaint or request a service. It was mentioned in the FGDs that instead, many women within the community would approach a male family member regarding their request. Women participating in the FGD, however, also said that this practice was something from the past and that more direct opportunities to contact officials have become available to women residing in the municipalities of Mafraq, Sarhan, and Ramtha.

The majority of FGD-participants (men and women) in Mafraq, Sarhan, and Ramtha believed that there were fewer opportunities for participation for women than for men, but there were also women who actively engaged towards social change. In Sarhan, the name of one particular woman was mentioned as she had launched several community-based initiatives. There was also mention of other women who are members of the local council.

The presence of female government officials has the potential to lower this threshold. The absence of women in the public sphere often means there is less awareness of women's concerns and perspectives. This often results in women's needs being less effectively addressed. CBOs working with female community members can play an important bridging role between women and the municipalities, because of their contextual awareness of the socio-economic local needs of women. Moreover, this awareness is also crucial to further move towards inclusive participation of women.

4.2.2 Youth within municipalities: challenges and opportunities

Many participants - those younger than 25 years old but also older participants - made mention that the views of young community members were often not taken seriously and that authorities often fail to effectively include and address their specific needs, for instance around the lack of employment and educational opportunities and the lack of public spaces.

However, this lack of inclusion of young people's voices can also be related to the lack of sufficient awareness among young persons on how to engage. Knowledge on and tools for engagement can have a significant benefit, as will become clear in the next section.

4.2.3 Refugee communities within municipalities: challenges and opportunities

Formal consultations with stakeholders reinforced the awareness for sensitivity towards formally including and addressing refugees' needs. Yet it is important to foreground that the aim of this project is to explore how to strengthen local engagement, in order to overcome local everyday difficulties of community members including Syrian refugees. This is even more important, given that refugee community members have specific local needs, for instance regarding accessing education, health services and affordable housing.

In regards to difficulties around participation, Syrian refugees emphasize the lack of clarity about if and when they are in- or excluded in the agenda of the municipality. It is unclear to many Syrian refugees whether local announcements, projects and activities equally apply to them. This not only highlights the need for awareness-raising among Syrian refugees about the criteria that municipalities follow in regard to including refugees, but also the necessity of municipalities to be clear to what extent the refugee communities are included in local development plans and goals.

In the FGDs, the need and potential for intermediaries was highlighted. The laws regulating decentralization emphasize the role of supporting committees, including a permanent local community committee. In formal consultations with governmental stakeholders ARDD came to the realization that there is limited space to include refugee community members into these committees. A potential intermediary could be an employee assigned by the municipality/government to directly engage with the Syrian refugee community, in order to enhance the knowledge of Syrian needs on the part of the municipality.

Local civil society has a key intermediary role as they can articulate refugee needs, relating to local governments' responsibilities and roles, to local authorities. In order to do this effectively, local CBOs need to be supported with the knowledge on how to engage with local government officials - on behalf of their fellow refugee community members. They also need to be supported with the right advice, information and guidance regarding specific refugee needs. Further, increasing the collaboration between municipalities and CBOs working with refugee communities also enables to essential factors that may create better opportunities for Syrian nationals and coherent approaches to respond to their needs.

This point was stressed upon as a result of the problematic support that the municipality offers to CBOs and the scarcity of follow-up mechanisms. Of the CBOs that are most aware of the needs of the local community, many face challenges due to the fact that there is an increasing number of CBOs and their dependence on the municipality for operating within the locality. The FGDs pointed out that the few organizations that address the needs of Syrians and Jordanians are not given much attention by their municipality and at times it impedes their work and progress.

Within the limits of the space that allows Syrians to be engaged in work legally, it is vital to make them aware of taking advantage of the opportunities they are eligible for and from which they could benefit socially and economically. Syrian FGD participants also called for the importance of sustainability and of keeping projects going.

Furthermore, economic empowerment plays an important role in pushing forward various types of local engagement, including the social and cultural spheres. For creating more chances for Syrians to participate economically and create stability, an age-related adjustment was suggested to the programs of CBOs and the different organizations was necessary. Older FGD-participants with a refugee background stated they were as much in need to gain experience, learn, and build new skills as much as the youth need, and would also emphasize their responsibilities towards their families.

Increased collaboration between Syrians and Jordanians is not only crucial to understand each other: it can also contribute to the collective interest. It is the role of the authorities, including the municipalities, to coordinate and to link the local community together, as well as to strengthen relations by demonstrating effective leadership skills, rather than widening the gap between the local communities through unproductive policies.

4.3 The role and development of civil society organizations

The project highlighted the fact that local charities have undertaken their own development of initiatives in cooperation with the local community, in light of the training they have received from ARDD.

The project partners have noted a significant benefit on behalf of youth who participated in this project, including an increase in their understanding of decentralization and local governance, planning and strategizing and participatory budgeting. Based on the initiatives implemented by local partners, as part of the capacity development section of the program, it has been observed that the workshops were able to raise awareness among young people and emphasized the importance of the work of community organizations.

This program was an opportunity for them to familiarize themselves with the work of the organizations and associations on the ground, which motivated them to develop innovative projects and provided them with a safe space for activities related to civic and political participation. ARDD witnessed massive improvement in the relationship between CBOs, between partners and ARDD, and between project partners and government officials. Further, it is evident that project partners have grown to better understand their specific role in decentralization, and their general understanding of decentralization structures in comparison to the beginning of this project.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations at the legislative and administrative level

1. Establishing permanent and sustained institutional support to build and maintain local participation, in addition to building confidence and activating civic participation beyond short-term electoral gains in order to maintain good governance;
2. Increasing clarity in relation to Jordanian laws and regulations and regarding the roles of organizations and community institutions. ARDD also calls for the inclusion and delineation of the roles and responsibilities of local civil society in legislation to address this lack of inclusiveness;
3. Creating a link between all stakeholders, including international agencies, local governance, local communities – encompassing all residents of a given area – and civil society organizations, within the decentralization project;
4. Improving participatory planning and budgeting at the national and Municipal levels in order to ensure fair and just distribution of resources;
5. Providing an interactive community media platform for effective communication and strengthening relationships with local communities;
6. Distinguishing between the concepts of “residents” and “citizens:” the former refers to all residents temporarily or permanently in a given area, who use its infrastructure, receive its services, engage in its economic and social activities and should be included in its cultural reality, planning process, and decision making. The concept of citizens refers to the holders of citizenship who are dependent on their State and enjoy full rights and privileges and all responsibilities and duties under their respective Constitution and laws.

5.2 Recommendations at the level of local civil society institutions

1. Activating the principle of local humanitarian action in order to effectively contribute towards the sustainability and growth of developmental and humanitarian efforts;
2. Building the capacity of local civil society institutions and designing training programs on decentralization and its role in development at the economic and civic levels;
3. Building the capacity of local institutions to play a central role in developing a comprehensive and transparent social protection system that is accountable to serve all members of society;
4. Assisting local civil society organizations that provide safe spaces for young people and women to interact with and participate in public affairs programs, and promote the electoral culture of local communities;
5. Strengthening coalitions between local organizations – such as the work of JONAF – for the sake of joint efforts and joint advocacy, and to ensure better coordination when it comes to issues such as responding to community needs, including the needs of refugees and emerging issues related to women and youth;
6. Establishing institutional partnerships with CSOs.

5.2 Recommendations at the community level

1. Strengthening community solidarity initiatives and collaboration;
2. Promoting citizenship based on rights and duties;
3. Reassuring the awareness of young people and women on the importance of the work of community organizations working to implement programs on social democracy and civic participation;
4. Ensuring the inclusion of refugee voices within local development through more effectively organized work of CBOs and CSOs;
5. Expanding democratic awareness so that electoral outputs on a programmatic basis allow accountability and community follow-up rather than on traditional grounds, such as tribe or region;
6. Distinguishing between the concepts of “civil development” and “political development:” the first refers to the improvement of the services, social and economic reality of a community for all its inhabitants, while the concept of “political development” refers to the involvement of citizens exclusively in the political process, whether through voting, political parties, or other forms of political action.

6. Conclusion

ARDD continues to explore ways to contribute to the empowerment and development of the local civil society and local communities. In this report we explored how in three municipalities in the north of Jordan (Mafraq, Sarhan and Ramtha) meaningful participation and engagement – including women, youth, and refugees – can be stimulated. By working towards the aforementioned recommendations, and building upon the work that has been done throughout this project, Ma’an Lenabne: Empowering Communities through Political Engagement, we hope to continue supporting this.

ARDD recognizes the central and unique positioning of local community based organizations in local governance and development. In continuing to work towards strengthening bottom-up social and development efforts, and in line with the findings of this report, ARDD will work with relevant stakeholders to continue clarifying and strengthening the role of civil society in community development, and specifically, the role of civil society in the process of decentralization. This will include an emphasis on improving the overall understanding of decentralization, as well as exploring ways to create more participatory and inclusive strategic planning at the local level and effective communication between local actors and other stakeholders.

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Programme description

The initiative « Maan le Nabne » is part of the activities implemented within the framework of the Qudra Programme – Resilience for Syrian refugees, IDPs and host communities in response to the Syrian and Iraqi crises

Implemented by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Spanish Cooperation (AECID), Expertise France (EF) and Hungarian Interchurch Aid (Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet/HIA)

Responsible

ARDD

Content Coordination:

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Design And Photo credits

ARDD / Qudra Programme

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This magazine was produced with the financial support of the European Union Regional Trust Fund 'Madad' and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) its contents are the sole responsibility of Spanish Cooperation and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commissioning Parties.



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