



Decentralizing Education in Jordan

Seizing the Opportunity to Improve the Quality and Equality of Jordanian Schools

Research Team:

E.J. Karmel, Head of Research
Ali al Batran, Project Coordinator
Mohammed Hussainy, Director

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with His Majesty King Abdullah II's vision of a decentralized state, the legislature is currently reviewing a draft decentralization law that would redefine the role of local authorities in governance. While the draft law's implications for Jordan's education system are negligible, the law will be succeeded by regulations and further legal amendments on relevant frameworks to complement and clarify implementation. Given that possible plans for education decentralization are already being discussed, education will likely be addressed in the follow-up process.

This is not necessarily good news. With the draft law's focus on governorate level authorities as well as the direction of current discussions on education decentralization, it is likely that education will be devolved to the governorate level through the empowerment of governorate directorates. This type of education decentralization in Jordan could yield negative effects on the quality of the Kingdom's schools. Indeed, a survey of case studies concerning education decentralization initiatives in other countries reveals that devolution has produced little positive impact on school quality and that in many cases, particularly in developing countries, it has yielded *negative* effects.

Case studies of projects that have delegated authority over education to the school level, however, have demonstrated much more encouraging effects on the quality of education. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is well aware of the potential benefits of school level decentralization and has started to work toward empowering Jordanian schools. In partnership with the Embassy of Canada in Jordan, the MoE is currently building the capacity of schools so that they can assume greater autonomy. Through its School and Directorate Improvement Project (SDIP), the MoE has built capacity for school based improvement in every public school in the Kingdom and has constructed inter and intra school mechanisms to increase the effectiveness and accountability of schools through the introduction of Jordan's School and Directorate Development Program (SDDP).

Yet, despite these significant efforts by the MoE and the positive impact that the SDDP has had on the capacity of Jordanian schools, there remains a disconnect between the government's legislative process of decentralization and the MoE's work on building school capacity. Even though the SDDP reforms are helping to decentralize education in a very positive manner, they are not being linked with the administrative process of devolution. The legal reforms are being seen as an administrative process and the SDDP reforms as a component of an educational one. These efforts need to be connected. By building local capacity, the MoE has already taken the first and costliest step toward a more effective form of decentralization and improved student outcomes.

Future policies pertaining to education decentralization need to move away from their focus on the governorate authorities and build upon the MoE's work. They should capitalize on the capacity that has been built and take the next step toward decentralization by delegating greater human and financial resources to the schools along with responsibility for improved service delivery. This delegation of power, however, is a large step and many members of the central government remain unconvinced that schools are prepared to effectively take on greater responsibility. A transition period could, therefore, prove beneficial, for it would allow limited power to be transferred to schools so that bottom-up accountability can be fostered and school capacities can be further developed and proven adequate to support a larger decision-making role. As such, this paper proposes a low-risk and cost-effective plan to build upon the MoE's work and transition from capacity building to school autonomy.

Recommended Next Step

- **User Fees:** The government should pass an administrative decree allowing schools to directly collect user fees (as they did until 2009). The collected fees would then go directly to schools' budgets to complement the limited funds with which schools are already provided. Jordanian parents who participated in our research indicated that they would be willing to pay a small fee of approximately 10 JD per annum if they were also able to monitor how the money is spent.
- **School Councils:** Oversight and accountability for spending would be ensured by transforming school councils and expanding their role. The councils would contain the principal, elected teachers, and community members. Together they would decide on school expenditures.

Benefits of Proposal

- **Short-Term Benefits:** With the council's freedom to use their budgets as they see fit, the user fees would allow schools to start to address immediate concerns such as repairs, professional development, lack of school supplies, and specific needs of the school's students.
- **Long-Term Benefits:** The plan would not only enhance the capacities of school principals and staff and help to increase the interest and input of parents and the wider community, but also demonstrate that schools are ready to take on increased responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Purpose.....	1
1.2 Methodology.....	2
1.3 Defining Decentralization.....	2
1.4 Kinds of Decentralization.....	3
1.5 Jordan’s Draft Decentralization Law.....	4
2. EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION IN JORDAN	4
2.1 The Implications of the Draft Law for Education	4
2.2 Should Jordan Decentralize Education?	4
2.2.1 Decentralization Is Not an End in Itself	5
2.2.2 Not Every Form of Decentralization Is Motivated by a Desire to Improve Quality ...	6
2.2.3 Not Every Form of Decentralization Will Positively Impact the Quality of Schools ..	6
3. EMPOWERING JORDANIAN SCHOOLS	7
3.1 The Importance of Capacity Building	7
3.2 Capacity Without Resources	8
3.3 The Disconnect Between Decision-Makers and Schools	9
3.4 Benefits of Empowering Schools.....	10
4. THE NEXT STEP	11
4.1 Overcoming Objections	11
4.2 Recommended Interim Plan	11
4.2.1 Reintroduce User Fees	11
4.2.2 Empower School Councils	12
4.2.3 Conclusion	13



As political development is the gateway to the full participation of all segments of the grassroots and civil society institutions in the various aspects of the development process, I assert here that political development should start at the grassroots level, then move up to decision-making centres, and not vice-versa.

– His Majesty King Abdullah II, January 26, 2005¹

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

Ten years after His Majesty King Abdullah II first expressed his support for decentralization, a law transforming his vision into reality is finally materializing. A decentralization law has been drafted and is now undergoing legislative review. Yet, as is often the first step toward decentralization, the law sets forward the principles of the new policy and outlines new structures of subnational governance, but it lacks a clear or detailed definition of power and responsibility regarding individual policy issues.² The next step, therefore, is to design more specific legislation and instructions that examine if, and how, each responsibility will be decentralized.

Within this follow-up process, the decentralization of education services will likely be tackled. Discussions within the government regarding possibilities for the future decentralization of education are currently underway, and the Minister of Education, Mohammed Thneibat, has mentioned the possible genesis of a new level of education administration at the governorate level. If education is indeed addressed in this subsequent legislative phase, it is important that discussions are mindful of the potential risks of decentralization. Even though education decentralization initiatives have produced positive effects in certain instances, in many cases – particularly in developing countries – they have yielded negative impacts on the quality and equality of education. These negative results are frequently the result of initiatives that are either undertaken for non-educational purposes, or else pursue a form of decentralization inconducive to enhancing the quality of education.

This paper assesses the prudence of education decentralization in Jordan. It examines the potential consequences of decentralization by comparing diverse forms of the process, their motivations, and their effects. It concludes that education should only be decentralized in Jordan if it is done so out of educational (rather than administrative or budgetary) motivations, and that the most appropriate form of decentralization for improving the quality of education in Jordan is delegating resources, autonomy, and accountability to the school level.

The MoE is also working toward school level decentralization and has already taken the first step in this process by endeavouring to foster the requisite local capacities to support increased school autonomy. With much enhanced capacities, Jordanian schools are increasingly ready to be given greater authority. The government should take advantage of the current decentralization momentum and concentrate on building from the MoE's committed work. It should exploit the developed capacities to decentralize greater administrative and fiscal control to schools. This power transfer, however, is a big step, and there remains significant resistance to it within the government. This resistance is centered around concerns over insufficient local capacity and inadequate mechanisms of accountability.³ Appreciating these prescient concerns about a drastic transfer of power, this paper concludes with a proposal to help transition from capacity building to greater school autonomy and, eventually, a form of stronger school-based management.

¹ His Majesty King Abdullah II, "Address to the Nation Announcing the Decentralization Plan," Amman, Jordan, January 26, 2005.

<http://www.kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/speeches/view/id/76/videoDisplay/0.html>

² Donald Winkler, "Understanding Decentralization," EQUIP2, April 2015, 5.

<<http://www.equip123.net/docs/e2-Understanding%20Decentralization.pdf>>

³ Identity Center, Interview with Dr. Ziad Abdulkareem Al-Nsour, Director of Professional Development Policies, Ministry of Education, Amman, May 31, 2015.



1.2 Methodology

This paper was conceived out of meetings that our research team held over the last two years as it conducted research about Jordanians' knowledge of decentralization and worked to disseminate information about the decentralization process. During these meetings, participants displayed widespread concern about the impact of decentralization on diverse social services, and particularly on education. As discussions regarding a decentralization law gained momentum, therefore, we began to focus on the law's possible implications for education. Reflecting our continued interest in improving the quality and equality of Jordanian schools, we concentrated on the potential of decentralization to further these aims.

With little existing literature on decentralization in Jordan, our research benefited from case studies of decentralization conducted in the region and in comparable socio-economic contexts. Throughout our desk research, we maintained a close relationship with the government authorities responsible for preparing the draft law and continually spoke with key stakeholders involved in implementing and monitoring the decentralization process. While they noted that discussions of education decentralization for the draft law were minimal, they confirmed that when plans were proposed regarding the possibility of education decentralization in the follow-up process, they fixated on creating a new level of administration at the governorate level. As a result, our research team initially focused on the efficacy of this type of education decentralization.

Concentrated on the legislative decentralization process and how new forms of subnational governance would affect education, it was not until we began to conduct interviews with the MoE, principals, and teachers that the Center was made aware of the tremendous amount of decentralization work that the MoE has already done through the SDDP.⁴ With the SDDP overlooked in previous discussions about decentralization, it became increasingly evident that different reforms are being compartmentalized. The legislative reforms are being seen as an administrative or political process and the SDDP as an educational process.⁵ As a result, even the Ministry of Education is not viewing school level decentralization as a viable approach for the legal process of administrative decentralization. Evidently there remains a large divide between this legal process and the efforts of the MoE to use school level decentralization as a means of improving the quality of education.

Given this unfortunate divide, the direction of our research shifted. In an attempt to bridge the gap, we began to focus on the viability of school level decentralization and to assess the reactions of principals, teachers, and communities to different strategies. With each of these groups, we held focus groups and subsequently conducted a phone survey with a representative sample of 500 Jordanians. Both of these methods helped us to better access the Jordanian public's views of education, decentralization, the work of the MoE, and this paper's consequent proposals.

1.3 Defining Decentralization

Decentralization describes a process through which powers, responsibilities, and resources are transferred from the central government to a subnational level. It is predicated upon "subsidiarity," an organizing principle arguing that central authorities should only perform subsidiary functions that cannot be executed effectively at a more local and immediate level.⁶ Subsidiarity recognizes that when public administrations are more closely situated to their citizens, they are more appreciative of the people's unique

⁴ See Government of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), "School and Directorate Development Program." <<http://www.erfke.ca/en/content/sddp>>

⁵ Identity Center, Interview with Dr. Khalwa Abu al Haija, Director of Training Department, Ministry of Education, Amman May 31, 2015.

⁶ For a more in depth discussion of "subsidiarity," See Walter B. Stohr, "Subsidiarity: A Key Concept for Regional Development Policy," *Regional Development Paradigms*, Vol. 3 (UNCRD, 2001).



demands and, thus, more capable of efficiently reacting to those needs. This principle applies at all levels, suggesting, for instance, that if a task can be performed by a school, decisions regarding it should not be pushed to a higher level.⁷ By bringing decision-making processes as close as possible to the communities that the decisions affect, decentralization carries the potential to enhance social justice, facilitate democratization and good governance, reduce poverty and unemployment, increase investment and business opportunities, foster greater social cohesion and political participation, and nurture the development of vibrant civil societies.

1.4 Kinds of Decentralization

Administrative Decentralization aims at transferring the position of decision-making authority and the responsibility for the delivery of select public services from the central government to other levels of government, agencies, or local branches of the central government. There are two major forms of administrative decentralization:

Deconcentration transfers decision-making authority – often by administrative decree – from a higher to a lower level of bureaucracy within the *same* level of government. The same hierarchical accountability is maintained between local units and the central government ministry or agency that has been decentralized. Deconcentration is often the first step undertaken by newly decentralized governments to improve service delivery. In terms of education decentralization, deconcentration involves reallocating decision-making authority within the Ministry of Education.

Delegation assigns – usually by administrative decree – decision-making authority for specifically defined functions to local units of government or agencies that are not necessarily branches or local offices of the decentralizing authority. In terms of education decentralization, responsibility is transferred to elected or appointed education governance bodies such as school councils, school management committees, or school boards.

Political Decentralization refers to a situation in which political power is moved either to regional or local bodies that are elected, or to administrative actors who are appointed and supervised by elected bodies. Political decentralization requires effective constitutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks to ensure accountability and transparency.

Devolution is a form of political decentralization. It involves a permanent – legal or constitutional – transfer of responsibility, decision-making, resources and revenues from a higher level of government to a lower, local level that enjoys substantial autonomy from the decentralizing authority. In terms of education decentralization, devolution transfers responsibility for education to lower levels of government, such as governorates, municipalities, or districts.

Fiscal Decentralization is the most comprehensive form of decentralization because it is directly linked to budgetary practices. It involves resource reallocation to subnational authorities. Fiscal decentralization touches upon all forms of decentralization, for reallocating responsibilities without assigning sufficient levels of resources to the newly empowered units will not result in effective decentralization.⁸

⁷ John Coons and Stephen Sugarman, *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Peter Rado, “Governing Decentralized Education Systems: Systemic Change in South Eastern Europe,” Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Foundations, 2010, 42.

<http://www.cep.edu.rs/public/Rado_Decentralizing_Education_final_WEB.pdf>

⁸ Robertson Work, “The Role of Participation and Partnership in Decentralised Governance: A Brief Synthesis of Policy Lessons and Recommendations of Nine Country Case Studies on Service Delivery for the Poor,” UNDP, New York, 2002.

<<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan006230.pdf>>



1.5 Jordan's Draft Decentralization Law

Even though decentralization has been on the government's agenda since His Majesty King Abdullah II first proposed it in 2005, more pressing issues of regional and national security pushed it toward the political backburner in the early 2010s. In 2013, however, the King reignited his vision by asking the government and parliament to start working towards the creation of a decentralization law once again. Since that time, there have been four draft decentralization laws, each of which was itself the culmination of numerous debates and revised versions. The most recent draft law has now been approved by the cabinet and submitted for parliamentary review.⁹

The draft law focuses on reworking the way governorate level administration functions. Currently, each governorate in Jordan contains a regional authority headed by a governor who is appointed by the prime ministry. The governor heads up a council that includes representatives of the ministries that work through field directorates in the governorates. In this system, the regional authorities act – with very limited freedom – on the central government's behalf.

The decentralization draft law in its current form would see the implementation of tandem councils in each governorate: a governorate council which would be 75 percent elected and 25 percent government appointed and an executive council that would include the governor (also appointed) and representatives of the directorates.

The executive councils, according to Article 5 of the draft law, would prepare strategic and executive projects, prepare the governorate budget (based on the sum allotted to it by the Ministry of Finance), prepare a yearly manual about the governorate's and its municipalities' needs, coordinate with municipalities and review their strategies, and take decisions to address public issues in governorates, especially with regard to public services.

The governorate councils, by contrast, would not be empowered to propose new policies. According to Article 8 of the draft law, their role would be limited to monitoring, discussing, and approving plans and strategies. While the governorate council would be responsible for reviewing and approving proposals of the executive council, the final decision would not be placed in their hands; if a disagreement between the executive council and the governorate council were to emerge, the draft law (Article 11) states that the matter would be referred to the prime minister, who would make the final decision.

2. EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION IN JORDAN

2.1 The Implications of the Draft Law for Education

The passing of the draft law would not profoundly change the situation of education in Jordan. The law does not discuss education in any detail, and the governorates are not explicitly tasked with any responsibility for education. However, while the law itself will have little effect on education, its accompanying laws and instructions could profoundly change Jordan's education system. In anticipation of possible education decentralization plans that could occur in this follow-up phase, it is important that we now begin to open up a dialogue about education. In this dialogue there must be sufficient space to examine the judiciousness of decentralizing education in Jordan and to ensure that if the government decides to decentralize education, it does so in an effective manner.

2.2 Should Jordan Decentralize Education?

In recent years decentralization has become a key feature of education reforms in many countries, and most Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

⁹ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Draft Decentralization Law No. () for 2015*. The current draft of the law is available through al Hayat Center.



countries have decentralized education in one form or another.¹⁰ The successes – or perceived successes – of these reforms have encouraged western countries and international organizations to adopt education decentralization as a key strategy for improving education services in developing countries. As a result, education decentralization programs have been implemented in diverse contexts, from South America to the Middle East.¹¹ The focus on decentralization is understandable given both its theoretical potential to enhance the quality of education services as well as the positive results that education decentralization has thus far produced in a number of Western countries.

However, education decentralization initiatives in less affluent countries have yielded neither clear nor even predominately positive results.¹² Even though a significant amount of theoretical and empirical research in the area of education decentralization has been conducted, there are many palpable gaps, particularly of studies covering the Middle East.¹³ Yet, the case studies that have been carried out in both the region and developing countries have produced key lessons that can guide Jordan through its impending discussions regarding the decentralization of education.

2.2.1 Decentralization Is Not an End in Itself

Extant case studies have highlighted that decentralization is often treated as an inherent positive and an end in itself. Positive outcomes are not, however, an automatic consequence of decentralization, but rather need to be thoughtfully planned for. Education decentralization only improves schools' efficiency, quality, and equality if the initiative is specifically designed to achieve these goals. Education decentralization rarely yields serendipitous results, and, in fact, risks exacerbating pre-existing issues regarding educational quality and equality if it is not formulated around educational ambitions.¹⁴

The treatment of decentralization as an inherent positive has become increasingly predominate, and the concept of decentralization is often merged with that of democratization to the point where the two are used almost synonymously.¹⁵ Such views are dangerous because they encourage countries to decentralize without sufficient thought for what decentralization is supposed to accomplish. In Jordan, there is an acute risk that education could be decentralized not with a focus on educational outcomes, but as a compromised half measure that gives lip service to international and monarchical support for decentralization.

If education decentralization is pursued based on these motivations and with mere decentralization as its end goal, it would be better for education to remain centralized. These shallow reforms could risk undoing the positive developments that have been accomplished during the last two decades of focus on education reform. They could also

¹⁰ Province of the Eastern Cape Department of Education, "IMBEWU II Programme: Literature and Best Practice Review on Educational Decentralization," August, 2004, 32.

¹¹ M. Fernanda Astiz, Alexander W. Wiseman and David P. Baker, "Slouching Towards Decentralization: Consequences of Globalization for Curricular Control in National Education Systems," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Feb. 2002): 66-88; and Hans Weiler, "Comparative Perspectives on Educational Decentralization: An Exercise in Contradiction?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* Vol. 12 (Winter 1990): 433-48.

¹² Marcia Bernbaum, "Decentralization: A Guide to Education Project Design, Evaluation, and Implementation Based on Experiences from EQUIP2 in Egypt, Georgia, Mali, and Malawi," EQUIP 2 Lessons Learned in Education, 2011, 9.
<<http://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EQUIP2%20LL%20Decentralization%20AAR.pdf>>

¹³ Nadia Nasser-Ghods, "What is the Effect of Education Decentralization on Student Outcomes in Egypt? An Analysis of Egypt's Education Reform Program," May 2006, 11. <www-econ.stanford.edu/academics/Honors_Theses/Theses_2006/Nasser-Ghods.pdf>; and Eastern Cape, Literature and Best Practice Review on Educational Decentralization," 33, 55.

¹⁴ Bernbaum, "Decentralization: A Guide to Education Project Design," 19.

¹⁵ Robin Chapman, "Decentralization: Another Perspective," *Comparative Education* Vol. 9, No. 3 (Oct. 1973): 128; and Frederik Fleurke and R. Willemse, "Approaches to Decentralization and Local Autonomy: A Critical Appraisal," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec. 2004): 523.



further complicate the relationship between Jordanians and decision-makers and increase the potential for corruption. If, however, decentralization focuses on addressing the problems currently preventing further educational development, the results could prove very beneficial. Approached correctly, decentralization could help the Kingdom to tackle key problems that have persisted despite intensive reforms.¹⁶

2.2.2 Not Every Form of Decentralization Is Motivated by a Desire to Improve Quality

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for decentralization. There are many forms of decentralization, and each reflects the unique motivations that push countries to decentralize. For instance, while the deconcentration of power within the same level of government and the devolution of power to lower levels of government are frequently fueled by politico-economic concerns, such as national level fiscal crises or democratization initiatives, the delegation of authority to schools is usually motivated by more educationally-focused reasons. School level delegation is often driven by the desire to improve efficiency, increase the quality of education being provided, or make schools more accountable to parents.¹⁷

The nature of the motivations – and, thus, the consequent type of decentralization that is chosen – is reflected in the results of the initiative. The more educationally motivated approaches bring decision-making closer to those who it affects. This proximity is crucial, for case studies have clearly shown that the closer decentralization transfers authority to the school and community the more likely it is to increase quality, equality, and effectiveness.¹⁸ While devolution shortens the distance between schools and policymakers to a greater extent than deconcentration, school level delegation can shorten this distance even further.

2.2.3 Not Every Form of Decentralization Will Positively Impact the Quality of Schools

Definitive answers regarding the effects of decentralization on the quality of education require significantly greater research (particularly in the developing world); yet, the evidence to date regarding the impact of school level delegation is the most extensive and encouraging.¹⁹ This increased amount of evidence may exist because the delegation of authority to schools is usually implemented for educational rather than political reasons and, as a result, the implementing authorities are more likely to monitor the process and evaluate its effectiveness. A number of pilot initiatives of school level delegation, for instance, have been accompanied by solid evaluations demonstrating positive impacts. Evaluations of large-scale school autonomy projects that utilized community-managed schools have similarly indicated that delegation results in small, but nonetheless positive, effects on parental participation, teacher and student attendance, and learning outcomes.²⁰ Cross-cutting international studies have not yet produced definitive data about the effects of delegation on education; however, the findings to date suggest encouraging results.

Devolution to lower levels of governance also offers strong *theoretical* benefits for improving the quality of education, but the empirical research hitherto conducted on devolution is the scarcest. This scarcity is likely due to both the political motivations that often underpin devolution initiatives, which do not encourage follow-up, as well as the

¹⁶ For more information on the current state of Jordanian public schools, see E.J. Karmel et al. "Securing Inclusive Education Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities: Cost Effective Steps for Addressing Gaps Between Legislation and Implementation," Identity Center, Amman, Jordan, April, 2015. <<http://www.identity-center.org/en/node/447>>

¹⁷ Winkler, "Understanding Decentralization," 3.

¹⁸ Bernbaum, "Decentralization: A Guide to Education Project Design," 45.

¹⁹ Alec Ian Gershberg and Donald Winkler, "Education Decentralization in Africa: A Review of Recent Policy and Practice," in B. Levy, and S. Kpundeh eds., *Building State Capacity in Africa: New Approaches, Emerging Lessons*, World Bank Institute, Washington DC, 2004.

²⁰ Donald Winkler and Boon-Ling Yeo, "Working Paper: Identifying the Impact of Education Decentralization on the Quality of Education," EQUIP2, 2007. <http://www.equip123.net/docs/e2-DecentQuality_WP.pdf>



holistic manner in which it often takes place, which renders follow-up more difficult.²¹ Moreover, the limited studies that have been conducted about devolution have not indicated that it can increase either the quality or equality of education. In fact, a number of cases, particularly in developing countries, have shown that devolution to subnational governments can be messy and exert a negative impact on quality and equality.²² Devolution can constitute a very complicated process, often occurring outside of the control of a country's ministry of education (unlike delegation, which is usually implemented and monitored by a ministry).

Deconcentration is the most common form of decentralization in developing countries, but it is the most limited in its implications (both in theory and in practice) of the three types and has not been shown to have a significant, positive impact on the quality of education.²³ More than representing a method of effective education decentralization, it constitutes a means of building an enabling environment for decentralization.²⁴ In effect, deconcentration is a first step toward decentralization and in Jordan it is a step that has already been taken.

3. EMPOWERING JORDANIAN SCHOOLS

If the Jordanian government does decide to pursue education decentralization to improve quality and equality, transforming schools into the primary units of decision-making (often called school-based management or site-based management) would prove the most effective strategy.²⁵ Not only, as discussed above, has school level delegation shown some of the best results worldwide and in developing countries in which extant administrative capacity is low, but it also offers strong potential to bridge the large gap that now exists between decision-makers and schools in Jordan. Appreciating the potential benefits of empowering schools, the MoE has started to lay the groundwork for this process. Since 2010 it has conducted trainings in schools across Jordan to ensure that principals, vice principals, and supervisors have the requisite capacity to assume greater control over their schools. This capacity building is crucial for the success of school empowerment.

3.1 The Importance of Capacity Building

A survey of prior decentralization initiatives in diverse contexts reveals that insufficient management capacity and inadequately trained local administrations and teachers render it difficult to realize the potential benefits of decentralization.²⁶ Capacity-deficits have repeatedly led to the failure of decentralization, particularly in developing countries, as subnational authorities have proved unprepared to assume the transferred functions.²⁷

²¹ Winkler, "Understanding Decentralization," 8.
²² Bernbaum, "Decentralization: A Guide to Education Project Design," 18; and Eastern Cape, Literature and Best Practice Review on Educational Decentralization," 33.
²³ Jeni Klugman, "Decentralisation: A Survey of Literature from a Human Development Perspective," UNDP Human Development Report Office, Occasional Papers, 1994.
<http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/jeni_klugman.pdf>
²⁴ Gershberg and Winkler, "Education Decentralization in Africa."
²⁵ There is considerable debate concerning whether school-based management involves a process of delegation or devolution. See, e.g., Ibtisim Abu-Dohou, "School-Based Management," *Fundamentals of Educational Planning* – 62, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, 1999, 26.
<<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001184/118487e.pdf>>
²⁶ EQUIP1 "Decentralization in Education," *EQ Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Sept. 2005)
<http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadf052.pdf>; and Building development capacities of Jordanian Municipalities – Baladiaty, "The Quest for Decentralizing Government in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Some Preliminary Findings of a Situation Analysis," *EuropeAid*, 2010, 16.
²⁷ See, e.g., Priscilla Wohlstetter and Allann Odden, "Rethinking School-Based Management Policy and Research," *Educational Administration Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 4 (Nov. 1992): 529-549; and Klugman, "Decentralisation: A Survey of Literature from a Human Development Perspective."



For education decentralization to succeed, it is crucial to build capacity at all levels of governance. The decentralizing authorities must be trained to perform their transformed functions and the subnational authorities, to whom responsibility has been transferred, need to be prepared to assume those responsibilities. Developing the requisite capacity in local institutions and transforming the central government from one primarily focused on direct management into one that can provide necessary support and strategic steering is a long process.²⁸ As a result, decentralization must be approached using a step-by-step process beginning with capacity building at all levels of governance.²⁹

Building capacity is the slowest and costliest aspect of decentralization. Legislative decisions about decentralization can be made overnight, but fostering sufficient capacity to support these decisions, and ensure their success, must be incremental and can take many years.³⁰ This long and costly foundation has already largely been laid in Jordan.³¹ Through the SDIP, the MoE has built capacity in every public school in Jordan and in the Ministry of Education's directorates.

3.2 Capacity Without Resources

Despite the fact that capacities have been enhanced, the efficiency and quality of schools have not significantly improved. The capacity is there, but schools have not yet been given the requisite administrative and fiscal authority. With neither resources nor decision-making power, principals and teachers are obliged to break rules if they want to try to improve their schools.

Just as education decentralization initiatives frequently fail as a result of local capacity-deficits, the insufficient allocation of funds to support decentralization can also limit success.³² Case studies have shown that successful examples of school level decentralization almost always involve some degree of fiscal decentralization as an initial step.³³ For decentralization to have a positive effect, the central government must either directly transfer funds to the schools or else provide them with a new, legal source of revenue.

Increased school funding is essential in Jordan. Currently public schools exercise very little control over the limited funds they receive. Each public school in the Kingdom is currently provided with a small budget that it uses for repairs, cultural and sports activities, and other minor costs. The amount a school receives is based on its student population. Three JD is allocated to the school for every student in grades one to three; four JD is allocated for each student in grades four to 10, and six JD is allocated for every student in grades 11 and 12. To use this money, a school's finance committee (which is made up of the principal and at least two teachers) needs to ask for approval from the directorate for every expenditure over 75 JD in primary schools and over 150 JD in secondary schools.

Within the total sum that is allotted to each school, moreover, the Ministry of Education determines what percentage can be used for each type of expense, and money cannot move between budget lines. Principals and teachers who participated in our interviews and focus groups complained that these restrictions prevent them from addressing

²⁸ Peter Rado, "Governing Decentralized Education Systems,"

²⁹ Taryn Rounds Parry, "Achieving Balance in Decentralization: A Case Study of Education Decentralization in Chile," *World Development* Vol. 25, No. 2 (1997): 213.

³⁰ Bernbaum, "Decentralization: A Guide to Education Project Design," 55.

³¹ Identity Center, Interview with Joan Donaldson, Project Manager, School and Directorate Improvement Project, Agriteam Canada, Amman, May 13, 2015.

³² Dennis Rondinelli and John Nellis, "Assessing Decentralization Policies in Developing Countries: The Case for Cautious Optimism," *Development Policy Review* Vol. 4, No. 1 (1986): 17.

³³ Priscilla Wohlstetter et al., "New Boundaries for School-Based Management: The High Involvement Model," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* Vol. 16, No. 3 (Fall 1994) 268-286.

<<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/admin/download.php?id=4229>>



priority issues. Money, for example, is often not required for a specific budget line in a given year, but the remainder cannot be used for another purpose.

Before 2009, these budgets were covered by user fees. Jordanian schools collected user fees from parents for each student, and the money was then transferred to the central government. A portion of these fees was then reallocated to individual schools. In 2009 His Majesty King Abdullah II announced that the government would cover these fees.³⁴ Since that time, schools continue to receive funding, but parents do not pay user fees.³⁵

In addition to the government funds, schools are also able to receive up to 1,500 JD per annum when they go through the SDIP training. In the 2014-2015 school year, for instance, approximately 1,100 schools received money from the SDIP.³⁶ While these funds are similarly subject to certain conditions (for instance, no more than 20 percent may be spent on building repairs), the conditions are less restrictive than the budget lines the government sets. Principals who participated in our research stated that the SDIP money was very helpful, but conceded that their schools require significantly larger budgets to address all of their immediate concerns.

While there has been talk of increased funding in the spring of 2015, a number of principals stressed in our interviews and focus groups that their schools had not received *any* government funds for the 2014-2015 school year – not even the normal per student allocations. Many principals stated that the only funds their schools had received this year came from the SDIP.

3.3 The Disconnect Between Decision-Makers and Schools

The potential benefits of the SDDP have not only been impaired by a lack of human and financial resources, but also by the inability of schools to make their own decisions. The reliance of schools on the MoE for every decision means that principals and teachers are unable to compensate for the dearth of financial resources with creative solutions.

Principals who participated in our research claimed that the SDDP had completely transformed their strategies for school management, but also expressed extreme frustration with their inability to apply the skills they had developed through the program. The principals stated that they are unable to do anything in their schools without prior approval of the MoE. They emphasized that they are completely cut-off from any decisions being made about their schools. This divide, the principals argued, has resulted in their inability to address local issues, the inefficient use of human and financial resources, and an inadequate supply of both basic learning materials (particularly for students with special/complex education needs) as well as the resources needed to perform simple infrastructural improvements or building maintenance.

As a result of the current system, proactive principals who try to improve their schools are often prevented from doing so. A principal in Irbid, for example, noted that when he moved to a new school that had previously neglected the olive trees growing on its property, he encouraged the students to care for the trees in their free time. The condition of the trees soon improved, and the school sold the olive oil it produced and raised 700 JD for its budget. When the Ministry found out, the money was confiscated and the principal was punished for not having obtained prior approval for the project.

Sending a formal request and waiting for approval seldom yields a better outcome. Not only is approval a prolonged process (as requests are first sent to the directorates and

³⁴ Muaid Al Habashneh, "The King: Students No Longer Need to Pay Fees," *Khaberni*, August 30, 2009. <<http://www.khaberni.com/more.php?newsid=20231&catid=1>>

³⁵ "The King Orders the Ministry of Education to Stop Collecting Fees from Students," The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Education, Official Website. <<http://www.moe.gov.jo/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=1323>>

³⁶ Identity Center, Interview with Ziad Twissi, Deputy Field Manager of School and Directorate Improvement Project, Amman, May 19, 2015.



then passed on to the MoE), but they often result in negative responses. For example, another principal stated that when his school's drainage system broke down during the winter, a large puddle emerged in front of the school that prevented access. He requested assistance from the MoE, but after waiting for two months without a reply, he asked the community to pitch in to help to fix the problem. A month after repairs started, a committee from the directorate finally arrived to assess the problem, but by this time the issue had already been solved and the worst of the winter had already passed.

3.4 Benefits of Empowering Schools

By bringing decision-making closer to the people whom it will affect, the issues that the principals discussed could more effectively be addressed. School-based management can increase efficiency and reduce costs so that local managers are able to make informed decisions and swiftly deal with issues as they emerge. With decisions being made by actors close to the ground who can be monitored by parents and the community, accountability is also simplified and transparency increased.³⁷ As a result, opportunities for corruption – which can flourish in other forms of decentralization – are reduced.³⁸

If schools were empowered with great authority, their administrations would not have to break the rules to ensure that their schools are properly looked after. Instead, they would be empowered and encouraged to lead their schools, and their innovation and creativity in responding to their unique situations and community needs would be rewarded. Principals who participated in our research relayed countless plans that they would like to implement if they were provided with greater administrative and financial decision-making authority. While they initially focused on addressing the urgent structural repairs that needed to be made in their schools, the principals then discussed professional development programs, greater extra-curricular and cultural activities that could be conducted cost-effectively, as well as improvements that could be made to resource rooms and school infrastructure to help students with disabilities.

Empowering schools not only increases the effectiveness of their respective administrations, but it has also been shown to have very positive effects on teachers. In their survey of school-based management literature, Leithwood and Menzies found that teachers are in most cases positively affected by school-based management and that their commitment and morale are usually enhanced.³⁹ Leithwood and Menzies's results showed increased collaboration among teachers, a greater focus on professional development, and an enhanced sense of accountability.


The nurturing of this sense of ownership and personal accountability is crucial in Jordan, as teachers are neither rewarded nor held accountable for their performance, and principals are able to exert very little control over them. With no influence over the hiring and firing of teachers (this responsibility is under the purview of the Civil Service Bureau) and effectively unable to discipline them, principals are denied any systemic means of ensuring high quality instruction in their schools. Numerous principals in our focus groups complained that there are teachers in their schools who put minimal effort into classroom instruction and even refuse to answer questions posed by their pupils. The delivery of quality education is currently rare, and in these few cases it is a result of the

³⁷ Felipe Barrera-Osorio et al., *Decentralized Decision-Making in Schools: The Theory and Evidence on School Based Management*, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2009, 30.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2632/487400PUB0dece101Official0Use0Only1.pdf?sequence=1>

³⁸ Suzanne Hinsz et al., "Effects of Decentralization on Primary Education: Phase I: A Survey of East Asia and the Pacific Islands," UNICEF Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, July 27, 2006, 20. http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Effects_of_Decentralization_on_Primary_Education.pdf

³⁹ Kenneth Leithwood and Teresa Menzies, "Forms and Effects of School-Based Management: A Review" *Educational Policy* Vol. 12, No. 3 (1998): 325–347.



extraordinary efforts of individual teachers; it is not systemically encouraged or monitored from above.⁴⁰

4. THE NEXT STEP

4.1 Overcoming Objections

The decentralization of authority over administrative and financial decisions to schools is necessary to mobilize the capacity that has been built, but this movement of power will face significant resistance from the central government. In Jordan, as is common elsewhere, national ministries have fixated on the lack of subnational capacity and accountability to justify the maintenance of centralized power.⁴¹ Even though these concerns may be justified, they have created a vicious cycle: no power is decentralized because the central government says that there is insufficient local capacity and accountability, and this capacity and accountability cannot be demonstrated or developed because no authority is decentralized.

What is required to break out of this cycle is a transitional phase during which schools could demonstrate that they are ready to assume greater authority and bottom-up, community-based accountability structures could simultaneously develop. Below is the outline of an immediate strategy that would introduce a “weak”⁴² form of school-based management into Jordanian schools. It would not require increased funds from the government and it can be pursued with minimal risk. Unlike the delegation of broad powers to local authorities (which should eventually take place), delegating limited powers and responsibilities rarely poses significant implementation challenges.⁴³

4.2 Recommended Interim Plan

4.2.1 Reintroduce User Fees

The government should pass an administrative decree indicating that schools are once again allowed to collect user fees. These fees would not be transferred to the central government (as they were before 2009). Instead, the fees would remain within the school where they were collected to contribute to the school’s annual budget. In combination with the current per student allotments that the central government gives to each school as well as the funds provided through the SDIP, the user fees would provide schools with a significantly enhanced ability to address immediate concerns.

The government needs to both standardize fees to prevent increased inter-school inequality as well as ensure that the fees stay low so that they do not discourage any parents from sending their children to school.⁴⁴ Parents with whom we spoke indicated

⁴⁰ Identity Center, Interview with Raed al-Azzam, Amman, Jordan, January 29, 2015.

⁴¹ Gershberg and Winkler, “Education Decentralization in Africa”; and Robertson Work, “Overview of Decentralization Worldwide: A Stepping Stone to Improve Governance and Human Development,” 2nd International Conference on Decentralisation, Federalism: The Future of Decentralizing States? Manila, Philippines, July 25-27, 2002. <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/committees/dal/Upload/library/overviewofdecentralisationworldwide_work_2002.pdf>

⁴² School-based management initiatives can be divided along a continuum based on the extent to which decision-making is decentralized to the local administration. On the “weak” end of the continuum schools have limited autonomy, perhaps over only instructional methods or planning. When school councils take on an advisory role, they may be termed “moderate.” As the autonomy of the council increases and they control hiring and firing of teachers and principals and are allocated their own budget, these schools can be classified as “strong.” At the far end of the continuum are schools with “very strong” school-based management, in which the councils have control over all educational decisions and schools essentially function as stand alone units. See Barrera-Osorio, *Decentralized Decision-Making in Schools*, 20-23.

⁴³ Bernbaum, “Decentralization: A Guide to Education Project Design,” 1.

⁴⁴ Hinsz, “Effects of Decentralization on Primary Education,” 5; and Klugman, “Decentralisation: A Survey of Literature from a Human Development Perspective.”



that they that 10 JD per year was fair and did not think it would represent an impediment to any family in the Kingdom.⁴⁵ Principals that participated in our focus groups stated that even a half dinar fee per month per student would be sufficient to realize profound improvements in their schools.

A nation wide phone survey, as well as the focus groups we held with Jordanian parents, indicated that most Jordanians would be willing to pay user fees if the money went to the schools themselves (where community can monitor how it is spent) and does not simply disappear into a bureaucratic maze.⁴⁶ The focus groups and survey highlighted how concerned Jordanians are about corruption. Participants stated that even though they pay taxes for education, they do not believe that the government is currently providing their youth with good quality education, or that the MoE is efficiently running schools in the Kingdom.⁴⁷ Those who participated in the focus groups and survey also indicated that they do not believe schools are provided with sufficient budgets to cover maintenance or basic needs.⁴⁸ Jordanians are keen to ensure that these needs are met, but they do not have sufficient faith in the MoE to be willing to pay user fees to it.

4.2.2 Empower School Councils

Building from both from the School Development Teams (which were introduced through the SDIP) as well as schools' existing finance committees, more inclusive and more powerful councils should be introduced. They would function similar to the School Development Teams, but would act with greater authority. In conjunction with the principal, the council would decide how to allocate the school's funds to ensure both that the money supports corroboratively developed improvement plans and that it is not wasted.

The council would also help to engage the community, empowering them to make decisions about the education of their children. Parent-teacher councils already exist in many schools, but the involvement of parents is only solicited when there is a specific problem to address, and parents are subsequently limited to an advisory role. Parents who participated in our focus groups felt that current structures restrict them from playing a more active role in schools. They suggested, however, that their inclusion in structured school councils could help to address that marginalization. By directly participating in the new councils, parents would remain constantly engaged in the work of the school and exercise their own decision-making power.

The council should be limited to no more than 12 members (excluding the principal), as greater numbers could impede its effective operation.⁴⁹ As such, the councils would consist of six teachers and six members of the community. Even though members of the

⁴⁵ Identity Center, Focus Group with Parents of School-Aged Children, Amman, Jordan, April 15, 2015.

⁴⁶ When participants in our phone survey were asked, "Would you support reintroducing a small user fee into schools if the money went stayed in the school itself and the community could monitor and help decide how it was spent?" 80 percent responded in the positive, 17 percent responded in the negative, and three percent indicated that they were unsure. When we asked, "Would you support reintroducing a small user fee for schools if the money went directly to the central, governorate, or municipal governments?" only 54 percent responded in the positive, 40 percent responded in the negative, and six percent indicated that they were unsure.

⁴⁷ When participants in our phone survey were asked, "Do you think that public schools across the Kingdom are currently providing good quality education?" 13 percent responded in the positive, 80 percent responded in the negative, and seven percent indicated that they were unsure. When participants in our phone survey were asked, "Do you think that the MoE is efficiently running schools and adequately providing them with sufficient resources and well qualified teachers?" 12 percent responded in the positive, 80 percent responded in the negative, and eight percent indicated that they were unsure.

⁴⁸ When participants in our phone survey were asked, "Do you think that individual public schools are currently provided with sufficient funds to cover maintenance and basic needs?" 13 percent responded in the positive, 81 percent responded in the negative, and five percent indicated that they were unsure.

⁴⁹ James W. Guthrie, "School-Based Management: The Next Needed Education Reform," *The Phi Delta Kappan* Vol. 68, No. 4 (Dec. 1986): 307.



council would not be paid for their work on the board, our focus groups showed significant parent and teacher interest in running for membership.

Teachers would be elected through an internal secret ballot election. To be placed on the ballot, teachers would be nominated by their peers (or nominate themselves). Similarly, community members would be nominated by parent groups or the principal (or nominate themselves). Elections could then take place cost-effectively either through mail in ballots or at a single community gathering at the school. If a surplus of candidates emerges, each could be required to achieve a minimum threshold of signatures on a petition to support his or her candidacy.⁵⁰ Elected members of the council would maintain their position for three years, with the option of running for reelection.

Not only did principals, teachers, and parents who participated in interviews and focus groups indicate enthusiastic support for the introduction of the councils and a definitive willingness to be involved in them, but Jordanians who were polled in our phone survey also expressed very strong support for the system. They expressed a clear preference that user fees would be placed under the control of these councils rather than the central – or a subnational level of – government.⁵¹

4.2.3 Conclusion

The system for which the research participants indicated support does not demand increased governmental funds or the decentralization of central government manpower. Instead, the research participants expressed their support (and, indeed, enthusiasm) for a system that harnesses Jordanians’ keen interest in the education of their children and enables that interest to be employed to better manage and monitor schools across the Kingdom.

The hardest and costliest step toward empowering schools and transforming Jordan’s education system for the better has already been taken. Now it is time for the next step. We have to take advantage of the current momentum toward decentralization and use it to improve the quality and equality of the education being provided. Rather than devolving education authority to the governorates, the government should focus on moving resources, authority, and accountability to schools where it can actually help to provide all Jordanian youth with the education that they need to succeed in our knowledge economy.

⁵⁰ Guthrie, “School-Based Management,” 307.

⁵¹ When participants in our phone survey were asked, “Would you support reforming the education system so that principals, teachers, and the community could together make some budgetary and administrative decisions for individual schools?” 88 percent responded in the positive, eight percent responded in the negative, and four percent indicated that they were unsure.