

Analysis of Youth Participation in Arab Countries¹

Case study on Jordan

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Prepared by:

Nihaya Al-Sheyab, Jordan
Mahmoud Alomari, Jordan

Thurayya Zreik, Beirut
Nadia Nahmeh, Beirut

Reviewed by:

Mayada Kanj, Beirut
Aline Germani, Beirut

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I. Introduction

This case study is developed in the framework of the **regional analysis** on the situation of youth in selected Arab countries, with a specific **focus on youth participation** in general, and the role of youth in policy making in particular.

The findings of the regional analysis will contribute to:

1. Increased understanding among policymakers of the issues faced by youth, including young women, particularly with regards to their equal participation in economic development.
2. Strengthened capacity of policy makers to formulate cross-sectoral policies that enhance effective participation of youth in economic, social, and political life.
3. Enhanced engagement between policymakers and youth groups in jointly designing, reviewing, and/or implementing youth-based policies for inclusive and sustainable development.

The regional analysis was guided by three key questions:

1. What is the degree of Arab youth participation in decision-making processes, particularly youth development policies, and how?
2. To what extent is youth participation in decision-making processes likely to improve the quality, responsiveness, impact and viability of development policies?
3. How can youth participation in the Arab countries be enhanced, and whose responsibility is it to ensure a larger space and stronger role for youth?

Objective

Case studies for three countries of the Arab region (Jordan, Tunisia and Kuwait) were developed with the aim to examine the following issues:

- What is the general situation of youth in Jordan?
- What is the situation of Jordanian youth in relation to participation in decision-making?
- What meaning does the Jordanian youth give to the concepts of participation and decision-making?
- What factors encourage the implementation of effective youth participation in decision-making?
- What are the obstacles limiting the effective participation of young people in decision-making?

II. Methodology

This case study consolidates information from desk based research as well as through qualitative participatory research conducted with young people and stakeholders in Jordan. It consists of:

1. A **desk-based background search** relying on documentation found in the desk review search of the regional analysis and documentation from focal points in Jordan
2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**
 - 8 focus groups were organized for the purposes of the study and brought together young people of different age groups, ranging from 15 to 24, from both genders and different sociocultural categories.
3. **Interviews with key stakeholders:**
 - Individual interviews were conducted with four stakeholders in the field of youth, who were representatives from civil society as well as the Jordanian government.

III. Background on Youth in Jordan

Table 1 shows that the Jordanian Society is very youthful in nature. Jordan's population is currently about 6.1 million. The majority (around 70%) of the Jordanian population are below the age of 30 years. 37.2% of the population fall between 15 and 24 years old.

Table 1 Youth Percentages in Jordan²

Youth (15-24)		
%	<i>Among Youth % Male</i>	<i>Among Youth % Female</i>
37.2	62	37

² Tabulated by Gallup 2015

Table 2 Youth Population Characteristics in Jordan Stratified by Gender

Youth unemployment rate ³			Youth literacy rate ⁴			Youth education level ⁵								
%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F	Elementary			Secondary			University degree		
						%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F
34.0	28.8	56.1	99.1	99	99.2	11.7	14.22	7.5	82.3	81.2	84.4	6.0	4.6	8.1

The percentages of Table 1 show a greater percentage of males than females in the youth population. Table 2 points to high levels of youth unemployment. A contributing reason to this phenomenon is school dropout rates and unsatisfactory work conditions for young Jordanians where they work in informal sectors for low wages, poor training, and no legal protection^{6 7}.

These percentages show gender differences in economic opportunities. Basic demographic data point to some discrepancies between male and female youth, especially in terms of unemployment, where the percentage of unemployed females is almost double that of unemployed males. Discrepancies also show between level of education for Elementary education and higher education, where young women are at a lower percentage that young men.

In 2014, Jordan was ranked 80th out of the 188 countries according to the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), Jordan’s HDI value for 2014 is 0.748 which increased as well by 25.8 percent or an average annual increase of about 0.68 percent⁸. The HDI indicators life expectancy, mean years of schooling, and gross national income respectively increased which lead to the total increase of the HDI (Table 3)⁹.

³ ILO modeled estimate (2016)

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?end=2016&start=2016&view=bar>

⁴ UNDP (2016) “Arab Human Development Report”- Mine the Data

⁵ Tabulated by Gallup 2015

⁶ “تمكين الشباب”

⁷ Al Gharaibeh, M.F (2016) “ Understanding the needs and rights of Arab Muslim Youth: The case of Jordan”

⁸ UNDP- Jordan

⁹ Ibid

Table 3 Jordan Human Development Index indicators

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP\$)	HDI value
1980	66.2	11.9	3.1	9,155	0.595
1985	68.3	12.0	4.0	9,023	0.618
1990	69.9	11.7	5.1	6,652	0.623
1995	70.9	12.1	9.3	7,202	0.688
2000	71.7	12.7	9.5	7,773	0.705
2005	72.6	13.8	9.7	9,495	0.733
2010	73.4	13.4	9.9	11,161	0.743
2011	73.6	13.3	9.9	11,189	0.743
2012	73.7	13.5	9.9	11,201	0.746
2013	73.9	13.5	9.9	11,290	0.748
2014	74.0	13.5	9.9	11,365	0.748

In 2016, Jordan also had a Youth Development Index of 0.586, ranking it at 114th out of 183 in the world.¹⁰ The YDI is a composite score of 18 indicators across the five domains of Civic Participation, Education, Employment and Opportunity, Health and Well-being, and Political Participation. The YDI in Jordan is at an average range, with low civic and political participation. Although the YDI indicated high general health and wellbeing, it also indicates that youth current face weak economic opportunities as well as low levels of participation.

Table 4 Youth Development Indices for Jordan¹¹

YDI	Political Participation	Health and Wellbeing	Employment and opportunity	Education	Civic Participation
0.586	0.345	0.811	0.456	0.77	0.252

A 2014-2015 Gallup poll also revealed data on the Civic Engagement Indices of Arab countries. This index is calculated using more indicators than that of the YDI in Table 4, and hence will be presented separately in order to offer an idea of youth civic engagement. Table 5 presents the score as well as the indicators (helping strangers, donating money, volunteering time) stratified by gender. The index in Jordan is low, with some differences in gender showing in the different components of the index, but with generally similar rates across genders. The most notable difference is between young men and women who helped strangers, which could be related to roles Jordanian women play in the public sphere, an idea that became prominent during the qualitative research.

¹⁰ Commonwealth (2016) “Youth Development Index”

¹¹ Commonwealth (2016) “Youth Development Index”

Table 5 Civic Engagement Index for Jordan¹²

Civic Engagement index											
			% Youth donated money			% Youth volunteered time			% Youth helped a stranger		
Mean	Male mean	Female mean	%	%M	% F	%	%M	%F	%	%M	% F
25.5	26.3	24.2	18.3	18.6	17.8	8.1	7.6	9.1	50.8	53.8	45.9

Background on Youth Policy and Participation in Jordan

1. Formal Structures for Youth and Youth Policy

The Higher Council for Youth (HCY), which has the status of a ministry, is responsible for youth affairs and the national youth strategy in Jordan. The HCY replaced the previous Ministry of Youth in 2001, and is also responsible for regulating and managing youth clubs, organizations, youth centers, and programs for “talented and disadvantaged youth”¹³. The national strategy came out as a response to the directives of King Abdullah II, and was prepared jointly by the HCY and UNICEF. It outlines a comprehensive and long-term vision and plan for the development of young women and men. The vision of the National Youth Strategy is to “raise and develop Jordanian young men and women who are aware of themselves and their abilities, loyal to their country and proactively take part in its progress and development, able to deal with the variables and developments of this age in a confident, aware and steadfast manner, within a secure and supporting environment”.¹⁴ The Higher Council for Youth in Jordan states that the National Youth Strategy was formulated using a scientific, participatory and cooperative approach¹⁵, involving the national government, private sector, voluntary organizations and international agencies. A total of nearly 50,000 Jordanian young people contributed their ideas and opinions. It identifies and explores nine central themes that impinge strongly on the lives of young Jordanians, namely participation, civil rights and citizenship, recreation activities and leisure time, media and culture, ICT and globalization, education and training, employment, health and environment.

¹² Gallup (2014-2015) Civic Participation Index

¹³ The One Mahmoud sent about centers

¹⁴ citation

¹⁵ The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan-Higher Council for Youth (2004).National Youth Strategy for Jordan.

The strategy also explores youth ethics and societal values, renounces “bad” behavioral manifestations, identifies social issues that concern youth (drugs, smoking, drinking, adultery, lying...) in addition to relevant “spiritual” matters. It also promotes adherence to humanitarian values. Despite the presence of the national youth strategy since 2005, Jordan does not have a clear youth policy¹⁶.

2. Youth Civic Participation

Jordan is among the Arab countries with the least level of youth civic engagement, contrasting with the stated aims of the national strategy¹⁷. Despite the increase in the civil society institutes, the government remains in control of most public spaces, leaving limited space for the activities of the civil society institutions¹⁸. Fear resulting from regional unrest and instability in the surrounding environment not only imposes restrictions on civil societies but also makes governments reluctant to cancel them¹⁹. Consequently, youth view civil societies as yielding to authority²⁰. In addition, there is a weak civil engagement culture among youth and an absence of awareness regarding the importance of people’s active citizenship²¹. Socioeconomic status, and not economic situation or political engagement, is the direct factor that determines youth civic engagement in Jordan²². Youth who have low educational levels, are unemployed, and who come from rural areas are less likely to be involved in civil society organizations²³.

3. Youth Centers²⁴

As a result of Jordan's participation in the Global Forum on youth policy, the higher council for youth insisted on panel discussions in order to formulate youth policy in Jordan, which was reflected in media^{25,26, 27,28}. It focused on improving the chances of young people in public life, promoting their knowledge, competencies and skills, and creating a supportive and safe environment for them to participate in public life and decision-making²⁹. In addition to focusing on the quality of education that respond to recent labour market requirements³⁰. The number of youth centers in

¹⁶ <http://www.youthpolicy.org/nationalyouthpolicies/#nav-J>

¹⁷ “الشباب والاحزاب السياسية في الاردن” (2011)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Mercy Corps (2012) “Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes”

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Exchange with Dr Yasin

²⁵ “جلسة حوارية حول تطوير السياسات الوطنية للشباب”

²⁶ “جلسة حوارية حول السياسات الشبابية والتدريب في الأردن”

²⁷ جلسة حوارية للاعلى للشباب عن قضايا السياسات الشبابية بالأردن

²⁸ “متخصصون يبحثون في الأردن دور الشباب في تحديث السياسات الشبابية العربية”

²⁹ “جلسة حوارية للاعلى للشباب عن قضايا السياسات الشبابية بالأردن”

³⁰ Ibid

Jordan is approximately 190, of which 95 are for females and the rest are for males. The centers are distributed in the governorates of Jordan at a higher rate than in the capital, Amman, due to the fact that the Amman region has better resources than the rest of the provinces of the Kingdom. The centers are distributed with 25% in the central region, 30% in the northern region, and 45% in the southern region.

These centers have provided an opportunity for youth to invest their energy and highlight their talent and skills.

Reaching youth through centers primarily takes place through partnership with community organizations. Youth work in youth centers as volunteers and are reached through schools, associations, parties, private non-governmental organizations, sports clubs and youth organizations. Parents of young people play an active role in these centers and are targeted by home visits that aim to clarify the objectives and role of youth centers. The centers also have advisory committees formed of parents and community leaders.

The youth strategies adopted by the centers revolve around training young people and exposing them to “success stories” in order for youth to benefit from the experience and success of other young people, and to become encouraged to develop activities that will ultimately help them in decision-making.

Training programs directly related to youth development are also available. Youth centers contribute to youth training and decision-making through the administrative body of the centers. Youth have an active role in developing their own strategies, where they are integrated into the strategy from the outset by holding hearings for them and then developing an implementation plan to integrate youth into decision-making and decision-making. The target group is 12-30 years of universities, schools, unemployed, interested, and youth in juvenile center and jails.

The weaknesses of these youth centers are analyzed at six different levels: worker/supervisors, building/center, equipment, program, youth involved, and management. The main weaknesses identified with supervisors is that they lack leadership and management skills, communication with group diversity, and poor skills to develop and manage youth programs, and that supervisors have low educational levels and degrees. Weaknesses associated with programs within youth centers relate to the fact that the programs implemented are repetitive, irrelevant to youth age group, with few programs targeting youth with special needs, not to mention that the programs are not up-to-date. As a result, youth lack the motivation to participate.

The challenges that these centers face are the presence of other youth centers, this leads to competition among them, financial legislations, equipment and

maintenance, weak visibility, poor distribution of staff workers, and lack of incentives for workers.

4. Youth Political Participation

Despite the fact that the age for joining a political party or for voting is relatively low, young people are less eager to take part in elections compared to older people³¹. Half of the young Jordanians believe that they have no influence on changing laws and many young people express lack of trust in parliamentary elections^{32 33}. Jordanian youth demand an active role in formulating policies as they do not want promises without actions, which would inevitably result in their marginalization³⁴. Jordanian youth want to express themselves and their political rights in a trustworthy environment³⁵. Resolving the issue of trust does not happen quickly, as trust is built when youth actually have an active role in planning public policy. Clear steps must be put towards youth political freedom and towards repealing the laws that limit their effective contribution in public life³⁶.

Nepotism and the inequality of opportunities for youth affected their active participation in elections³⁷. To this day, traditional institutes with inheritance culture are still given more importance in the political process over the political parties³⁸.

Political parties lack the ability to present programs that attract the participation of youth, which in turn excludes them from having an active political life³⁹. The Adaleh Centre for Human Rights Studies published a guide intended to deepen the understanding of political culture and knowledge among Jordanian youth and encourage them to participate in political institutions⁴⁰; thus giving young people the ability to formulate their own opinions in order to participate in the decision-making processes as well as take part in the development of their communities in a democratic atmosphere⁴¹.

³¹ Al Gharaibeh, M.F (2016) “ Understanding the needs and rights of Arab Muslim Youth: The case of Jordan”

³² “ Youth political participation and the challenge of building trust” July, 2010

³³ Al Gharaibeh, M.F (2016) “ Understanding the needs and rights of Arab Muslim Youth: The case of Jordan”

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ لشباب والمشاركة السياسية وتحدي بناء الثقة

³⁷ Al Gharaibeh, M.F (2016) “ Understanding the needs and rights of Arab Muslim Youth: The case of Jordan”

³⁸ (2011) “الشباب والاحزاب السياسية في الاردن”

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ "دليل تدريبي لتفعيل مشاركة الشباب الأردني في الحياة السياسية" (2007)

⁴¹ Ibid

Despite the fact that the national government itself is working to empower youth and the implemented programs in Jordan aim towards creating an active, resilient youth labor force, half of the young Jordanians believe that they have no influence on changing laws and many young people express lack of trust in parliamentary elections⁴².

5. Channels for Youth Participation in Jordan

As is the case in many countries in the Arab World, UN agencies and other NGOs are large actors in promoting youth and youth participation in Jordan. Programs to support youth participation in social, economic, and political activities mainly targeted youth between the ages of 18-35. An intervention supported by UNDP in collaboration with Ministry of Political Development (MoPD) trained a core of 15 young trainers and piloted two debate training programs to increase youth political participation⁴³.

UNDP supported MoPD to amplify its engagement with youth through social media (Facebook and Twitter)⁴⁴ and developed a database for online youth groups to request their input on how to increase their participation in political life⁴⁵. Program activities included an innovating camp for youth, mock elections, public speaking and use of social media for development and other skills⁴⁶.

This resulted in training 1000 men and women on local governance. Platforms to channel youth participation were established in at least two municipalities where online portals were launched and utilized by at least 1000 young men and 1000 young women⁴⁷.

UNDP also identified examples of good practices to enhance youth political participation across the electoral cycle⁴⁸; such as helping MoPD develop its social media capacities in order to better communicate with young citizen⁴⁹. “Ana Usharek”, a youth political participation program at the National Democratic Institute, offered advanced youth participation programs where 250 students have taken part in debate workshops, organized debates between candidates, and interned with different organizations across the country⁵⁰. An online platform was available for youth to discuss issues related to human rights, democracy, and

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ UN (2013) “YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING”

⁴⁴ UN (2013) “YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING”

⁴⁵ UN (2013) “YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING”

⁴⁶ UN (2013) “YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING”

⁴⁷ UN (2013) “YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING”

⁴⁸ UNDP (2012) “Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle”

⁴⁹ UNDP (2012) “Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle”

⁵⁰ UNDP (2012) “Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle”

political participation⁵¹. Both projects were no longer active on Facebook when the search for this report was conducted.

Another program by US institute for Peace, “Generation Change”, provides leadership and conflict resolution training in order for emerging leaders to increase their resilience and have greater impact on their communities⁵². The program provides a space for participants to share ideas, gain new tools, practice constructive conversation, and expose them to experts in the field of leadership and conflict resolution⁵³. The participants should hold leadership roles within civic organizations in order to participate⁵⁴.

Mercy Corps supported youth in developing their capabilities and opportunities to enable them to be responsible citizens to have effective change on their communities⁵⁵. After they have prioritized and assessed the primary needs, young people design and manage action projects that address these concerns⁵⁶.

Another joint initiative between British Council and Anna Lindh Foundation funded over a three year period the project “YAV: Young Arab Voices”, which aimed to train youth to acquire techniques of debating and provide platforms for youth to meet and exchange views as well as support online blogging⁵⁷. The youth are encouraged to run and manage effective debate and therefore enrich the dialogue in the Arab World⁵⁸.

It is worth noting that some programs like “YAV” and “Generation Change program” are still active, but young people are still not recognized to have critical roles in their societies⁵⁹.

Except for the UNDP work, all the above section points to NGOs who are training youth to enhance their abilities to engage in their communities; however, there is no documentation to indicate that these skills were actually applied or used in decision-making.

⁵¹ UNDP (2012) “Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle”

⁵² UN (2016) “YOUNG PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING: A PRACTICE NOTE”

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ Spencer C., Aldouri S. (2016) “Young Arab Voices Moving Youth Policy from Debate into Action”

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

IV. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Stakeholder Interviews

1. Methodology

1.1 Focus Group Discussions

Participants were recruited from four separated high schools in Northern Jordan from the Irbid Educational Districts (two for boys and two for girls). Schools were recruited based on the principals' interest and agreement to participate. Three of these schools were public schools, and only one girl's school (Yarmouk Model School) was a private institution with students from higher socioeconomic status. This school is located inside Yarmouk University in Irbid City and is built for employees from Yarmouk and JUST universities. A large number of students in this school are from high socioeconomic status with at least one parent who is employed and well-educated. The other three schools include students from low to middle socioeconomic classes. A total of 30 students in the four focus groups in schools were enrolled based on a voluntary basis and with previous arrangement with the school principals. The focus groups at schools, except for one male school, were all audiotaped for transcription purposes. Four other focus groups were conducted in two universities in Irbid city; one at JUST university (16 students were involved), and three at Yarmouk university with five participants in each focus group. These universities are large and accommodated for a large number of students in different disciplines, from various places in Jordan with different socioeconomic status.

The first focus group was held on the 14th of March, 2017 within the campus of Yarmouk University in Irbid City, which included male 5 students from 3 different disciplines: media in its branches (public relations and advertising, radio and television) and law. Another focus group held on the same day at Yarmouk University in Irbid City, and included 5 female students from 3 different disciplines: Media, Economics, and Political Science. The third focus group was held on the 16th of March, 2017 within the campus of Yarmouk University as well, and included 4 female students and one male student from different disciplines: Media and Sociology. The fourth focus group was held on the 14th of March, 2017 at Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), and included 16 students (8 males and 8 females) from different disciplines, namely: nursing, management and health policies, and applied medical sciences.

Students were selected based on a voluntary basis as they were invited to participate by the student representative at the school of nursing at JUST and by a student at Yarmouk University who also worked as a research assistant in this project. All the eight focus groups lasted an average of one hour during study time. These focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

1.2 Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were held in order to reflect on the state of Jordanian youth with regards to their participation in decision-making, as well as the current and projected policies to adopt in order to improve the level of participation of young people in decision-making. Two interviews were conducted through phone and two were face to face. All the interviews, except one phone interview, were audiotaped after obtaining permission from the stakeholders. The interviews were conducted by the consultants in Jordan, with time of the interviews at 20 minutes

2. Findings

During the FGDs, young people were asked about their perception of their general situation with regards to their level of participation in decision-making, and the motives and barriers encountered in the process of participation in decision-making.

2.1 Understandings of youth participation in Jordanian youth

According to youth, "youth participation" indicates the engagement of youth in individual and community activities with the aim of personal and social development. In an attempt to define "youth participation in decision-making", young people demonstrated a wide range of understanding around the concept. Although the concept of youth participation in decision-making was clearer in university students as compared to those in high schools, several male and female students from school and university focus groups agreed that "participating in decision-making" means having the chance to positively contribute to the society. Another definition of participation was to be allowed to present and implement ideas freely without obstacles or worries.

The types of participation reported varied among participants, ranging between charitable, political, intellectual, and cultural initiatives. These youth agreed that their feeling of social responsibility and self-satisfaction, which result from their engagement in participation, are important aspirations to widen their participation in decision-making.

Interestingly, the majority of young people in the eight focus groups strongly believe that all stakeholders concerned with youth in Jordan should be younger in order to be able to understand youth needs, desires, interests, and concerns. They specifically indicated that the Minister of Youth should be around 25 years old, and thus better able to involve youth in youth-related policies.

On the other hand, some high school students, especially females from lower socioeconomic status, believe that young people are still too immature to make decisions independently, thus should be guided by adults to always point them in

the correct direction. This perspective was not evident among young people from higher socioeconomic status, who think that youth have a large amount of energy and potential that could positively affect society if appropriately adopted.

Overall, the concept of "youth participation in decision making" varied among different groups of participants in the 8 focus groups. This variation was according to gender, socioeconomic status, and educational level with no noticeable difference between university students' perspectives and high school students' perspectives. This is interesting to note, as age has not been shown as a factor that might affect youth perspectives about participation in decision-making.

2.2 Youth participation in decision-making from the perspective of Jordanian youth

Overall, according to the shared opinion from the eight focus groups among youth in Jordanian schools and universities, there seems to be very limited participation by youth in decision-making. In fact, more than half of the young people who participated in the focus groups did not fully understand the concept of youth participation in decision-making. One high school female student from a low socioeconomic status aged 16 years old defined youth participation in decision-making as sharing of ideas between husband and wife. Another 17-year-old high school male student from a low socioeconomic status said: *"There is no real participation of youth in decisions that matter to them most....and this makes us all feel depressed, helpless, and sometimes defeated"*.

According to our sample from high schools, "youth participation in decision-making" was largely linked to superficial and low-scale charitable initiatives, usually developed by a teacher in compliance with Ministry of Education requirements (such as keeping cleaning the school). On the other hand, few high school students and a large proportion of university students felt "indifference" to participating in making decisions. This was most evident in political participation. According to their experience, these students discovered that an MP elected into the Jordanian parliament was not appropriate or qualified for the job and instead sought to fulfill a personal agenda. In this regard, one university male student aged 20 years old said: *"you think that this was the right person to elect...but once he won...he forgot all his promises toward his community...so...what's the point of voting then?"*

In Jordan, where youth account for a large segment of the population, the current findings are disappointing and reflect little focus on training and engaging youth in decision-making process.

Many of the youth's participations in activities and initiatives were not in leadership roles. Most of the times, the youth followed other people leads, usually teachers. One 16-year-old female high school student who was a leader in her school's parliament

said: *"Even though I've been elected by my class peers, I still don't have an active role in taking decisions....in fact, I only execute decisions made by school teachers and school principal".* She added: *"Most of my roles are limited to keep classmates quiet and more disciplined and to motivate school students to clean the school... which is fine,"* she said, *"But I would like to have a more active role in making decisions in these initiatives".*

2.3 Youth participation in decision making from the perspective of stakeholders

Interestingly, the views and perceptions of young people about youth participation in decision-making were not similar to those of the stakeholders. Contrasting to the FGD findings, the four stakeholders interviewed had positive perceptions about youth participation in decision-making. Additionally, these stakeholders revealed several policies that directly aim to involve youth in decision-making. One example is the National Youth Strategic Plan, which aims at designing agendas to enhance youth participation and involvement in decision-making;

One stakeholder explained that young people need to be personally motivated and dedicated to participate despite obstacles they may encounter: *"I have participated in the youth parliament... and I have been interested in volunteer work and participated in national ceremonies since I was a student... Youngsters nowadays are no different They also can take advantage of the available opportunities.... But maybe they need to work for these opportunities".*

Another stakeholder highlighted the vital role of His Majesty King Abdullah II in empowering youth to take the lead in the society and be in charge: *"His Majesty King Abdullah II always stresses on the importance of youth participation and giving them the opportunity to participate in decision-making...We recall here the initiative of His Majesty the King: "Jordan first", which's a development document that unleashes Jordanian youth into participating in decision-making of all society domains... Jordanians of all ages, genders, and racial backgrounds are guaranteed by the Constitution to participate in all life domains including youth participation in political decision-making...This royal initiative is a testimony of efforts to involve youth in decision-making".*

2.4 Influencers of youth participation in decision-making

2.4.1. Family:

Overall, most of the participating young people in the eight focus groups believe that family plays a vital role in children's participation in decision-making, which is largely dependent on the family socioeconomic status. In other words, parents with higher income tend to support their children's activities, especially initiatives that are self-developed or created by peers in schools, neighborhoods, and universities. Also, most of the students in the eight focus groups highlighted that the level of

parents' awareness about the importance of participation in decision-making is essential in their support of their children's participation. One female, high school student said: *"When parents themselves believe in how important for us to participate in different activities, they'll be more likely to support and motivate us"*.

Most of the female students in a private school in Irbid agreed that their parents frequently encourage them to engage in various activities that are beneficial on the individual and societal levels. In fact, two of these students said that their mothers had initiated charitable activities themselves in order to encourage and motivate their girls to be involved in community work.

2.4.2. Cultural and Societal Values

For the most part, Islam, the dominant religion in Jordan, encourages youth to positively contribute to building societies. The students from all genders and age groups recited verses from the Quran and Sunna that portrayed youth participation as pivotal in all domains of life. When the females were specifically asked about their hijab, they reported that they did not perceive it as a hindrance to their participation in any domain, including sport. The female students expressed their belief that Islam encourages sport for all, but that it has to be practiced in secluded areas for females. They gave further examples of themselves and international female athletes who wear hijab during sport events. Some even thought hijab might "protect" them from male counterparts during co-ed initiatives, in the case, they explained, that the males have "inappropriate intentions".

2.4.3. Civic participation

Overall, students reported limited participation in civil society. Most of the initiatives developed by students were very low-scale, were initiated by the school or the university administration, were disorganized, were only able to benefit a limited number of people (such as 60), and do not attract or involve NGOs. There are several obstacles that young people face that hinder their participation in civil society. For example, some of interviewed undergraduate students complained that the civil society center at their university does not make efforts to engage vast number of students in activities. One female student said: *"It would be great if the civil society center at JUST would announce the activities and initiatives beforehand so we can have a chance to participate"*. She added: *"We only learn about the initiative after it happens and is completed"*. Interestingly, there was no mention of youth centers in the FGD findings.

2.4.4. Political participation

Although students in the FGDs concurred about the issue of lack of trust in the government, interviewed stakeholders disagreed with the notion that the reason

that young people are prevented from participating in decision-making is the lack of trust and transparency among stakeholders/political parties and youth.

One stakeholder stated: *"I have no knowledge of the issue of this lack of confidence, but through my follow-up, the politicians in Jordan are ministers who have an interest in the subject of youth participation, and there is regular dialogue with young people organized by the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Political Development."* In addition, there is a permanent committee in the House of Representatives called the "Committee of Youth and Sports," where interested ministers continue to conduct meetings with the youth. According to the same stakeholder, the most telling evidence against the reported lack of confidence is the "Promising Leadership" program, which provides opportunities for young people to meet with political elites and discuss their views and listen to their opinions. However, these opportunities are not necessarily available to all young people in Jordan. There are usually available to young people with high academic grades, who are carefully selected from the school and university, and thus are not representative of the general youth population.

As for the complaints on lack of transparency, the same stakeholder added: *"This issue of transparency has been overcome, and youth now have several opportunities available for them, proving that the Jordanian state hold good intentions towards the participation of young people in public life and at all levels. For example, His Majesty the King has invited youth to accompany him to conferences and visits to various parts of the world, and this is the largest evidence of transparency. Today, at the initiative of His Majesty, a number of young people have been invited to attend the opening session of the Summit, to be hosted by Jordan at the end of March this year"*. Usually, young people are selected to participate in the Summit through their schools and universities, with mostly school teachers in charge of the selections.

Similarly, another stakeholder disagreed: *"...But there is a lack of trust among members of society as a whole, as well as between politicians and governments. Legislation must be clarified for young people and the government is not the one to legislate, but the House of Representatives chosen by the people. Thus, if the selection was accurate, the legislation would be very good. The problem is not with legislation but with successive governments"*. The quoted comment pointed towards a lack of trust on a larger scale in the Jordanian political sphere.

One of the stakeholders pointed to the participation and involvement of youth in the formulation of youth policies. Policies for youth participation are based on the principles established by youth agencies, including Ministry of Youth and Sports and social work agencies, in tandem with young people who participated in fieldwork related to drafting these policies.

A female student from a private school contended: *"The members of the parliament must hold frequent meetings with us in order for the state officials to realize our needs and interests, and to increase the opportunity of our participation in deciding policies that concern us"*.

2.5 Obstacles facing youth participation in decision-making

As revealed in the findings, several obstacles and challenges confront youth participation in decision-making in Jordan. Those are:

2.5.1. Political obstacles

Despite the disagreement of the interviewed stakeholders, the lack of trust in the current political system was reported to be the main challenge for youth in decision-making. Overall, the vast majority of young people who participated in the eight focus groups had no confidence in the current stakeholders in Jordan. They indicated that trust among young people in officials/stakeholders in the government is one of the most important determinants of the participation of youth, and mentioned the lack of trust prevalent among youth in this case. One university female student said: *"In the absence of the secretariat hovering corruption, thefts, moderation and favoritism on all governmental institutions youth lose hope for change"*. The comment echoes the notion that with the high levels of corruption and favoritism in the political and civil systems, youth are losing hope and trust in the system.

Another male university student said: *"The problem of trust and transparency will not be solved unless young people are employed in ministries and parliamentary councils, where youth take the lead"*.

One male school student said: *"I believe that the nepotism and prejudice practices of senior officials in the country are the main factors that make all of us feel unequal [disadvantaged]... this inhibits our participation in different social initiatives."*

According to one stakeholder, the mistrust between politicians and society members, and especially youth, has hindered youth participation in the community. Therefore, it is important to rebuild this trust and establish transparency in order to further involve youth in society. The stakeholder suggests building trust between politicians and the community through holding regular meetings with the aims of providing a platform for people to voice their problems and concerns.

2.5.2. Economic obstacles

The financial hardship of families, schools, and universities in Jordan make it even more challenging for youth to participate in decision-making.

One stakeholder mentioned: *"Youth must be motivated by money, meals, and travel-related costs, especially since there is a problem of unemployment among young people in Jordan"*. Moreover, some children and young people, especially those who are placed in SOS Villages (an NGO dedicated to helping orphaned children), have even less of a chance to engage in civil society. The director of SOS Children's Village in Irbid confirms: *"SOS here is dependent on donations from the local community or from the mother SOS organization. In the long term, organization must be self-sufficient and obtain its own finances, so that's a challenge for us to keep creating opportunities for these disadvantaged group of children and youth"*.

2.5.3. Social and cultural obstacles

Many of the obstacles reported by the youth stem from social or cultural barriers. For example, although the family plays a positive role in encouraging youth participation, these perceptions varied across participants. The vast majority of participating young people, except for females from one private school in Irbid, believed that their parents are considered barriers in participation in decision-making due to several factors. Among these factors are concerns about safety, especially that of females, and academic performance, as well as a lower level of awareness of the parents around the importance of engaging youth in decision-making activities. One high school female student, aged 16 years old, said: *"My parents won't allow me to get involved in any activity outside the school, especially if the activity requires for me to sleep outside my home"*. Another high school male student said: *"My parents do not let me participate in any activity because they are afraid that my GPA will be influenced"*. Additionally, a 21-year-old undergraduate female student said: *"In general, parents think that any young person who is engaged in activities outside his academic curricula is a bad student"*.

One undergraduate university student, aged 22 years old, said: *"My father doesn't believe in my ability and doesn't have confidence in youth's abilities to make a change...my father thinks I am too immature to be in charge"*. Another male student said *"If my parents aren't convinced of the usefulness of such participations, they'll prevent me from being involved, because of many challenges.... Such as religion, culture, or traditions"*.

In terms of cultural barriers, despite some participants reporting that the hijab facilitates their participation, some female students reported that the government is not providing enough secluded areas for females to engage in sport activities, and thus hindering them from participating in sports activities because of the lack of the ability to comply fully with Islamic rules and regulations. In contrast, in the FGD, three out of nine female "upper class" high school students mentioned that the hijab might hinder participation, especially in sport.

2.5.4. Schools and universities as obstacles

For the young people interviewed, participation was heavily mediated by schools and universities. Accordingly, limitations in the resources in these schools and universities led to reported limitations in participation.

Interestingly, overall, and regardless of gender or socioeconomic status, young high school students in the four focus groups in Jordan perceive school as a barrier to participate in different activities, especially in the case of extracurricular activities, although sometimes it is a barrier indirectly. The participants agreed that schools mainly focus on completing the academic curricula, and perceive teachers to always be under stress to keep up with the curricula as such.

In addition, students agreed that their schools do not provide enough extracurricular activities that motivate students to participate in decision-making activities, nor do they have the time to be self-motivated due to the huge pressure of academic work and required assignments and homework for various subjects.

Moreover, schools are generally not adequately equipped to support extracurricular initiatives, and the infrastructure of schools in general do not permit students to be creative and develop their own projects. In fact, most of the interviewed students highlighted their attempts to address the issue of cleanliness in their school bathrooms, whereby some have helplessly tried to get involved in initiatives to make bathrooms cleaner. One female student from a girl's public school, who was a member in the school parliament, said: *"We tried to develop initiatives, some of which were facilitated by school administration, to make the toilets cleaner, but that didn't last long"*. Another female student, who was a high academic achiever, said: *"It's impossible for me to focus on anything else rather than my school homework to keep up my high grades"*. Another female student from a public school said: *"All the opportunities are available in schools in the capital city, Amman...we, here in Irbid, and I think in all other parts of Jordan, are less privileged and have very minimal chances to get involved in decision-making activities"*.

Some students raised the issue that school teachers, and even university professors, only select students to get involved in decision-making activities based on their academic achievement, with little emphasis on the interests and motivation level. One female undergraduate university student said: *"If you're not of those whose GPA is high, then, you're less likely to get a chance in participating"*.

The development of student parliaments in schools is an encouraging step towards motivating students to take charge and to take more decisions. However, these student parliaments have a very limited opportunity to be creative or to take major decisions that are independent from the school administration.

Reiterating the previous section, it was also mentioned by students that young people's civic participation through university centers is also inhibited by the lack of communication between the university and its students.

2.5.5. Structural Obstacles

One interview revealed a number of structural obstacles facing youth participation in decision-making roles. For one, the licensing of new organizations and agencies is made difficult by extensive governmental licensing processes and requirements, and this in turn limits such more organizations from being present.

When asked about the challenges that hinder the development of youth policies, the interviewee mentioned that policies are subjected to a high standard of processing and analysis, and that these policies should be monitored by the government in order to prevent any errors in implementation. Another structural limitation to policy, according to the same person, is the limited physical financial capacity of a person to obtain a policy license.

V. Analysis

The analysis of the findings of the case study aims to answer the regional analysis three main research questions:

1. What is the degree of (country) youth participation in decision-making processes, particularly youth development policies, and how?
2. To what extent do youth perceive that participation in decision-making processes is likely to improve the quality, responsiveness, impact, and viability of development policies?
3. How can youth participation in the (country) be enhanced, and whose responsibility is it to ensure a larger space and stronger role for youth?

1. The Degree of Youth Participation in Decision-Making in Jordan

The findings of the background search and FGDs with youth pointed to a lack of meaningful participation of youth in decision-making. With meaningful participation here, in the framework of Hart's Ladder of Participation and DFID's three-lens approach, referring to youth in partnership and leadership positions and youth engaging in decision-making, shared or otherwise, many of the initiatives and policies described in the case study fell short of this definition.

Stakeholder interviews starkly contrasted this notion, and most of the interviews insisted on the availability of channels for youth participation. They pointed to the

participatory approach towards drafting the national youth strategy to underscore this claim.

Although it is true that 50,000 young people were involved in the development of the national youth strategy, their participation was only at a consultative level. In this sense, young people have not achieved full participation, partnership, or decision-making roles, keeping them in low levels in both DFID's three-lens model for youth participation in development, as well as on Hart's ladder of participation. In addition, the practice of bringing young people along for international visits may relegate them to a more "decorative" position, placing them very low on the ladder of participation as tokens.

In practice, there were very few instances of youth taking on leadership roles. The availability of youth centers was one channel within which youth were described by both the stakeholders and the literature as having the capacity to take on leadership and decision-making roles. However, no mention of these youth centers arose in the focus groups.

The background search on Jordan revealed a large amount of UN and NGO mediated initiatives that engage youth. However, in most of these cases youth participation was constrained to trainings, workshops, and skill-building initiatives. Youth here are beneficiaries, according to the three-lens approach, and are trained and in some cases consulted, which does not constitute full and meaningful participation in terms of Hart's ladder.

The most salient result of the FGDs and the stakeholder interviews was the degree of disagreement between young people and government officials being interviewed with regards to political participation. Official stakeholders reported that the state currently provides accommodating policies as well as a large amount of opportunities for youth participation. On the other hand, young people cited a lack of trust in the political system and a perceived lack of transparency in the government as one of the main barriers to their political participation.

Surprisingly, the FGDs showed that schools also disempowered students and denied them of meaningful decision-making roles, even within their own student parliaments. Students described not being able to take any decisions and rather basing their actions on the decisions and instructions of their teachers and principals. The lack of decision-making power in school parliament once again places young people in the role of tokens rather than partners or actors, very low on the ladder of participation. In the FGD sample, participation in civil society organizations is also mediated through a selection process in schools that is largely exclusionary and based on arbitrary criteria (such as GPA) rather than personal

interest or motivation. This, in turn, has excluded young people from participating as well as demotivated them.

It is important to note the role of the location of the FGDs in the findings. The FGDs took place among children who were residents of Irbid, which is located away from the capital, Amman. Young people mentioned that there was a degree of centralization of activities in Amman, and so more research is needed to see how the degree of participation varies across the country.

In addition, the financial situation of young people can be inhibitory to their participation in civil society. There is very little civic engagement in Jordan due to barriers that make it difficult for young people to be financially able to work as volunteers without pay.

Cultural barriers currently exist for youth in Jordan, preventing them from meaningful participation. The view of young people as immature and incapable of decision-making, as well as other religious and traditional views, was described by youth as detrimental. However, Islam itself was also described as valuing the participation of youth within its principles, which has in turn encouraged youth to participate. Similarly, the family sphere can either play a facilitative role or an inhibitory role for the young participant.

The dynamics of gender and class also came through the FGDs with youth. Especially in terms of gender, different forces were at play. Where one young woman was not allowed to participate in civil society activities because she was barred from sleeping outside the house, two girls from private schools were motivated to participate by their own mother's founding of organizations. Interestingly, the hijab was described as both protective of a woman's participation in mixed-gender activities, but also led to her exclusion in sports participation when there were not enough secluded courts.

2. Youth Perceptions of the Role of Participation in Decision-Making in Development

There was consensus that participation is important from the key stakeholders, and youth themselves perceive its immense importance as evidenced by their responses in the FGDs. Young people expressed on several occasions that they want the chance to participate in decision-making, because they believe it will be beneficial to them and to their place in society to have their voices heard. Unfortunately, young people also displayed incomplete understandings of the notion of participation and sometimes, total indifference. Their lack of knowledge and conceptual understandings of the notion could affect their perception of the importance of participation, thus indicating the need for more education among young people on youth participation and its principles.

Unfortunately, what both the case studies and the regional analysis revealed is that there is a great dearth in the amount of literature documenting the effects and consequences of youth participation for development. Better documentation of project outcomes is needed in order to identify best practices for youth participation in Jordan.

3. Enhancing Youth Participation: Main Actors and Stakeholders

Young people in the focus groups contended that participation is important for social development, as well as their own personal development. The case study has shown that several spheres influence youth participation, beginning with the family unit. The results indicated that the family is an important determinant in youth participation, where encouraging families were reported to motivate young people to participate. On the other hand, restrictive, traditional, and religious families were also described as having the potential to hinder participation, especially in the case of young women. Interventions targeting families could be a first step, one that is already in place for youth centers.

One of the main stakeholders in youth participation is, of course, the government. Although the research indicated the presence of youth centers, these centers were not brought up by young people in the FGDs, pointing to a possible need for more communication between the government and young people.

Interestingly, one of the stakeholders put the responsibility of youth participation on the young person's own personal qualities, such as their responsibility, determination, and hard work. Although these qualities do play a role, it is important to consider the discrepancy between stakeholder's perceptions and youth's perceptions of opportunities. Young people continue to say that they have little opportunities, and they suffer from a lack of trust in the political system; while at some points in their interviews, government officials deny this. One way to overcome this disparity in perception would be for the government to engage in better communication of the possible for youth to participation.

Major obstacles currently facing youth should be addressed through overarching policies. This includes the economic situation of youth, as well as the centralization of services in Amman. Updating school systems might be a good step towards placing schools in more empowering positions for young people.

In order to continue to enhance youth participation, the help of NGOs and UN agencies is not enough without documentation of these practices. More importantly, making this documentation available to the public is crucial for providing civil society and young people themselves with the tools to be able to formulate their own projects and practices.

The triangulation of the search results and the qualitative research has shown that the responsibility of enhancing youth participation in Jordan is multifaceted and does not fall on one actor alone.

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