



IDENTITY CENTER

Policy Paper: Building Grassroots Participation for Decentralization



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Executive Summary

For almost a decade, King Abdullah II has advocated a policy of decentralization, whereby power would be devolved from the national to subnational level. Yet, despite the king's support, concrete steps towards the policy's realization have not been hitherto accomplished.

Little progress has been achieved because decentralization has largely constituted a top down political process in Jordan. This has proved problematic, as decentralization – and democratization more generally – must fundamentally occur from the bottom up.¹ That is, societal change leads to a transformation in state behaviour and a subsequent transition to greater democracy and decentralization. States themselves, therefore, do not create deep democracies, but rather they respond to democratic changes occurring within society.

Decentralization efforts in Jordan have thus far focused almost exclusively on legislative reform aimed at providing subnational authorities with greater responsibility. As a result, support for decentralization remains extremely limited: politicians fear the political repercussions of these changes, the media is apathetic, civil society participation is limited, and the Jordanian population remains indifferent to the process, or even unaware of its existence.

This paper, therefore, will review the shortcomings of previous initiatives, and propose an alternate plan for realizing decentralization. Rather than focus on legal and constitutional changes, as previous schemes have, this paper advocates a bottom up, grassroots approach to decentralization. It suggests that only by first developing awareness, capacity, and accountability at subnational levels can the requisite foundation for decentralization be established.

This paper will provide suggestions regarding three interconnected factors that are quintessential for both establishing solid foundations for decentralization and preparing subnational authorities to take the first step towards assuming a greater political role:

1. Capacity: Before greater administrative and fiscal responsibility can be devolved to the municipalities, greater technocratic capacity needs to be fostered. This can most effectively be achieved through the creation of regionally specific projects that teach local authorities to benefit from their respective resources.
2. Funding: Without reforming the law or constitution, subnational authorities need to be supplied with the requisite information and tools so that they can collect the taxes and fees that already lie within their legally mandated roles.
3. Participation: Awareness campaigns need to be launched to encourage participation. These campaigns need to be tailored for their recipient audiences and outline diverse benefits and means of engagement in the process.

Research Methodology

This paper attempts to bridge gaps left behind in the sporadic literature currently available regarding decentralization. As a result, it exploits, and seeks to balance, several different sources of information. The historical information in the report is largely derived from scholastic sources and the reports of international organizations concerned with decentralization in Jordan. At the same time, the report also benefits from the unique experiences and views of a plethora of individuals involved (or previously involved) in decentralization efforts in Jordan. To distill this information, the center convened focus groups in varying regions of the Kingdom to interview Jordanians involved in politics, civil society, and academic research. These focus groups were followed by subsequent workshops and interviews with these individuals to review the paper and its conclusions. Subsequently, Identity Center conducted phone surveys to acquire information pertaining to public knowledge of decentralization and its implementation. The focus groups, interviews, and surveys were synthesized with the textual research so as to address omissions in previous reports on decentralization as well as provide a historical narrative that will allow the current situation and previous decentralization schemes to be situated within a relevant socio-economic context.

By identifying omissions in previous works, this paper seeks to provide an alternative approach to realizing decentralization. Implementing decentralization will inevitably involve government policy changes and this paper, therefore, hopes to bring key issues to the government's attention. However, because the recommendations of this paper focus heavily on the role of civil society in the realization of decentralization, civil society actors and organizations constitute the paper's central audience. Without their involvement, decentralization will remain little more than a proposal and a pipedream.

Outline

The paper begins with a background to the issue to decentralization and a brief overview of previous attempts to achieve decentralization in Jordan. It then highlights the shortcomings of these proposals by examining the limited potential for realizing decentralization through legal reforms in a state where the development of autonomous civil society has been impeded. The paper then describes the lessons that can be derived from the failures of previous initiatives in Jordan and the successes of schemes in other contexts. It concludes by suggesting an alternative, civil society-based approach to decentralization, and presents concrete first steps for initiating a socio-political transformation of this nature.

The Concept of Decentralization

Decentralization describes a process through which a range of powers, responsibilities, and resources are transferred from the central government to subnational governments. This process represents an efficient means of building legitimate, pluralist democracies, for inherent in the concept is the foundational idea that public administration should function at the smallest possible level. This "subsidiarity" principle suggests that when

public administrations are more closely situated to their citizens they are more appreciative of the people's unique demands and more capable of efficiently reacting to those needs.² As a result of the closer proximity, citizens are able to exert the greatest influence possible on issues that affect them. Decentralization, therefore, has the potential to 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.

However, to effectively decentralize power in a unitary – rather than a federal – state such as Jordan requires substantial commitment on the part of the central government. Its willing involvement is crucial, as the redistribution of powers is immensely complex. Decentralization requires that not only responsibility, but also finances be disseminated across multiple levels of administration. The respective subnational responsibilities and requisite funds for their fulfillment must simultaneously and symbiotically be introduced to subnational governments, or the newly-introduced system will not be able to sustain itself.³ There is, however, no fix-all formula for accomplishing these redistributions and achieving successful decentralization. While it is necessarily a long and complicated process, its exact form must inevitably conform to the nation's unique socio-political demands.

Prelude to Decentralization in Jordan: “Defensive Democratization”

Previous attempts to achieve decentralization in Jordan have accomplished only limited results because they have largely represented a modern manifestation of “defensive democratization” in the Kingdom.⁴ That is, the regime makes concessionary democratic reforms – or simply proposes new policies – to preempt more serious challenges to the *status quo*. Defensive democratization has been a tactic of the Hashemite regime since 1989, at which point King Hussein initiated reform to quell the unrest that was then sweeping the Kingdom: what is now commonly referred to as the “Habbet Neesan,” or “the April Outburst.” The 1989 unrest emerged in reaction to the evolving socio-political situation in Jordan, as the Kingdom shifted away from a rentier economy. That is, the country had previously depended on rents rather than taxation for state revenue.⁵ These rents were derived from state to state transfers, largely from petroleum producing Arab countries. As these rents began to dry up in the late 1980s, Jordan faced a severe economic decline, and was subsequently forced to rely on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to weather the crisis. To qualify for IMF assistance, the government was forced to cut public expenditures. These fiscal changes exacerbated discontent, as subsidy reductions on staple foods and other products led to price increases at a time when Jordanians were already confronting severe financial concerns.⁶

To forestall the development of a more revolutionary atmosphere, King Hussein introduced limited concessionary democratic reforms. In the short term, this resulted in the restoration of parliamentary rule, the legalization of political parties, the suspension of martial law, and an opening up of state control over the media. Since this time Jordan has, albeit erratically, continued to progress towards democratization. Yet, this process nonetheless remains state orchestrated and top down.

Just as King Hussein used democratization proposals to forestall the 1989 unrest, so too did King Abdullah II use them as a defensive tactic to address the growing instability that emerged in 2004 and 2008. That decentralization initiatives have largely emerged as a defensive tactic in Jordan helps explain the limited results that they have thus far achieved. These top down proposals have not seriously pursued reform, but rather a means of reifying the *status quo* during precarious periods in the Kingdom. Thus, decentralization has not moved forward substantially because it has not enjoyed continuous or genuine state support.

Previous Decentralization Initiatives in Jordan

The push towards decentralization in the Kingdom emerged between 2004 and 2005 when King Abdullah II announced a plan to provide greater autonomy to local institutions, emphasizing that “political developments should start at the grassroots level, then move up to decision making centers, and not vice versa.”⁷ He suggested that to facilitate this transformation the twelve existing governorates should be divided into three “development areas or regions.” In justifying this structural shift, King Abdullah II referred back to the subsidiarity principle, positing that this change should occur because “the people of each region are more aware of their interests and needs” than the central government. To help draft a concrete proposal for decentralization, King Abdullah II appointed a Royal Commission in January 2005 to examine the decentralization scheme and make recommendations for its implementation.⁸

The plan that was subsequently outlined bestowed the regional assemblies with powers that had hitherto been under the purview of the parliament and central government, such as investment, public facilities, general expenditures, and the performance of all official bodies in each region. King Abdullah II's plan, however, was received with trepidation and reserve. The anxiety regarding the proposal largely sprang from the inclusion of several vague recommendations. Many of the ministries that were asked to provide a response to the decentralization proposal, had only the very brief report of the Royal Commission to inform their analysis. This report left many questions unanswered regarding changes in authority and jurisdiction, as well as the validity of recent legislation.

The most significant concerns regarding the policy related to the actual implementation of new administrative units. Focus groups that the Identity Center conducted with civil society members, politicians, and individuals connected to previous government attempts to introduce decentralization stressed that the possible genesis of a parallel system for regional elections led many to fear that broader questions regarding the electoral law could be opened for change. This, Jordanians worried, could allow urban Palestinian Jordanians to exert greater influence than their more rural East Bank counterparts. More importantly, however, many feared that the proposal could undermine the state's future unity and lead to a federal system. Apprehension regarding the balkanization of the country was exacerbated by conspiracy theories and conflicting media reports arguing that the West Bank could become a fourth region in the federation, thereby justifying

Jordanian fears of the “Jordan option” for the future state of Palestine.⁹ As a result of these questions and concerns, consensus was not obtained and the momentum for decentralization was lost.¹⁰

The proposal, however, was reexamined in 2007 and 2008 at the behest of the King who formally advocated the policy in his speech from the throne in October of 2008. Yet, once again the government failed to reach consensus regarding concrete steps for implementation, as they were largely working from the findings of the Royal Commission report.¹¹ Thus, concerns over jurisdiction, authority, and regional divisions once more prevented the plan's implementation. The current prime minister recalls that “the topic of decentralization was constantly on and off the agenda” at that time. Since then, it has continued to reappear intermittently on the Kingdom's political radar. Currently, the cabinet is reviewing the proposal put forth in 2008, which focuses on establishing greater subnational control in the twelve governorates rather than the three administrative regions. This proposal, however, has not yet reached the legislature.

Thus, while decentralization has been on the government agenda for almost a decade, few tangible steps have been taken towards realizing its implementation. Jordan, in fact, has only become more centralized since the policy's initial proposal, and the politico-economic gap between the powers of the central government and the municipalities has only widened.¹² The Kingdom, for example, spends approximately 5% of total public expenditure on local institutions, whereas the United Kingdom and the United States spend 24% and 25% respectively.¹³ Indeed, services that often lie within the jurisdiction of municipal authorities in other countries are centralized in Jordan. For instance, the central government's Ministry of Education is the primary provider of education in the Kingdom. While many of the Ministry's powers have been regionally institutionalized, policy and funding largely remain under the control of the central government.

The shortcomings have in large part resulted from the disparities between both rhetoric and actions as well as legislation and implementation. One of the king's previous cabinet ministers argues that “development is what defines [King Abdullah II].”¹⁴ Yet, this commitment to reform largely manifests itself in terms of economic restructuring and streamlining. A Washington Institute report has noted that “[t]he push for economic reform that has characterized King Abdullah's six years on the throne has not been matched, however, by a similar push toward expanded liberalization and democratization.” The rhetoric is there, but few tangible gains have been secured.

Limits to Legal Reform

The inability to achieve greater decentralization, however, is not solely a result of legislative deficiencies or royal unwillingness to divest power from the executive. According to the constitution and the law, the municipal authorities should already be responsible for a greater role than the one they currently perform.¹⁵ As a result of this disparity, the World Bank has noted that one of the most “outstanding aspects” of the municipal function in Jordan is “the big gap between the wide functions and

responsibilities that the Law [sic] assigns to the municipalities and authorizes them to exert, on the one hand, and the extremely limited number of services which they provide and functions which they assume, on the other.”¹⁶

Article 41 of the Municipal Law of 1955 designates 39 functions for which the municipalities are responsible. This legally mandated municipal role includes a wide array of fields: city and street planning, water, electricity and gas, sewerage systems, public markets, jobs and businesses, transportation, hotels, public spaces, ethics and manners, parks, fire fighting, flood response, disasters response, public health, sports and cultural institutions, food safety, etc.¹⁷ Of the 39 that were originally mandated, 13 have slowly been commandeered by the central government, leaving a remaining 26 that still touch upon almost every aspect of life within each municipality.¹⁸ Yet, even in regards to these 26 fields of responsibility, the municipal role is nonetheless severely restricted.

Many of the services included under the purview of the municipalities in the law are currently administered by central government departments or public service companies.¹⁹ Water, electricity, sewerage, gas, education, health, social action, housing, and several others are entirely outside the scope of municipal institutions. The law places all of these functions within municipal responsibility, but this division is not enforced. Because there have been only limited adjustments to the 1955 law since its inception, it reflects neither the current socio-economic stakes of the various administrations, nor their respective capacities. More importantly, the 1955 law does not *clearly* provide the municipalities with the requisite autonomy to allow for the creation of policy responses, which would, as a result, allow municipalities to effectively respond to unique local requirements. While the law states that the municipalities should have “legal personality” and administrative independence, the description of their governance role is vague.²⁰

Because of the massive disparity between law and practice, this paper, unlike preceding ones, attempts neither to address the legally mandated roles of the central government and subnational authorities nor the relationship between them. Such a review would extend well beyond the limitations of this study and provide little relevant information, as the legally designated functions of these different levels of power do not function according to the law, but according to practice.

Due to the law’s current interpretation and implementation, the municipalities do not have sufficient autonomy to formulate local responses for local needs. Consequently, the municipalities do not even play a role in the decision making process regarding the services that they actually provide; instead, they merely execute the decisions that are made for them at the central level.²¹ The central government has the power to intervene in all matters that occur at the local level and the Minister of Municipal Affairs is permitted to appoint a Municipal Director General to work in conjunction with the mayor, overseeing the day-to-day administration of individual municipalities.²² All municipal activities, moreover, currently require approval from the governor who is in turn appointed by the Ministry of Interior.²³

Not only do the municipalities lack the authority to autonomously guide policy, but they are also financially dependent upon the central government.²⁴ In spite of recent municipal

spending increases, Jordan, as noted above, remains one of the region's most fiscally centralized countries. The present financial weakness of the municipalities contributes to their inability to perform a more involved role in their mandated fields of responsibility. As a result, the municipalities are confined to the mere provisioning of a limited number of basic services.

Civil Society In Jordan

Just as the central government has further restricted decentralization of state power since the policy's inception, so has it continued to restrict the operations of independent civil society actors in the Kingdom. Even though the number of NGOs has vastly increased since the start of King Hussein's democratization process, these numbers largely represent an enhancement of "traditional forms of cooption, interest articulation, seeking of symbolic legitimacy, and competition for domestic and international resources."²⁵ In fact, many of the most important organizations involved in welfare provision and development are connected to the royal family. These so-called RONGOs or GONGOs are given larger budgets and greater operational freedom than other NGOs operating within the country. At the same time, many of the remaining civil society institutions in the Kingdom are organized upon kinship and tribal affiliation;²⁶ as a result of the non-voluntary basis of their membership, many civil society scholars would not even consider these groups *bona fide* civil society organizations.²⁷

The weakness of civil society in Jordan renders the country increasingly insusceptible to the realization of decentralization and further exacerbates the already weak capacities of subnational authorities. Decentralization has the potential to foster greater democracy, but sufficient democratic participation at the local level is also a necessary precondition for the genesis of decentralization.²⁸ That is, a vibrant civil society facilitates greater political awareness and thereby encourages greater political engagement in the processes of decentralization and democratization.

Without this increased engagement, decentralization and deeper democratization are not possible; if participation is not encouraged, decentralization loses its *raison d'être*.²⁹ As noted earlier, the subsidiarity principle is the very basis for the rationale behind decentralization. Thus, civil society must be expanded, as it helps ensure that the poor and unrepresented can exert equitable influence upon decision makers and subsequently receive the services that they need.³⁰ However, to include these voices and be able to make decisions and formulate policies that reflect the wishes of those ignored at the national level requires that effort is actually devoted to generating greater civil society participation.

The expansion of civil society and democratic participation also ensures that when decentralization is actually implemented that subnational authority is not commandeered by local elites. This would render local government even less accountable to the people than the currently centralized government.³¹ Hence, civil society is not only necessary for the transition to decentralization, but also for decentralization's sustenance. Without

increased democratic participation, decentralization will continue to be a top down process and continue to be confined to legislative futility.

Learning from Previous Policy Proposals

The decentralization initiatives put forth in 2004 and 2008 focused on both revising the structure of subnational levels of Jordanian government as well as reexamining their respective responsibilities. In varying manifestations, the proposals envisioned a consolidation of the governorates and the introduction of new mechanisms for regional oversight. The plans envisioned amendments to existing legislation, largely concentrating on the transfer of administrative decision making authority from the Ministry of the Interior to regional commissioners. They also suggested a transfer of control over taxation and fee collections from the central government to the regional authorities.³²

That the central government has repeatedly examined a reorganization of the country's fiscal and administrative allocations demonstrates not only the importance of decentralization, but also the complexity of its implementation. Indeed, to accomplish genuine decentralization in Jordan will require the culmination of a host of different factors: a legal framework that outlines the division of roles, sufficient financial resources to enable the different levels of administration to accomplish their respective responsibilities, adequate human resources at every level, satisfactory subnational capacities, and institutions for oversight and accountability. Identity Center focus groups stressed that *all* of these factors were necessary for the successful realization of decentralization in Jordan. These focus group, however, also acknowledged that the satisfaction of these requirements will inevitably constitute a slow, difficult, and costly process. The focus groups stressed that it cannot be a colossal and hurried process, as both politicians and the general population will be too wary of the ramifications of such a project. Decentralization will have to move step by step, and not attempt to simultaneously satisfy all of these requirements as previous plans have done. But this begs a single question: which step comes first?

As with all preceding proposals, the current decentralization initiative of the central government suggests that the process should begin with a reexamination of the law and constitution. Yet, the executive or parliament, out of anxiety for possible political ramifications, will inevitably block its ratification once again. Moreover, and more importantly, what can be accomplished if there is yet another review of the legally designated division of powers? As seen above, the currently mandated parameters of subnational power, namely of the municipalities, are not being heeded. The current roles being performed by the municipalities reflect neither the 1955 law, nor subsequent amendments. Thus if the socio-political system in place does not reflect the law or constitution, reforming either will achieve very little. The situation cannot be rectified by confining decentralization schemes to a reanalysis of either the distribution of powers or the relationship between the national and the subnational.

Juxtaposing the failures of Jordanian decentralization initiative with successes that have occurred elsewhere in the world highlights a fundamental lesson: decentralization requires the willingness of the center, but it should not originate from the center. Previous Jordanian attempts have fallen short of successful implementation because they have been unable to rely on grassroots support. Decentralization is a democratic process that requires the participation of the people. It must begin in the governorates and municipalities and progress up. The absence of sufficient local structures for the support of decentralization has proven to be the missing keystone in previous decentralization plans. Thus, the first step towards realizing decentralization must be the development of capacity and awareness at the subnational level.

Capacity Building: While capacity building has certainly been addressed in previous Jordanian decentralization schemes, it has been treated as a co-requisite for increased subnational responsibility in these initiatives; instead, capacity building should be seen as a vital pre-requisite. Decentralization's success depends upon the existence of strong subnational foundations. A plethora of international organizations involved in decentralization projects in diverse regions have noted that insufficient subnational capacities –in terms of financial and human resources – is often identified as “the principle obstacle in furthering decentralization processes.”³³ Its absence in Jordan constitutes the central impediment to a successful implementation of decentralization.

Jordanian decentralization continually faces its birth and death in the legislature. It cannot mature outside of the halls of power, as there is insufficient local support for its development. Because previous decentralization proposals did not begin by addressing local capacities, subnational authorities remained passive and incapable bystanders to fruitless political maneuvers. Lacking the knowledge and capacity to launch their own decentralization initiatives, subnational authorities are simply waiting to be allocated greater authority and increased financial resources, constantly facing disappointment as decentralization proposals are repeatedly consigned to the legislative scrap pile.

To facilitate the further development of decentralization, the strengthening of local capacity needs to precede both further legislation as well as greater jurisdiction and resource allocation, as the subnational authorities are prepared for neither. The inadequacy of subnational, specifically municipal, capacities has been widely noted in Jordan and cited as a central reason for the central government's retention of power. Members of the government have continually declared that the local authorities are too immature to be tasked with governance.³⁴ While the obvious bias of those working in the central government needs to be appreciated, these politicians can, nonetheless, point to the manifest shortcomings of the services currently being provided by subnational authorities to demonstrate the dearth of existing technical and operational competence.

Jordanian citizens have likewise expressed severe discontent with current subnational capacities. In a survey undertaken by an Identity Center pilot project, the Municipality Civilian Monitoring Groups, results showed that 70% of those surveyed were not satisfied with the progress of municipal affairs, while only 16% indicated the opposite.³⁵ A significant number of other national and international organizations have also have

noted the lack of satisfaction with which most Jordanians regard the municipal authorities. The prevalence of these attitudes is not surprising given the state of infrastructure and development in the municipalities.

Fostering improved technocratic abilities will contribute to the creation of a strong foundation upon which decentralization can be developed. While some limited steps have been made towards the creation of these capacities, there is an ongoing need for technical assistance and pragmatic lesson sharing.³⁶ Without this focus, the existing capacities will not allow subnational authorities to assume greater responsibility. Encouraging technocratic development will increase the ability of subnational authorities to transparently acquire greater revenue. It will allow these authorities to more efficiently levy taxes and fees, as well as foster their ability to establish income-generating projects. Ideally, the municipalities will become able to financially support some of their enhanced responsibilities without becoming entirely reliant on revenue transfers from the central government. This heightened level of fiscal autonomy will also facilitate greater public engagement and encourage democratic participation.

Awareness: Along with technocratic training, greater awareness of decentralization and the democratic process more generally must be encouraged. During Identity Center focus groups with community members in our Municipality Civilian Monitoring project it became increasingly evident that communities understood very little about the municipal councils or the roles that they were supposed to perform. Moreover, a phone survey that the Identity Center undertook for this report revealed that more than 50% of the 500 Jordanians surveyed had not even heard of the decentralization process, and were even more uninformed regarding its implications.³⁷ Yet, when participants in the phone survey were informed about basic concepts regarding decentralization, the concept was greeted with enthusiasm. Those interviewed overwhelmingly believed that decentralization would be beneficial for Jordan, and that it had the potential to limit corruption, increase participation, improve the performance of parliament, and reduce the severity of identity conflicts within the Kingdom. However, without greater awareness, or even a basic understanding of the meaning of decentralization, communities will not participate in furthering decentralization, as they will not appreciate these significant changes that decentralization's realization could provide.

It is not only the general public, however, that would benefit from greater awareness. Political parties, media, and civil society members have all demonstrated a very limited understanding of the details of decentralization. As a result, previous decentralization plans were not ratified because the government did not understand their political implications, and were unable to explain them to their constituents; the media was unable to engage with the subject and provide insights to their readers; and civil society remained uninterested in the proposals and censorious to their potential ramifications.

Greater awareness and engagement will, in turn, help to further enhance the capacities of local institutions. Institutional efficiency can also be improved through an active partnership between sub-nationals and both civil society as well as the private sector. These connections must be deliberately sought, for it is here that important partners for

the realization of decentralization can be found. By fostering greater support for subnational authorities and providing them with the means of becoming financially independent of the central government, it will become increasingly possible to create transparent mechanisms for accountability: a necessary pre-condition for the subsequent allocation of greater fiscal responsibility from the central government.

Suggestions for Moving Forward

If future attempts at decentralization are to avoid repeating the same problems, and thereby avoid the legislative scrap pile, they must approach decentralization as a gradual process. Democracy and decentralization need to proceed in stages from the bottom up. Only after local capacities and awareness are developed can the focus move to amending the constitution and the legal distribution of powers. Decentralization is not a paint by number process that can be transposed upon any context. While some states can support a quicker implementation, Jordan does not have the requisite local capacities or popular support to enable such rapidity. Legal and fiscal changes are necessary steps, but in Jordan they are steps that necessarily have to occur after capacities are already developed. While there is no magical formula for fostering greater capacity and awareness, we can learn from the successes and failures of capacity building projects in other contexts. However, effective decentralization proposals will necessarily reflect the specific socio-economic environment of Jordan.

In light of all of the problems that this paper has discussed, several suggestions for realizing decentralization are presented. These recommendations, primarily directed towards NGO involvement, focus on a feasible first step: creating greater awareness and participation among diverse Jordanian demographics. Because of the limited functions currently being performed by the government and political parties, NGOs, and civil society actors more generally, need to play a large role in Jordanian decentralization. The initial steps that are suggested here, therefore, rely heavily upon the participation of national and international civil society actors.

1. Technocratic Capacity:

Regional Projects: While increasing subnational capacities will require the allocation of greater resources, these funds cannot be given directly to local authorities. The requisite subnational capacities do not yet exist to responsibly use and distribute these funds. Instead, the focus should be on the provision of training projects. The projects should concentrate on developing capacities to efficiently build upon existing strengths and exploit the unique assets present in each region. These projects, therefore, will not be universal, as they have to be tailored to fit the needs of individual regions. While some regions should, therefore, be given instruction on improving agricultural practices, for example, other schemes will focus on creating sustainable industries in tourism or the extraction of natural resources (such as oil shale). These programs should reflect pilot initiatives such as the Poverty Alleviation through Municipal Development (PAMD), which seeks to provide municipal leaders with the requisite skills and tools to more

effectively carry out their current roles as well as prepare these leaders for increased responsibilities.

Regional Assessments: For each municipality or region, therefore, a study will have to be undertaken and produced in a manner that is accessible for local administrators. This initial data collection can largely be amassed by civil society organizations or NGOs, many of which have already done partial examinations of regional capacities.

Competency Control: During focus groups undertaken by the Identity Center in Jordanian municipalities, it became clear that many communities were concerned that municipality boards, and in particular the board heads, were insufficiently educated and unnecessarily restricted in their work and vision. Because the central government also expressed concern regarding inadequate qualifications, it amended the Municipalities Law in 1994 and in 2002 so that only half of the municipal councilors would be elected – the other half, as well as the Mayor, were to be appointed to ensure adequate ability. These amendments have again been revised, but this demi-appointed system remains in effect in Amman. This solution to municipal ineptitude is, needless to say, adverse to the principles of decentralization. A more appropriate means of ensuring sufficient capacity could be as simple as minimum requirements for councilors. Councilors could, for example, be minimally required to possess a bachelors degree (a suggestion arising from Identity Center focus groups) or pass a standardized competency exam. Regardless, reestablishing a fully elected council will increase transparency and encourage greater electoral participation.

2. Funding:

Legal Review: While it will be difficult to achieve any legal or constitutional reform in the early stages of decentralization, this is not, in fact, an immediate concern. The first issue that needs to be addressed is subnational awareness regarding existing legal rights and responsibilities. This will require that subnational authorities are presented with legal reviews of their mandated fiscal roles so that they can begin to take control of their own finances. With this awareness, subnational authorities can slowly start to generate more of their own finances by assuming greater control of local sources of revenue.

This is not an extensive undertaking, as subnational authorities clearly have jurisdiction over more revenue sources than they are currently managing. For instance, under the Municipalities Law, municipalities represent their own fiscal units and can collect their own taxes. Currently, funds flow first to the central government, with only small percentages being filtered back into the hands of municipal authorities. Likewise, members of the municipal authorities in our focus groups stressed that by law each Municipality is entitled to 250 million Jordanian Dinars per year as their percentage of the fuel tax. Currently, these officials said, municipalities are only receiving around 45 million. Moreover, according to section 46 of the Municipalities Law, tax and fee collection can be done by *either* the municipality or the central government. Collection should, therefore, be the sole responsibility of the municipality, thereby allowing funds to

be directly distributed to local projects, with significantly smaller amounts finding their way into central government coffers.

Participants in Identity Center focus groups involved in municipal affairs emphasized that the control of local revenue sources must pass into the hands of local authorities. Allowing subnational authorities to become more financially independent will help them to achieve greater financial balance. Imbalance occurs when an administration's resources are insufficient to cover the duties for which it is mandated responsibility. Without this balance, or fiscal compensation for an imbalance, subnational authorities are forced to rely on debt to finance projects (and refinance debt from previous projects), or they are rendered incapable of providing the necessary services. While this balance is not easily achieved, and the central government is often forced to allocate additional funds, it should represent the financial superlative.³⁸ Fiscal balance, however, can only be achieved by allowing the municipalities to collect the taxes and fees for which they are legally responsible, and by fostering their ability to do so.

International Development Funds: Enhancing local capacities and ensuring sustainable governance is a slow process that will require substantial start up resources. The central government will have to provide some of the necessary start-up funds for these projects. However, in large part these funds should be derived from international development contributions. Participants in Identity Center focus groups noted that a significant amount of the substantial development funds that Jordan receives every year do not actually find their way to their intended projects. Instead of being given first to the central government for further allocation, subnational authorities, these participants argued, should request that these funds be directly distributed to local capacity building initiatives, thereby allowing for greater fiscal transparency for international funds. As local capacities develop, the subnational authorities will become increasingly capable of funding their own initiatives.

3. Participation:

Awareness Campaigns: Decentralization encourages greater local participation, but there has to be sufficient existing support for the process to gain momentum. To foster participation, we must start by increasing awareness regarding decentralization. Hence, one of the first steps towards realizing decentralization must be awareness campaigns. These campaigns need to clearly present the benefits inherent in decentralization. While these campaigns would benefit from the involvement of the central government, especially with its media access, they also represent an opportunity for NGOs, and civil society more generally, to get involved in decentralization, as they maintain unparalleled local presence across Jordanian communities. These campaigns, like the regional reports, cannot be universal in their content; they must be specifically constituted for their target audiences. Several different targets, therefore, need to be pursued:

- a. **Political Parties** need to be provided with helpful information regarding the role they can play in the decentralization process and educated regarding decentralization's benefits. They need to be provided with a decentralization

- vocabulary that can be used to discuss the subject in a manner that will be conducive to garnering greater support within their electorates. For example, they need to be able to clearly describe the process in a way that belies fears that decentralization equals federalism. This fear, our focus groups noted, was central impediment preventing the creation of broad support for previous proposals.
- b. **The Media** also needs to be a focus of these awareness campaigns. Currently they provide almost no information about decentralization, local capacity, or subnational politics. Like political parties, media outlets need to be provided with a diction that can help encourage decentralization, as well as with potential material for coverage of decentralization.
 - c. **The Jordanian Public**, however, must represent the single greatest concentration of these campaigns. Identity Center phone surveys regarding decentralization revealed that there was very little awareness, much less understanding, of the process among most Jordanians. This needs to be rectified. Awareness campaigns need to focus on the specific benefits that will emerge as a result of the implementation of decentralization. Only by giving citizens a stake in the project's realization can widespread apathy regarding the political process be overcome. Focus groups need to occur with greater frequency within the various municipalities. To ensure widespread dissemination, the campaigns should also concentrate on schools and universities.

Civil Society: Civil society is essential for both facilitating greater awareness and encouraging greater participation more generally. While civil society organization will have to play a key role in fostering greater awareness, they also, however, constitute a target for these campaigns. International development organizations and strong domestic institutions have to focus on expanding the currently limited range of civil society groups operating within the Kingdom. New organizations need to be nurtured, coordinated with, and taught how to spread grassroots awareness and contribute to the process of decentralization. By increasing participation in politics and the political process, it will become easier to share responsibility, monitor local governments, and ensure accountability.

Conclusion: These suggestions focus on the role of civil society and building local capacity because decentralization has to follow a bottom up progression. The process must be guided by the subsidiarity principle throughout; otherwise, it will neither be realized nor contribute to the creation of deeper democracies. If the poor and voiceless are excluded from the process, power will continue to be concentrated in elite hands and unbeneficial to Jordanians. Only by working from the ground up and concentrating on those who have not been able to express their concerns under the current system will genuine decentralization yield tangible results.

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- ¹ Glenn E. Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Aug. 1998), 389.
- ² 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).
- ³ World Bank, *World Development Report 1999-2000: Entering the 21st Century: The Changing Development Landscape* (Washington: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 1999): ch 5.
- ⁴ Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," 387.
- ⁵ For a more comprehensive explanation of the rentier system in Jordan, See Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," 387-390.
- ⁶ Curtis R. Ryan, "Working Paper 7: Civil Society and Democratization in Jordan," *Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2010), 1.
- ⁷ Robert Satloff, "A Reform Initiative in Jordan: Trying to Keep Pace with Iraqi and Palestinian Elections," *Policy Watch No. 953*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (Feb. 2005).
- ⁸ CDA David Hale, "Royal Commission On Decentralization Appointed; Parliament Moves To Restore Election Of Municipal Councils," (U.S. Embassy, Amman, February 6, 2005).
- ⁹ See, for example, Fahd al-Kitan, "Regions: From Dismantling the State to Dismantling the Home," *al-Arab al-Yawm*, March 29, 2009.
- ¹⁰ Satloff, "A Reform Initiative in Jordan."
- ¹¹ Ambassador Robert Stephen Beecroft, "King Renews Calls for Decentralization, Government Stalls for Time," (U.S. Embassy, Amman, April 15, 2009).
- ¹² Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2012 — Jordan Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012): 7.
- ¹³ World Bank, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiques. Third Tourism and Development Project: Secondary Cities Revitalization Study* (Washington: World Bank, 2005): 16.
- ¹⁴ Ryan, "Civil Society and Democratization in Jordan," 14.
- ¹⁵ See, for example, the Jordanian Municipalities Law of 1955, Article 41; and the Jordanian Constitution, 120.
- ¹⁶ World Bank, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, 13.
- ¹⁷ Municipalities Law, No. 29, Jordan, 1955.
- ¹⁸ Adnan M. Hayajneh, "UCLG Country Profiles: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," *United Cities and Local Government* (United Nations, 2008): 4.
- ¹⁹ Hayajneh, "UCLG Country Profiles," 3.
- ²⁰ See Municipalities Law, No. 29, Jordan, 1955; and World Bank, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, 5.
- ²¹ World Bank, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, 13-14.
- ²² Hayajneh, "UCLG Country Profiles," 3.
- ²³ Hayajneh, "UCLG Country Profiles," 4.
- ²⁴ World Bank, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, 11.
- ²⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2012 — Jordan Country Report*, 23.

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- ²⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2012 — Jordan Country Report*, 23.
- ²⁷ For an overview of debates regarding conceptualizations of civil society, See David R. Karp and William M. Sullivan, “The Idea of Civil Society: Scholarship and Debate,” (Westport: Smith Richardson Foundation, 1997).
- ²⁸ Juraj Nemec, “Decentralization Reforms and Their Relations to Local Democracy and Efficiency: CEE lessons,” *Uprava*, Vol. V, No. 3 (Sept. 2007): 13.
- ²⁹ Benjamin Goldfrank, “The Politics of Deepening Local Democracy: Decentralization, Party Institutionalization, and Participation,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jan. 2007): 149.
- ³⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Jordan Human Development Report 2004: Building Sustainable Livelihoods* (Amman: United Nations, 2004): 129.
- ³¹ UNDP, *Jordan Human Development Report 2004*, 126.
- ³² See Mustafa Riyalat, “Royal Commission of the Regions Publishes Final Report,” *al-Dustour*, April 9, 2009; and Ambassador Robert Stephen Beecroft, “King’s Decentralization Plan Has Many Critics, But Could Advance Electoral Reform,” (U.S. Embassy, Amman, December 18, 2008).
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- ³⁴ Hayajneh, “UCLG Country Profiles,” 3.
- ³⁵ Identity Center, “Manual of Civil Monitoring of Municipalities Work,” March 2013. <<<http://identity-center.org/en/node/188>>>
- ³⁶ See, for example, the Poverty Alleviate through Municipal Development (PAMD) Programme. UNDP, *Jordan Human Development Report 2004*, 126.
- ³⁷ When asked “Do you know about or have you heard of decentralization?” 54% of the 500 Jordanians surveyed answered in the negative.
- ³⁸ For information on vertical and horizontal financial balance, See Steven L. Schwarcz, “Global Decentralization and the Subnational Debt Problem,” *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Feb. 2002).