

April 7th, 2010

DR. MARTIN BECK
LEA COLLET

Civic Participation and Local Development: Building Effective Communities in Jordan

Event: Regional Workshop

Date/Place: April 7th, 2010, Al-Balqa Applied University

Concept: Dr. Khaled Awamleh, Dr. Martin Beck

Organization: KAS Amman, Visions Center For Strategic and Development Studies

1. Program Overview

Wednesday, April 7th, 2010

Visions Center for Strategic
And Development Studies
Amman-Jordan

Dr. Khaled Al Awamleh

Resident Representative of the
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Dr. Martin Beck

Local Development Directorate
Ministry of Interior-Jordan

Dr. Raad Al Adwan

Ambassador
Embassy of Switzerland
Amman-Jordan

HE Ms. Andrea Reichlin

President
Al-Balqa Applied University

Dr. Omar Al-Rimawi

Vice Prime Minister and
Minister of Interior
Amman-Jordan

HE Mr. Herr Nayef Soud Al-Qadi

First Session: Decentralization and Institutional Capacity Building for Local Administration

Decentralization and Local Public
Administration in Jordan

Dr. Raad Al Adwan
Local Development Directorate
Ministry of Interior-Jordan

Institutional Capacity Building
and Local Development

Dr. Jihad Abu Alsondas
Dean, Faculty of Planning and Management

Moderator

Mr. Salame Hiari
Mayor of Greater Salt
Municipality

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Second Session: The Role of Municipalities in Local Development

How to Empower and Run a Municipality
– A German Perspective

Dr. Christoph Strünck
Professor of Political Sciences
University Siegen

The Role of Greater Salt City in Civic
Participation and Local Development in
Jordan
Moderator

Ms. Khaleda Khleifat

Dr. Raad Al Adwan
Local Development Directorate
Ministry of Interior-Jordan

Third Session: Public Media and Local Development in Jordan

Public Media and Social Responsibility

Ms. Reem Obeidat
Senior Consultant/Trainer for Leadership
Development
Media Gender and Communication

Media and Local Development in Jordan

Dr. Basim Al- Tweissi
Director of the Center of Studies and
Community Department. Al- Hussein Bin
Talal University, Ma'an Jordan

Moderator

Dr. Amjad Al- Kadi
Director und Manager
Audiovisual Commission

General Discussion of Finding

2. Objectives

With the first competitive elections in 1989 Jordan's late King Hussein paved the way for enhancing the political participation, which is a substantial component of a functioning political system. King Abdullah II initiated the first measures to improve the political, social and economic framework of a political and equal participation. He therefore founded a royal commission in 2005 to work out a decentralization plan for Jordan's political system. This plan aims at enhancing the political participation of citizens on the local community level, creating an open, transparent and citizen friendly political system and delegating power from the highly centralized government bureaucracy to the governorate and community level. Though it is the main objective of the regime to stabilize the prevalent political order with its limited opportunities of political participa-

tion, Jordan's citizens should take the government by its word and should seize the chance of widening the civic participation. During the workshop on April 7th, 2010, organized by KAS Amman and the Visions Center for Strategic and Development Studies at the Salt University of Applied Sciences, 20 experts discussed with over 300 participants from the private, public and scientific sector the possibilities to improve the civic participation and the local development in building effective communities in Jordan in the context of the decentralization plan launched in 2005 by the government.

3. Details

Dr. Khaled Awamleh opened the conference thanking all experts, participants and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Amman and gave a brief introductory overview on the workshop program emphasizing that the

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workshop aims at supporting the municipalities so that they could play a major role in conflict resolution in the future.

Dr. Martin Beck, Resident Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Amman, pointed out that the workshop can be traced back to the promising initiative of King Abdullah II to decentralize the political decision-making process in Jordan.

However, this decentralization process should further enhance the capacities of municipalities and strengthen the participation on the local level. The government should therefore take measures to help citizens getting the opportunity to take part in decision-making processes and to implement their interests on the local level. Hence, the government has to provide the municipalities and governorates with the necessary financial means.

Both **Dr. Awamleh** and **Dr. Beck** stated that the KAS-Visions Center workshop is particularly important as it is the first coordinated effort between the government, represented by the directory of the local development at the ministry of interior, municipalities, local media departments, institutions of higher education and advocacy groups to organize a joint event on local development and civic participation in governorates and local communities.

Dr. Al Adwan pointed out to the important role of the present international and political experts as well as the representatives of the Salt municipality. The Swiss ambassador, Ms. **Andrea Reichlin**, evinced her interest in the topic of civic participation. In view of her long life experience with the Swiss political system, she welcomed the opportunity to talk about the direct democratic structures of one of the most decentralized countries in the world. Not only in Swiss but everywhere else is the state dependant on the active interaction with its citizens.

She then depicted briefly the Swiss political system. Swiss citizens can vote for parliament and the institutions on the communal, cantonal and national level. In addition they

can submit a petition for referendum or vote on a referendum to express their views on laws and rulings. From two to four times do the Swiss vote on national, cantonal and communal affaires per year. Whereas the Swiss local communities have their own public administrations and enjoy decision-making autonomy in domains such as security, education, health care and transportation, the autonomy of the public administration and decision-making is even higher.

The cantons have own constitutions, governments, parliaments, courts and laws which are in line with the institutions of the federation. This political decentralized system facilitates the participation of the citizens in the decision-making process.

Dr. Rimawi reflected on the important role of universities in educating the students in subjects such as social economics as a basis for local development. In developing a social market economy and strengthening the social structures, the government could push for sustainable local development.

The vice prime minister and minister of interior, Mr. **Nayef Soud Al-Qadi** expressed his joy over inaugurating this series of workshops. In view of the national parliamentary elections, scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2010, the importance of measures to enhance the active participation of citizens in the decision-making process is steadily increasing. The cooperation between the public sector and local institutions should be improved decisively in the future in order to guarantee more transparency, civil rights, accountability, economic security and prosperity. Therefore the government has to implement a comprehensive system of democracy, local development and security. The workshop of KAS and the Visions Center will enrich in this regard the activities of the ministry of interior.

After the welcome speeches **Dr. Al Adwan** presented in his lecture on "Decentralization and Local Administration" the decentralization plan of the government. A new committee works since 2009 on compiling the fi-

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financial, political, organizational and judicial framework for the implementation of the decentralization plan. The decentralization envisions a delegation of power, capacities and resources on the governmental and communal level.

The capabilities and financial means of the 12 governorates have to be strengthened in such a way as to enable the civil society to participate at the political life of the state on all levels. The huge socioeconomic gap between the rural and urban population shows that the decisions of the government do not always reflect the needs and priorities of the citizens.

In the following **Dr. Jihad Abu Alsondas** talked about the six possible steps to improve the local capacities. The needs of the local development should be identified, educational programs for the formation of municipal, communal and local employees should be developed, suitable effective legal measures should be decreed, a committee for local development activities and a national observatory centre for measuring the indicators of the local development process have to be established. To build local effective communities the private sector has furthermore to contribute to the local development process.

In the discussion the participants and experts talked about the role of already established local organizations in the decentralization process. They also examined if the delegation of government competences to the governorates means initiating a truly new political system in Jordan.

Professor Christoph Strünck gave in his lecture a short overview on the essential pillars of civil society in Germany. He underlined that self-government at local level is enshrined in Germany's constitutional law. Germany has about 14.000 municipalities in which the citizens vote for a mayor, who is the representative of the people and the local public administration and their district representatives in the city. The two main

tasks of the local government are to attract and keep businesses and to take care for needy people, since the municipalities predominantly provide public services in Germany.

Hence, he talked about the main groups of the civil society, i.e. the associations, citizen groups, local political parties, local media and non-profit-organizations.

He then focused on citizen loans as a new source of local revenue: citizens lend money to the city and will get it back with a fixed interest rate. The city uses the money for example to refurbish schools.

The German experience shows clearly that through the decentralization of the political system the citizens can assert their right of participation and their preferences in the socioeconomic process.

Ms. **Khaleda Khleifat** focused on the role of the Salt municipality and its public administration structures. Salt is not only the eldest municipality but also the most populated area in Jordan.

Though the municipality can decide autonomously on certain topics, the city and regional administrations in Jordan enjoy only a limited freedom of action as they are dependent of the central government concerning the financing and administration of public services and infrastructures. This would constrain the communities decisively in their communal activities.

Thanks to the great support of the private sector, there are numerous logistical projects to improve the city planning.

After the second session the participants debated whether the German decentralization of the political system is a possible model for Jordan and if this transformation would be advantageous or disadvantageous.

Ms. **Reem Obeidat** opened the third session analyzing a picture of a young Jordanian street child, published in one of Jordan's newspapers, to discuss the communication methods of print media.

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She considered the fact that the media in Jordan does not report on social and humanitarian problems as problematic and said that this is the main reason why the media does not contribute to local development. Therefore, the media should be more open and improve its quality standards in reporting to serve as a real exchange platform for citizens.

She added that the media plays a significant role in the decentralization process as a communication tool between the national administrative and the local level.

Dr. Al-Tweissi identified in this respect the media as a key tool in the local development policies and transformation process of the Jordanian society. The support of the local media in the different governorates should be a crucial task of the government in order to push for its reform measures and to bridge the gap between the north and the south and between the rural and the urban population in Jordan.

The media is not only an indispensable connector between the public and the private sector, but it allows the citizens to participate actively in the decision-making process. To enhance transparency, accountability, to combat corruption and to diversify the economic structures, the infrastructure of the media has to improve significantly.

In the final discussion participants and experts commented on the role of the media in Jordan. Due to the tribal structures in society, some participants considered a socio-economic transformation through the influence of the new media as unrealistic.

The experts were of the opinion that though the development of the local media is not fully accomplished yet, it plays a crucial role in the local development process.

The governor of Salt, Mr. **Fawaz Irshedat**, stated in the discussion on the workshop outcome his view about the upcoming national elections advocating a more transparent and open election campaign.

To achieve real democratic results voters should not jeopardize the election results due to family and client structures.

Professor Strünck pointed in his final comment to the important role of women in the local development process. He underlined that their participation, a positive investment climate and education are the most relevant pillars for a social, cultural and economic local development.

Dr. Beck remarked finally that the Jordanian governorates and local communities should campaign for more financial aid by the government as it is the case in Switzerland where 30 percent of the total public expenditure goes to the local level. Similar results should also be achieved in Jordan in order to enhance the local development process and the civic participation.

4. Conclusion

As a first coordinated effort between the government, represented by the directory of the local development at the ministry of interior, municipalities, local media departments, institutions of higher education, advocacy groups, the joint workshop of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Visions Center for Strategic and Development Studies on civic participation and local development has paved the way for future discussions on decentralization.

The participation of the vice prime minister and the minister of interior, Mr. **Nayef Soud Al-Qadi**, and of the Swiss ambassador Ms. **Reichlin** as well as of other high ranking experts showed that political decision-makers in Jordan consider working on concepts of local development, civic participation and decentralization of the political system as highly important.

The workshop fulfilled the function of bringing together experts from different sectors to discuss explosive topics such as the decentralization of power and financial resources in Jordan. The feedback in the workshop was positive. The participants enjoyed the opportunity of a free exchange of

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opinions on such rarely debated subjects. The lively contribution of the participants and experts clearly showed that there is a major interest in attending a following event and continuing the decentralization talks. The workshop was recorded by important Jordanian television channels as Jordan TV, JoStar, 7Stars und Nourmina TV and was covered by famous daily newspapers such as al-Dustur and al-Ghad. Short comments and reports on the workshop can be also found on several websites as www.fananews.com, www.shbeebnews.net, serajjnews.com or www.albalqanews.net. An overview on the main articles can be found under http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_546-1442-1-30.pdf.