

Decentralization and Local Development in Jordan

Event: Regional Workshop

Date/Place: February 21st, 2011, Al-Hussein Cultural Center

Concept: Dr. Khaled Awamleh, Dr. Martin Beck

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

1. Program Overview

Monday, February 21st, 2011

Visions Center for Strategic
And Development Studies
Amman-Jordan

Dr. Khaled Al Awamleh

Resident Representative of the
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Léa Collet on behalf of Dr. Martin Beck

Chargé d'Affaires
German Embassy
Responsible for Economic, Media
And Security Issues
Minister of Municipalities

Friederike Hellner

Vice Chairman
Greater Amman Municipalities

Eng. Mr. Amer Al-Bashir

Chairman of Parliament
House of Parliament

HE Mr. Faisal Al Fayez

First Session: Decentralization and the Role of Master Planning in Local Development

Decentralization and the Role of Greater
Amman Municipalities in Master Planning
and Local Development

Eng. Samir Al-Mousa
Head of Planning Department
Executive Director for Planning
Greater Amman Municipality

Role of Municipalities in Local Development
and Decentralization

Eng. Iman Zaki
Chairwoman of Planning Department
Ministry of Municipal Affairs

Moderation

Eng. Mr. Amer Al-Bashir
Vice Chairman
Greater Amman Municipalities

Second Session: Decentralization and the Management of Local Resources

Analyzing and Evaluating Decentraliza-
tion Efforts in Jordan

HE Dr. Abdullah Al-Nsour
Ex-Vice Prime-Minister
Member of Parliament

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German Experience in Decentralization and
Managing Local Resources

Moderation

Ms. Gabriella Neumann
Senior Budget Advisor
Jordanian Ministry of Finance

HE Shahada Abu-Hadeib

2. Objectives

KAS Amman and the Visions Center for Strategic and Development Studies started to work intensively on the major topic of decentralisation already in 2010. Yet, in the light of recent events in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere in the Arab world, the relevance of the issue has become even higher. Everywhere in the Arab world, people demand freedom and political rights. Decentralisation is to be considered a major instrument to fulfil these legitimate aspirations. Decentralised political structures give people a voice since it means that political entities and people on the local level are entitled to run their own affairs. Decentralisation is based on the genuine democratic value of subsidiarity: People should be empowered to deal with affairs that directly affect them to the highest possible degree. Actors from the central level should only interfere up to the degree that is inevitable to maintain national interests. KAS Amman and its highly appreciated partner, the Visions Center, feel deeply committed to the value of subsidiarity and the aim of realising it – be it in Jordan, Germany or elsewhere.

During the workshop on February 21st, 2011, organized by KAS Amman and the Visions Center for Strategic and Development Studies at the Al-Hussein Cultural Center, ten experts discussed with over one hundred participants from the private, public and scientific sector the chances to improve civic participation and local development in building effective communities in Jordan in the context of the decentralization

plan launched in 2005 by the government. The aim was to further develop a national strategy and to contribute to the creation of a comprehensive development plan. The rationality of the decentralisation strategy is also to fight poverty and unemployment, to create business and investment opportunities, and to improve living conditions of citizens by focusing on institutional capacity building both in the public sphere and the private sector.

3. Details

Dr. Khaled Awamleh opened the conference by thanking all experts, participants and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Amman for their support and gave a brief introductory overview on the workshop program, thereby emphasizing that the workshop aims at activating Jordanian citizens, enhancing the role of integrated participation of the private sector, supporting civil society organisations, promoting institution-building, and developing scientific and practical mechanisms for development in Jordan.

Léa Collet, who was talking on behalf of the Resident Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Amman, **Dr. Martin Beck**, pointed out that rather than central agencies local and regional actors are often better in designing and implementing policies since they know the local circumstances best. She emphasized that decentralization programs are very political, since they touch basic democratic principles such as the rule of law. The principle of subsidiarity which is

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the basic value shaping decentralisation efforts is eventually based on the belief that human beings can deal autonomously with affairs affecting them. She also emphasized that decentralisation is a complex task, which requires substantial financial means and support from the central authority as well as the civil society. **Ms. Collet** also underlined that KAS does not present and prescribe an ideal model but seeks to encourage dialogue.

Eng. Mr. **Amir Al Bashir**, Vice Chairman of the Greater Amman Municipalities (GAM), pointed out that GAM acted not only as a partner, but also seeks to adapt strategies developed in this workshop. GAM's aim thereby is to provide basic services to all citizens. He emphasized that all local institutions should define and develop their own role in a way that helps to improve the standard of living and the development in Jordan.

The Chargé d'Affaires of the German Embassy, Ms. **Friederike Hellner**, described how the topic of decentralization was constantly on and off the agenda since the time she first arrived in Amman more than two years ago and expressed her conviction of its importance and pertinence. For her as a German citizen, it is more difficult to comprehend centralization than the opposite. She then outlined the German federal system. The German ideal is a clear division of tasks between local, regional and central authorities. There is high degree of local autonomy, yet within the limits of a framework defined by the national parliament and the central government. Only seven domains in Germany are confined to central legislation only: Foreign affairs, defense, as well as policies of nationality, immigration, air traffic, currency and nuclear energy. All other domains, such as education, health care and even police are subject to regional or concurrent legislation by the "Bund" and the "Länder". She described the advantages

of a decentralized system, since the "Länder" have different identities and needs, which is why a central solution would not suit all equally well.

Thus, the "Länder" have a great deal of autonomy, but they must keep in line with the institutions of the federal system. She brought up the example of education which is decentralized. The university system and organisation is different in each "Land". However, the degree obtained by students is recognised in all of Germany. Ms. **Hellner** also pointed out to one of the most crucial points: financing. If you want to decentralize power, you have to decentralize finances and provide the provinces with their own revenues and incomes.

HE Dr. Hazim Qashou, Minister of Municipal Affairs, reflected on the difference of federalism and decentralization. He pointed out that not the former, but the latter is at the core of interest to Jordanians. He emphasized the need to expand residential areas and to pay attention to geography, so that, for instance, it is not necessary to go to Amman to look for a job in Irbid. He also pointed to the crucial partnership between the public and the private sector, since social issues such as unemployment loom large and have to be dealt with. **Dr. Qashou** then underlined the need for a strong political will to achieve satisfactory results. Finally, he emphasized that the workshop jointly organized by the Visions Center and KAS Amman offers a unique opportunity to the Jordanian government that should utilise its results in the ongoing legislation and planning processes.

The Chairman of Parliament, **HE Mr. Faisal Al Fayez**, emphasized the crucial role of the central government in all efforts to decentralize the Jordanian system. He also referred to the lack of human and financial resources as the main obstacle to a decent partnership between central and local authorities. He encouraged intense participa-

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tion of citizens and more efficiency. Decentralization should be considered as an opportunity for interaction between the citizens and the government. He also pointed to a crucial factor that could inhibit decentralization efforts: lack of accountability. In his view, serious accountability provided by free and transparent elections for representatives could ensure better results.

After the welcome speeches, Eng. **Samir Al Mousa** presented in his lecture on "Decentralization and the role of GAM in Master Planning and Local Development" the master plan for decentralization of the government. This master plan is the result of dozens of meetings with all kinds of shareholders such as investors, civil society, citizenry and politicians. Although the master plan is designed for Amman, it is meant to serve as a model also to other regions. The master plan encompasses various layers, particularly development, social benefits, water, electricity, civic participation, agricultural land reform etc. One of the most challenging tasks is coping with population growth in the coming years and decades. Thus, three different scenarios on population growth were incorporated into the master plan to ensure flexibility and preparedness. Another important issue is citizen participation. Only if citizens feel they take part in decentralisation, they will be committed to implement it. Thus he concluded by favouring a more bottom-up approach.

Also Eng. **Iman Zaki** talked about the master plan as a tool for decentralization. The first objective is the improvement of the standard of living of Jordanians and the narrowing of the gap between rich and poor in Jordan. A crucial point is the expected doubling of the population in the next 20 years. Therefore, interrelated master plans in different domains have to be implemented, such as transportation, social services etc. Legislation has to be reviewed and amended. Measures to enhance participa-

tion and commitment including public meetings should be taken. **Ms. Zaki** also called for amelioration of coordination between local and central authority as well as between the public and the private sector, to empower municipalities.

In the discussion, the participants and experts talked about the nature of the master plan and how to amend or change it. It was also discussed how to better implement useful master plans and how best to cope with population growth.

HE Dr. Abdullah Alnsour, former Vice Prime Minister, gave a lecture on the pitfalls of recent decentralization plans which were not implemented. He also talked about the distinction between merely technical aspects, as already dealt with in previous presentations, and political structures that can enhance or weaken successful decentralization. In the light of the fact that Jordan's political system is based on three pillars—the parliament, the cabinet and the king—he opted for strengthening the parliament and the role of political parties.

Ms. **Gabriella Neumann**, senior budget advisor at the Jordanian ministry of finance, talked about her experience with decentralization in other countries, particularly in Germany. While Germany has a long history of sub-national governments, there have also been efforts to equalize living conditions in all of Germany. There are institutionalized horizontal and vertical financial transfers to achieve this aim. **Ms. Neumann** also pointed out that in some cases you can even see a recentralization in Germany. However, the "Länder" are still the biggest public service employers. They have a great deal of autonomy; yet, successful regional and local planning requires the active participation of citizens. As the example of Cologne shows, there is often a lack thereof. She emphasized that despite the different background in Jordan and Ger-

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many, the exchange of experiences can be fruitful.

After the second session, the participants debated the question of feasibility of stronger local councils and parliaments and the extent to which foreign experience could help Jordan. Also the issue of why Jordanians without prior decentralization experience should feel the need to decentralize in the first place was a topic in the discussion.

Finally, the Moderator, **HE Eng. Shehada Abu-Hdeib** asked to submit comments and recommendations in written form. He also emphasized that despite the achievements made, there is still a long way to go. As a closing comment he thanked all participants, speakers and organizers of the workshop and closed the session.

4. Conclusion

As a coordinated effort between the government, municipalities, represented by the directory of the local development at the ministry for planning and members of parliament, local media departments, advocacy groups and experienced professionals, the joint workshop of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Visions Center for Strategic and Development Studies on "Decentralization and Local Development" has paved the way for future discussions on the topic which should take place also outside Amman.

The participation of many high-ranking decision-makers and representatives of the civil society and high-ranking experts showed that the issue of local development, civic participation and decentralization is of utmost importance for Jordan's reform agenda. The workshop fulfilled the function of bringing together experts from different sectors and various backgrounds to discuss explosive topics such as the decentralization of power and financial resources in Jordan.

An exchange of thoughts between the German and the Jordanian participants appeared equally fruitful: Major differences and similarities could be debated to apply results and insights to the legislative and planning process. The feedback on the workshop was very positive. The participants enjoyed the opportunity of a free exchange of opinions on otherwise rarely debated subjects. The lively contribution of the participants and experts clearly showed that there is a major interest in attending following events and continuing the debate on decentralization.

The workshop was recorded by important Jordanian television channels such as Jordan TV and JoStar and was covered by renowned daily newspapers such as al-Dustur and al-Rai. A report on the press coverage can be found at: http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_3038-1442-2-30.pdf?110228082018.