

Region: Arab States
Thematic Focus: Administrative reform
Country: Jordan

Context

Jordan's governance system consists of three levels:

Central Units: composed of (26) ministries and (23) central departments. The center is responsible for developing strategies and policies that govern service delivery to citizens. Despite reforms to enhance decentralization, it is said that most decisions are made by central authorities.

Regional Units: is composed of 12 Governorates; each has sub-divisions called districts (Liwa) and sub-districts (Qadha').

Local Units: consists of (309) municipalities and (157) village councils and (40) common service councils.

Key Factors

Decentralized structures in Jordan are a combination of the following types of decentralization:

Deconcentration: in this perspective, Jordan runs a dual system. First, there are the governors, the heads of the districts and sub-districts and their staff who are employees of the Ministry of Interior. In addition, other ministries (e.g. education, health, public works, etc...) have their branch offices in the Governorates. The Governorates are headed by a governor who is nominated by the Minister of Interior and appointed by the Cabinet.

The Governor is the representative of the King and government on the regional level. Therefore, he/she can not be considered a representative of the local population. However, governors have a strong position in the running of local affairs. They are responsible for maintaining law and order at the local level, and at the same time they supervise the activities of the ministries at the local level. Governors are assisted by two councils:

The Executive Council: is composed of local representatives of the different ministries (i.e. the general directors). Responsibilities include implementation of decisions of the ministries on the regional level, as well as, budget proposing. It is chaired by the governor.

The Advisory Council: is chaired by the governor and is composed of representatives of parliament members at the regional level, mayors of municipalities, NGO's, and trade unions. This council can only make propositions; whereas it is up to the executive council to make binding decisions. However, this council provides democratic participation in the common issues of the concerned locality.

Devolution: decentralization can be realized through the following categories of local administration:

Village Councils: Village Administrative Law No. 25 of 1954 defines the village as "any place recognized by the Minister of Municipalities to be a village or tribal settlement". Villages normally have a population of less than (2500). Members of the Village Council (3-11) are chosen by the governor to represent local residents, and traditional chiefs are included by virtue of their position within the community. The governor appoints the head of the council from among its members

and controls all activities of village councils. All administrative, financial or technical decisions of village councils are, by law, subject to approval by the Governor.

In practice the village council has a very limited service delivery due to the lack of sufficient finance or revenue generating capacity. Due to this limitation, the government is planning to merge those villages with nearby municipalities.

Municipalities: the most important units of local administration in Jordan.

The Municipal Council is directly elected by the people. Elections are held once every four years. Since July, 1995, elections have been held on the same day for all municipalities in Jordan.

The Mayor (chairman of the council) is also elected by the people.

Municipalities have been strengthened by recent reform which entails the following:

- a. Upgrading local democracy through mayoral elections.
- b. Generating additional revenue, for example, the share in the fuel tax reserved for municipalities and villages has been increased as well as local building taxes and garbage disposal fees.
- c. Granting the central government the authority to merge small and neighboring local councils to improve efficiency of municipalities.
- d. Creation of new municipalities and reduction of the number of village councils.
- e. Four categories of municipalities have been created. Category A: Capitals of the Governorates, a university degree is required by mayors of this category. Category B: District capitals, a high school certificate is the minimum requirement for mayors of this category. Category C: Municipalities which are the administrative centers of the sub-districts. Category D: all other municipalities. The ability to read and write is the only requirement for mayors of category C & D.

However, what should be emphasized is that "total" spending by Jordanian municipalities is very low by international standards (5.5) percent of total spending compared to (20) to (30) percent in other developing countries". Municipalities have no independent source of revenue, all local revenues are tightly controlled by the center. They face financial stress which hinders their efforts to meet the basic needs of local citizens.

Village councils and municipalities have their own budgets for carrying out their tasks. These budgets no longer need the approval of the ministry of municipalities, according to the revised municipality law, but must be approved by the governor. However, the sources of revenue are very restricted and limited.

Common services councils: established to combine the forces of several villages and or municipalities for a shared specific task (for example, administration of garbage disposal sites and public schools).

This form of local administration can be considered as a sole horizontal relationship among local councils.

Delegation: these are semi-autonomous units where the central government has transferred its decision-making and administrative authority and responsibility to state owned enterprises. Examples of these units are public universities, training institutions, and telecommunication corporations. The impetus behind such delegation is to allow these enterprises to be managed in a different style than that which governs other public organizations. Those semi-autonomous

enterprises are responsible for delivering specific activities at the regional or national level. There are (41) public enterprises that are managed according to such form. Those enterprises are granted financial and administrative autonomy under indirect control of the central government.

There is no systematic framework of local governance to be followed by all local governments in Jordan. Deconcentrated units vary in the authority and responsibility delegated to them by the governmental hierarchy.

Main Lessons

- The moderate level of characteristics of good governance in Jordan is a natural reflection of the level of democracy in the country. The democratic experiment in Jordan has a relatively recent history, as it has been introduced in the late 1980s. Free elections were institutionalized in the recent elections, and they were reflected at the local level through the election of municipality mayors and municipal councils in the same day.
- Application of decentralization and good governance is difficult without availability of an adequate infrastructure, including trained human resources, and the necessary facilities and technology.
- The institutionalization of good governance through the adoption of the required legal and organizational framework intensifies and sustains better service delivery to citizens. In turn good governance increases citizens' participation, as private individuals and members of civic societies, and deepens awareness of the values of equity and equality.

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