

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

(دهي مشاهل ةين درألأ قكلممل ' ىمشنل لاجرل دلب)



Capital: Amman

Inhabitants: 6.053.193 (2007)

Area: 89.342 km²

1. Introduction



Jordan is located at the heart of the Middle East. It gained its independence on 25 May 1946. It is a constitutional monarchy: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It has a population of about 6,2 million people according to July 2008 estimations. The area of Jordan is 92,300 sq km. Jordan branches of government include: the executive branch where the King is the Chief of State and the Prime Minister is appointed by the King to run the affairs of the state; The Legislative branch, is a bicameral national assembly: The House of notables, which has 55 seats and is appointed by the King, and the House of representatives, which has 110 seats elected by popular vote; the Judicial branch includes the court of Cassation, and the Supreme Court-Court of Final Appeal.

Jordan being an emerging democracy in the region, many political reform attempts have taken place to encourage political participation and to strengthen democracy based behaviors.

Jordan, is divided into 12 governorates. They include, as shown on the map, Ajlun, AL 'Aqabah, Al Balqa, Al-Kark, Al Mafraq, Amman, Al Tafilah, Az Zarqa, Irbid, Jarash, Ma'an, and Madaba. It is worth noting that Amman is a special case as, while under the Law of Municipalities, it is treated differently in terms of appointment of the Mayor and financial resources. Therefore, it will not be included in this paper. Moreover, the future of Al'Aqabah is unclear due to the special zone status of the city.

Local governance and municipalities are not new in Jordan. They were established decades ago and developed over the years. Irbid was the first municipality established in the year 1881. The number of municipalities reached more than 300 at the beginning of the new century, before being merged together to reach now 93 municipalities.

2. Territorial Organization

Local administration is composed of 93 municipalities in Jordan. There is no hierarchal relationship among municipalities neither with other government's agencies. All are connected to the central government. It is worth noting that the capital city Amman in



connected to the prime Minister and possesses a different statute from that of other municipalities. The management of Amman was a success story that some members of the government have tried to duplicate in other big cities but - according to Dr. Tubishat, former Minister of Municipal Affairs - these experiences failed, due to many factors including the lack of the financial resources, the lack of interest of the central government and the non application of the strategy to create several areas within these newly formed municipalities. (Tubishat 2006). In addition, there are no clear laws and legislations that pinpoint exactly the roles of the municipalities and the roles of the central government via the governors. The confusion of the laws and the isolations are evident in the case of Jordan (See Zubai, 2006).

3. Local Democracy

After it made the decision to merge more than 300 municipalities into 99, the government of Jordan had abolished popular election of municipal councils. However, the last municipal elections, that took place on July 31, 2007, were carried out in 93 municipalities under the new municipal law adopted in 2007. This text provides for the popular election of all municipal council members and mayors, except in the city of Amman, where the Mayor and half of the municipal council are still appointed. As a consequence, voter turnout increased to 62 %.

The new law brought another change by lowering voting age from 19 to 18. Contrarily to what happened in 2003, the main opposition party, the Islamic Action Front withdrew its candidates after claims of irregularities.

Voting for women whether by male or female electors was disappointingly low. However, under the new law, 211 seats were reserved to women.

Many progressive candidates complained that the very short duration of the electoral campaign, that is six days, prevented them from campaigning on local issues. As a consequence, according to a poll carried out during the election, most people voted according to community and family affiliation criteria and had "locked" their vote well in advance.

These elected bodies have limited impact on political issues because most of their responsibilities are service- related and the central government would not allow them to intervene in political debates. There is a lack of public opinion polls to see the approval rate of the public of the work of these municipalities. However, you hear a lot of complaints about their work and they are not serving the people as they should.

4. Central-Local Relationships

Due to the increasing duties of the central government of Jordan over the past decades, and as a response to many factors including the rise of the call for decentralization, human rights and democracy, a Ministry of Municipal Affairs was created in 1965 in order to give some responsibilities to the locals. It was transformed in 2002 and now employs 788 staff, and supervises the 96 municipalities and 22 Joint Service Councils with a total budget of 13 228 Millions JOD for 2008.

Although municipal councils and mayors are now elected, the central government retains its powers and intervene in everything at local level, all the more so,



that under the new law, the Minister of Municipal Affairs is entitled to appoint a Municipal Director General to work alongside with the Mayor, and be responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of the municipality.

Actually, what local governance in Jordan really is, is unclear. It does not have what one can call local administration. Almost everything is connected to the central government in Amman. The governor, who is appointed by the Ministry of Interior, represents the central government in the local area though he has no power to tax and legislate, nor a budget to spend. But he does exercise power and authority over the municipalities because he controls, in cooperation and under the direction of the central government, the affairs of the municipalities under his jurisdiction. The Jordanian constitution (article 120) states that "The administrative divisions of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the establishment of the Government Departments, their classification, designations, the plan of operations and the manner of the appointment of civil servants, their dismissal, their discipline, supervision and the limit of their competence and powers shall be determined by regulations issued by the Council of Ministers with the approval of the King". In addition, article 121 provides that "Municipal and local council affairs shall be administered by municipal or local councils in accordance with special laws." Nonetheless, many changes and amendments have taken place with regards to the law of municipalities, which does not spell out clearly their role and mandate.

Moreover, due to the changes of the Law of Municipalities in 1995, many responsibilities of the municipalities in Jordan are taken away from them by the central government which decreases its

role in many aspects of local governments. 13 responsibilities were taken from the municipalities to other central government agencies after the changes of the Municipalities' Law of 1995. These are essential to local governance including: Water, Electricity and gas, sewerage system, local transportations, oversight of hotels, oversight of the ethical and cultural norms, fire fighting, health, sports, anti-begging measures, etc...In addition, the trend of privatization that the central government is emphasizing for good services has given some of the responsibilities of many municipalities to the private sector. They include local and mainly international corporations which affect the way people decide, how to live their life and weakens local democracy. If this trend continues, the municipalities will be left with little to do and the question then will be what the need for them is?

The current laws confuse the relations between local municipalities and the central government. Some in the government still believe that the locals are still immature to govern themselves. This was the rationale behind the appointment of the mayors and half the council members. The new trend in Jordan is, for the central government to retain the power. In a nutshell, decentralization is not yet the norm of local administration in Jordan.

5. Local Responsibilities

There is no clear understanding of the role of the mayor of any municipality in Jordan. The cultural factor plays an important role in defining this position. Some view it as a prestigious position from a cultural point of view while others in the government want technocrats to run the affairs of municipalities. However, it is faced with the dilemma of democracy where people have the right to select their own municipality



council as well as their mayor while others do not believe in this. The government, as of 2001, wanted to appoint the mayors as Tubishat would argue for a short time until the position is stabilized but in return the experience and the whole strategy was not implemented and many municipalities' councils were changed by the central government and other have resigned because they lack public legitimacy.

It can be argued that the responsibilities of the municipalities included 39 and 13 were taken over the years by the central government and they are left with 26 responsibilities. They include: planning of the city and its streets, building and construction measures, water, electricity and gas, sewerage system, public markets, jobs and businesses, transportation, hotels, public places, ethics and manners, parks, fire fighting, measure of floods, helping the victims of disasters, public health institutions, sports and cultural institutions, food safety, oversight of the safety of meat, cleaning and maintenance, oversight of health, public health, cemeteries, public safety, begging, gambling, foreign employees, advertisement in public spaces, repairing the old places, etc. In summary, they include every part of the citizen's life.

This number of these responsibilities, as discussed earlier, will decrease in the years to come, due the role of the central government which has taken back 13 responsibilities and due to the trend of privatization where the central government will give up these responsibilities via privatization to the private sector which will leave the local municipalities with limited responsibilities which can make them useless in the future.

Moreover, all the activities of the municipalities require the approval of the Minister of Municipal affairs, from which one can draw his own conclusion about the

extent of local administration and local governance in Jordan. One cannot define the mayors' role as independent when the governor can actually run the affairs of these municipalities. If a municipality wants to organize a lecture for example, it has to have the approval of the governor who is appointed by the Minister of Interior. The security aspect is a determining and important factor in the development and future of municipalities and of local governance in Jordan.

6. Local Finance and Management

The local public spending of municipalities and their finances are troubling. Most municipalities do not have resources to pay their employees. Most are living in debt from the Cities and Villages Development Bank. The central government has tried to pay off some of the municipalities badly affected by debts in order to give them new starts. According to sources in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, it has paid the debts of 72 municipalities out of 99. They were from the third and fourth categories, e.g. not big. The ministry is also promised that it would help to the remaining ones by 2011. The objective of these central government attempts is to allow the municipalities to use all their resources to serve citizens. In addition, the ministry claims to have decreased administrative expenditures by about 20%, which in turn will leave a bigger share to capital and service-related projects. The total budget of all municipalities (99) for the year 2006 is (114) million JOD- (\$161) Million-, which increased by (10) million JODs from the previous years. (See Al Arab Alyuom, May 25, 2006). The 2005 Budget was (114) million JOD and the 2004 budget (105) million JOD.

Local governments, namely municipalities, are over staffed with little productivity. They employ more than 23 000 persons, 5



535 of which for cleaning. Most of them are unskilled labor. The ministry tries to upgrade their capabilities via hundreds of training programs, the latest of which consists of 11 agreements signed with official universities, The Jordan Royal Geographic Center and the Arab Academy. All budgets have recently become computerized. The lack of leadership is a major obstacle preventing municipalities from carrying out their work. The Municipality of Amman spends more (35) million JOD (\$50 million) to keep the city clean, that is one third of the budget of all municipalities in Jordan. It shows that the government is interested only in the capital of the country, whereas other regions are ignored. It is important to note that, as discussed earlier, some municipalities' whole budget does not suffice to pay employees' salaries.

The main financial sources of municipalities are:

- The central government which establishes legislation that generates income for them and foreign aid devoted to the development of municipalities.
- Investment of their own property
- Fees of certifying different jobs and businesses within their own jurisdiction
- Revenues or fees from municipal land and areas.
- Contribution from national and international individuals and institutions.
- Loans from the Cities and Villages Development Bank.

However, most municipalities face problems in collecting funds from the people, including taxes, fees, etc... And in spite of the recent improvements in the legislation related to municipalities, they will still face financial problems for the many years to come.

7. Conclusion

This paper has tried to give an actual picture of the state of decentralization, local democracy and municipalities in Jordan. The country still has many steps to take before reaching the level of advanced democratic countries. Nonetheless, the King of Jordan has established a year ago a high level committee to debate the idea of dividing the country into three regions including the North, the Middle and the South. The idea is to have a regional parliament with members elected by popular vote to decide on local issues while a national parliament would devote its efforts to national issues. The idea is still in the thinking process but it will require a number of pieces of legislations and cultural changes before it can be implemented.

According to the ministry, the main challenges municipalities face include:

- Lack of measures for transparency and evaluation of the productivity of municipalities
- Lack of cooperation among neighbouring municipalities
- Weakness of the institutional powers of municipalities and the Ministry as well as the Cities and Villages Development Bank,
- Lack of technocratic expertise.
- Limitation of financial resources and inability of the municipalities to establish generating income projects.

A pioneering study carried out by the strategic studies center of the University of Jordan has called for several recommendations to deal with challenges of the municipalities and the changes that started to take place in 2001. They include:



- More transparent legislations to specify the relations between the municipalities from one side and the central government on the other side.
- Create specific responsibilities for the municipalities and, more importantly, ways and means for them to gain control over these affairs, including enough power to implement the laws.
- Creation of transparent measures on allocation of governmental revenues.

In summary, as stated by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and by many studies, local democracy and decentralization in Jordan still need a lot of improvement. Elections, new legislations, more income generating projects and citizen cooperation are key elements to any improvement in the future. Jordan is taking many steps to strengthen democracy and to improve political life and it can start at local level because all politics are local.

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