النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development
ARDD

Fostering a Culture of Responsibility and Accountability

Improving the Learning Environment in Jordan

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Introduction

At the start of the 1990s, education reform was prioritised by the Jordanian government which led to substantial investments in the development of human resources over the past three decades; ultimately resulting in a concrete overall improvement in performance on the Human Development Index.[1] Jordan continues to build on these achievements, which is demonstrated by its recent commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.[2] Despite Jordan's remarkable achievements and numerous initiatives pursued by the government and different stakeholders, to reform the education sector, several challenges still persist. One major challenge is accountability within the education system. This paper seeks to provide insights into the challenges and gaps in accountability, as well as explore inter-linkages with the legal framework, and the challenges of decentralisation and governance. To this end, a review of the relevant literature, and fieldwork research were conducted to identify obstacles related to access to education and the provision of quality education and a supportive learning environment in Jordan. In addition to a learning event was held entitled "Fostering a Culture of Accountability for improving the Learning Environment for Children in Jordan"[3] in order to discuss the findings of the project "Education for the Future: Communities of Learning among Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities[4]" with a wider stakeholder community. The areas highlighted are the following:

- The Legal framework: issues of access, quality, and equity.

- Communication and Accountability: communication between schools and parents, the Ministry of Education, and other stakeholders (civil society/community involvement).

- Decentralisation and Governance: autonomy of schools, national decentralisation, the role of the local community.

Significant gaps in the accountability system and a lack of coordination between the multiple administrative layers within the Ministry of Education (MoE) are pressing issues[5] which extend to the spectrum of stakeholders involved in the education system, such as local civil society organisations, communal platforms, and parents.

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[1] UNDP (2015) Human Development Report, 2015 Education Achievements, p 243, Also see p209 http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf, Available in Arabic: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2015_report_arabic.pdf

[2] UNDP Jordan (2015) 'A New Sustainable Development Agenda'http://www.jo.undp.org/content/jordan/en/home/post2015-.html

[3] Learning Event, entitled "Fostering a Culture of Accountability for Improving the Learning Environment for children in Jordan", 11th January 2017, Amman, Jordan, co-hosted by ARDD, Fafo and Durrat Al Manal, and supported by the Norwegian Embassy.

[4] Education for the Future: Communities of Learning among Syrians and Jordanians in Host Communities Project. http://ardd-jo.org/node/527 .

[5] Identity Centre, "Decentralizing Education in Jordan: Seizing the Opportunity to Improve the Quality and Equality of Jordanian Schools", Social Justice in Jordan Series, Policy Paper No. 2, p.9

Efforts of the MoE to decentralise [delegate some decision-making powers] the education sector and build the capacities of its staff, are significant steps in the right direction. However, there are still no concrete results on the ground; the education system remains quite centralised with decisions being made, and resolutions being passed in a top-down manner, with little or no consultation.

An additional focus of this paper is the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the education system. The on-going Syrian conflict has further hindered progress in reforming the education sector in Jordan. Based on the figures published by the government of Jordan, Syrian refugees residing within the Kingdom amount to around 1.2 million,[6] of which 655,314 are registered with UNHCR.[7]

Official records released by the MoE indicate that 143,000 Syrian children were enrolled in public schools across Jordan in the school year 2015/2016[8], compared to 16,713 in 2011/2012, indicating an increase of 875%,[9] thereby exerting acute pressure on education sector resources and infrastructure. The number of Syrian children enrolled in schools has created additional barriers affecting the quality of the learning environment and the achievements that Jordan attained during the reform process. Although Jordan had previously attempted to eliminate double-shift schools, the Syrian influx has resulted in the opening of an estimated 200 afternoon double-shift schools to accommodate the Syrian children.[10] This has not only impacted the quality of education, but also the infrastructure of schools which was already suffering in some areas.[11]

To support organisations working in the education sector in Jordan, national civil society organisation, the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) and the Norwegian research institute Fafo, conducted a study of the learning environment in Jordan as part of a two-year project in the governorate of Mafraq. Visits to 40 schools were undertaken, individual and group interviews were conducted with children, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders, and a small sample survey was administered. The goal of the latter was to increase understanding of several issues including: available channels of communication between the schools and parents and the extent to which they are utilised, overall satisfaction with school performance, and opportunities for improvement. The findings clearly demonstrate the impact of the above-mentioned challenges on the learning environment for Jordanian and

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[6] Al Bawaba (2016) Jordan's census counts 1.2 million Syrian refugees, 31 January 2016 http://www.albawabaeg.com/78017

[7] UNHCR, Operational Update, December 2016, http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR20%Jordan20%Operational20%Update20%-20%December202016%.pdf

[8] Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and United Nations (2016) 'Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis -2016 2018', p.47 http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JRP18_16_Document-final+draft.pdf

[9] Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and United Nations (2016) 'Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis -2016 2018', http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JRP18_16_Document-final+draft.pdf

[10] UNICEF, (2016) 'Jordan Commits to Provide Education to Every Child' 19 August 2016 https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media_11137.html

[11] Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households". https://goo.gl/PzBelS

Syrian refugee children in Mafraq, where the population of Syrian refugees exceeds that of the host community.[12] Key challenges identified include severe overcrowding and educational and cultural differences between refugee and host communities.[13] These issues undermine the on-going reform efforts.

As mentioned above, this paper places much focus on accountability and its inter-linkages with other issues such as decentralisation, community engagement and the impact of the Syrian crisis on the education system in Jordan. However, it also highlights the shortcomings of the legal framework and the lack of enforcement of education laws. Given the limitations of time, and geographical reach, this paper does not attempt to highlight all challenges facing the education system in Jordan, but rather seeks to compliment other efforts to elevate the status of education in the Kingdom.

Current situation

Since 1990, Jordan has launched comprehensive education reforms and interventions aimed at achieving the 2014 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[14] As a result of these reforms, key education indicators have improved consistently. The illiteracy rate in 2010 was 7% - among the lowest in the Arab world. Net enrollment in primary education was 99% in 2012, and the transition rate to secondary education has increased from 63% in 2000 to 99% in 2012.[15] A zero double shift schools policy was adopted before the Syrian crisis, however, Jordan has had to resort to double-shifted schools to accommodate Syrian children. This appears to have already had an impact on the quality of education children receive and educational outputs. For example, though the outcomes on the science portion measured in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have increased by thirty points since 1999, the outcomes for the mathematics portion have fallen by more than twenty points.[16] More recently, Jordan has committed to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, building on other initiatives designed to reform the education sector. A few examples are listed below:

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[12] See Khetam Malkawi (2015) 'Mafraq, Ramtha population doubled since start of Syrian crisis' Jordan Times 27January 2015, http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/mafraq-ramtha-population-doubled-start-syrian-crisis%E99%80%2; UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response - Mafraq

https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/settlement.php?id=173&country=107&region=77

[13] Svein Erik Stave et all, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Improving Learning Environments in Jordanian Public Schools – Lessons from school visits and community dialogue in Northern Jordan", pp 7 ,4. https://goo.gl/jpes57

[14] See Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and United Nations Jordan, 'Keeping the Promise and Achieving Aspirations - Second National Millennium Development Goals Report Jordan 2010' , pp42-29 http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG20%Country20%Reports/Jordan/20%2010en.pdf

[15] World Bank, (2015) SABER Country Report 2015 – Jordan, http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAA/SABER_SAA_Jordan.pdf   Also see: UNESCO Education For All Report,2015 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/232205/002322/0023e.pdf

[16] National Centre for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, (2016) 'Highlights from TIMSS and TIMSS Advanced - 2015', November 2016 p.5 Available at: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017002/2017_timss_2015_results.pdf

National Strategy for Human Resources Development (HRD- 2016)

The National Strategy for Human Resources Development (HRD-2016) articulates the following objectives:

• By 2025, ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood learning and development experiences that promote primary school readiness, ensure healthy lives, and promote their future wellbeing;

• By 2025, ensure that all children complete equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes;

• By 2025, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship; and

• By 2025, ensure fair access to affordable, relevant, and quality university education opportunities.[17]

To accomplish these objectives, the HRD strategy provides a set of clear principles that guide its future design and operation for the purpose of reforming the education sector, as follows:

(1) Access; all learners should have fair access to quality education, training, and equal opportunities at every stage of their education;

(2) Quality; the system should strive to provide world-class experiences and outcomes for all students;

(3) Accountability; regulation of the system must be based on a transparent set of rules that inform decision making;

(4) Innovation; the system must adopt creative and innovative approaches to deliver the required outcomes; and

(5) Mindset; the system instills national values, honours heritage, and promotes unity in citizenry.[18]

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[17] The National Committee for Human Resources Development, (2016) 'Education for Prosperity: Delivering Results – A National Strategy for Human Resources Development 2025-2016, See: http://www.hrd.jo/nationalstrategy, Executive Summary available at: http://media.wix.com/ugd/176e7_64f507bb190834173a55c0743e0bf6c9d.pdf

[18] Ibid.

Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA)

The Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA) is another example of Jordan's efforts to reform the education sector. Established in 2009, the academy is an independent non-profit institution tasked with advancing HM Queen Rania Al Abdullah's vision of empowering teachers, supervisors, and principals with the skills, recognition, and support necessary to excel in their roles. Since its establishment, the academy has benefited 19,834 teachers, with the goal of reaching around 30,000 teachers over the next five years.[19] QRTA supports the MoE's efforts to enhance the quality of education. It has developed numerous teacher training and professional development programs, established the Teacher Skills Forum, and worked with the MoE to develop new teaching materials and curricula in order to improve standards of literacy and numeracy amongst primary school children.

Quality of Education and Accountability Unit (QEAU)

The MoE took a significant step forward in educational reform with the establishment of the Quality of Education and Accountability Unit (QEAU) in 2015. This unit is tasked with holding education stakeholders accountable and upholding the laws and regulations already in place. The newly established QEAU will support the development of accountability processes in the educational system through building the capacity of the directorates of education, schools' principals, and teachers to foster a culture of accountability, and will embark on establishing a transparent system where all stakeholders are fully aware of their roles and are held accountable for their actions.[20]

School and Directorate Improvement Project (SDIP) & School and Directorate Development Program (SDDP)

In partnership with the Embassy of Canada, the MoE is currently building the capacity of schools so that they can assume greater autonomy. Through its School and Directorate Improvement Project (SDIP), the MoE has constructed inter- and intra- school mechanisms to increase the effectiveness and accountability of public schools through the introduction of Jordan's School and Directorate Development Program (SDDP).[21]

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[19] The Queen Rania Teacher Academy, http://www.queenrania.jo/en/initiatives/queen-rania-teacher-academy

[20] Quality and Accountability Unit, Ministry of Education http://www.moe.gov.jo/Departments/DepartmentPage.aspx?DepartmentID=41

[21] Embassy of Canada, 'Jordan, School and Directorate Improvement Project (SDIP): May 2011–April 2015' http://www.agriteam.ca/projects/profile/school-and-directorate-improvement-project-sdip-jordan/

Jordan Response Plan to the Syrian Crisis (2016-2017)

The Government of Jordan has taken several measures to respond to the effects of the Syrian refugee crisis on the quality of education in Jordan. A key response in its resilience-based approach was the Education sector strategy. The strategy seeks to ensure sustained quality educational services for all refugees and for vulnerable Jordanians affected by the crisis.[22]

INEE Minimum Standards for Education

In recent years, the Jordanian Ministry of Education has worked with both international and national organizations to safeguard the right to education in humanitarian emergencies. The Government of Jordan has taken the INEE Minimum Standards for Education, which were developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (Preparedness, Response, Recovery), and adapted them to the local context. This project aimed to contextualize the strategy that guides the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education interventions.[23]

The Education Policy in the Community Participation Standards include:[24]

- Standard 1: Law and Policy Formulation: Education authorities prioritize continuity and recovery of quality education, including free and inclusive access to school; and

- Standard 2: Planning and Implementation: Education activities take into account international and national educational policies laws, standards, and plans and the learning needs of affected populations.

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[22] Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and United Nations (2016) 'Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis -2016 2018', http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JRP18_16_Document-final+draft.pdf

[23] Peter Hyll-Larsen, UNESCO (2015) Adapting Minimum Standards for Education to Jordan, 11 May 2015 http://www.ineesite.org/en/blog/adapting-minimum-standards-for-education-to-jordan

[24] Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), UNICEF (2015) Jordan Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies: Contextualized from the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery'. p.11 http://toolkit.ineesite.org/resources/ineecms/uploads/1154/INEE-English_18_June__9_2015_(online)_(1).pdf

Challenges

When observing the nature of the interventions outlined above, it becomes evident that most of these interventions are policy-based or procedural in nature, improving the learning environment in an ad-hoc manner. However, none of the initiatives mentioned address gaps in the legal framework that governs the learning process, nor do they sufficiently address gaps in accountability and the system of governance within the education system. Moreover, to ensure that the impact of these initiatives is sustainable, it is necessary to examine and draw upon the legal framework, highlighting gaps and addressing three main challenges:

1.   The legal and policy framework governing the Jordanian education system;

2.   The lack of communication and accountability; and

3.   Decentralisation and governance.

1. The Legal and Policy Framework Governing the Jordanian Education System

The public debate around education reform has mainly focused on the operational and curricular aspects of education; its legal aspects have seldom been discussed. Yet an understanding of the applicable legal framework is crucial to improving the education system and strengthening accountability, for the benefit of Jordanians, Syrians and other refugees. One of the objectives of this paper is to raise awareness of the laws protecting educational rights and identify the areas in which laws are not being upheld, in order to equip parents and children with some of the tools they need to assert the Right to Education.

International Law

The right of the child to education and the corresponding obligations incumbent upon state parties is set out in Articles 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989.[25] Jordan has ratified the CRC and published it in the National Law Gazette, rendering it applicable in domestic courts.[26] The Kingdom's obligations under the convention include: ensuring primary education is free and accessible to all, 'encouraging the development of different forms of secondary education', and 'mak[ing] higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means'. Article 29 mandates that education be directed *inter alia* towards respect for human rights (paragraph b). In a clause particularly relevant to refugee children, education must take into account: 'the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values [...] the country from which he or she may

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[25] UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx   Under article 1: 'For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.' The age of majority in Jordan is eighteen.

[26] Child Rights Network, Jordan National Laws, https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/jordan-national-laws

originate [...]' (Article 29, paragraph c).[27] The obligation to provide education to children with disabilities is set out in Article 23, paragraph 3.

Although Jordan is a not a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, the Kingdom entered into a memorandum with UNHCR in 1998. Whilst the MOU does not reflect obligations to provide education to refugee children, it sets out other relevant commitments including an agreement to respect the right to freedom from discrimination for refugees registered with UNHCR.[28]

National Law

This section sets out the domestic legal and policy framework governing the following areas:

1. The Right to Education
2. The Right to a Safe Learning Environment
3. Communication between Schools and Parents and Accountability
4. Teachers' Qualifications.[29]

1- The Right to Education:

Education Law number (3) of 1994, Chapter Three, discusses the "periods of education" required for each age group, formalizing the minimum requirements of education, as follows:

i- Kindergarten: 2 years, from the age of 3 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months, (Article 8). This stage is not compulsory or free, and there are few public kindergartens for this age group (KG1)

Law of 1994, chapter two, section C provides a general framework for the learning environment, which includes:

1- Jordanians are equal in political, social and economic rights and duties, to the extent they give to their community and belong to it.

2 - Respect for individual freedom and dignity.

3 – In the interest of the community's cohesion and survival, there is a need for the basis of social justice for each of its members to establish a balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of society, and cooperation and solidarity of its members in the public interest to assume responsibility individually and communally.

4 –The progress of society is subject to its members organizing in order to preserve the national interest. 5 - Political and social participation in the framework of the democratic system is a right and duty for the individual in his society. 6 – Education is a social need and the right to education is for all, each according to his disposition and particular capabilities.

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[27] However, these obligations are mediated by paragraph 2 of Article 29, which states that: 'no part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions'.

[28] Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of Jordan and UNHCR (Apr. 1998 ,5) http://mawgeng.a.m.f.unblog.fr/files/02/2009/moujordan.doc

[29] Further details of the framework governing the evaluation of school/teacher performance are set out below in the section on Accountability.

ii-   Basic education: 10 years, from the age of 5 years and 8 months, through to age 16. This stage is compulsory and free in the public sector (Article 9 and Article 10).

iii-   Secondary education is a two year term, free, but not compulsory (Article 11).

Education Law of 1994, chapter three, section C, provides a set of general guiding principles applicable in the management of education which reflect international legal norms of equality and non-discrimination, subject to the constraints of the national interest.

2-The Right to a Safe Learning Environment

There is a comprehensive policy framework regulating the learning environment, particularly its physical attributes. Chapter 6 of the Jordanian National Education Strategy 2006-2016, is devoted to the learning environment, emphasizing that it should be safe, healthy, and conducive to learning. [30] The Department of Educational Planning has produced guidelines stating that the optimal class size is 1.2 metres squared per student and in cases where this is not possible, it ought to be 1 meter squared per student. In addition, there must be 2 to 2.5 meters squared of outdoor space per student and the ground must be flat, non-slip, and free of dust and not shared with space allocated for vehicle parking. The amount of indoor and outdoor space thought to be appropriate in schools attended by children with disabilities is greater and government policy maintains that schools should be fully accessible to disabled children.[31]

3- Communication between Schools and Parents and Accountability

According to the 'Description and Classification of Posts No. (5)' for the year 2009, published by the Directorate of Education and Private Education, it is the principal's responsibility to:

i.   Enhance the social role of the school and open up prospects for cooperation and integration between the school and parents.
ii.   Ensure that parents are aware of the condition and progress of their children's education and any problems their children may be facing.

These policies are reflected in the relevant legal framework. Regulation number (9) for the Year 2007 for the Parent-Teachers Associations in Public and Private Educational Institutions outlines expectations for PTA meetings and co-ordination.[32] Guidelines for Educational Development Councils (local leadership and planning councils) and networks (connected groups of schools, connected through cooperation efforts) can be found in Regulation No. 1 of 2014, which is based on Article 6-L of Education Law No. 3 from 1994.[33]

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[30] Jordanian National Education Strategy 2016-2006 (NES). http://inform.gov.jo/Portals/0/Report20%PDFs/20%.2Human20%&20%Social20%Development/i.20%Education20%&20%Training/20%2006ERFKE20%National20%Education20%Strategy.pdf

[31] Ministry of Education, 'Rules, principles, and general guidelines- Department of Educational Planning'

[32] Regulation number (9) for the Parent-Teachers Associations in Public and Private Educational Institutions, 2007

[33] Regulation No. 1 of 2014, Educational councils networks of schools and education development councils in the Directorates of Education

4- Teachers' Qualifications

The Education Law of 1994, Chapter 4, Article 20, requires that teachers obtain an official permission from the Ministry of Education, to work in the teaching profession. In order to obtain permission, kindergarten and primary school level teachers must hold a relevant university degree. Secondary School teachers must hold a one year educational qualification or Master's degree in addition to a first degree.[34] The Educational Descriptions and Job Classifications for Public Schools for the Year 2007 also sets out guidelines for hiring teachers and the qualifications required of teachers in Jordanian public schools.[35] However, there does not appear to be any laws that expressly deal with disciplinary measures including firing teachers for gross misconduct, or penalizing persistently inadequate performance.

Challenges

Due to the increase in the school-aged population, **these laws are now being tested in unprecedented ways**. A lack of transparency and public knowledge of the legal and policy framework makes it more difficult for the public to **access their rights to education.** Similarly, a lack of proper inductions for new school staff, results in a lack of awareness of legal duties amongst teachers. Constant reshuffling of ministers in the MoE over the past few years and a lack of communication and coordination between departments has also undermined the implementation and enforcement of Education Law. Therefore, increased accountability for school management and stakeholders must be part of the education reform process. Accountability can be increased through the establishment and participation of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and elected educational councils. Although the law currently recognises their role, their participation in policy formation and the reform process is not guaranteed.

It may be possible to address some of the challenges of access, quality, and equity within the education system by advocating for better accountability for education stakeholders and better utilization of the existing policies. However, while promoting and protecting the legal right to quality education, and advocating for better implementation, the need arises to strengthen education rights with the goal of ensuring access to education and the provision of quality education for all children, regardless of status.

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[34] The Education Law of 1994, Chapter 4, Article 20

[35] The Educational Descriptions and Job Classifications for Public Schools for the Year 2007

In summary, some of the issues exposed through an analysis of the legal and policy framework include:

- *There are serious challenges in providing access to basic education in line with legal standards in the humanitarian emergency context within Jordan. Obligations, particularly in relation to class size (the number of pupils) and the physical learning environment (the amount of space provided), including for disabled children, are not being met.*
- *There is a legal basis and detailed guidelines for schools to engage parents in their children's education, which is not being utilised. There are also gaps in the law which means that the role of PTAs and School Councils in decision-making is not protected.*
- *There seems to be a lacuna or gap in the law relating to disciplinary measures that can be taken against teachers who compromise the safety of children, have committed gross misconduct or persistently underperform in their role.*
- *There is a need for better dissemination of education law and policy amongst teaching staff, parents, students and other stakeholders.*

2. Lack of Communication and Accountability

Accountability can be understood as a collaborative process whereby stakeholders work together to ensure the delivery of educational goals. A major barrier to quality education has been the lack of communication, accountability, engagement and trust between parents, communities, schools, and the MoE. UNICEF sees communication and community engagement as crucial in building a positive learning environment; schools should be "actively engaged with, and enabling of, student, family, and community participation in all aspects of school policy, management and support to children".[36] The MoE and the QEAU also see a relationship between parent and community participation and the quality of education children receive.

Within the framework of "Education for the Future" project, a survey was conducted by ARDD and Fafo in the governorate of Mafraq targeting Jordanian and Syrian refugee households, and investigating relations between parents and schools in Mafraq city, which provides interesting insights into this issue. Throughout the informal interviews and focus group discussions conducted as part of the study, subjects expressed frustration with the lack of communication between different stakeholders involved in the educational process (such as schools, parents, civil society...etc.). Many Jordanian parents had little communication and engagement with their children's schools. Refugee parents often stated that they did not trust school staff to safeguard their children and to provide quality education; and schools may lack trust in the refugees as outsiders in their communities. Teachers were frustrated with parents for not being engaged enough in their children's education.

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[36] Child Friendly Schools Framework-Manual, (2009), UNICEF.
https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child_Friendly_Schools_Manual_EN_040809.pdf

The survey showed that almost one quarter of respondents admitted that their children do not do their homework, or that they are unaware of whether they do it, with Syrian parents responding that they didn't know more often that their Jordanian counterparts.[37] The survey also found a positive relationship between children's performance and parents' follow up on their homework. The survey reported almost 40% of parents know almost none of their children's classmates or their parents. Furthermore, only 7% of parents often discussed issues related to their children's schooling with other parents, 41% did it sometimes and 52% never talked with other parents about their children's education.[38]

The survey found that only 25% of parents learn about their children's performance and wellbeing from written feedback from school, with only 17% being given individual meetings with teachers, and 36% relying on information from other children (Figure 1). Interestingly, Syrian parents often resorted to other children for information, while Jordanian parents were more likely to meet with teachers. The survey showed that a striking 54% of respondents have never received any written report about their children from the school. The data gathered denotes a variation in answers between Syrians and Jordanians, where 61% of Syrians reported never having received written feedback from the school about their child's performance compared to 49% of Jordanians who reported the same. The gap is even greater in light of the school shift the child attends, with 69% of parents of children attending the afternoon shift reporting that they had never received information about their child from the school, compared to 48% of those whose children attend the morning shift. Similarly, 54% of respondents to the survey stated that they were never invited to individual meetings with teachers.[39]

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[37] Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households", p.4. https://goo.gl/PzBelS (All these survey results, included in graphs and tables, in this section are found in this document)

[38] Ibid, p5

[39] Ibid, p.5

Figure1: Percentage of parents who receive written information from school about their child, and percentage of parents who are invited to individual meetings with their child's teacher(s) and general meetings, and the percentage who attend such meetings always or sometimes.
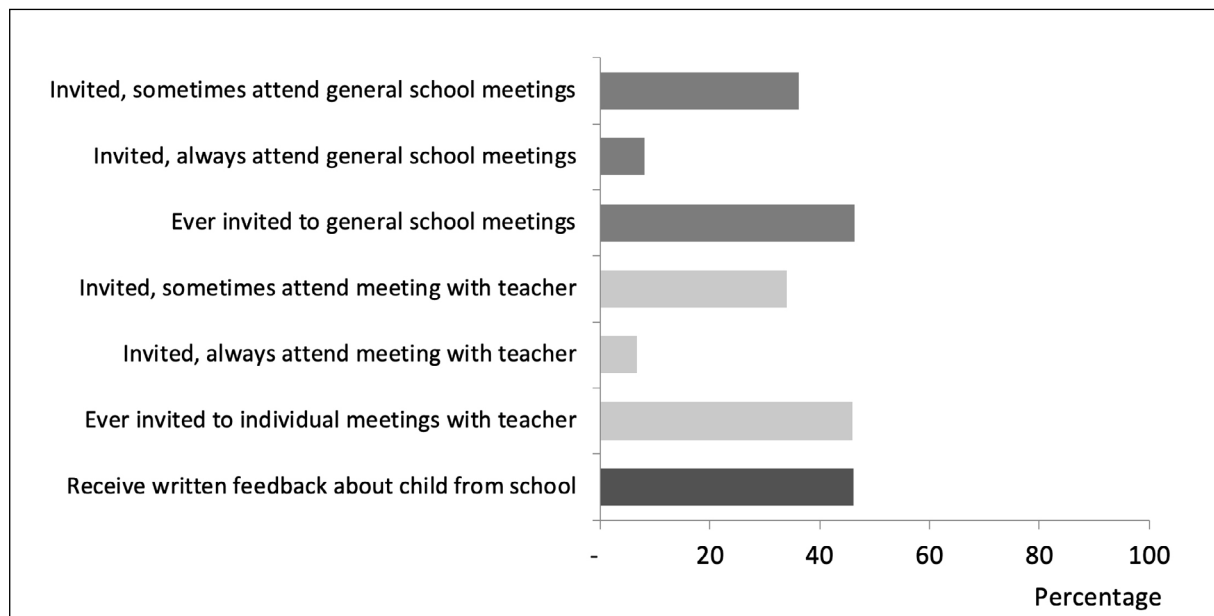
(Source: Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households")

Despite the previous figures indicating little communication between parents and schools, a striking 83% of parents reported being satisfied with the general information they receive from the school about their children, with 88% reporting that they were satisfied with how the schools follow up on their children's academic performance and behaviour in school. Levels of satisfaction amongst Syrian parents differed however, with 73% reporting being very satisfied or satisfied. Arguably, the difference might be a result of the variation in the quality of educational services offered in morning shifts as opposed to afternoon shifts.[40]

Moving on from contact initiated by the school, to that initiated by the parents, the survey shows (Figure 2) that 52% of Jordanian parents versus 41% of Syrian parents have approached the school, with 54% of parents with children in a morning shift, versus only 34% of parents with children in an afternoon shift school (Syrian refugees). Of those who contacted the school, 16% reported being very satisfied, 73% reported being satisfied, and only 7% reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, with Syrian parents constituting a higher proportion of those who were dissatisfied. Finally, when asked about whether the school had parent-teacher associations, 75% said no, 23% said yes, and 2% said they didn't know.[41]


[40] Ibid, p.6.

[41] Ibid, p.7.

Figure 2: Parents' overall satisfaction with quality of education and shows how it varies by nationality, household economy, type of shift and child performance. (percentage very satisfied to satisfied)
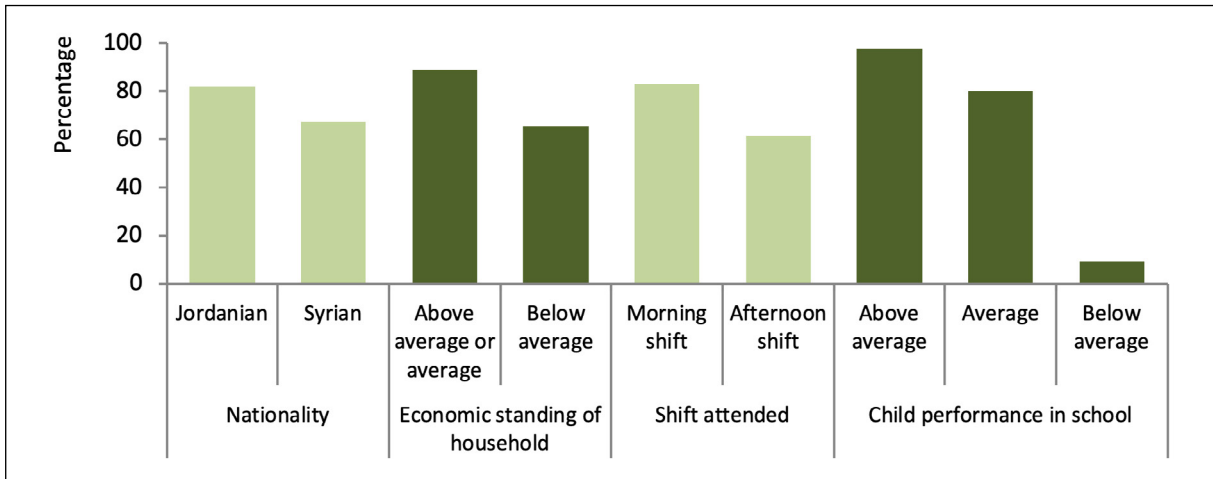
(Source: Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households")

The survey also touched on aspects that parents would like to see improved. Figure 3 shows areas deemed in need of improvement.[42]

Figure 3 Areas of improvement: Percentage of parents who have mentioned an item as the 1st, 2nd or 3rd most important issue to tackle.
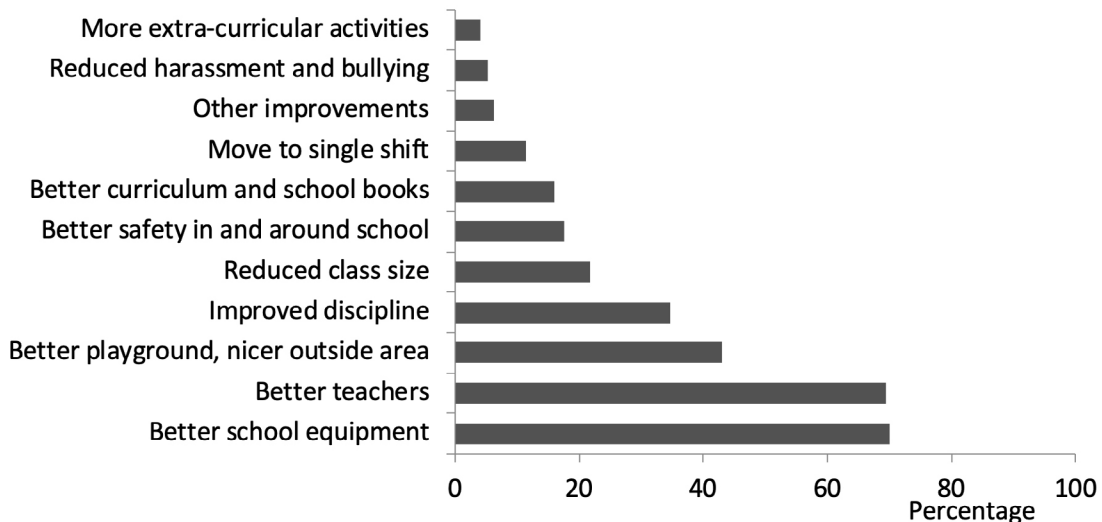
(Source: Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households")

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[42] Ibid, p.9

The survey denotes a clear distinction in priorities between Syrian and Jordanian parents, where Jordanian parents put significantly more emphasis on school equipment and reduced class size. Syrian refugee parents more often than their Jordanian counterparts mentioned the need for better teachers, improved discipline, improved safety, and avoiding double shifts. The table below provides further insight on the issue.[43]

Table 1 Areas of improvement: Percentage of parents who have mentioned an item as the 1st, 2nd or 3rd most important issue to tackle by nationality and type of shift.

	Nationality		Type of shift		All
	Jordanian	Syrian	Morning shift	After-noon shift	
Better school equipment	86	46	79	52	70
Better teachers	64	77	67	75	69
Better playground, nicer out-side area	42	45	43	43	43
Improved discipline	29	44	30	44	35
Reduced class size	29	12	28	10	22
Better safety in and around school	13	24	14	24	18
Better curriculum and school books	17	14	18	13	16
Move to single shift	3	23	6	22	11
Other improvements	7	5	5	8	6
Reduced harassment and bul-lying	3	9	4	8	5
More extra-curricular activities	6	1	5	2	4

(Source: Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households")

The survey also demonstrated the stark contrast in satisfaction with school performance amongst parents whose children attend morning shifts, and those whose children attend afternoon shifts. However, as Table 1 demonstrates, Syrian refugee parents seemed to acknowledge the fact that expanding school facilities to accommodate all students in the morning shift (through renting buildings or build new ones) is unlikely, and hence they concentrated more on improving the situation for their children in the afternoon shift, which is conveyed in their selection of items they wish to see improved.[44]

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[43] cIbid, p.10

[44] Ibid, p.11

The ARDD and Fafo study highlighted a lack of communication between schools and parents, but their findings also indicate that parents are willing to engage. To summarize the findings:

- Around 51% of parents admit feeling free to contact the school or their child's teacher.
- Only 10% of Syrian parents are aware of PTAs but 80-90% said they would like to attend PTAs
- 50% had never received written feedback, and more than 50% had never been invited to a meeting with the schools but of those parents who had been invited to attend, most did.

Therefore, if outreach efforts by schools are increased, parents are likely to be receptive and it could lead to an increase in levels of parent engagement.

A lack of communication between schools and the MoE itself is a common complaint among teachers and staff.[45] A top-down approach is adopted in communicating policies and curricula changes where the Ministry imposes alterations without consulting principals and teachers, who are then bound to implement them. School staff also expressed frustrations about the limitations of their authority to manage other aspects of education delivery.

Accountability was also a chief concern when discussing firing teachers who have committed gross misconduct or persistently underperform and hiring qualified teachers. Ineffective teachers, including those who break the law prohibiting corporal punishment for example,[46] may enjoy social protection by their communities.

A Code of Conduct for teachers has been proposed to the MoE to increase accountability and help to safeguard children in their care. This Code of Conduct aims to provide the basis for institutionalising accountability and making it an integral part of the education system. However, despite taking several steps towards putting this Code of Conduct into effect, it has not yet been materialised.

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[45] Åge A. Tiltnes, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Basic education and parents' relations with school in Mafraq city, Jordan- Findings from a mini-survey of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households"pp8-5 . https://goo.gl/PzBelS

[46] Student Discipline 2007 General Rules.

3. Decentralization and Governance

There is a positive relationship between decentralisation, accountability and ownership over the educational process among stakeholders; hence it is important that these notions aren't studied in isolation. Jordan is currently undergoing a transitional phase towards a more decentralised style of governance. The Decentralisation Law [47] has been ratified [48] and possible decentralisation measures are being reviewed by Parliament. In light of public support for decentralisation, the MoE realised the need for decentralizing the education process through greater sharing of responsibility among senior and middle managers. This is clearly communicated through "Decentralisation: The Reform of Governance and Management of the Educational Services in Jordan", a study prepared for the MoE by the Development Coordination Unit. [49]

"We have to decentralise. Decentralisation and accountability is something the MoE is working on." Dr Raed Al Alewa, Head of the QEAU, the MoE. [50]

Despite the MoE's commitment to transition towards a more decentralised model of governance, there are still no concrete results on the ground. Centralisation of decision making and the top-down approach to formulating policies, laws and regulations without consultation with relevant stakeholders, remains among the primary challenges that schools and communities are facing.

The World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) report lists autonomy in planning and management of the school budget, and personnel management as key policy goals. The report calls for allowing schools to make decisions on these two issues at the school level. If implemented, this will grant the school's management more leverage over appointing teachers and tracking their performance, thus reinforcing accountability within schools. Decentralising the school system to an extent, will also provide the means to achieve meaningful participation for the community, in the form of school councils which play a role in promoting a culture of accountability.

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[47] Law on Decentralisation, Law no 2015) 49) http://iec.jo/sites/default/files/6DecentralisationLaw2015EN. docx0_(1)20%.pdf

[48] Jordan Times (2015) Royal Decree Ratifies Decentralisation Law, 17 December 2015, http://www.jordantimes. com/news/local/royal-decree-ratifies-decentralisation-law

[49] Jordanian Ministry of Education, Development and Coordination Unit (2008) Decentralisation: The Reform of Governance and Management of the Educational Services in Jordan, December 2008 http://www.moe.gov. jo/uploads/Decentralization20%Revised20%Final.doc

[50] Comment at Learning Event, entitled "Fostering a Culture of Accountability for Improving the Learning Environment for children in Jordan", 11th January 2017, Amman, Jordan, co-hosted by ARDD, Fafo and Durrat Al Manal, and supported by the Norwegian Embassy.

The research carried out by ARDD and Fafo shows agreement amongst teachers interviewed in Mafraq governorate on the existence of gaps in the overall management of the school system, which have seriously contributed to the deterioration of the learning environment.[51] Lack of coordination and dialogue between the MoE and directorates in governorates was signalled as one of the major gaps. An example of this is the top-down manner in which curricula are changed without consultation with teachers, or the necessary training. There is also a risk that without proper consultation, the unique priorities and needs created by the Syrian refugee crisis, which impact different directorates and governorates differently, are not taken into account in current decision making processes. There are also structural gaps in governance at the school level.[52]

Needless to say, the previous section on accountability signals a clear rift between school and the local community, in the form of a lack of information exchange as well as in terms of the influence of the latter on the educational process. This is arguably the result of a structural issue where the current system does not recognise the role of PTA's, School Councils, and other similar platforms which empower the community to participate in the decision-making process, and accordingly increase accountability over both the school and the community. In support of this argument, the SABER report called for enhancing the participation of the School Council in school governance. The current legal framework does not encourage the School Council to play an active role in the educational process. For example, the Parent-Teacher Council has no role in planning the school budget, while the Educational Council that represents school clusters has a voice in adopting budget items. Furthermore, neither council has a legal right to be involved in the management of teaching and non-teaching staff or learning inputs. The same issues apply to the school's ability to address underperforming teachers, as appointment, disciplining (and firing) teachers is conducted by the MoE in a centralised manner, thus further limiting the school's autonomy and principals' authorities to take decisions at the school level.

From a broader view, despite the efforts of the MoE to promote the decentralisation of the education system, there remains a clear disconnect between the government's legislative process of decentralisation, and the MoE's work to promote decentralisation, as the latter's interventions tackle decentralisation as a capacity-building issue rather than an overarching style of governance. This is also echoed in Identity Centre's report "Decentralizing Education in Jordan" which argues that efforts by the MoE are a component of an educational process rather than an administrative process of devolution.[53]

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[51] Svein Erik Stave et all, ARDD and Fafo, (2017) "Improving Learning Environments in Jordanian Public Schools – Lessons from school visits and community dialogue in Northern Jordan", Fafo Research Institute, p 7. https://goo.gl/jpes57

[52] Ibid. p8

[53] Identity Centre, "Decentralizing Education in Jordan: Seizing the Opportunity to Improve the Quality and Equality of Jordanian Schools", Social Justice in Jordan Series, Policy Paper No. 2, p.1 http://www.identity-center.org/sites/default/files/a.20%Decentralization2%C20%English_0.pdf

Suggested Interventions:

On 11th January 2017, ARDD co-hosted a Learning Event with Fafo, entitled "Fostering a Culture of Accountability for Improving the Learning Environment for children in Jordan". The event brought together stakeholders in the education sector to share best practices and ideas for developing accountability mechanisms, in line with a core objective of the Jordan Response Plan 2017: 'strengthening systems'. The following interventions were the results of the discussions at the event.

1- Introduce strategic interventions to expand partnerships and coordination with local civil society:

o   Strengthen the role of local civil society to improve access to education facilities and improve the learning environment. Local civil society organisations are often more flexible than the state and operate at the grassroots level. In many developing countries, they take on responsibility for non-formal education programmes and are particularly successful in reaching marginalized and excluded people through approaches attuned to the needs and life conditions of the poor. They are also well-positioned to raise awareness of laws among parents, children, and teachers.

o   Empower local civil society to take ownership of positive change and participate in acts of civic engagement to promote a more accountable and whole society. In this case, members of the local community can participate in developing and improving governance processes through better service delivery and empowerment to ensure the long-term sustainability of development programs in their communities

o   Local civil society organisations can be innovators and sources of 'new' thinking and practices - they can help fill the 'ideas gap'.

o   Promote the role of local civil society in empowering citizens and enabling them to demand their rights, ultimately enhancing their ownership and role in the educational process, and heightening community standards to improve adherence to human rights.

o   Promote and facilitate the role that local civil society organisations (CSOs) play in the effective development of local and national policies given that CSOs represent the voice and needs of the community.

o   Give civil society a role in monitoring and feeding into school assessments conducted by the QEAU at the MoE.

o   Establish a consultation process through which feedback from education stakeholders: civil society organisations, schools, teachers, parents, and children, is actively sought. The consultation process should take place prior to the drafting of new laws and policies so that comments can be taken into account by policy-makers. The process should involve publicizing the fact that an issue is under review, informing education stakeholders and inviting feedback over a stated, set period. Feedback can take written form or be submitted during focus group sessions with the QEAU at the MoE. After laws, regulations and policies are passed, they need to be disseminated and any necessary training provided.   This consultation process needs to be protected by law.

2- **Intensify efforts that aim to provide pre-and in service teacher training, as well as benefit from the expertise of retired teachers in responding to arising needs:**

o Accelerate pre-and in service training processes.
o Maximise the number of teachers reached, including teachers in the afternoon shifts (schools accommodating Syrian children).
o Introduce the Training of Trainers model to sustain the impact of training programmes.
o Raise awareness amongst teachers and counsellors on elements of psychosocial care, resilience, and tailoring services to refugee communities which will certainly enhance their engagement with students.
o Engage civil society; encourage it to play a part in supporting the MoE in the training process.
o Equip parents and civil society to play a role in monitoring education.
o Rehiring retired teachers in cases of emergency in order to expand the pool of qualified teachers, ready to be deployed in areas of need and employ Syrian teachers and teaching assistants to help bridge cultural gaps and differences in national curricula.
o Recognise and reward excellence in teaching, provide training in leadership skills and psychosocial support to teachers, and establish clear guidelines on disciplinary measures.

3- **Building the internal capacity of Quality and Accountability Unit in the Ministry of Education to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance, and services it provides:**

o Build capacity of the Unit staff according to the identified needs and demands to foster a culture of accountability, responsibility, and leadership within the education sector.
o Develop and activate measures for accountability which include codes of conduct, monitoring and evaluation, disclosure of reports, and increased community participation.
o Ensure close monitoring of directorates and schools' compliance and follow up on evaluation results.
o Develop channels through which members of the community can provide feedback.
o Increase the number of qualified staff to fully activate the unit's mandate.
o Achieve a certain level of regularity and consistency in school visits, thus ensuring a greater level of compliance with evaluation results, and the education standards set by the MoE.
o Provide evaluation tools to the school's leadership, so that they can monitor and evaluate the performance of their school and teachers before the accountability department starts inspections. This will empower school leaders to be accountable and enable them to identify and address challenges and gaps in service provision before being assessed.
o Develop an ethics of accountability which goes beyond assessments, and is mainstreamed into policy design across the education sector.

4- Devise interventions that aim to promote a culture of accountability among school staff and parents and enhance information exchange

o   Establish effective relationships between parents, communities, teachers, and principals.

o   Strengthen and empower PTAs by giving them more oversight in school planning, budgetary and personnel management.

o   Introduce notions of collective responsibility-sharing through recruiting more parents or local teaching assistants to help in overcrowded classrooms, thus increasing the sense of ownership over the education process for refugee and Jordanian families alike.

o   Schools are urged to actively reach out to parents and the broader community, communicating clearly with them about their child's education, establishing formalized processes to do so, and inviting feedback and engagement in decision-making.

o   Set guidelines in regards to communications with parents, for schools and teachers, so that the smooth running of a school is not dependent on the personality and leadership skills of the Principal. The partnership between parents and schools needs to be supported by the policy framework.

5- Adopting strategies to mainstream decentralisation and autonomy across the educational system:

o   Increase school-level autonomy and decentralization of school finances and decision-making. This will reinforce the notions of accountability and ownership as more local stakeholders will be involved in school budgeting and expenditure.

o   Streamline information exchange between the MoE, the Directorate and school staff; this will ensure easy access to information and continuous updates on the latest policy developments.

o   Facilitate the inclusion of directorate and school staff, especially teachers, in formulating and amending educational policies and curriculum changes. This proposal can be implemented as part of a broader policy of consultation discussed above.

o   Legally empower PTA's and School Councils to assume a more prominent role in school management, monitoring performance, and evaluating learning outcomes.

o   The Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) 2015 Country Report for Jordan recommends more school-level autonomy over the school budgets and personnel management.[54] The QEAU in the MoE has launched an initiative in this direction, which aims to build the capacity of the Directorate of Education, foster accountability and transparency. Principals will be able to take more immediate action, particularly in emergencies, where quick decisions are needed to protect the safety and security of students and staff. Nevertheless, many principals are not yet fully aware of this development due to communication issues, so awareness needs to be raised.

o   In accordance with commitments the MoE has made to operate with transparency, the Ministry is urged to keep publishing assessment reports promptly, and civil society to play a role in monitoring initial reports and records from follow up visits. It is also suggested that PTAs, parents, communities and civil society organisations assist the MoE with following up and checking that recommendations suggested in QEAU reports are implemented, given the limited capacity of the QEAU and the substantial task ahead of it.

o   There needs to be clearer policies in place setting out disciplinary measures to deal with teachers who compromise the safety of children, support measures for teachers who are struggling to cope, and a process of recognizing/rewarding excellence in teaching so as to provide for and incentivize professional development. Support could include leadership training and psychosocial support, along the lines of the excellent QRTA provision in this area. However, if comprehensive training is offered, and does not bear results, disciplinary measures must be available and could take the form of depriving teachers of raises or promotions, or transferring them to other roles with less child contact or to teach different age groups or class sizes, or through offering early retirement.

o   Accountability in the education sector should not be considered as making the school solely responsible for every aspect of the educational system. Accountability is a collaborative process that all relevant stakeholders and sectors should work jointly to achieve, in pursuit of educational reform.

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[54] SABER – Jordan Country Report, (2015), World Bank

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of an all-inclusive approach to reforming the education sector in Jordan, where all concerned stakeholders reach common agreement over the shape of future interventions.

This paper serves to highlight some of the main challenges that mar the delivery of services within the education sector in Jordan. The government, alongside key institutions have undoubtedly made remarkable achievements in responding to a wide array of challenges within the education sector, for the purpose of maintaining the prestigious status the Jordanian education system holds in the region. Hence, this paper sought to commend those achievements as well as provide insights into areas where more progress is needed.

The legal and policy framework for education in Jordan is detailed and fairly comprehensive. However, as this paper proposes, there is a need for an in-depth analysis of the legal framework, to investigate gaps while concurrently working to draft legislation and formulate policies and enforcement mechanisms to enable and ensure proper implementation of the law.

Without doubt, there are significant challenges to implementation. For example in rented schools, compliance with legal standards is particularly low as they are not purpose-built, and this has compounded others issues affecting the learning environment. Yet, given the humanitarian emergency context, it would be counter-productive to close all rented schools. Many of the problems related to accountability may appear to be caused by the increased pressure on schools resulting from the influx of Syrian refugees, however the crisis has exposed systemic challenges that existed prior to, and independently of the Syrian crisis.[55]

Accountability and communication remain two of the most pressing matters within the educational system. As this paper argues, the full integration of accountability into the educational process, and enhanced communication between all stakeholders, are prerequisites to an effective education system. From this standpoint, all stakeholders should bear collective responsibility to achieve both of these goals. Additional funding flowing into Jordan may be directed towards addressing those challenges for the benefit of Syrian and Jordanian children alike.

Moving into 2017, Jordanian politicians are spearheading a more decentralised style of governance. This is an opportunity for officials leading education reform in Jordan to adopt a similar approach as they seek to decentralise the education system in the country. In the same respect, it is necessary to explore the interlinkages between accountability and governance within the education system. Empowering the local community to take part in the educational process fulfils the goals of greater accountability and decentralisation, and will lead to a more context-conscious approach to educational reform in Jordan.

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[55] Comment at Learning Event, entitled "Fostering a Culture of Accountability for Improving the Learning Environment for children in Jordan", 11th January 2017, Amman, Jordan, co-hosted by ARDD, Fafo and Durrat Al Manal, and supported by the Norwegian Embassy.

In light of the above, this paper recommends the following:

1- Promote notions of citizenship throughout the educational process to emphasise the important role of citizens in advancing positive change, sustain the development process, and promote ownership and accountability.
2- Local civil society and popular platforms must be empowered to play a more proactive role in policy dialogue and accountability within the education system.
3- The legal framework must be subject to an in-depth analysis, ultimately leading to addressing current gaps in legislation.
4- Introduce new mechanisms for hiring and tracking the performance of teachers alongside clear pathways for rewards and disciplinary measures.
5- Consolidate current initiatives for training and building the capacity of teachers.
6- Improve information sharing between the schools and parents through establishing clear and direct communication channels between parents and school staff.
7- In light of the recommendations of the HRD, the QEAU should be independent from the MoE; this will grant the unit more freedom and transparency in its work.
8- Introduce a self-assessment mechanism for each school, whereby they can carry out internal assessments based on the same criteria set by the QEAU, ahead of assessment by the Unit.
9- Streamline decentralisation and activate the role of institutions in the educational process.
10- Empower parents to engage in their children's education at home, in addition to building parents' capacities to hold the MoE and school accountable for delivering quality education to their children.