



ARDD

النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية  
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development

Research

**Civic Engagement:**

The Key for Women's Political Participation in Karak

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## **Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD)**

Founded in 2008 in Amman-Jordan, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) is a Civil Society Organization that seeks to reinitiate a new Nahda (Arab Renaissance) project to contribute in addressing the challenges faced by the Arab World, building on the achievements and ideas of the Arab Nahda and aiming to open the doors for future participation in formulating concrete actions to achieve the desired change and development. ARDD supports individuals and communities—including refugees and migrants— in acquiring and enjoying their social, political and economic rights, through legal aid, psychosocial support, media and grassroots mobilization, and research and advocacy to raise stakeholders' awareness locally, regionally and internationally about the challenges that vulnerable persons face in Jordan and the Arab Region.

## 1. Executive Summary

This report provides an evidence-based assessment intervention enhancing women's leadership and civic engagement in the governorate of Karak that can contribute to enhance women's meaningful political participation at the governorate and municipality level.

The research sheds light into the contours of women's political participation in Karak that goes beyond formal politics. Our work shows that there is a solid base of active and engaged women in community-based organizations (CBOs) who are deeply engaged in everyday politics, working to make a difference within their communities. In many cases they are starting on where formal politics stops on simply cannot address precisely because they are community based. The sort of activities that these women are participating in encourages the idea that what they are doing is not just charitable work but a demonstration of their political participation. Our findings support theoretical notions that consider civic engagement as a form of political participation, where the formal space of politics is compromised by structural deficiencies.

Based on the differences in lived experience and knowledge of the women involved in the "EadB'ead" project we determine that there are three types of women engaged in Karak: those engaged and willing to participate in formal politics; women focused on the community sphere; and those engaged but unsure of how to take action. Importantly the existence of these engaged and active women does not however indicate a generalized situation of civic engagement. Indeed, there remains barriers for some women to leave the house and make decisions for herself.

Because of these differences in experience and level of engagement our research indicates that to encourage further political participation of women in Karak a number of steps must be taken. This includes support for already empowered female voices in the community, deeper engagement with those women willing to engage and a broader campaign to raise awareness about the issue of women's rights as well as equality. In short it is an effort to engage people where they are at; and, importantly, involve the community throughout all the process.

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## 2. Introduction

Opportunities for women to participate in the public sphere in Jordan are still limited, as the low rate of political and economic participation indicates. With regards to political empowerment Jordan has been ranked 140 out of 145 countries and the current economic participation rate for women sits at %16, compared to %70 of men. (World Bank 2015). Both figures represent a significant deterioration in progress since 2014 when political participation of women ranked 119 and participation %23 (World Bank 2014). Women's participation in driving the change and representation in the government is evidently limited: women are only allowed to participate to promote the agenda set by men, not necessarily in the better interest of their women constituencies. Furthermore, political life remains largely centered around personalities as opposed to issues, which fundamentally limits the understanding of the everyday realities of political life at community levels. This is particularly relevant to the everyday political acts undertaken by women, as they remain largely unseen.

Women in Karak face social and political obstacles hindering their full participation in the communities where they live. Traditional political venues such as municipal elections are largely determined by tribal politics that neither intersect nor respond to considerations of gender. In spite of the political reforms providing them with representation in governmental institutions at the governorate and municipal levels, the overall social perception, observed through engagement with the Karaki community, is that the presence of these female representatives is a mere 'showcase' that does not provide meaningful content in the advancement of women's rights in the political and social agenda of the municipality.

It is clear in the national and Karaki context that the progressive top-down legislative decision to increase female political participation has not compelled a change in culture that fosters increased participation of women; suggesting that for change to occur the community must be engaged from a local level. This presents a paradox as it is the community at large and the cultural perception of women's roles within the culture that appear to limit female political participation. Culture, however, is not a monolithic force and is expressed with nuance and variation. Through our research we have found that it is the family's interpretation of social norms and women's roles in Karak which matters most. This is what explains that while some women in Karak can actively engage in the political process, others remain steadfast that women's role should remain within the home.

The limited substantive role of women within the formal political processes at municipal and national levels and the prevalent social perception that women should not involve themselves in politics, should not be taken as evidence, however, that women are not involved in the political processes affecting Karak. Indeed, Karaki

women have a long history of civic engagement through charitable organizations and civil society organizations where they contribute their time, energy and political ambitions. Through the ARDD-Legal Aid project “EadB’ead” the Research team has been able to chart the active involvement of these women as well as identify ongoing issues associated with making a difference within their communities.

### ***Understanding the Political Implications of Civic Engagement***

Although civic engagement has not usually been understood as a necessary condition for political participation, recent research highlights how these ‘latent’ forms of participation are crucial to understanding new forms of political behavior and, when the necessary conditions allow for it, even predicting prospects for political participation in different countries (Ekman and Amna 296:2012). In this case, our research among women and youth in Karak, indicates that civic engagement may be the most representative way of measuring their high level of current and potential political participation. It demonstrates that civic engagement lays the foundations of political engagement and participation as political action is already being undertaken at a localized, community level. Furthermore, our research findings demonstrate that while such engagement is present it is not generalized and significant community work needs to be done to ensure all women have the opportunity to engage in political life – whatever form, whether that be running for elections on making a difference in their community through involvement with a charity. Our research also points to the already established relation between barriers to political participation and economic exclusion of women from the workforce. For many women in Karak, employment was a necessary requirement for women’s potential future engagement with politics – be it formal on community based. Crucially without this step from the home into the workplace be it paid on voluntary-, the environment for potential political engagement and activity is reduced.

The task at hand then is twofold: on the one hand it is necessary to strengthen the voices of already socially and politically empowered women, while on the other, it is a must to provide the skills, knowledge and opportunities needed to empower those who are on the periphery, in order to ensure that there are layers of support for women’s political participation that can filter through discussions with families, friends and neighbors. This necessitates supporting structural developments in the economy more broadly.

What this means in practice is a coherent program that can scale up: confidence building trainings, employment opportunities and rights-based education from an early age. How to achieve all of this however is not easy. Each requires time, patience, flexibility and importantly deep engagement with and from the community as a whole.

### 3. Methodology

This paper is the result of a qualitative assessment of women members of charitable associations and universities students in Karak governorate. The assessment consisted of in-depth desk review of available documents relating to women's empowerment, and political participation. Accompanying this literature review was an analysis of how current political theory relates to civic engagement as a political process. Available literature shed light on how to interpret, with the right lens, the engagement observed from the field.

The activities of the "Ead B'ead" project offered the opportunity for participant observation that enabled our primary categorization of women in Karak based on their current political capacities. The motivation, priorities and strategies of five women activists, identified through the project, were explored and expanded upon through semi-structured interviews held in Karak in early January 2016. Interviews were also conducted with staff involved with the "Ead B'ead" project to provide a general overview of how participants engaged with the material presented and their perspectives on how better to engage the community to discuss issues relating to women's rights and political participation. The mixed methods approach enabled ARDD-Legal aid to access information from multiple and varied perspectives that ensured a holistic understanding of the barriers presented to women in the political sphere in the Karak governorate and exposed opportunities for change.

Although the research was impacted by some realities of implementation on the ground, that limited the amount of focus group discussions that were undertaken, this has not have had a significant impact in how the findings of this research are representative of larger trends in Karak. The ethnographic work conducted as part of this project offers deep insight into the barriers presented towards women's political participation in Karak.

#### 4. Situational Analysis: Understanding Karak

Hoskins et al. argue that understanding the political history of a country is essential to understanding citizenship and civic competence (2015:432). Like many countries the social and political fabric of Jordan is made up of various histories, influences and cultural precepts dependent on region, family, migration and tribal link. The Karak governorate in the South of Jordan is no different. Karak has a rich and diverse history of habitation since the Iron Age, with influences from Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods. This intersection of history and culture is today embodied by a number of 'distinct, yet interacting settled and nomadic Bedouin tribal groups', with the majority Sunni Muslims and a significant Christian minority (Virtual Karak Resources Project). With a population of 260,400 (DOS 2014a), the population represents 3.9% of the total Jordanian population (UNDP and UNICEF 2015). 65% of people live in rural settings with only 35% in the urban settings (DOS 2014a). Karak has long been understood within the Kingdom as being well resourced as a consequence of the support given to the monarchy. This is reflected in the number of schools, hospitals and medical centers available within the governorate (DOS 2014b; 2014c); as well as the makeup of the electoral system which provides Karak with a similar number of seats in the national parliament as other governorates with much larger populations (Tuasted 2014:14).

The suggestion that Karak is objectively better on does not come through in quantitative data available. For example, while the majority of households in Karak own their homes (81.7%), which is usually used as an indication of household wealth, Karak has long suffered from a discrepancy between average household income and expenditure. Since 2006 there has been a rapid separation between average income and expenditure, with expenditure far outstretching income (DOS 2014d). By 2013 this discrepancy had improved with income just surpassing expenditure. However, breakdown of what households spend their income on demonstrates that spending remains focused on necessities such as food, transportation and communication and housing, accounting for a total of 68% of average household income. With only a very small portion of income spent on extracurricular, leisure activities, clothing, let alone medical care (DOS 2013).

The issues that the average household faces are reflected in the persistence of unemployment within the governorate, the current rate of which 12.6%. Like in most governorates the unemployment rate is significantly differentiated by sex, with female unemployment sitting at 18.9% compared to 10.3% for men (DOS 2014e). It should be noted that these numbers represent a significant improvement from only six years ago when unemployment of women in Karak was 25.9% (DOS 2014f).



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Perhaps of more significance than the unemployment rate is the extremely low rate of female participation in the economy, currently sitting at 22.9%. This indicates that the majority of women are economically inactive and are not seeking employment opportunities (DOS 2014e). The implication of this is that the large majority of women in Karak are thus not financially independent. Despite the low overall level of participation compared to men, when compared to national averages, Karak has the highest rate of female economic participation throughout the Kingdom (Goussous 2015). Although this may suggest that women in Karak are in a better position than women in other governorates, this fact should not mislead us in underestimating the issues that women in Karak face.

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#### **Tribal politics in Karak: A determining force for women's political participation?**

Tribal politics has long been recognized to have a hold on Karaki society (Virtual Karak Resources Project). Throughout the preceding centuries various tribes have vied for power of the strategic geographic position and the Karak castle was even used as a place for tribal councils (City of Karak). The remnants of this history have not waned, with tribal politics remaining as an important part of key areas of life. We hear reports of this tribalism in the clashes that have broken out on Mu'tah university campus (Al-Samadi 2013), as well as its determining force in formal politics. While tribalism can be a source of strength and togetherness (bin Muhammad 1999), there is an evident patriarchal nature to the tribal politics of Karak. This is expressed as a substantive denial of the right of women to enter the formal political sphere. In the 2007 national election, of the nine members elected from Karak seven were considered as tribal leaders and all of them were men (Ryan 2007: 188).

What we see in Karak is that despite formal equality before the law, and formal entitlement to be involved in the political process through the civil service under the constitution, a tiny fragment of women ever has the opportunity. To be sure, this is not solely a Karaki stony and broadly affects other governorates in Jordan, and indeed other parts of the Arab world.

In a study conducted by Pietrobello with candidates for the Jordanian national election, interviewees indicated that the main impediment to female political participation is tribes and cultural stereotypes (Pietrobello 2012: 27). Deeply conscious of this dynamic within Jordanian society the Jordanian government introduced a quota in 2003 to encourage participation and representation of women at the highest levels. This was progressively increased in 2010 and 2013. Through the quota women have ostensibly become visible in politics in the governorate.

Through the legal aid work and a preliminary needs assessment conducted in the city of Karak with CBOs and in the university in August 2014, ARDD-Legal Aid became familiar with some of the political and social realities facing women and women's political life in the governorate. For instance, the preliminary findings showed the twenty-five per cent quota for women in municipal councils enacted in 2010 by the Jordanian House of Representatives has de facto increased the presence of women in the municipalities. However, through the community consultations it was clear that the perception is that the presence of these female representatives is a mere 'showcase' that does not provide meaningful content in the advancement of women's rights in the political and social agenda of the municipalities. Review of the results of the 2013 municipal elections offers a compelling argument backing this social perception as less than seven women were elected to municipal seats on a competitive basis, and many of the women who were elected to fill out the twenty-five per cent quota did so with less than ten votes each. Analysis of Karaki women councilor's activities through the Beyond Quota initiative reveals a number of things. There is a variety of involvement, though relatively high compared to other governorates, limited media engagement and relatively high number of community meetings organized and despite women's attendance of all municipal meetings and contributing proposals; no women headed committee meetings, leaving positions of visibility and local leadership to be filled by men. Thus it appears that the involvement of women in the councils simply functions to tick boxes (Identity Center 2014).

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## 5. Understanding Women's Political Participation in Karak

**New research highlights how these 'latent' forms of participation are crucial to understanding new forms of political behavior and, when the necessary conditions allow for it, even predicting prospects for political participation in different countries.**

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Sole focus on the formal political participation of women in Karak does not capture the extent of political participation of women in the governorate.

As Pahad argued, focusing on formal politics can 'obscure the multiplicity of ways in which citizens engage politically' (Pahad 2005). Previous studies of women's political participation in Jordan have recognized that although the formal political space is difficult to enter, women have been involved 'politically' through community-centered engagement with charitable organizations and civil society organizations (Brand 2003). While this has long been responded historically, seeing such activity as political activity is only a fairly recent development in theory. Indeed, civic participation has not usually been understood as a necessary condition for political participation. However, new research highlights how these 'latent' forms of participation are crucial to understanding new forms of political behavior and, when the necessary conditions allow for it, even predicting prospects for political participation in different countries (Amna and Ekman 2012).

In their study on youth political engagement in Europe Amna and Ekman indicated that if volunteering and other forms of community engagement are taken as examples of political activity then youth engagement is much higher than the declining participation in elections suggests (Amna and Ekman 2013: 7). This is an important development in the theoretical understanding of political participation precisely because it moves beyond the limited understanding of politics as only occurring inside the walls of parliament.

**Civic engagement may be the most representative way of measuring their level of political participation since traditional political venues such as municipal elections are largely determined by tribal politics that neither intersect non respond to considerations of gender.**

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As the following pages explain, our research shows that there are many active and empowered Karaki women involved in charities, associations and clubs, and through their involvement express their energy and political ambitions to make a difference within their community. In many cases they pick up where formal services within the community end. Indeed, they believe that they have more capacity to make a difference working directly with the community. Our research among

these women indicates that civic engagement may be the most representative way of measuring their level of political participation since traditional political venues such as municipal elections are largely determined by tribal politics that neither intersect nor respond to considerations of gender. How and when this civic engagement leads to political action in the formal sense of the term is yet to be determined as it needs to factor in larger issues of geopolitical stability in the region. However, it is clear that political activity does take place. Importantly this involvement cannot be taken as generalized, and certainly it should not serve to discount the cultural barriers that continue to permeate through Karaki society.

### ***Civic Participation as a Venue for Women's Political Participation in Karak***

There are significant differences of experiences amongst women in Karak. Not only are not all women politically disempowered, there are a small number of activists engaged in a variety of activities seeking to make a difference within their community and contribute to the progressive development of their society.

Women expressed that the formal political process is not the only site of politics in Karak on the only avenue to make a difference. There were varying degrees of recognition of this, but overall women recognized that the work they do is somehow political; as well as understanding it as community and charity work. There was also a sense that what they do in the communities is a part of them. Phrases such as, 'it is my duty', 'it is a part of me', 'politics is in my blood' were commonly expressed. This is interesting precisely because it cuts against the understanding that women are not political in Karak. Women further strongly believed in the power of community-based work. This was expressed in different ways however the below quote captures the intention of the women's community work as an explicit site of political participation:

'What I am doing is more important than what some of the officials do. Because I am with the people, I am making a difference. Ok they are doing the budget for 2016. I am making a plan for these people for their lives. So see. I am in the political more than the prime minister.'

### ***A critical view of the Quota System***

There is a perception that women elected through the quota system were merely 'show-case'. Opinions ranged in regards to the qualitative participation of these women counselors; however, in general it was negative, highlighting the system led to the election of unqualified counselors. Increased visibility was recognized to be an important aspect of the quota system however the unqualified nature of the women elected detracted from the importance of this visibility.

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'The woman who go to the municipality has go (sic) by chance. They didn't have one hundred votes. ...So I didn't think they affect their societies at the same level. Some of them they are not educated, they are not cultured. They decided overnight.'

This is an interesting finding considering the substantive inequality of representation in the formal political process, and the ongoing social barriers to women participating in the formal political sphere.

However as empowered women themselves it was evident that they did not like the idea of getting to a position not based on merit. The quota is seen as something that does not reflect the quality of female activists in Karak and serves to diminish the power and influence of them. It may also reflect their belief that given current constraints in formal politics, community work offers them more space for creating change on the ground. Indeed, concern over entering the formal political sphere was significantly overshadowed by focus on community work. It was understood however that supportive decision-makers in the municipal and parliament would make a qualitative difference even in their work.

### ***Gender Norms and Political Activity***

Understanding the limited and non-substantive representation of women in formal politics as well as the presence of female activists in charitable organizations on civil society organizations demonstrates the same point. There is a perception that exists within Karak that "society still believes that women's sphere of action is her home and should focus only on being a 'good wife'". Women expressed that tribalism and traditions exist which can be expressed to limit the participation of women. However, there was disagreement as to what extent this exists and, in a different vein, that the social bonds created through these practices have positive as well as negative implications. This seemed to be a working contradiction amongst all the women. On one hand they deeply expressed the supportiveness, awareness and progressiveness of their society- 'there is a real awareness in the society, and we have passed the stage of ignorance' and on the other the desire for change, 'the social system is a barrier for women's participation in our community'.

The example that best demonstrates this is marriage and divorce. Women indicated that in Karak if the husband does not give his wife her rights in divorce her brother and father would stand with her to make sure she secured such rights. However, women indicated further that the issue of a woman's rights in divorce is not so important in a society where they are unable to choose their husband in the first place.

'before talking about her rights in divorce, make a lady who can choose her husband. And if she chooses him, she chooses him because of what her friends and society think... This is a serious problem in Jordan and in the Arab world.'

Women also raised the fact that talking about divorce amongst more conservative members of the Karaki community could have negative consequences for women. When hearing that divorce was discussed in a training, their husbands may decide that she is not allowed to return. On maybe she will decide not to return because it is a sensitive issue. In this simple example, the patriarchal nature of the Karaki society is exposed in both positive and negative light.

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**The patriarchal nature of Karaki society is not homogeneously expressed and is largely dependent on family.**

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It is evident that the patriarchal nature of Karaki society is not homogeneously expressed and is largely dependent on family. The examples of the women interviewed are cases in point. All come from a variety of backgrounds and ages, they are each individually powerful examples of progressive and empowered women making a difference within their respective communities. For some women their families were deeply encouraging of their development through education and described their families as open minded.

My father, he opened the way for me to study in Syria and my sister in Iraq... and he kept supporting us that you must improve yourself. You do not have to feel shame that you are a girl. It's not a big issue that you are a girl on a boy. So as I told you it is according to the family, to give the girl the way. Just need some support and helpful environment'.

It is important to recognize however that this does not appear to be the generalized experience. At the same time as some women have opportunity because of their families, others are restricted by them. The experience of the many university students is testament to this. Some girls do not have choice in what they study and once they finish university go straight back into the home. However, the family's influence in determining a female's choices, again, is not homogeneously expressed. Women indicated that there are some restrictive families in Karak and yet their daughters go on to become famous in the public sphere. 'It is according to her family but you need someone who is strong enough to say to the family stop here, that is my own family. It needs just a strong person.'

What seems to be expressed in Karak is family understanding and perpetuation of social norms and this has a huge impact on the possibilities for women's participation in all areas of life.

Importantly, the families' position does not wholly determine the trajectory of their daughters' advancement. In the case of one woman denied her choice of education, this became the catalyst for change and her own activism on the issue. However, she indicated that the story of her sister is much different as she stayed in the home.

Because of the evident different lived experiences of women, it is important that when working to increase political participation of women and the evident social barriers which prevent this, cultural and social practices must be understood in a nuanced way. It is not monolithic or homogeneously expressed. In Karak we see a range of interpretations of culture dependent on family and thus women at different stages of political awareness, engagement, and participation. How to address the cultural barriers that prevent engagement is exactly what these women activists are actively engaged in. Each employing long and short-term strategies, in different ways, to encourage cultural development that will ensure all people within Karak, including women, have access to the political sphere whatever form that may take.

### ***Structural Barriers hindering Women's Political Engagement***

Because of the difficult financial position and lack of employment opportunities for many in Karak, some women indicated that the focus on women's rights alone is misguided. The issue is not exclusively social exclusion of women from political participation. There is an apparent structural weakness for both men and women's participation in the economic system, and cultural exclusion from politics is something that should be addressed on top of this rather than the other way around.

The unemployment situation for men and women in Karak is significant, with drastically low participation of women. This was keenly understood by women to be a barrier to political participation because the step from home into the political sphere is too big. Entry into the political sphere was seen as possible through initial involvement in the economic sphere. As one woman asked, how do you expect women to jump from the home into parliament? Getting out of the home through work was seen as the first step towards potential political engagement and activity, whether expressed as participation in elections or in associations.

**Substantive exclusion from the economic sphere serves as a barrier to female political participation in Karak.**

Considering the difficult economic situation of many families in Karak, as evidenced through the difference between average income and expenditure, economic empowerment of women could also support their families' economic situation as well as provide the opportunity for interaction with society at different levels and po-

tentially engagement with the political sphere. However, women indicated that what is needed in Karak is not simply economic empowerment. There is a need for development within the governorate to ensure that people do not just have a 'living, but a life', which includes engagement in the community. How to ensure a life without a living, considering average income only recently surpassed average expenditure, will be difficult and requires significant community mobilization as well as economic development.

Along with the structural barriers to inclusion in the workforce and the limited political participation in formal process, women expressed that there are issues of self-confidence for women that must be addressed. 'If you want to highlight their right in politics, then make an independent self-confident woman.' The ambition of most of the women was to raise the confidence of women through building their skills, including through voluntary and paid work as well as through microfinance projects, and trainings and activities through NGOs.

Women recognized that sole focus on economic empowerment and confidence building activities for women is not enough to address the cultural issues that are inhibiting female's participation in Karak. Education was widely propounded as a useful and powerful method to employ to spark new ways of thinking in the community. Most women indicated that education about women's rights and human rights should stafft at the earliest levels all the way up to university. As the providers of knowledge, teachers should be included in these trainings to ensure the continuation of such ideas throughout the school life of a child.

Engaging different gender and age groups was understood to be essential to the possibility for change in Karak. This is primarily because of the important role that the family plays in the community. To ignore men and male youth in the process thus is seen as a roadblock for progress as the possibility for societal and cultural change requires involvement of all members of the community. To this it was also recognized that all religious groups should be included in the possibility for change. This sentiment of inclusion was widely expressed but is most eloquently captured in the quote below:

*'Don't work on the idea, work on the self and the community. Not on the identity – a woman on whoever. We don't need identity. Our problem in Jordan is that we look at the identity, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds, you are an unveiled woman, you are with hijab. Please help me with this. Work on the software not on the hardware.'*

Such a strong message of inclusion indicates the importance of community-based engagement and organizing. It is only from the base that these considerations can be fully appreciated as well as felt when not conducted properly.



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## 6. “Ead B’ead”: Supporting Women’s Civic Engagement in Karak

With the broad understanding of women’s exclusion from the formal political process the “Ead B’ead” project sought to build capacity and raise awareness on the issue of women’s rights and political participation in the Karak governorate. Conducted over a 10-month period, the “Ead B’ead” project conducted trainings about international women’s rights, personal status law, civic engagement and advocacy. Through these trainings, 25 women and men from community-based organizations (CBOs) were engaged as well as 40 students from the Mu’tah University. While the project was aimed at working with both men and women, 72% of participants were female: only two men were involved in the CBOs trainings, while 44.4% of participants at the university trainings were male. As the majority of CBOs are run by women this should not be taken as having too much significance. What it does suggest however is that charitable organizations are sites for female engagement and political activity, rather than for men who can access other spaces.

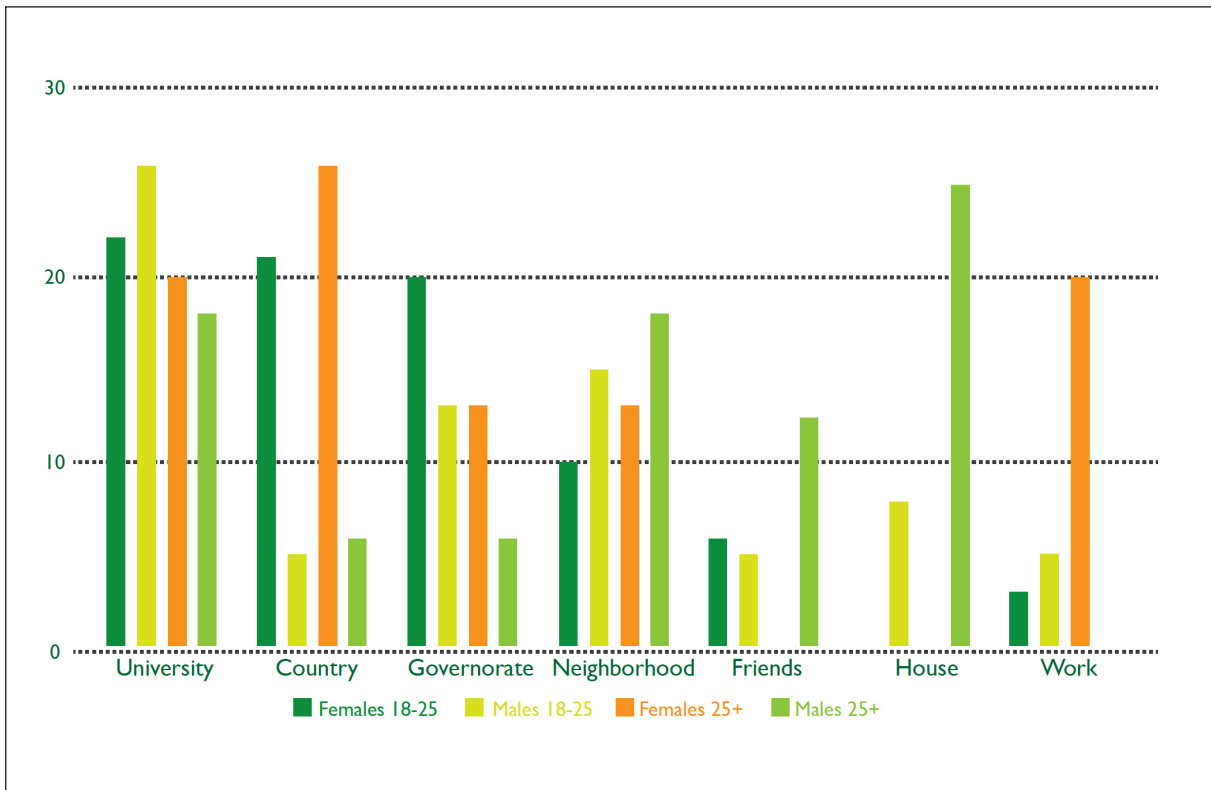
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### Three different types of women were identified to be currently engaged in the Karak governorate

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Over the course of the training’s participant observation was conducted which led to the development of a classification of the types of women involved in political activities/associations in the Karak governorate. Importantly, Karaki women, and the women who participated in the trainings, come from diverse backgrounds, with diverse educational and activist involvement. Three different types of women were identified to be currently engaged in the Karak governorate: those women who are highly engaged, with a high profile and may run for elections at either the municipal on national level; the second group of women are engaged and are aware of problems within their communities but do not participate in electoral politics focusing on community instead; the third and final group of women are aware of problems within their communities but are not aware of how to take action on make change on the ground. Having this categorization of Karaki women is useful because it enables the ability to recognize the different degrees of engagement stages and intention of activists. This can then be used to develop strategies to broaden political participation.

The second group of participants was university students. The structure of the training and concurrent participation observation followed the same format as that provided for the CBOs. However, in this session participants also worked through an exercise of self-assessment of the problems facing their community. The results of this self-assessment showed that issues are largely determined by age and gender.



As shown in the graph above, the majority of males (18-25) self-identified that problems exist mainly at the university level, followed by concerns at the neighborhood, country and governorate level. Interestingly, females of the same age group also self-identified that problems exist at the university level, followed by country, and governorate level, with only a minority of participants indicating problems within the neighborhood, friends and family exist.

In contrast, men above the age of 25 indicated that the majority of problems facing their community exist within the house, followed by university and neighborhood, friends and country. The responses from females above the age of 25 indicated that the majority of problems exist at the country level, followed by work and university, with governorate and neighborhood issues coming in next. The comparison between men and women within this group is interesting because not only are the responses different, they are also distinct from the responses from the other age group.

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**participants were highly concerned and looking forward to be engaged in issues related to their social and political sphere rather than personal sphere.**

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Looking from a gendered lens, it is further discernible that females of both age groups show more varied answers regarding their relation to different contexts than men. Interestingly, however, no women from either age group responded intra-household dynamics to be a problem, while a minority of men in both groups did. It is further interesting that tribe did not rank highly for any of the groups; consistently ranking amongst the lowest issues. This is interesting precisely because tribal culture had been raised during the discussions as a barrier for political participation. It is evident, however these issues are prioritized, that the participants were highly concerned and looking forward to be engaged in issues related to their social and political sphere rather than personal sphere. This is a significant finding in and of itself because, as was clear from one-to-one interviews, family remains to be a key determinant of the possibilities for women's participation in the social, economic and political spheres.

After the final training sessions, a workshop was organized for all participants who had been involved in the training. It was an opportunity to see how the information provided through the trainings had been absorbed, taken on board, mediated and implemented in the community. Participants at the workshop also included two representatives from the Ministry of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs (MOPPA) and the Assistant Governor, which gave the opportunity for members of the training to communicate directly with the authorities. The workshop was also an opportunity for the researchers to disseminate the initial research findings, and in this way have a feedback loop with participants about what had been observed through the project. Interestingly there was little disagreement with the findings.

After the presentation of the initial research findings the participants were asked to break into five groups to discuss how to move forward now that primary issues had been identified. All groups reordered the issues dependent on the group members, which seems appropriate considering each group was made up of a variety of ages and gender. Each group highlighted a different topic of major concern to their community and sought to develop an initiative that could be implemented on the local level to address these concerns.

Participant observation of this event led to the development of three points. First participants were enthusiastic to address issues and strategize ways to remove barriers to female political participation, as well as demonstrating deep consideration and thought about this process. For example, one group sought to locate their activity in the university because ‘it is a stage of maturity intellectually, politically and socially, and allows for many opportunities for participation in various fields... also, beliefs and conviction about the opposite sex change.’ Another group indicated that they sought to target the community level because ‘we get our ideas, parents, friends from the community, and from the same community we get our beliefs, culture, politics, and our foundation; and all of these factors affect the individual’s personality and their political and social participation.’ The second point is that all participants stressed the importance of the particularity of the Karaki context and thus the need to design campaigns accordingly. To make a difference within their communities it is necessary to draw upon local knowledge and experience. It is possible to suggest then that initiatives perceived to be from the ‘outside’ would be less successful, unless they engage with this local knowledge and experience. Thirdly, it was observed that the presence of representatives from MOPPA and the Governor’s office had a significant impact on the participants, precisely because there was an opportunity to directly speak with the representatives about the issues people face in their communities. The engagement and interest from the representatives validated the concerns people raised and potentially opened avenues for formal action.

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**Deeply engaging with the community is essential to the success of projects in Karak. Making a difference requires knowledge about, and engagement and participation with the community.**

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### *Lessons learned from “Ead B’ead” Targeted projects*

All developed projects drew upon the different trainings provided. One group titled their project “I Can Change” and sought to promote political participation of women by holding awareness raising sessions in the university context. Another group titled their project “You and Me” and sought to raise awareness about women’s right and increasing political participation by speaking directly to people in their hometowns as well as the university. There was a specific focus on highlighting success stories of local women who had broken through the traditional understanding of what it means to be a woman.

Another group drew upon the advocacy skills in the training to present their project titled “Just Like You”. This project sought to not only hold awareness raising sessions but also draw upon local radio stations to reach out to different groups of people, with the hope that the message for change would be passed on from friends to family to neighbors.

It was from this engaged basis that a participation week was organized for projects to be implemented with the support of “Ead B’ead” project staff. Over the course of one week in December 2015, 17 small projects were implemented ranging from awareness raising sessions, to radio sessions, blog posts and a graffiti afternoon. This had originally been intended for university students however after the experience of the “Ead B’ead” workshop it was assessed that the involvement of CBO members would be an important step in bridging the community work, allow exchange of experiences and social cohesion of active members of the Karak community. Out of the 13 people involved, four were from CBOs and the remainder students.

Identifying who implemented projects is important because, broadly speaking, the people working in CBOs were previously mobilized and active in their communities, more so than the students. Of the total number of students involved in the trainings, 22.5% implemented a project. It is to be expected that not all students would implement a project. However, the involvement of some students demonstrates that there is a link between political intent (through participation in trainings) and political action (implementing a project). It further suggests that it is possible to engage members of the community to become active and involved in making a difference in their communities.

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**With almost one quarter of students from the project implementing their own activity, it is evident that education about women’s rights has a powerful mobilizing element that can lead to people taking action.**

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An interview with the assistant of the project indicated that the students who implemented projects lacked the knowledge of how to continue campaigns without financial support. This is important to recognize because it demonstrates that further skills development is required specifically in regards to community outreach and mobilization, and strengthening of solidarity ties; as it is through these skills that a collective movement can be developed.

At the same time as the Participation week, another ‘multiplier’ initiative was taking place that sought to increase the outreach of the training sessions already provided. Conducted in association with Pioneering Women of Karak over the course of four days, in different associations throughout the governorate, this training reached 70 new women. Observation of these sessions indicated that there was a general perception amongst the women that women in Jordan already have their rights. However, when exposed to information about Jordanian law and women’s rights under law it was evident that there was a general lack of knowledge, but importantly a willingness to engage with the material. Discussion within the groups focused on whether the laws outlined were contrary to the teachings of Islam, whether this would impact their obedience to their husbands and commitment to the home. The trainer was able to indicate that Jordanian laws are not opposed to Islam and in fact reflect the spirit of the religion. The questions raised by these women suggest that there is another category of women in Karak and it is possible to suggest that these women largely represent the 77% of non-economically active women within the governorate.

It is evident that through the project life of “Ead B’ead”, engaged and willing members of the Karaki community sought to make a difference within their community. The “Ead B’ead” project sought to build upon the strengths of these people by exposing them to new ways of organizing, advocating, reaching out and importantly skilling them up with knowledge about national and international law. What does not seem to have occurred over the short life span of the project is a solid mobilization of new activists though it was a support for existing activists in CBOs and some students. The idea however is that the multiplier project implemented is the seed to enable new activists and initiatives to

## 7. Way Forward

Analysis of Karaki women's involvement in the formal political processes suggests that Karaki women are largely excluded from it and those who have been included through the quota system have come to be seen as 'showcase'. Focus on these formal processes however distracts from a broader conception of political participation in Karak which centers on civic engagement. Although not always visible from afar it is evident through this research that there is a small group of dedicated female activists working in Karak to make a difference in their community, through involvement in various associations and in many cases cover the community needs that have not been covered by formal politics. Each of these women are powerful and strong in their own right, and substantively demonstrate the capacity of women to make a difference within their community. However, these women should not be taken as representative of all women in Karak. As outlined throughout this paper, there are at least four categories of women in the governorate: those willing to enter formal politics, those engaged at the community level, those willing but unsure of what to do, and finally those who largely remain away from public sphere. This categorization suggests that culture in Karak is not a monolithic force and demonstrates that there is a variety of interpretations.

One of our finding is that these interpretations are based on family allegiances; however, it is also evident that some women also push against the boundaries set by their families. For some sections of society, there remain remnants of collectively self-imposed social norms that suggests women should not be politically visible and this is reflected in the continuing difficulty for women to enter formal politics as well as the ongoing issues of women making decisions for themselves. Importantly however, this is not generalized across Karaki society but is largely expressed differently from family to family. How to ensure development in a society where family dominates requires deep engagement with the community as well as community leadership. It is evident that such leadership is present though at present seems disparate and working in isolated settings.

Based on our understanding of the current political participation of women in Karak the following three broad recommendations can be made to further substantiate and increase female political participation within the governorate, namely:

- **Community-based advocacy efforts:** Engaging with the communities of activists already mobilized, as well as the broader community of men, women, boys and girls currently peripherally engaged makes a difference. Social dialogue is a key steppingstone into changing perceptions about gender norms, and this can only be achieved by inviting the community to participate in this dialogue. Currently in the context of Karak there are barely any opportunities for frank social dialogue, so it is key that donors and institutions offer their support to community-based activities. Rolling-out these dialogues via engaged activists is through the development of programs as instructions, trainers and community facilitators, are key activities to achieve this.
- **Education is key:** buttressing community-based advocacy efforts, curriculum review regarding gender norms for primary and secondary school-levels about women's rights and human rights should be made a reality. Addressing misconceptions progressively throughout the school cycle from primary through to secondary may enable a generation- al change in understanding about women's roles in society; serving as a counterweight to other understandings in the community.
- **Economic participation the path to future political participation:** Future policy measures to increase female political participation in Karak must take into consideration the economic barriers for women to enter the political sphere. Increasing female economic participation will open doors for political participation. Importantly because of the structural barriers to employment within Karak for both men and women, measures should be taken to increase economic participation of both sexes. Increased economic participation will ease financial pressure currently facing families in Karak and open room for engagement with social issues.



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## 8. Resources

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