



Enhancing the Capacity of Schools to Create Options, Not Dependency





Reforming Education in Rural Jordan

Enhancing the Capacity of Schools to Create Options, Not Dependency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan guarantees all Jordanians the right to free primary and secondary education, and the Jordanian government has gone to great lengths to protect people's freedoms to exercise this right. As a result of the efforts of the Jordanian government and its cooperation with international partners, the Kingdom's education system has undergone a drastic transformation in the last two decades. Jordan now enjoys a net enrollment rate in primary education that is higher than 97 percent and a persistence rate of nearly 98 percent.

Yet, while this progress is impressive, its impact has been more quantitative than qualitative. Enrollment numbers may have improved, but many of Jordan's public schools are still struggling to provide their students with high quality education. These struggles are most prevalent in rural communities. With rural schools lagging far behind their urban counterparts, rural students graduate with much lower levels of education and often prove unprepared to continue into post secondary education or employment.

This qualitative disparity prevents many rural students from equally benefitting from their right to education and has reinforced a socio-economic divide between urban and rural communities in Jordan. The education gap has contributed to lower rates of rural employment as well as higher rates of financial precariousness among rural Jordanian families. With an education system that is failing to adequately prepare rural Jordanians to enter the work force, many continue to rely either on low productivity jobs in the public sector or informal economy, or else on assistance from their families or the government. In effect, the education system is perpetuating the same rural reliance on government assistance that has existed since (Trans)Jordan was first consolidated through patron-client relations in the 1920s.

The continued rural reliance on the government stems from two interconnected factors. 1) An rural to urban migratory cycle of teachers that is leaving rural schools with high staff turnover rates and a prevalence of inexperienced, uncommitted teachers. This cycle is impairing the quality of education that is being provided in rural schools, and failing to prepare students to benefit from higher education. 2) Insufficient resources (often stemming from insufficient student populations) in rural schools as well as a culture of shame surrounding certain occupations is denying students the option to pursue diverse educational tracks that could lead to the development of marketable skills in their local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Improving the Quality of Teaching in Rural Schools

Ending the Rural to Urban Migratory Cycle of Teachers

- Provide greater financial incentives to both teachers who are asked to move to rural schools as well as teachers who volunteer to do so
- Ensure the availability of better quality accommodation options to relocated teachers
- Determine travel bonuses based on distance not on geographical unit

Enhancing Teacher Capacity

- Offer professional development courses during summer vacations
- Give financial incentives to teachers to ensure their participation in the courses
- Allow rural schools to engage more directly in teacher hiring decisions

Providing Options to Rural Youth

Providing More Diverse Educational Options

- Present information on technical and vocational options and encourage them as equally respectable and viable career options
- Disseminate clear, accurate information about market needs to students
- Offer more technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial courses in primary school

Addressing the Culture of Shame

- Give presentations of success stories from varied educational paths
- Hold meetings with students and parents to provide information and discuss options
- Launch a media campaign to show positive image of technical and vocational career

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“Education is...an enabler, not only of productivity and success but also, of responsible citizenship. What's needed are connections as well as curriculum standards – support systems to encourage great thinking and innovation.” – HM King Abdullah II

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The development of knowledge and skills is crucial to an individual's capacity to lead a healthy and productive life; one's ability to acquire these fundamentals, therefore, should not depend upon her or his socio-economic status or background.¹ As such, a country's education system should be designed to even out extant inequalities and provide all members of a society with equal opportunities.

While the reach of education in Jordan has vastly expanded over the last two decades, the quality of education being provided in rural Jordanian schools remains significantly lower than in urban areas. This qualitative gap is exacerbating rather than evening out urban-rural socio-economic divides. As a result, the system is limiting the educational and occupational opportunities open to most rural youth and forcing their continued reliance upon government aid. This cycle of dependence is preventing human development in rural Jordan and denying rural youth the dignity of choice and social justice.

1.2 Structure

This paper first provides a brief historical background for the current state of Jordan's education system and labour market. It then offers a general overview of the nation-wide discrepancy between educational outputs and labour demands before focusing more specifically on its effects on rural Jordan and what can be done to provide rural students with more effective and more appropriate educational opportunities. It concludes with recommendations for reforming the education system to ensure that rural youth are equally able to benefit from their right to education.

1.3 Methodology

In seeking to understand the consequences of the urban-rural education disparity in Jordan, this paper examines human development through the “capability approach”, as pioneered by the Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen in the 1980s.² The capability approach proposes that the freedom to achieve well-being is a function of what a person is able to do and to be, and, therefore, the kind of life she or he is able to lead. The approach works to realize enhanced human development by increasing an individual's capabilities and thereby expanding the opportunities available to her or him. The most fundamental requirement for human development is the capacity to live a healthy, long life and to obtain the knowledge and resources required for a sustainable living. Without this foundation, choices regarding what a person can be or do are severely restricted.³

The quality of education provided in rural Jordan limits the capabilities of rural youth and the options available to them are severely reduced. As a result, their ability to engage in decision-making and to have their voices heard is also confined. In response to this subalternity, Identity Center has focused on ensuring that the voices of rural Jordanians, and rural youth in particular, were expressed throughout the research for this paper. Following an initial period of desk research, Identity Center's research team began to conduct focus groups with young Jordanians in rural communities in Jordan (Ma'an, Karak, and Mafraq). (The paper also benefitted from a series of six focus groups with teachers and principals that were convened for previous papers in this series). Following these focus groups, the Identity Center held additional interviews with individual rural youth. From these discussions, the Identity Center

¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 63.

² Amartya Sen, “Rights and Capabilities,” in *Resources, Values and Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 307-324; and Amartya Sen, “Capability and Well-being,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 30-53.

³ Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Jordan Small Business and Human Development,” Amman, 2011, 33.

identified other subjects for direct interviews and designed a telephone survey that was conducted with a representative sample of 500 Jordanians. Once all of the results were compiled and analyzed, the Identity Center workshopped the results with young Jordanians and education experts.

1.4 Background

1.4.1 Induced Rentier Economy and the Foundation of Patron-Client Relations

By the time it achieved independence in 1946, (Trans)Jordan had developed into an “induced rentier state”.⁴ That is, as a result of the growing influx of British funds throughout the Mandate period (1921-1946), (Trans)Jordan’s economy became dependent upon an external third party for rents in the form of aid.⁵ The ability of the Hashemite family to draw upon these external funds throughout the Mandate period affected the development of domestic politics in the proto-state. Through their distribution of incentives and financial grants, the Hashemites were able to build strong patron-client relationships with the powerful nomadic tribes, and thereby give them a stake in the maintenance of Hashemite rule in the proto-state.⁶ As the state’s power continued to expand throughout the Mandate period, the Hashemites ensured that rural tribal leaders played an ever-growing role in the nascent state’s burgeoning institutions.⁷

1.4.2 The Effects of the Patron-Client System on Employment and Education

These patron-client relations outlived Jordan’s independence in 1946, with the government increasingly providing for key tribes through state employment. Although many rural Jordanians continued to earn their livelihoods through pastoral and agricultural activity, employment in the army as well as national and subnational governments became increasingly prevalent. By 1989, as much as 75 percent of East Bank Jordanians were employed in the public sector.⁸ With rural employment focused in agriculture and the public sector – neither of which required higher education (except for top tier government jobs) – most rural Jordanians did not begin to view secondary or post secondary education as being crucial for their livelihoods until after the economy began to change in the 1970s.

1.4.3 The Decline of Jordan’s Rentier Economy and the Rise of Neoliberal Reform

The maintenance of the government’s patron-client relationships depended on the resilience of Jordan’s rentier economy. Reliant on the continued flow of rents, the Kingdom remained vulnerable to the volatility of global economics. This precariousness proved problematic for Jordan in the 1980s, as the effects of the decline of the oil economy, the Iran-Iraq War, the *intifadah* and disengagement, and the subsequent onset of the Gulf War all collided, rendering continued Hashemite reliance on rents and patron-client relationships untenable.

The crisis forced Jordan to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Appealing to the donor community at a time when growing importance was being placed upon aid conditionality, Jordan was forced to comply with the IMF’s neoliberal economic requirements.⁹ Thus, Jordan’s 1989 request for US\$275 million in credit was granted on the condition that the Kingdom rearrange its economic policies, emphasizing private sector development and the reduction of public sector expenditure. To fulfill the latter condition, Jordan had to cut subsidies on basic commodities and reduce public sector employment. Since 1995 public sector employment (as a percentage of the total workforce) has fallen from almost 60 percent

⁴ Warwick Knowles, *Jordan Since 1989: A Study in Political Economy* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), 26.

⁵ Great Britain, “Report by His Britannic Majesty’s Government on the Administration Under Mandate of Palestine and Transjordan for the Year 1924,” 1925, in *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports 1918-1948, Vol. I 1918-1924*, ed. Robert L. Jarman, (Cambridge: Cambridge Archive Group, 1995), 494-495.

⁶ Musa Budeiri, “Poor Kid on the Bloc: The Importance of Being Jordan,” *Die Welt des Islams* Vol. 36, No. 2 (July 1996): 244; and Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1993), 100.

⁷ Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism, and the Modern State* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2009), 64-65.

⁸ Rex Brynen, “Economic Crisis and Post-Rentier Democratization in the Arab World: The Case of Jordan,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. XXV No. 1 (March 1992): 82.

⁹ Mahdi Abdul Hadi, “The Jordanian Disengagement: Causes and Effects,” *Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)*, September 1988, 8.

to between 30 to 40 percent.¹⁰ This contraction has disproportionately affected rural East Bankers because of their overwhelming dominance in the public sector.¹¹

1.4.4 A Jobless Growth Strategy

While neoliberal economic reforms have resulted in some very positive effects on the economy, increased employment opportunities have not materialized for Jordanians. A large number of employment opportunities have been created, but they have primarily been in low skill, low paid jobs that are largely unappealing to Jordanians. These jobs have consequently been filled by migrant workers who are willing to accept poorer salaries and working conditions. Government statistics indicate that migrant workers now account for between 22 and 26 percent of Jordan's employed population.¹² This means that the unemployed population of Jordan is outnumbered by foreign workers who hold Jordanian work permits (not including the even larger number of illegal foreign workers).¹³

1.4.5 High Unemployment and Even Higher Rural Unemployment

Unemployment in the Kingdom has consequently remained high, fluctuating between 12 and 15 percent, and economic engagement has stagnated between 37 and 40 percent, one of the lowest rates globally.¹⁴ Out of a total 3.5 million potential Jordanian workers, only 1.4 million are economically active.¹⁵ Unemployment rates are even higher in rural communities. In 2014, unemployment stood at 12 percent in urban areas and 18 percent in rural areas.¹⁶ These higher rates of rural unemployment are in part a result of the contraction of the public sector and the concentration of private sector job creation in urban areas and the Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs).¹⁷

2. THE MISMATCH BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

2.1 Growing Demand for Higher Education

Demand for higher education in Jordan first began to expand in the 1970s as a result of both the oil boom in the Gulf and its consequent creation of jobs for Jordanian graduates. At the same time, the post 1970 "Jordanization" process pushed Palestinian-Jordanians out of the public sector and made university education increasingly crucial for their employability in the private sector.¹⁸ Paradoxically, however, demand for higher education grew most rapidly during Jordan's economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. The crisis not only rendered most families financially unable to send their children abroad for education, but also the decline in oil economies and the Gulf War forced the return of hundreds of thousands of expatriate Jordanians.¹⁹ Because most of these returnees were high skilled workers who had held good

¹⁰ European Training Foundation (ETF), "Employment Policies in Jordan," 2014, 10.

<[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/8D5C3712F2457914C1257CD000505340/\\$file/Employment%20policies_Jordan.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/8D5C3712F2457914C1257CD000505340/$file/Employment%20policies_Jordan.pdf)>

¹¹ Glenn E. Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 30, No. 3 (August 1998): 391.

¹² ETF, "Employment Policies in Jordan," 6.

¹³ Regis Chapman, "Education Public Expenditures Working Paper," Jordan Fiscal Reform Project II, USAID and DAI, August, 2011. <<http://www.frp2.org/english/Portals/0/PDFs/Education%20PEP%20Working%20Paper.pdf>>

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme, Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Council, La Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, "A Panoramic Study of the Informal Economy in Jordan," August, 2012, 17

<<http://www.mop.gov.jo/echobusv3.0/SystemAssets/pdf/Reports/informal%20sector%20panoramic%20study%20final.pdf>>; and ILO "Decent Work," 4, 25.

¹⁵ International Labour Office (ILO), "Employment Sector, Employment Working Paper No. 118 – Macroeconomic Policies and Employment in Jordan: Tackling the Paradox of Job-Poor Growth," Geneva, 2012, 21.

<http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_191243.pdf>

¹⁶ European Training Foundation (ETF), "Mapping Vocational Training and Training Governance in Jordan," 2014, 9. <[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/9A93CDC49DAA7AECC1257DA20049318C/\\$file/Jordan_mapping%20VET%20governance.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/9A93CDC49DAA7AECC1257DA20049318C/$file/Jordan_mapping%20VET%20governance.pdf)> See also, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Labour Market: The Case of Vocational Training in Jordan," May 2014.

<<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/poverty/Vocational%20Training%20Study%20-%20Final%20Draft%20presented%20in%20the%20press%20conference.pdf>>

¹⁷ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "Public Expenditure Perspectives" Fiscal Reform Project II, December, 2011, 28. <http://dai.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/pep_book.pdf>

¹⁸ For more information on "Jordanization", see Adnan Abu-Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians, & the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Daniele Cantini, "Higher Education as Formation of the Self and Citizenship: An Ethnography of the University Students from Amman, Jordan" *EMIGRA*, Working Papers No. 6, 2007.

jobs in the Gulf, their return put severe pressure on the labour market as they looked for equivalent jobs in Jordan.

The decrease in employment opportunities in conjunction with the increase in the number of graduates looking for employment made it almost impossible to obtain work in the country without a post secondary education.²⁰ As a result, university education began to transform into a basic requirement for employment, most higher level jobs in the government, and quick advancement through the ranks of the military. These changing requirements forced rural Jordanians to start to view university education as a necessary step for ensuring good livelihoods.

2.2 Reduced Employment Opportunities for University Graduates

Because the number of jobs available for high skill workers has remained relatively stagnant while the number of youth pursuing university degrees continues to expand, the amount of unemployed graduates is increasing.²¹ Every year 40,000 university students graduate, but only 30 percent of the newly created jobs are filled by these graduates.²² As a result, 40 percent of unemployed Jordanians are now university graduates, a rate that has grown by approximately 20 percent in the last decade.²³

Jordanians graduate from university with high skills levels and high expectations for subsequent employment and are often unwilling to accept the poor working conditions and salaries offered by the majority of available jobs. While this has pushed some Jordanians into “voluntary unemployment”, it has driven others to rely on opportunities beyond Jordan’s borders; an estimated 600,000 Jordanians – a figure half the size of the Jordanian work force at home – now work abroad, largely in high skill occupations.²⁴

2.3 Social Stigmas Surrounding Vocational and Technical Jobs

Aside from high expectations for post graduation employment, many Jordanians refuse to accept low skill jobs because of a persistent “culture of shame” (*thaqafat al ‘aib*) that continues to engulf vocational and even technical jobs.²⁵ Due to this stigma, Jordanian youth receive little encouragement from teachers, councilors, families, or society to pursue these options.²⁶ Rural youth who participated in our focus groups noted that even though some information about vocational and technical options is now provided in most of their schools, these options were not encouraged.²⁷

Enrollment in vocational and technical programs has consequently remained very low and has even declined as a percentage of total enrollment in all types of education and training.²⁸ With decreasing demand for vocational and technical programs combined with a growing demand for university seats, some of the community colleges that were established to create a technically skilled workforce have even strayed into offering academic preparatory courses to help students bridge into universities.²⁹ This change, according to Jordan’s National

²⁰ Yitzhak Reiter, “Higher Education and Sociopolitical Transformation in Jordan,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 29, No. 2 (November 2002): 141.

²¹ International Labour Office (ILO), “Decent Work Country Profile: Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,” Geneva, 2013, 31. <http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/documents/publication/wcms_232764.pdf>

²² ETF, “Employment Policies in Jordan,” 7; and Fakhri Khader, “Strategies and Roadmap for Effective Higher Education in Jordan,” 6.

²³ ILO, “Decent Work,” 31; and ETF, “Mapping Vocational Training,” 8.

²⁴ ILO, “Decent Work,” 21; and ILO, “Employment Sector,” 21.

²⁵ When phone survey participants were asked, “Do you think there is still a lot of stigma against vocational employment in Jordan?” 76.39% answered in the positive, 22.22% answered in the negative, and 1.39% stated that they were unsure.

²⁶ When phone survey participants were asked, “Do your communities encourage vocational or technical education?” 24.29% answered in the positive, 70% answered in the negative, and 5.71% indicated that they were unsure. Also see UNDP, “Labour Market,” 10; and Chapman, “Education Public Expenditures Working Paper,” 33.

²⁷ When phone survey participants were asked, “Do Jordanian schools encourage vocational or technical education?” 19.72% answered in the positive, 73.24% in the negative, and 7.04% stated that they were unsure.

²⁸ Ahmed al-Sa’d, “Evaluation of Students’ Attitudes Towards Vocational Education in Jordan,” Malmö Studies in Educational Sciences No. 32, Malmö, 2007, 27 <<http://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/5259/Thesis.pdf>>

²⁹ ETF, “Employment Policies in Jordan,” 27.

Employment Strategy (2011-2020), is merely exacerbating the development of “an inverted pyramid such that Jordan graduates too many engineers and not enough engineering assistants.”³⁰

3. JORDAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM: PREVENTING RURAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

While the growing divide between labor supply and demand has adversely affected employment levels across the Kingdom, it has yielded particularly negative impacts in rural areas. The acuteness of its impact on rural communities is directly related to the lower quality of education provided in many rural areas, which limits the ability of rural youth to access and benefit from university education and subsequently find employment. Lacking a strong pedagogic foundation, rural students are unproductively pushed through subsequent education levels and ultimately rendered dependent on the public sector: a highly problematic phenomenon, given the recent contraction of the public sector as well as the concentration of low productivity, low wage employment in it. Denied equal basic education and, in turn, the opportunity to choose productive education and employment paths, rural youth remain reliant on the support of the government.

3.1 Problems Facing Rural Public Schools

Despite the improvement of rural enrollment rates in basic education, the education opportunities available to rural students remain limited because the quality of education provided in rural schools is not as high as that of urban schools. The existence of this disparity is manifest in the results of *tawjihi* (General Secondary Education Certificate Examination); schools in urban areas far outperform their rural counterparts, and the rate of students from rural areas who pass the exam remains very low.³¹ In the 2015 summer session exam, for instance, there was a concentration of schools in rural areas of the Kingdom in which no students passed *tawjihi*, and less than 14 percent of students in the southern governorates passed.³²

3.1.1 Rural to Urban Teacher Migration

While a number of factors contribute to the poor quality of education in rural Jordan, it is crucially a result of a vicious migratory cycle of teachers in Jordan, which leaves rural schools with the most inexperienced teachers.³³ This cycle is created by the widespread preference among teachers for positions in urban schools. Teachers whom we interviewed for this paper stated that the preference for urban schools is primarily a result of the fact that many teachers work a second job to supplement their low salaries. As such, teachers generally prefer to work in schools in urban areas of the country where there are more auxiliary employment opportunities in the private sector and the informal economy (such as tutoring or even driving a taxi). Because teachers usually move to urban schools as quickly as they can, many more opportunities open up in rural schools. This dynamic means that rural schools mostly receive inexperienced teachers, who have only reluctantly moved to a rural school for employment opportunities.

3.1.2 Insufficient Student Populations, Insufficient Resources

In some rural schools with low student populations, the negative effects of inexperienced and uncommitted teachers is reinforced by insufficiently sized teaching staffs. In a rural school that one of our research participants had attended, for instance, students from multiple grades were all taught in the same class by the same teacher. In another, a single teacher taught all

³⁰ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, “Jordan’s National Employment Strategy, 2011-2020,” Amman, 2012, 38.

<http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_313611.pdf>

³¹ Alaa’ Mithhir, “342 Schools Where No One Passed,” *al Ghad*, August 5, 2015 <<http://www.alghad.com/articles>>; Hussein al Sharaa, “69 Schools in the Two Baladiyyas Where No One Passed,” *al Rai*, July 30, 2015 <<http://www.alrai.com/article/728016.html>>; Mohammed Abu Rumman, “Educational Disaster Areas,” *al Wakeel News*. <<http://www.alwakeelnews.com/print.php?id=147286>>

³² Bassam al Badarain “Revealing the Hidden: Hundreds of Public Schools Where No One Passed” *al Quds al Arabi*, August 1, 2015. <<http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=381143>> Perhaps as a result of the discrepancy in scores between urban and rural schools, there is a widespread belief among both urban and rural Jordanians that schools in rural Jordan offer significantly lower quality education. When participants in our phone survey were asked, “Do you think there is a big divide between the quality of education in urban and rural?” 95.83% answered in the positive, 2.78% answered in the negative, and 1.39% indicated that they were unsure.

³³ Identity Center, Interview with Raed al Azzam, Editor in Chief of Amad.Jo, Amman, June 28, 2015.

of the subjects in the school. With insufficient student numbers, some rural schools are also unable to offer all of the *tawjihi* streams. While the lack of adequate educational programs forces many male students to commute to the next town (or stay with family living there), this option is often unavailable for female students, many of whom consequently either pursue a different education stream than they otherwise would, or stop attending school altogether.

3.1.3 Pushing the Unprepared Through to University

With the provision of low quality education in rural schools, one might expect high levels of grade repetition. But this is not the case. While students worldwide repeat grades at an average rate of four percent, the rate of repetition in Jordan is around one percent.³⁴ Teachers who participated in the research for this paper stated that this low repetition rate does not attest to the effectiveness of the Jordanian education system, but to a propensity to push students through to the next grade regardless of their success at the previous level. This situation, they stated, was particularly acute in rural schools in Jordan. The predisposition to push unprepared students through to the next level is not limited to primary and secondary education. Students from rural areas of Jordan whose *tawjihi* results would normally bar them from admittance to universities are able to enter through a system of quotas.

3.2 University Quotas: Too Little Too Late

University quotas are commonly regarded as an advantage given to rural students or students who come from less privileged areas or poorer families as a form of compensation. While the system is ostensibly designed to level the playing field between urban and rural Jordanians and could, therefore, be considered a mechanism for enhancing social justice, professors whom we interviewed highlighted a very different reality. They emphasized that students who attend poor quality primary and secondary schools in rural areas of the Kingdom often enter university with insufficient knowledge and skill bases. As a result, these students often face much greater challenges in university, which frequently impede their abilities to equally benefit from university education.

Students admitted through the quota system as a percentage of all students admitted to public universities through the general admission process for the 2013-2014 academic year*											
Children of Military (Royal)		Children of Teachers (Royal)		Refugee Camps (Royal)	Persons with Disabilities	Families of University Staff	Tribes and Less Fortunate	Best in Governorate	Best in Sub district (al Lewa)	Best in School	Total
Competitive	Exceptions	Competitive	Exceptions								
5.4%	16.5%	6.5%	1.8%	1.1%	0.4%	1.9%	10%	0.6%	0.1%	0.18%	44.48%
*All statistics for this chart collected by ThabZoonaa											

*All statistics for this chart collected by Thab7toona

Both professors and rural students themselves stated that rural youth not only face problems traversing the socio-cultural divide that exists between urban and rural communities, but also encounter problems with insufficient educational foundations and even linguistic abilities. Professors and students noted, for example, that as a result of poor quality English language instruction in their primary and secondary schools and the fact that many university programs are taught in English, rural youth frequently find it difficult to keep pace with their urban peers who receive better instruction in English, and, in some cases, attend schools in which English is the primary language of instruction. Possessing much weaker educational foundations, rural students are often unable to achieve the same results as their urban counterparts. Recent graduates from rural areas emphasized that disparities between educational levels remained present throughout their degrees and, consequently, in their standing at graduation.

³⁴ USAID, "Public Expenditure Perspectives," 40.

Counterbalances to the Quota System: Admissions Options Open to Affluent Students

While the quotas are made available to Jordanians who would otherwise face socio-economic difficulties obtaining university admissions, their impact is augmented by the admissions options that are open to affluent students. Students whose secondary school credentials would normally bar their admittance to university – or, at least, the program of their choice – have three more costly options available to them:

1) *Private Universities*: 18 private universities now exist in Jordan, accounting for approximately 26 percent (according to the Jordan's Department of Statistics) of the total number of enrolled undergraduate students. The private schools allow students to enter with lower marks but demand higher fees.

2) *Parallel Program*: The parallel program (*al nizam al mu'azi*), which was introduced in 2002, allows students to enter most faculties with lower *tawjihi* grades than those required by students who apply through the general admissions process, but requires them to pay much higher fees. The parallel system now accounts for more than 30 percent (with some estimates as high as 60 percent) of all seats in public universities.

3) *"International Students"*: The final option, which is much less prevalent, allows Jordanians to register as international students. These "international students" must pay even higher fees than are necessary for parallel students, but they are able to enter with even lower qualifications.

The combined effects of the different options for accessing university outside of the general admission process enable some poor students to enter university, but ensure that all affluent students have access to university. That is, the quotas give some students from rural areas with high poverty and low academic success the opportunity to enter university despite *tawjihi* scores or financial statuses that would otherwise prevent such possibilities; yet, the private, parallel, and international systems ensure that all affluent, largely urban students are able to pursue higher educations.

3.3 Public Sector: No Longer a Preference, But the Only Option

Some recent studies have argued that rural Jordanians continue to prefer employment in the public sector because they believe it provides better access to social services and is more stable, lucrative, and flexible.³⁵ Although this was once the case, our interviews and focus groups with rural Jordanians showcased a more complicated narrative.³⁶ Rather than favouring one sector over the other, rural youth identified benefits and drawbacks of both. The participants almost unanimously asserted that the private sector provides less stability and benefits than the public sector, but stressed that it offers higher financial rewards and greater potential for career advancement.³⁷

3.3.1 Rural Exclusion from High Skill Jobs in the Private Sector

However, while most of the participants expressed an interest in the private sector, they maintained that they are usually unable to access high skill employment opportunities in the private sector because of two key reasons. Firstly, because the private sector is heavily concentrated in urban centers, employment opportunities remain much more limited in rural areas of the Kingdom. While some, predominately male, rural youth in our focus groups expressed a willingness to move to another area of Jordan if a good opportunity was offered in the private sector, this option is neither preferred nor always financially feasible.

Secondly, without an effective base for learning in primary and secondary school, rural Jordanians often prove unable to access more competitive faculties or to equally benefit from university education. They are pushed through university and are usually able to graduate, but they often do so without developing tangible, marketable skills. With strong competition for jobs in the private sector, many of these rural graduates consequently find themselves unable to compete with their affluent, urban counterparts.

³⁵ See, e.g., ILO, "Employment Sector," 21; and ILO, "Decent Work," 27.

³⁶ When phone survey participants across Jordan were asked, "Is employment in the public or private sector preferable?" 20.83% indicated a preference for the public sector, 59.72% indicated the private sector, 16.67% stated they had no preference, and 2.78% percent were unsure. Of the rural respondents, 30.8% indicated a preference for the public sector and 69.2% a preference for the private sector. (Interestingly, however, 100% of participants from Badia regions indicated a preference for the public sector).

³⁷ When phone survey participants who indicated a preference for public sector employment were asked why, 2.63% indicated pay, 57.89% job security, 7.89% benefits, 6.9% flexibility, and 26.38% other reasons. When phone survey participants who indicated a preference for private sector employment were asked why, 53.45% indicated pay, 5.17% job security, 15.52% benefits, 6.9% benefits, and 18.87% other reasons.

With more public sector opportunities available in rural communities and access to them requiring less competitive qualifications, rural Jordanians rely on the public sector out of necessity – not out of choice.

3.3.2 Attending University for Public Sector Qualifications, Not for Skills

This exclusion from high skill private sector jobs has affected the educational tracks that most rural Jordanians pursue. Appreciating the difficulties of finding a high skill job in the private sector, rural Jordanians focus on attaining any degree so that they can satisfy the basic qualifications required for higher-level employment in the public sector. As such, the post secondary educational path that most rural students choose to follow prioritizes their gaining minimum certification over their building tangible skills that are required for employment in the private sector.³⁸

Young Jordanians in our focus groups who had recently graduated and were looking for employment stated that they had thus far had little success in their search for private sector jobs and were consequently relying on acquiring a job through the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), with which all of them had already registered. By signing up with the CSB, a centralized department for public sector employment, these graduates have entered a very long queue that may require years of waiting before a job is offered. Although there are around 300,000 Jordanians currently waiting on the CSB's list, very few are hired each year. In 2012, for example, the Civil Service Bureau recruited only 6,430 employees.³⁹

3.4 Continued Rural Reliance on the Government

Because of the barriers that they face in accessing and benefiting from higher education, rural Jordanians are frequently forced to rely on either the public sector or the informal economy for their livelihoods. Both of these situations contribute to continued rural dependence on the government.

3.4.1 Informal Economy

While rural youth who do not pursue post secondary education frequently become dependent on the informal economy, the long waits of the CSB push many rural graduates into accepting low wage employment in the informal economy in their local communities.⁴⁰ With the informal economy dominated by low productivity jobs, the salaries provided are also low. The low wages of the informal economy contribute to the high rate of poverty among workers in Jordan. In fact, with the swelling of the informal economy in recent years, the majority of Jordanians who are in poverty are working.⁴¹ Many families that are entirely dependent upon the informal economy are forced to rely either on assistance from charity organizations and relatives or direct cash assistance from the government.⁴² The latter is not insignificant. Cash assistance now constitutes a key form of government support for poor communities in the Kingdom, accounting for almost three percent of the national budget.⁴³

3.4.2 Public Sector Employment

Although less explicit than direct cash assistance, public sector employment represents an even more common form of government aid to poor Jordanian communities. Despite the reduction of public employment, the government continues to use it to support poor communities and maintain patron-client relations with rural Jordanians. Focused on providing jobs rather than productivity, the ranks of the public sector have become over-bloated and inefficient.⁴⁴ As a result, most public sector jobs are low productivity and low paid. They

³⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Jordan Poverty Reduction Strategy: Final Report," 104-105, 2013. <<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/jordan/docs/Poverty/Jordanpovertyreductionstrategy.pdf>>

³⁹ ETF, "Employment Policies in Jordan," 27.

⁴⁰ ILO, "Employment Sector," 22.

⁴¹ ILO, "Decent Work," 5, 45.

⁴² UNDP, "Jordan Poverty Reduction Strategy," 201; and World Food Programme (WFP) and the Jordanian Alliance Against Hunger (JAAH), "Jordan Food Security Survey in Poverty Pockets," 2008, 4-5. <<http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp204530.pdf>>

⁴³ USAID, "Public Expenditure Perspectives," 20.

⁴⁴ World Bank (WB), "Jordan: Economic Development in the 1990s and World Bank Assistance," Washington, DC, 2004, 7-8. <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2004/06/4361614/jordan-economic-development-1990s-world-bank-assistance>>

provide minimal wages that are sufficient only to provide basic needs and to pacify rural communities. When effective technical capacity is required, it is obtained via short term, well-paid contracts.

3.4.3 Charity Not Social Justice

Regardless of whether rural Jordanians find a job in the public sector or end up receiving direct government assistance, they nonetheless remain dependent on the government. Both cash assistance and public sector employment are provided with good intentions, and it certainly helps families to afford basic necessities, but it does not facilitate rural Jordanians' human development. Instead of enhancing capabilities, this aid perpetuates rural reliance on the government and prevents the development of capabilities and the enjoyment of the dignity to choose one's futures.

4. ENDING THE CYCLE OF RURAL DEPENDENCE

4.1 Starting at the Beginning

While patron-client relations with the government once benefitted rural communities in Jordan, continued reliance on the government is slowing development in rural regions. Ending this dependence requires significant changes to the education system. The end goal of the reforms is enhanced access to higher education and employment opportunities for rural youth, but the reforms need to focus on the earliest stages of education if they are going to be effective. Attempts to rectify urban-rural educational inequality through the university quota system have proven ineffective and have, in fact, intensified rural dependence on the government. Subsequent reforms should focus on ensuring that rural youth can equally benefit from primary and secondary education so that they can build their capabilities and enjoy the ability to choose different education options and career paths.

4.2 Building Equality Through Difference

Greater equality in Jordan's education system will not be produced by ensuring that all students have the same resources, but by safeguarding all students' access to the resources that they need to benefit from their right to education. With students coming from different situations and backgrounds, the education system needs to be designed to even out socio-economic divides; the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills should not depend on socio-economic and geographical status. Redressing the current inequalities in the system to ensure that rural students can equally benefit from their educational rights and freedoms will require giving rural schools more resources than their urban counterparts. These increased funds are crucial to ensure that rural schools can maintain effective teaching staff and obtain the necessary materials to ensure equal access to opportunities.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Improving the Quality of Teaching Standards in Rural Schools

5.1.1 Ending the Migratory Cycle of Teachers

To improve the quality of education provided in rural schools, it is crucial that rural schools retain their teachers and attract interested potential candidates. The rural to urban migration cycle that has become prevalent can be broken through a number of simple measures.

- ***Provide Teachers with Greater Financial Incentives***
The government currently provides small financial incentives to teachers to compensate for the burdens that teachers face when relocating or commuting to rural communities. On top of regular teacher salaries, the government currently provides teachers with between 50JD and 150JD for these expenses. These extra sums, however, often prove insufficient compensation for teachers' travel or living expenses, let alone for their moving away from their families and communities. Teachers stated that if the bonuses were increased, many of them would be willing to work in rural communities. Most agreed that if the bonuses were doubled, that would constitute sufficient compensation.
- ***Provide Teachers with Good Quality Housing***
Some teachers also asserted that the provision of housing for teachers who move to rural communities would be an effective means of keeping them in those communities, as it would offset the costs of living outside their communities. While the government

attempted to use housing incentives in the past, this initiative failed because of the low quality of housing that was provided and the consequent unwillingness of teachers to have their families move with them. Better quality housing – and dorms for female teachers – should, therefore, be provided to relocated teachers.

- *Make Travel Bonuses Dependent on Distance Not Geographical Unit*

Currently the allocation of travel bonuses depends upon travel/relocation from one geographical unit to another. There are three levels of bonuses: 1) one directorate to another (50JD), 2) one governorate to another (100JD), and 3) one region to another (150JD). This system is ineffective, as it does not take into account the possibility that moving from one unit to another could represent a shorter distance than moving within that unit. The allocation of travel bonuses should be rearranged so that they are based on the number of kilometers traveled.

- *Provide Teachers Who Volunteer to Teach in Rural Areas with Pay Incentives*

While teachers who are asked to work in rural schools currently receive travel bonuses, teachers who request to work in rural schools do not. This discourages teachers who are keen to work in rural communities, as it might render the move financially unfeasible. A number of teachers who participated in our research also stated that they would be willing to work in a rural area if they received sufficient financial incentives.

5.1.2 Enhancing Teaching Capacity in Rural Schools

In addition to ensuring better teacher retention in rural schools, it is also necessary to give extra attention to human resources in these schools.

- *Provide on the Job Trainings at Better Times and with Bonuses*

A greater focus and budgetary allocation should be directed toward training teachers in rural schools. In general, very limited professional development is currently provided to schools in Jordan. Teachers complained that when trainings are provided, they are usually at the end of a full day and teachers are consequently too tired to participate. Likewise, insufficient notice is often given, which similarly prevents teachers from attending. Teachers in our focus groups, therefore, suggested that professional development could be provided during their long summer vacation. Holding professional development workshops at this time, they stated, would enable their enthusiastic participation. Teachers and principals in our interviews and focus groups added that providing small financial bonuses to teachers who attend would ensure very high rates of participation.

- *Allow Rural Schools to Have More Oversight on Human Resources*

Teachers are currently hired through the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), which offers available positions to teachers at the top of its list, giving preference to those who live in the region of the available position. This process does not ensure that the teachers who are sent to rural schools are keen to work in them, and, thus, it contributes to the migratory cycle of teachers. Rural schools could find more qualified, more interested, and more appropriate staff if they were allowed to have greater control over the hiring process. Through its School and Directorate Improvement Project (SDIP), the Ministry of Education has already conducted trainings in every school in Jordan to help improve principals' capacities to effectively manage their own schools. This capacity can be capitalized on so that principals are at least involved in the hiring process and allowed, for instance, to interview potential candidates.

5.2 Providing Options to Rural Youth

Rural youth should be provided with as many educational and career options as possible and the freedom to choose between those options. They are currently being denied these options by the provision of limited education streams as well as a culture of shame that limits their options even further.

5.2.1 Provide More Diverse Education Options

- *Disseminate Information on Market Needs*

Currently the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) is distributing brochures and leaflets, holding lectures and workshops, making visits to schools, and offering students the opportunity to visit the VTC and its local branches. The VTC is also preparing a new

strategy to encourage greater enrollment in vocational and technical training⁴⁵ Hopefully the new strategy will ensure that rural students are provided with more information about technical and vocational opportunities, and ensure that these options are presented as equally viable and respectable career paths, and with the same status and priority given to university stream programs. As part of the new strategy, the VTC should provide information to students in primary and secondary school about the actual job prospects of the market. This is especially crucial in rural areas where opportunities to obtain a high skill job in the private sector are limited. Information should be provided not on lofty market goals for the future, but on the actual demands of the current labour market. Vocational colleges have already begun to collect statistics on the enrollment rates of their graduates. These statistics need to be collected at a nation wide level for all post secondary institutions and subsequently disseminated to students.

- *Offer More Technical and Vocational Courses*

Alongside providing greater information, rural primary schools should themselves offer more technical and vocational courses. Offering these courses will not only expand students' horizons and options, but push them to view technical and vocational skills as being equally important to academic ones. Regardless of what education track students eventually choose, these skills will enrich youth, as early engagement with a mix of both academic as well as technical and vocational training increases capacities for critical thinking.⁴⁶

- *Provide Better Training on Entrepreneurial Opportunities*

Rural students should also be encouraged to examine innovative ways to create their own private sector jobs and help develop their local economies. Building upon extant programs, more in-school courses should be provided to both develop business skills (such as bookkeeping, promotion, branding, and financing), as well as provide tailored information about how entrepreneurs can benefit from their local contexts and resources. (A number of organizations are already providing microloans from which well-trained youth could benefit. However, because these loans are often high cost, they can render lower yield business models financially unproductive. Appreciating these constraints, the government could promote greater innovation in rural Jordanian communities if it provided low interest microloans, especially if it made application procedures for the loans less complicated and protracted.⁴⁷)

5.2.2 Addressing the Culture of Shame

Breaking down social stigmas is a very difficult process that requires a multifaceted and holistic approach. Not only students, but also their families and societies need to be targeted in this process.

- *Provide Presentations of Success Stories*

Alongside the provision of information about vocational programs, campaigns should be held in rural public schools to showcase success stories from diverse educational paths. Presentations could, for example, be provided by successful individuals who were trained in technical and vocational fields.

- *Hold Meetings with Students and Parents*

To help show parents the merits and opportunities of technical and vocational options, schools should host meetings between parents and students. In these meetings, information about the kinds of jobs opened up by different education streams as well as the realities of the labour market should be presented in a clear way. A number of principals and teachers who participated in our research emphasized the importance of these conversations and all teachers expressed their willingness to participate in them.

- *Launch a Media Campaign to Show Positive Image of Technical and Vocational Careers*

To target ingrained negative perceptions of vocational and technical occupations, the Ministry of Education, VTC, and Ministry of Labour need to launch a comprehensive campaign on traditional and especially social media platforms that depicts vocational, technical, and even entrepreneurial careers in a more positive light.

⁴⁵ Identity Center, Interview with Eng. Hani Khleifat, Deputy General Director, Institute of Excellence Affairs, Vocational Training Corporation, Amman, August 27, 2015.

⁴⁶ Al-Sa'd, "Evaluation of Students' Attitudes Towards Vocational Education in Jordan," 26.

⁴⁷ Identity Center, Interview with Dr. Khalid al-Wazani, August 17, 2015.