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USAID YOUTHPower JORDAN NATIONALLY SCALABLE STRATEGIES

Youth Influencing Local and National Governance: A Technical Brief

This technical brief is one of three that USAID YouthPower developed documenting high-impact strategies that proved effective across the activity and show promise for scale. They are as follows: 1) Youth in Governance, 2) Youth Economic Empowerment, and 3) Youth Leaders and Influencers.

Introduction

In 2018-2019, only 43% of people aged 18-29 in Jordan expressed confidence in their national government (down from 60% in 2007), and there is limited representation of young people in government institutions. Furthermore, 90% of young people in Jordan believe government corruption is present at a large or medium extent.¹ Youth participation in governance has been largely limited by the perception that youth are a potential risk to stability and security, and that they lack the skills and experience to meaningfully participate.² With youth comprising more than one-third of Jordan's population, building youth trust in government and increasing both their participation and representation in decision-making are critical to the effectiveness of government policy and long-term resilience. Jordan's Ministry of Youth developed the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025) to respond to these challenges faced by Jordanian youth and promote effective youth development, citizenship and leadership.³

Within this context, USAID YouthPower partnered with youth to improve their capacity to engage as active citizens in policy development and governance at the local and national levels. As a result, 300 youth (134 female, 166 male) trained in advocacy and governance and engaged another 1,107 youth (658 female, 449 male) to meet with hundreds of decisionmakers, develop 36 policy papers with data-driven recommendations, and implement 12 initiatives focused on municipal excellence in their communities, resulting in several commitments and actions by government officials to take on youth recommendations. USAID YouthPower participants also collaborated with the Ministry of Youth to design a roadmap to jointly introduce the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025) to the youth. As a result, the youth collaborated with the Ministry of Youth to design and implement 72 related community initiatives under three main pillars of the strategy, reaching more than 1,000 youth. This brief outlines the elements of USAID YouthPower's model for youth participation in policy and governance, and provides lessons learned and recommendations for its use as a nationally scalable strategy.

¹ OECD. 2021. *Empowering Youth and Building Trust in Jordan*. OECD Public Governance Reviews. Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1787/8b14d38f-en>.

² Ibid.

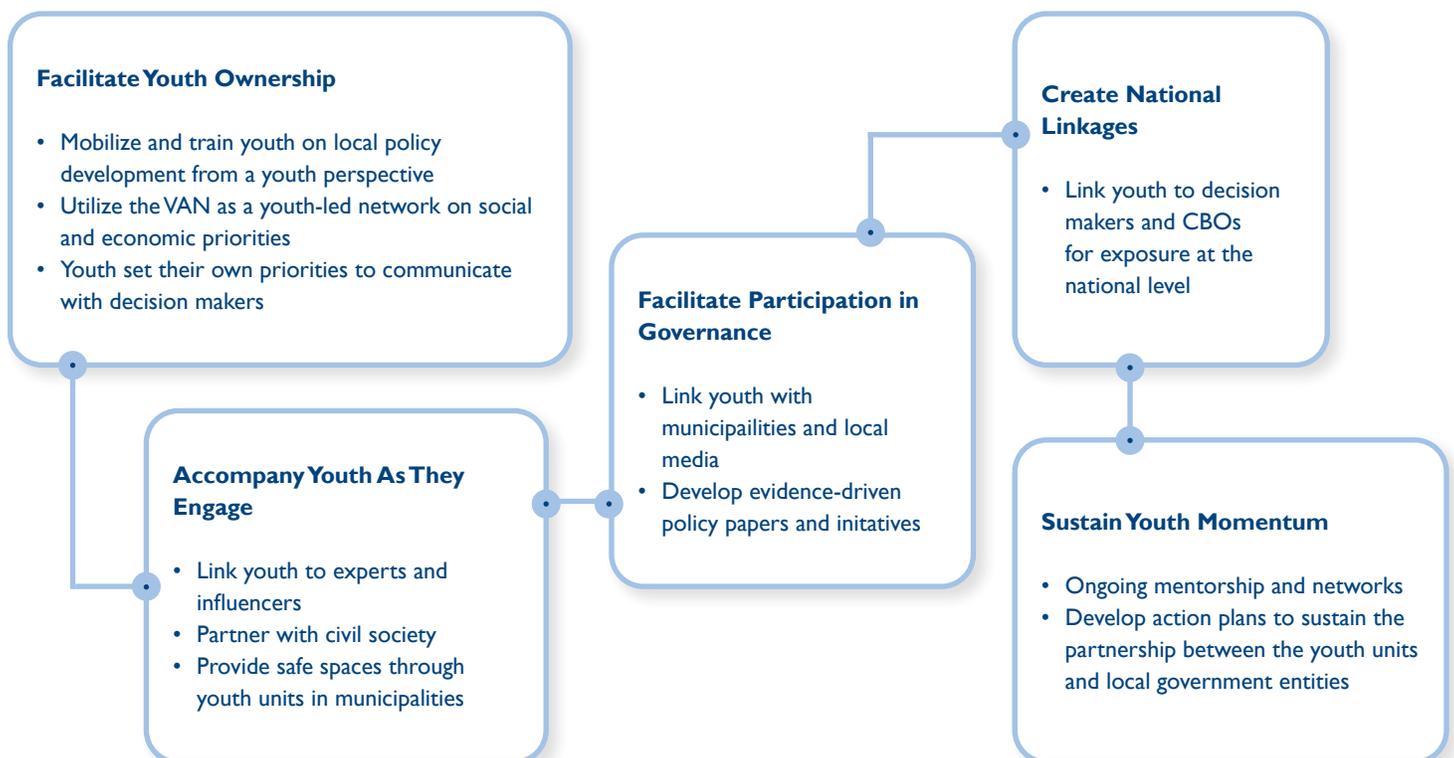
³ Jordan Ministry of Youth. 2019. *National Youth Strategy (2019-2025)*. Government of Jordan Ministry of Youth. Accessed at https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Jordan_2005_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf

Launched in 2017, USAID YouthPower Jordan was a five-year program that engaged 16,415 youth ages 10-29 to act as engaged citizens and productive members of society with the agency to advocate for themselves and shape services designed to better prepare them to enter higher education, vocational training and the workforce.

A model for youth participation in local governance and national policy

Youth programming in Jordan has often focused on top-down volunteerism and capacity building for the sake of capacity building, strategies that alone fail to drive youth leadership or provide opportunities to engage with governance and policy processes in a meaningful way. Through an approach grounded in positive youth

development, USAID YouthPower shifted the way youth view their problems and fostered a culture of solution-oriented youth advocacy. In doing so, youth also successfully shifted the way decisionmakers value and work with youth. The resulting model is summarized in the figure below.



Facilitate youth ownership

Early on, USAID YouthPower identified a need to inspire a paradigm shift among youth, encouraging them to be an active part of solutions rather than blaming service providers for their problems. Recognizing that youth generally perceive peers' messaging as more credible, USAID YouthPower established the **Volunteer Ambassadors Network (VAN)**, a group of 300 (134 female, 166 male) highly motivated youth activists and changemakers. These youth, referred to as VANers, developed their abilities to lead youth-to-youth mobilization and advocate for their needs to their local decisionmakers, training a total of 1,107 youth (658 female, 499 male) over the lifetime of the activity. VANers received mentorship and training from USAID YouthPower in skills that enabled them to identify their audience, communicate with decisionmakers and practice active listening and evidence-based advocacy. In addition, youth learned to propose data-informed policy papers grounded in the findings of youth community mapping, which allowed youth to better understand their needs, resources, opportunities and priorities. On the national level, USAID YouthPower partnered with the Ministry of Youth to provide training to 300 VANers on the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025). The youth then identified three pillars of the strategy **in line with their priorities**: Youth Education and Technology, Youth Engagement and Effective Leadership and Youth Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment.

Accompany youth as they engage

Practicing their skills through meetings with local decisionmakers, youth increased their confidence and decisionmakers became more willing to host and listen to youth. USAID YouthPower then **linked youth to sector experts** to conduct 12 training workshops on policy paper development, engaging 244 VANers (108 female, 136 male). **Safe spaces**, established by USAID YouthPower as Learning Clubs and housed at the Ministry of Youth's youth centers and local community-based organizations, served as physical spaces for youth learning and cooperation with local stakeholders while ensuring inclusion and accessibility for female youth and youth with disabilities. In leading the development of these spaces, youth proactively created a social and economic enabling

environment foundational to the sustainability of youth-led initiatives.

To continue the youth learning journey, in its final year USAID YouthPower **partnered with civil society organizations** via grants issued through the activity's Innovation Fund. USAID YouthPower selected Al-Hayat Center-Rased, considered to be one of the key policy development influencers in Jordan, and King Abdullah II Center for Excellence (KACE), a training hub for public sector excellence at the national and regional levels, to support youth in developing initiatives to respond to policy gaps and improve municipal services, respectively. The grantees worked with youth to first complete a learning phase, where they supported youth to conduct in-depth needs assessments and identify priority areas for youth learning and initiatives.

Enable participation in governance

After the grantees' learning phase, youth **developed action plans** for their initiatives and received specialized training, such as how to research, read, and interpret laws, and completed field observations in their priority areas. Grantees linked youth to a network of local experts, who served as youth coaches and gave feedback to youth throughout the process, while connections with **local community-based organizations (CBOs) and local media** helped build a network of safe resources and relationships for youth to leverage both now and in the future.



Under KACE, 59 VANers (31 female, 29 male) designed and implemented 12 initiatives to improve services within municipalities, such as developing a municipal services manual, conducting a citizen satisfaction survey, and designing a municipal performance self-assessment and guidelines. Under Rased, 120 VANers (66 female, 54 male) created 24 local policy papers relating to issues at the governorate level in education, health, tourism, employment and employees' rights, environmental sustainability, and municipal services. Importantly, youth learned to make logical recommendations with clear roles for youth, local leaders, and their community.

Youth policy papers achieve government buy-in

Government officials praised youth for proposing recommendations that are both low-cost and align with their objectives and made several commitments to take on the youth's recommendations. For example, the head of the Ministry of Local Administration's legal unit committed to adopt recommendations concerning the governorates and conduct regular follow up with youth, while the Executive Manager of Ma'an added youth to its consultancy council to be part of municipal needs assessment activities. Senior leadership at the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship committed to reflecting recommendations into the Ministry's current policy reports. The General Secretary of the Ministry of Education committed to adopt recommendations and bring youth into a working group on a new education strategy. The Ministry of Tourism signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Rased to take on recommendations for the tourism sector. Madaba municipality's health sector leaders committed to reflecting recommendations in their local advocacy session and ongoing follow up with the youth team. Senior staff of the Integrity and Anti-corruption Commission and the Audit Bureau showed a high level of interest in the youth recommendations through a possible MoU and twinning agreement with Rased.



Creating national linkages

Youth **formed national coalitions** to share their experiences working on similar issue areas. For example, a coalition formed by four groups of youth working on education sector policy papers approached the Secretary General for the Ministry of Education to share their work, and the Ministry is now prepared to have these youth serve on a board to contribute to a strategy for Jordan's 2022-2050 education needs. Moreover, the youth working with Rased **engaged with national stakeholders**, such as the Integrity and Anti-corruption Commission, to develop a national policy paper to tackle potential corruption occurring via institutional and legislative loopholes. To scale-up related efforts, USAID YouthPower in partnership with Rased organized a two-day conference to connect the youth with policymakers and national and local stakeholders to further advocate for their priorities and collaborate on these at the policy, programming and procedural levels of the government. Youth received positive feedback and commitments from government officials on their recommendations.

Under the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025), VANers designed and implemented 72 grassroots initiatives to advance the goals of their three priority pillars, reaching more than 1,000 youth indirectly and marking a breakthrough for youth as decisionmakers and enablers in the local community. For example, under the Youth Engagement and Effective Leadership pillar of the strategy, VANers established five municipal youth units in Ajloun, Kofranjeh, Borma, Al Qadesiyeh and Talal alongside municipal directors and community members. The youth units model how local government processes can integrate youth, who subsequently contribute to the design and implementation of youth-sensitive and youth-led programs and policies. The 50 youth leading these

Youth units demonstrate the value of partnering with youth

Participants established a Youth Unit at the municipal building in Ajloun, to advance the relationship between youth and the municipality and enhance and expand municipal services. The youth developed a joint action plan with the municipality to identify shared priorities. For example, the youth are developing a clear organizational chart for the municipality (which did not formerly exist) to familiarize citizens with departments, services offered and staff roles. The youth will also integrate this information into a municipality Facebook page for increased accessibility. In addition, the youth trained municipality staff in basic computer skills. By identifying clear needs and contributions, youth are proving their value and reshaping their position and relationship with their local government.

units are organizing learning and engagement activities for peers with an anticipated community-based outreach to more than 3,000 youth annually.

Sustain youth momentum

Expert mentors and CBOs will provide **continued mentorship** to youth moving forward, while connections to local media ensure that youth already enjoy high visibility in their communities. Decisionmakers' increased willingness to partner with youth also increases youth motivation for continued collaborations. Youth have also sustained their efforts and visibility at the national level; a group of 6 VANers (5 female, 1 male) met with the Ministry of Youth to present their achievements under the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025) and share their ideas for how they – together with the Ministry – can sustain and scale their efforts. For example, the VANers recommended advanced training through the Ministry's centers and linkages to other government departments and private sector entities to expand their initiatives and promote a new stream of training and learning

linked to economic empowerment and work placement opportunities for youth. Youth also received several commitments from government officials after presenting their policy papers.

As youth strengthened their capacity in policy and governance, they also increased their confidence and realized a stronger sense of agency, taking the lead on their initiatives and acting more independently over time. Some youth were even motivated to take on more individual responsibility, nominating themselves for upcoming local elections. Across the new youth units, **VANers signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the municipalities** and independently held municipal **action planning** meetings to determine where to focus their work over the coming months. Youth continue to build a sustainable model for the units by identifying revenue streams and advocating for their institutionalization into municipalities' organizational structures.



Going to scale: Lessons learned and recommendations

1. Youth ownership and leadership throughout the program cycle is essential

From the beginning youth should partake in the design, lead implementation of activities, transfer knowledge to their peers, and establish peer networks like the VAN. Further, by youth studying the target communities through community asset mapping, a much clearer image emerges of the local circumstances and opportunities and allows for the design of more appropriate interventions, such as adjusting for gender norms and ensuring accessibility, representation, and improved public services for female youth and youth with disabilities.

2. Integrate youth-focused capacity building on good governance into existing mechanisms

Through the VAN, USAID YouthPower established a strong core group of youth knowledgeable in local governance and policymaking. This type of training and capacity building could be linked to the Ministry of Education to include such topics in mainstream curricula at schools and universities. There are also 180 Youth Centers across Jordan; the Ministry of Youth could take the model of the VAN and implement similar training and initiatives across these centers.

3. Establish formal government partnerships from the start

While youth were ultimately able to connect with a number of national-level officials by the end of the Activity, due to government focus and resources diverted to the impacts of COVID-19, USAID YouthPower found it challenging to establish national linkages without formal partnerships with government ministries. Thus, engagement of government institutions related to building the capacity of youth (i.e., Ministries of Youth, Labor, Education, Municipalities) as formal partners at the start is recommended.

4. Create mechanisms for youth participation within national government

Having a youth platform directly attached to the Ministry of Youth focused on research, learning, and policy development from the youth perspective would provide a clear and central way to link youth to the national level. In a role similar to the Jordanian National Commission for Women, this would serve as an entity to review policies, regulations, work plans, and budgets and ensure they are youth-sensitive.

5. Establish and formalize youth units across municipalities

The youth units in the municipalities are a scalable model in and of themselves. This could be done through agreements under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, with youth units assembled across municipalities, integrated into municipality organizational charts, and given clear mandates and scopes of work. Youth units could then receive funding under the umbrella of or in collaboration with the municipality. They could also then serve as a mechanism to connect youth across geographies.



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