

# Précis



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## Partnership for Education in Jordan

**W**ITH VISION AND AN INNOVATIVE SPIRIT, JORDAN launched a program of education reform in 1985, and continues to work toward the goal it embodies: to establish an educational system that will enable its graduates to match the highest international standards of educational achievement. A long-time partner with Jordan in advancing education, the World Bank has actively supported this enterprise. In a study of the results achieved thus far, the Operations Evaluation Department (OED) found that the program has produced significant accomplishments, establishing a record deserving attention from other countries that aspire to achieve similar goals. But OED also noted impediments that will slow future progress if left unresolved.

### A Vision for Jordan's Future

In the late 1980s, Jordan's school system compared favorably with those in other Middle Eastern countries. But for the Jordanian government and the Jordanian people, this was not good enough. A country rich in human capital but poor in natural resources, Jordan is a natural site for knowledge-based industries, a future the government chose to pursue. This decision made investment in education, particularly in science and technology, a pressing national priority. The government decided to begin a broad-based reform program. The first step would be

to establish the institutional and physical infrastructure needed to support Jordan's educational goals.

To move reform forward, the government took several bold steps: a new education law was prepared; the school system was restructured, abolishing middle schools and reducing the secondary school cycle from three to two years; the curriculum was modernized; and higher minimum qualifications were established for teachers, including degrees for instructors at the secondary level. The new system included 10 years of compul-





Photo courtesy of Japan's Bank for International Cooperation (formerly the OECF).

sory basic education. Two additional years were available to those who qualified by examination; vocational education was to be provided for the remaining students.

In addition to the demand for excellence, public pressure to build more schools grew. Along with the country's strong commitment to free public education and equal opportunities for children of all socioeconomic groups, population pressures were on the rise. The very high birth rate, internal migration to already overcrowded urban areas, and the need to serve small, isolated communities led to the need for a substantial building program.

### A Partnership for Education: The World Bank and Jordan

World Bank involvement in Jordan's education initiative represented the renewal of an established partnership. Two Bank projects were initiated to support Jordan's ongoing reform efforts.

The Seventh Education Project (Education VII), a \$40 million loan approved in FY88, was designed to improve the quality, cost-efficiency, institutional capacity, and responsiveness to the labor market of the system of education and training. The project included a large school construction component and several qualitative and institutional elements to benefit schools, community colleges, and project management. Although the Ministry of Planning considered the three-year preparation time too long, in retrospect it is clear that this investment project contributed substantially to preparing the way for the innovative follow-up operation.

The First Human Resources Development Sector Investment Loan (HRDSIL I), a \$73 million project approved in FY89, was planned as a programmatic operation, signaling the Bank's commitment to support reform and the steps taken to implement the program during the preceding years. The first priority of this

project was the qualitative improvement of basic and secondary education, while at the same time realizing cost-efficiencies in school construction and strengthening sector institutions. It included investment in buildings, equipment, furniture, books, and other materials, as well as in teacher training. The construction program was designed to replace rented and double-shift facilities, and to provide libraries, laboratories, and workshops. Within the program framework, the operation was divided into 7 special programs, which, in turn, were subdivided into 34 subprojects to be prepared by the implementing agencies and appraised and monitored by the National Center for Educational Research, now the National Center for Human Resource Development (NCHRD), a unique, semi-autonomous institution set up under the Intermediary agency, which guides Jordan's human resource development policies.

The design of the HRDSIL was a forerunner of the Bank's Adaptable Program Loan. Each subproject included a proposal from the Ministry of Education for a mini-investment with objectives, targets, action plans, and costs. The subprojects were to be developed and approved as the overall program took shape and experience increased. Only the ongoing curriculum development was to be financed without division into subprojects. The main difference between this approach and that of the Program Loans was that approved expenditures were to be reimbursed retroactively, not in advance against a sector expenditure plan.

Education VII and HRDSIL I represented a turning point for the partnership in the education sector between Jordan and the World Bank. The projects were designed to shift the focus of Bank assistance from investment in infrastructure to investment in improving the quality of basic and secondary education through sustainable strategies and effective institutions.

## A Partnership of Donors

In Education VII, the World Bank agreed to finance school construction, while the European Union (EU) provided a grant of \$2.5 million to support a technical assistance and fellowship program that was intended to cover the majority of the qualitative and institutional components. HRDSIL I attracted a great deal more donor support. Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF; now Japan's Bank for International Cooperation, JBIC) provided financing in equal shares with the Bank for school construction and hardware. The Bank financed about one-third of the construction of schools, as well as the construction of teacher training campuses at three universities. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID) provided funds for technical assistance, fellowships, and studies to advance qualitative improvements in curricula, textbooks, and in-service teacher training. At the request of the government, Japan's Program for Human Resource Development (PHRD) Fund provided a substantial grant for studies and fellowships. USAID continued its ongoing assistance with supplementary funds for computer technology and education studies, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) continued its role in language training for those selected to study overseas.

## Challenges to Program Implementation

Reports on the progress made by Jordan commented consistently—and OED agrees—that the success in the accomplishment of activities and the achievement of targets was outstanding. But constraints remain that are relevant to the sector program and the follow-up project, HRDSIL II, which is currently supporting the program into maturity. Project accomplishments can be seen as doubly impressive when the challenges to implementation are recounted:

- Inward migration during the Gulf War created a surge in student numbers; currency pressures; increased budgetary constraints; and delays in construction, technical assistance, and the delivery of supplies.
- Leadership and organizational changes at the Ministry of Education seriously disrupted administration.
- Inefficiencies in government administration caused delays in tendering, accounting, and auditing.
- The new curriculum required education officials and teachers to adopt new, unfamiliar values and behaviors.
- Delays in the timing of donors' inputs disrupted the sequencing of subprojects.
- Ministry of Education managers and staff—disrupted by rapid turnover—were burdened with concurrent responsibilities for several Bank-assisted projects and other donor interventions.
- The frequent changes in Bank teams were seen as disruptive by Jordanian officials, and the government has emphasized this point. Other donors commented that Bank supervision was rushed and overloaded. They also wanted more attention from the Bank to help troubleshoot problems when implementation

bottlenecks occurred, although in general the Bank's presence in Jordan was appreciated.

- The inherent complexity of the projects was compounded by the inclusion of components that were under the supervision of a variety of ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Higher Education, the Vocational Training Corporation, and the Ministry of Education.

With the exception of the Gulf War fallout and the changes at the Ministry of Education, these constraints could have been identified early in the process. Many of the same difficulties had been experienced in past efforts in Jordan, and, in retrospect, the implementation plan for the complex operations embodied in the projects may well appear overly ambitious. Yet both Bank and government staff have commented that the fast pace was essential to the maintenance of momentum and to the timely disbursement of funds. Despite the difficulties, and the launch of the projects in the wake of a severe recession, Jordan maintained a high level of commitment to the projects, and the Ministry of Education implemented all subprojects, with great strides in textbook publishing and the piloting of innovative in-service teacher training.

In three areas, however, OED found shortcomings. The presentation of cost and financing data was not fully transparent, and inconsistencies in facility records could not be reconciled. These deficiencies prevented OED from validating the integrity of financial processes applied to the projects or determining how well the projects were able to achieve their cost-efficiency objectives. A related shortcoming was the government's failure to invest in the computer technology, software, and staff training needed to establish a computerized management information system (MIS). Databases maintained by different agencies and units could not connect with one another, and this missing link affected financial controls and quality assurance. Finally, technical assistance proved less effective than anticipated—a lesson of previous experience in Jordan that should have been taken into account. Opportunities for capacity-building, skill development, and policy development were not fully utilized because project managers were not engaged and did not directly bear the cost of the services provided under grant aid. In these areas, the Bank was less assertive during supervision than it should have been, although, as staff point out, it could not directly intervene in the activities of other donors.

## Outcomes

As might be expected in an overall program of such ambition and complexity, the results of the two projects have been mixed.

### Quality Improvement

Although enrollment statistics in Jordan are among the best in the Middle East, the quality of school manage-

ment, teaching, and learning remain below the standard required, and have yet to meet the expectations of the Jordanian government and people. Improvements in teacher effectiveness and student achievement have been slow in coming, despite generous teacher training and textbook supply. Most teachers are not yet sufficiently motivated or equipped to deliver a higher level of instruction.

This slow pace must be viewed in the context of what we know about the process of change in an education system: it takes at least a decade for teachers and students to adapt to change and become familiar with a new curriculum. Yet the government and the people are becoming concerned, and are anxious to see results. In the short term, more could be done to promote public understanding of the challenges and to disseminate information about the pace of progress that might reasonably be expected. In the long term, the effort must be sustained, especially at the local level, to ensure that all schools become effective. For lasting improvements to be achieved, the government must continue to display tenacity in addressing the systemic issues of school management and of teacher training, recruitment, pay incentives, and supervision.

#### *Institutional Development*

The projects supported the development of important institutional capacities, including school supervision, in-service training, and book publishing and distribution at the Ministry of Education, and quality assurance and research and evaluation in the NCHRD. The NCHRD has developed its database to evaluate the program's eventual impact, and has established a capacity for independent progress monitoring and quality assurance. Both the ministry and the NCHRD gained from the experience of managing and implementing the projects needed to continue the work begun under HRDSIL II, and benefited from the computer technology and training acquired.

In other areas, results were less encouraging. The numerous project-funded studies produced only modest effects on policy and operations, although a few, such as a study of a school maintenance program, did have positive results. The planned impact evaluation study was slow to begin, but it is now under way. It will be extremely important in the mapping out of future policies and programs.

The most damaging institutional outcome so far has been the failure to establish a modern MIS within the Ministry of Education, which has severely compromised the ability of decisionmakers to formulate sound strategies, monitor progress, and to be accountable. The seriousness of this lapse could intensify as program efforts shift to the local level.

#### *Investments in Physical Infrastructure*

The planned improvements to the physical environment of schools were achieved, and the attractive classroom environment greatly benefits students and teachers. But serious

unanswered questions remain about the rate of expansion, cost-efficiency, and sustainability. It is quite likely that the emphasis on meeting—and even exceeding—construction targets may have distracted attention from less costly, but equally important, qualitative components.

Preliminary findings of the JBIC audit conducted with OED indicate that approximately two-thirds of the unsuitable facilities targeted were actually replaced by new schools under the auspices of HRDSIL I, but one-third remain in use, and the government plans more school construction to keep pace with the rapid growth of the population. The JBIC also observed that costly new facilities are underused. They have low student-teacher ratios and extremely small class sizes.

#### **Box 1: School Utilization**

STUDENT ENROLLMENT RATIOS (ACTUAL number of students to school capacity) vary greatly from school to school. Ratios were available for 103 of 181 schools, and ranged from 18 to 174 percent, with an average of 75 percent. In 32 schools the ratio was lower than 60 percent, while in 11 others it was higher than 110 percent. According to the Ministry of Education, the capacity of each school is designed to accommodate future population growth. Seven new schools visited were furnished and maintained well, but three were filled to only 70 percent of capacity, and the number of students in each school was declining. The JBIC recommends that the Ministry of Education reassess the size of schools needed for future school construction projects.

*Source:* JBIC, preliminary findings.

Cost-effectiveness also requires attention: for example, in school libraries and resource learning centers, where few reference materials are available to support the new curriculum, and in the Ministry of Education, which needs to use staff skills to the full. Serious budget shortfalls may make it difficult to maintain all the facilities, shortening their useful life and increasing the cost of the initial investments.

Cost-efficiency still needs a great deal of attention. The present value of the cost of the project schools owned by the government is highly sensitive to the discount rate used, according to JBIC analysis. At 3 percent, the government-owned project schools are cheaper; at 5 percent, they cost more; and at 10 percent, they cost twice as much as rented schools.

#### **Next Steps**

As education reform passes year 13, Jordan must remedy these weaknesses and sustain the momentum that has carried the program thus far. Specific steps that can be taken to promote the goals of reform include the following:

- *Local support.* The program must ensure that the direct support provided to schools is tailored to local conditions, and that strategies to enhance local participation, ownership, and accountability are put in place.
  - *Communication.* Open and transparent information-sharing is urgently needed to maintain public support. This involves the design, implementation, and monitoring of a strategy that accurately informs the public about progress and invites parents to engage in partnership with the schools.
  - *New construction.* The government needs to insist on rigorous field research to establish when and where new schools or upgraded facilities are needed.
  - *Monitoring and evaluation.* As a beneficiary of donor assistance, NCHRD must be vigilant to ensure that it safeguards the independence and credibility of its monitoring and evaluation functions.
  - *Ministry of Education.* Establishing an efficient and reliable data collection and monitoring capacity in the very near future is the most important investment the ministry can make to better serve the school system and its beneficiaries.
- The subproject device also proved effective because it allowed experience to grow through limited interventions that could be sequenced and adapted to the pace of implementation. The experience developed the government's skills in project design, appraisal, and implementation by demanding fully justified proposals with precise objectives, progress indicators, targets, action plans, and costs. This helped strengthen ownership, realism, the focus on targets, and accountability.
  - The subproject approach also showed some limitations. It had little effect in creating broad and lasting teamwork among Ministry of Education units and, indeed, may have increased competition in nonfunctional ways. It also showed that when administrative and financial procedures are not shared between project and non-project activities, tensions might arise, especially if senior managers do not continually emphasize that all staff serve the same clients.

Now that the focus has turned to district and school-based initiatives, the subproject device needs to be tailored to local capacities. Based on the earlier experience, vigilance is needed in several areas:

### Lessons of Broad Applicability

Several lessons of the education program development experience in Jordan stand out as worthy of consideration by other countries embarking on ambitious and innovative sectorwide programs with the support of the Bank and other partners:

- The device of limiting disbursements to approved subprojects probably minimized the risks to the financial integrity of HRDSIL I. It is unlikely that disbursement against a sectorwide expenditure program would have been efficient, given the weaknesses in financial accounting.
- Ministry of Education units that “own” subprojects need to see themselves not as beneficiaries of subprojects, but as providers of direct services to the schools.
- The process for subproject approval, monitoring, and accounting must be made efficient.
- Senior managers must ensure that all the stakeholders appreciate how the subprojects contribute to the broader sector policy and strategy and the outcomes expected. Otherwise, spending the subproject budget allocated may become more important than achieving immediate results and ultimate impact in the schools.