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Civil Society and Inequality in Jordan: A Study on the Effectiveness of the Community Development Center in Ashrafiyah

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Abstract

Poverty exists across the globe, in almost every region and area there is present a form of social injustice. This inequality comes from several different factors and is caused by a multitude of both domestic and foreign affairs alike. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is no exception to the rule. This study is aimed at measuring the effectiveness of the Community Development Center in reducing the inequalities that exist in the town of Ashrafiyah, however, through the method of teaching civil society. Civil society, originally a western, democratic concept, is not often spoken about in Jordanian society. However, with the elections of Parliament approaching, the constant surge of media from the west, and the ever-changing world we live in many believe that the democratic route is currently the best path for Jordan. Through the use of the concepts of civil society organizations introduced in *Civil Society and Urban Poverty-examining complexity* by Diana Mitlin, this study will analyze how implementing a democratic concept in a non-democratic society successfully reduces inequality in Jordan.

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I.   Introduction

A.   Rationale

Poverty exists across the globe, in almost every region and area there is present a form of social injustice. This inequality comes from several different factors and is caused by a multitude of both domestic and foreign affairs alike. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is no exception to the rule.

After research in high school about various underprivileged areas in both Latin America and Southeast Asia along with memberships to several social justice based organizations at my university, I began to note the different approaches each one of groups took to address the issue of inequality. Chapters of the Canadian based organization *Free the Children* work through raising awareness of issues of child labor and sex trafficking to the Western world as well as raise funds to send to grassroots organizations in troubled regions. The local Baltimore, Maryland service project EBLO works to teach immigrant children English as a second language. Habitat for Humanity works through the construction of houses all around the world for impoverished communities. Each organization has a unique way of addressing some of the main issues that have plagued social workers for decades; lack of attention to human rights, illiteracy, and community underdevelopment, to name a few.

When accepted into the SIT program, Jordan: Modernization and Social Change, I began to brainstorm on topics for my Independent Study Project that I thought both spoke to the needs of Jordanian culture and society as well as the theme of the program. Taking into consideration my previous work with social justice based organizations in the United States I began to develop

an idea for what I wanted to research in Jordan; later which I decided would be the issue of social inequality.

It wasn't until I sat down for an informal meeting with my host uncle that I decided exactly what would be the theme of my research. I asked to meet with him because I had heard that he worked with the Jordanian Red Crescent and got his masters in Social Work at McGill University in Canada. When he told me about the project he was currently working on, the McGill Middle East Project on Civil Society and Peace Building, I knew that it was exactly the kind of research that I had been looking for.

The McGill Middle East Project on Civil Society and Peace Building roots itself in the belief that, "the reduction of inequality and the promotion of civil society and social justice are intricately related to peace building".[i] I found that their mission of social justice and its ties to the peace efforts in the Middle East fit perfectly with the theme of the program in Jordan as well as my interests and previous work in the United States.

My interest in the MMEP only increased after most of my time in Jordan had only been spent in West Amman. I knew that I was experiencing only some aspects and ways of life that made up Jordanian culture and I found myself wanting to get the whole picture. What I was drawn to most was the approach in which they took in addressing inequality; that of teaching civil society. It had always interested me how and why organizations took the approach they did and I wondered why an organization based in the Middle East would focus so much on western practices; granted the program was started by a Canadian university, however, I wondered; Does this method work in Jordan? Is it actually reducing poverty and addressing inequality? Is the originally democratic concept of a civil society accepted in the Muslim world? These questions, along with many others ran through my thoughts, and so the foundation for my research was

established. However, the next question that would have to be addressed was why this research would be relevant to Jordan and to the people who live here.

B.   Relevance

In 2009 the World Bank reported that 19% of Jordan's rural population is poor and 12% of Jordan's urban population is poor.[ii] It would take 1.8 million JD a month to bring all poor individuals up to the poverty line in Amman alone.[iii] Poverty is a significant issue in Jordan and many citizens may not even realize it. However the significance of this research doesn't stop at poverty. Women's empowerment, community development, illiteracy and many other issues exist in Jordanian society and the program at the Community Development Center addresses most of them. Not only does the program address social justice issues domestically but also its ultimate goal is to create a more stable nation with informed citizens in order to build on the peace process between Israel, Palestine and Jordan; a topic with which most Jordanians are concerned about.

C.   Parameters of the study

My study will focus on the specific Community Development Center located in East Amman in the town of Ashrafiyah. This center was established in 2008 as one of McGill University's Rights-Based Community Practice Centers, otherwise known as an RBCP, based on Canadian Professor Jim Torczyner's model.[iv] Its foundations lay in community mobilization,

issues of law, and a "store-front" approach, that is making the centers main entrance at eye level therefore inviting all members of the community inside.

My main research will focus on the effectiveness of teaching civil society in order to reduce inequality. Before determining if a reduction of inequality has been made I must first determine whether or not the Community Development Center is actually employing the concept of civil society. I will address the questions of effectiveness and the indicators of civil society according to questions posed in an article by economist Diana Mitlin.

I intend to go about my research by visiting the Community Development Center and conducting interviews with various employees and heads of programs. I will conduct a small focus group of about 4 to 5 women whom are all members of the Community Centers Women's Club. I intend to use a total of 2 sources outside of the program for interviews to gain a well-rounded view of the whole picture. After I have collected the data from my focus group and personal interviews I will measure the effectiveness of the program as a whole, according to economist Diana Mitlin and the review of specific programs carried out by the organization.

By the completion of my research I hypothesize that I will find that the Community Development Center located in Ashrafiyah positively effects the community as a whole and successfully implements the concept of civil society in today's world. Through the review of its various programs and through the feedback of its members, the Community Development Center will prove to not only be positively effecting the lives of individuals but also reducing the inequalities that exist in Ashrafiyah.

D.   Definition of terms

Civil Society: "Civil society is a goal to aim for (a 'good' society), a means to achieve it through associations with community organizations and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means through deliberation and common interests."[v]

'Good' Society: "Civil society associations as a means through which values and outcomes such as social justice, solidarity, mutuality and sustainability are nurtured and achieved….[through] the inter-action between and impact of governments, businesses and civil society."[vi]

Effective Civil Society:

✓ Organizations support their poorest members to increase and achieve development options

✓ NGOs support participatory processes

✓ Staff uses their professional skills and expertise to enable the poor to control development programs

✓ Grassroots organizations and NGOs reduce their own role and do not try to reinforce dependency, powerlessness and exclusion

✓ Minimal bureaucratic intervention

✓ Organization networks with various grassroots organizations previously established in community[vii]

Beneficiaries: those people in the community gaining some sort of tangible skill, knowledge, or feeling of empowerment from participation in the programs offered at the Community Development Center.

Internal Non-Beneficiaries: the employees, academics, or volunteers that work towards the expansion, continuation, and upkeep of the programs offered at the Community Development Center.

<u>External Non-Beneficiaries:</u> those academics and professionals within the region that are experts in the fields of foreign NGOs, voluntary works organizations, and political science. These people have no connection with the Community Development Center itself, but rather hold knowledge on the themes and concepts surrounding the workings of a community center.

II.   Literature Review

A.   Civil Society

In 1913 the Scots-American philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, established Carnegie UK Trust.[viii] This is a non-profit organization built on the foundation of civil society, social justice, and research. It acts as one of the UK's leading independent foundations and is represented in 20 countries worldwide.

According to the Carnegie UK Trust the creation of civil society has three main factors that contribute to its existence. The first is that of "civil society as associational life".[ix] By this term they are referring to the connections the organization has with other independent, non-profit organizations such as faith-based, social movements, and co-operatives. The next factor of the Carnegie UK Trust's working definition of civil society is that of "the 'good' society".[x] In their opinion, a 'good' society is one that encourages and nurtures attitudes of social justice, solidarity, mutuality, and sustainability. They argue that an associational life alone will not guarantee a positive outcome, but it is through the combination of networking and working towards a positive outcome that civil society is really established.

The final and last factor to the Carnegie UK Trust's definition is that civil society acts as "arenas for public deliberation".[xi] An organization can have the right intentions and network with various organizations towards achieving their goals, however if there is no physical place for deliberation then a working civil society does not actually exist. "It is the public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated."[xii]

To review, the main factors of a civil society are; (1) An organization that works with various organizations from all different backgrounds and motives (2) An organization that, through work with various networks, share the common goal of social justice and community (3) An organization that has a physical space for discussion debates and exchange of ideas.

The definition of civil society that has been gleaned from Carnegie UK Trust and that will be used in this study is that of; "Civil society is a goal to aim for (a 'good' society), a means to achieve it (associational life), and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means (arenas for deliberation)."[xiii]

After reviewing the research and history of the Carnegie UK Trust I believe that its working definition of civil society is an accurate representation of what the majority of academics view to be a civil society. After reading different articles and journals about the subject I think that this definition is the best I have found so far. It not only includes the main aspects of what civil societies are but it also breaks it down into three measurable parts with examples of each. This type of definition is exactly the kind of tool that I need in order to measure the existence of a civil society organization and therefore its effectiveness.

However, the definition is not without it's flaws. My study is on the effectiveness of a civil society organization in a town in Amman, Jordan. The definition stated above has been

developed, predominantly, for comminutes that exist in Britain and Ireland. Does the definition of civil society for these areas truly pertain to a respective organization in the Middle East? In order to determine whether the Carnegie UK Trust definition of civil society is compatible with a community in Jordan, I have reviewed further literature on the topic.

B.   Civil Society in the Middle East

Augustus Richard Norton describes in his book, entitled *Civil Society in the Middle East Volume II,* that civil society is a social phenomena that can not be clearly described with one definition to fit all societies. However Norton does believe that there is a place for civil society in the Middle East because it is not the citizens that determines the type of civil society but instead the state acts a "referee, law giver and policy maker of civil society."[xiv]

Despite the differences in government systems across the Middle East and North Africa, examples of civil society have appeared numerous times. In the tenth and eleventh centuries in Iran and Iraq the Buyid Dynasty made it possible, through "trust, loyalty, and patronage"[xv], for economic prosperity and social stability. In this society there was an encouragement of networks that "implied a moral order".[xvi]

James Bill speaks about a concept in Iran known as *darwas,* literally meaning circle.[xvii] This is a concept that focuses around joining together in a small group to discuss matters of everyday life and views on religion, politics, and society. These groups would meet periodically and would network to other groups in order to expand their discussions. In the early 1970's there were about 2,000 darwas in Tehran alone.[xviii] This in itself is the forming of a civil society.

In Kuwait in the early 20th Century *diwaniyyas* began to arise throughout society.[xix] The concept of *diwaniyyas,* very similar to that of *darwas*, can be compared to the European *salon*. Here, men and women could discuss issues of politics and society freely. They were be viewed as "neighborhood cooperative societies which served as significant political arenas."[xx]

Many have doubted the existence of civil society in the Middle East because, more generally speaking, the definition put on civil society is that of a Western perspective. One of the most notable differences between civil society in the East and West, according to Norton, is that civil society in the East is often less autonomous than civil society in the West and it is mostly due to strict and limiting political regimes that the flame of civil society is extinguished.

How then, one might ask, can one conduct a study in Jordan about the effectiveness of civil society reducing inequality when the definition put on civil society comes from a Western view? There are several reasons why the western definition of civil society can be applied to my study of the Community Development Center in Jordan. First, it is important to look to how and why the community center was developed. The Community Development Center in Ashrafiyah is a project that began 2 years ago by the McGill University in Canada. This program was designed specifically for the Middle East, however purposefully with a northwestern version of civil society. Secondly, the definition given by Carnegie UK Trust does a good job of encompassing a lot of different views of civil society and could be applied in many places.

This being said it is important to remember that the study, while created by a northwestern university, is being conducted in the Middle East and therefore the information presented by Norton is a significant factor in determining the effectiveness of this organization. Both where the organization is rooted, and the region in where it will grow, are two very significant aspects to consider throughout the study and both are necessary parts.

In *The Status of Civil Society in Jordan as Expressed in Literature,* Mohammed Yacoub discusses the role of civil society in Jordan. His commentary, on a research paper by Mr. Hani Al Hourani entitled "Literature Published about Civil Society Organizations in Jordan", was given at the Foundation for the Future Regional Conference entitled "Research on Civil Society Organizations: Status and Prospects."[xxi]

Yacoub addresses the fact that prior to the second half of the 1980s, "the term "Civil Society" was not mentioned in any sociological literature published in the region in general, and in Jordan in particular."[xxii] In a qualitative comparison between the references of civil society available in both Arabic and English, only 3.12% of the references discussed the Jordanian Civil Society.[xxiii]

Despite the lack of information prior to the second half of the 1980s there was an increase in the existence of civil society organizations, due in large part to international donors. In 2008 there existed 1178 civil society organizations in Jordan, 32.51% of which located in Amman.[xxiv] Yacoub points out that the limitations that Jordan has experienced in teaching civil society is due to the influence of tribal living on society.[xxv] It is because of this fact that the civil society organizations are able to thrive more in a progressing city like Amman.

After establishing exactly what the definition of civil society is and how it works in the Middle East, and in Jordan, I did further research on how civil society organizations effect the inequalities that exist within a community.

C.   The Effectiveness of Civil Society in Reducing Inequality

In *Civil Society and Urban Poverty-examining complexity*, Diana Mitlin reviewed common inquires about the effectiveness of civil society organizations in addressing inequalities within a community. Diana Mitlin is an economist who gained her bachelors in economics and sociology at Manchester University and her MSc in economics at Birkbeck College in the University of London.[xxvi] Her main research projects focus on urban poverty and inequality, state and civil society shelter policies, grassroots organizations and community development, and civil society and development.[xxvii]

In 2001 the article *Civil Society and Urban Poverty-examining complexity* was featured in *Environment and Urbanization.* In this article Mitlin discusses the questions one should ask when assessing a civil society organization as well as outlines certain problems that hinder a civil society.

The main questions presented by Mitlin will be the foundation of how I judge the effectiveness of civil society; "Do such organizations really support their poorest members to increase and achieve development options? How do NGOs truly support participatory processes? Do their staff use their professional skills and expertise to enable the poor to control development programs, or does decision-making remain in the hands of a few? Do grassroots organizations and NGOs reduce poverty, or is their role to reinforce dependency, powerlessness and exclusion? How does the state intervene to influence these organizations and the way in which they are developing?"[xxviii]

These are only some of the questions outlined in Mitlin's article, however she goes further into her analysis of civil society through the identification of what determines whether a civil society organization has been created with the right intentions and if it actually will reduce inequality within a community. After reading Mitlin's article I have outlined 6 factors in

measuring the effectiveness of a civil society organization; (1) reasons for establishment (2) relationship between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (3) overall participation in programs offered (4) identity of the participants (5) networking and (6) government involvement.

The first factor is an important one for Mitlin. She states, "Among the more common factors instigating and then supporting grassroots organizations are kinship, ethnicity, trade union involvement, city-based federations, NGOs, religious organizations, political parties and the private sector."[xxix] She goes on to outline each of the aspects mentioned and believes that every grassroots organization has one of these aspects backing its existence and through these aspects emerges a particular agenda.

The next few factors I have outlined from Mitlin's article discuss the relationship between the members and leaders of said organizations and whether or not the leaders actually give independence to their members. She discusses the importance of participation in order for the society to function as well as the significance of the identity of the people who are participating. Mitlin, as well as numerous other academics, have noted that one of the most important factors to an effective civil society is limited, to no, government involvement. This fact is talked about frequently in Mitlin's analysis of civil society organizations.

D.   Literature Conclusion

Through my literature and research I was able to find a cohesive definition for civil society. The definition was refined in order to pertain to the understanding of civil society in the Middle East. Finally I studied an analysis of how civil society organizations can positively or negatively effect a community and the different factors in determining that effectiveness.

Through my research of pervious work in the topic area of my independent study I was able to form a strong foundation for which to begin my in-depth study and analysis of the effectiveness of civil society on the town of Ashrafiyah.

III. Methodology

A Overview of Methods of Research

The main objective of my research was to measure the effectiveness of the Community Development Center's ability to reduce inequality through teaching civil society. I knew that I needed to get the perspective of individuals who were both directly and indirectly involved with the center. I also felt that it was necessary to gain the perspective of those individuals who were well versed in the fields of both civil society and non-governmental organizations in Jordan.

As mentioned earlier, some of the research questions that I wanted to focus on, in measuring the effectiveness of the organization, were; "Do such organizations really support their poorest members to increase and achieve development options? How do NGOs truly support participatory processes? Do their staff use their professional skills and expertise to enable the poor to control development programs, or does decision-making remain in the hands of a few? Do grassroots organizations and NGOs reduce poverty, or is their role to reinforce dependency, powerlessness and exclusion? How does the state intervene to influence these organizations and the way in which they are developing?"[xxx] All of these questions were taken into account when deciding from whom I wanted to gain knowledge from and the method in which I wanted to go about gathering information.

I decided on two main forms of methodology; interviews and a focus group. Below I will describe my reasoning for both, whom I applied the methodology to, and the ways in which I carried out the process.

A1.   Interviews

Collecting data through interviews proved to be very significant in my study. After thinking about the scope of my research I decided that I would get the most information from experts in both fields of civil society and non-governmental organizations. My objectives were to determine the effectiveness of teaching civil society in reducing inequality so I looked at this objective from two different angles. The first angle I took was how NGOs function in Jordan; what are their roles, how are they established, what kind of organization has the best success rate, and so on. The next angle I choose to take was that of the role of civil society on NGOs in Jordan? Is there a place for civil society in the Middle East? Is this civil society different than that of the west? Generally speaking, would a civil society based organization be effective in reducing inequality in Jordan?

After determining the fields in which I wanted to investigate and the questions in which I wanted addressed I began the process of finding individuals who could afford me with the most information. I began with an employee at The Ministry of Social Development. The Ministry of Social Development focuses its mission on that of supporting the development of the community and the society through the medium of social work. Stated on the ministry's official web site is a list of their main programs, based around family, childhood, social defense, and special education. Their introduction explains; "Activities associated with these issues are numerous,

including planning, follow-up and improved performance, resulting in added dedication towards achieving the profound objectives sought in developing the human being and helping people help themselves, by themselves, for their benefit and for the interest of their society."[xxxi] It was this line, found the introduction, that drew me to the ministry as a great source of information; "helping people help themselves, by themselves, for their benefit and for the interest of their society."[xxxii] This line, in many ways, described exactly what the Community Development Center was trying to achieve as well as reinforcing the foundations of civil society.

The second interview I sought out was with another individual who was indirectly connected with the community center, but directly related to the themes of my research. Dr. Amin Al-Mashaqbeh is the president of the General Union of Voluntary Societies in Amman, Jordan. The General Union of Voluntary Societies is dedicated to social work and volunteerism. Its mains goals are to assess the work of social justice based organizations within the government sector. Although my research is focused on a non-governmental organization, I wanted to see to what criteria and standards governmental organizations are held to. Dr. Ameen also works with NGOs and is a professor of Political Science at the Middle East University. I knew that he would be a great source to speak with about the concept of civil society in the Middle East.

Now that I had experts in the main themes of my research it was time to glean more information from the source itself; The Community Development Center of Ashrafiyah. I got in contact with an employee at the Community Development Center. This source had received their masters through the fellowship at McGill University and because of this began working at the community center. This employee was able to direct me to the director of both community centers in Amman, Mahmoud Al-Hadid. Through these interviews I was able to learn how the community center functions on a day-to-day basis. I learned about the community center from

the staff perspective, a point of view that is vital in measuring the effectiveness of the organization in carrying out its mission of civil society.

A2.   Focus Group

Through my interviews I was able to gain the information needed to support the side of my research dealing with how the organization is run and the general view of the organizations effectiveness from experts. However, I was still missing one of the most significant aspects to my research; how the community center has effected the community itself. In order to judge if the organization was actually able to reduce the inequality that the people in the community suffered from I had to speak with the people of Ashrafiyah about their views and feelings on the subject.

I was able to arrange a meeting with four members of the center's Women's Club. One of the community center's main focuses is women's empowerment. The majority of the community center's members are women of all ages. I set up a time in the middle of a weekday due to conflicting schedules and I had to bring a translator in order to conduct the focus group. I spent about an hour and a half speaking with these women at the community center.

The method of a focus group was beneficial in several ways. The fact that there were four women together sharing their stories was extremely revealing in the way in which the community center worked. The women were able to feed off the energy in the room and add to each other's answers or stories. Since they had already established a family within their group it was easier for them to open up to me honestly because they were surrounded by people they trusted in a place they were familiar with. I feel as though an interview, one-on-one, with each

woman would not have achieved the same result because they would have been less open to speak to a young, American, college student. A survey would have been too disconnected, and I feel as though I would not have understood the dynamic of the women or have heard the personal stories they decided to share if the information was gained through a survey.

B.   Maintaining the integrity of data

Throughout my collection of data through interviews and focus groups I had to keep in mind the culture in which I was conducting research and the integrity of my study. Every interviewee or focus group participant was described their role in my research. They were told why I was there and what I wanted to achieve. I received written consent to use their findings in my paper and no pressure was put upon the participants to agree to have their name mentioned or their answers discussed.

Conducting a focus group with a translator was an aspect of data gathering that could have lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of my objectives. Thankfully, with the help of my translator I was able to discuss the questions that I wanted to ask and the point I wanted to get at. My translator, being a Jordanian herself, was able to let me know when a question I wanted to ask would be culturally insensitive and gave me constructive feedback to how I might change the wording of the question in Arabic to get at the same point.

C.   Obstacles and Changes

Different obstacles arose during planning the methodology used and while collecting data for my research. Whether I had to reschedule an interview more than once or was called at the last minute to come in for a meeting, it was hard to always be as prepared as I wanted. After this had happened the first time I made sure to plan ahead for interviews at least two days in advance just in case of any last minute changes. I also made sure to get the contact information of whomever I was interviewing so that I could call to ask any follow up questions.

Initially I had wanted to conduct a survey of about 30 participants from the community center. I felt that this would be a great way to gain some quantitative data measuring the effectiveness of the center. However, after many phone calls with a representative there, they informed me that it would be almost impossible to generate that many participants. While the community center hosts many programs only a few volunteers come regularly to the center and in the time span of my research there were no programs available for me to hand out a survey.

With the help of a source within the center I was able to schedule a focus group with 4 of the members of the Women's Club. Although it was not my initial intent, I found that this method was excellent in gathering personal stories and real life examples to how the community center has changed lives; an aspect I might have missed out on in a survey.

Although some of my original plans had to be changed I feel as though my research benefited from it and displayed the dynamic of the community center. The fact that I couldn't conduct a survey speaks to the fact about the community center that is worth noting and significant for my final conclusion. The obstacles that I was met with were, at times, frustrating but overall they helped me see more clearly the culture in which I was conducting research; an aspect that can not be passed over.

Through various interviews, discussions, and the sharing of personal stories I was able to collect all of the data I needed in order to continue my research on the effectiveness of teaching civil society in reducing inequality. The next section will discuss my findings and a reflection on my initial hypothesis.

IV.   Findings

A.   Revisiting my hypothesis

As stated in my introduction, my initial hypothesis was that the Community Development Center located in Ashrafiyah positively effects the community as a whole and successfully implements the concept of civil society in today's world. Throughout the process of collecting data I found that my view of the topic went through certain changes. Now, having completed the research, I can say that I still agree with my initial hypothesis however I view the aspects of this hypothesis in a different way.

Below, I will explain my initial findings within the scope of non-beneficiaries. I will discuss the interview process as well as the information gleaned from my meeting with them. Next, I will describe my findings within the scope of the beneficiaries while discussing the process and the information gathered. Finally, I will analyze the data collected in my conclusion.

B.   External Non-Beneficiaries

All of the data collected from non-beneficiaries was found through interviews. This allowed me to get in-detail information about both civil society and the aspects that surrounded

my topic. My main objective in interviewing external non-beneficiaries was to gain a non-bias view of the Community Development Center. Some of the main questions addressed in these interviews focused on how foreign NGOs function in Jordan, if there is a place for civil society in the Middle East, if there should be a distinction made between civil society in the West and civil society in the Middle East, and, from their expert opinions, what they think is the best way to reduce inequality.

My first interview was with an employee of the foreign NGO sector of the Ministry of Social Development. This employee is an expert in helping NGOs establish themselves in the Kingdom as well as following up with their progress. This sector of the Ministry works with various NGOs that exist within Jordan and has experience dealing with many different methods taken on by the organizations. There exists hundreds of NGOs in Jordan and 70, alone, are from the United Sates.

My source from the Ministry of Social Development described two common ways for NGOs to conduct work in Jordan. The first consists of the establishment of an organization whose representatives work in the field with an interpreter. The second type of foreign NGO works with local governments and grassroots organizations to achieve their goal, supplying the organization with more funds than manpower. This source believes that the second option has proved to be the most successful in the region. The local organizations know more about the people they are trying to serve, they know about the villages that need help, and important aspects of the culture that may be overlooked by a foreigner. The employee did express, however, the need for the higher powers of the NGO to train, in the native language, the local organizations to deal with the social issues presented to them and to continually follow up with its progress.

For example, let's say a family living in a small village in the south of Jordan is financially suffering from a father's handicap. A foreign NGO has trained individuals within the community to hold lectures on starting your own business as well as training courses in handicrafts. The mother of this family heard about the lecture and training course through a local organization and has decided to attend. Within three months she has been able to improve her handicraft skills as well as start selling pieces of jewelry and woven rugs to her neighbors from her home. Through the support of grassroots organizations and the backing of a foreign NGO this family has found a way to recover from their financial burdens.

The source from the ministry urges foreign NGOs not to just give money or handouts but to teach the people a skill, and by learning this skill it will help secure their futures. Some of the most successful NGOs they have worked with have been active, creative, on an organized budget, worked with local organizations, and have studied the people they want to serve.

Dr. Amin Mashaqbeh, president of the General Union of Voluntary Societies, also believes in the power of the Jordanian citizen to effect society and social work. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary social work is, "any of various professional activities or methods concretely concerned with providing social services and especially with the investigation, treatment, and material aid of the economically, physically, mentally, or socially disadvantaged."[xxxiii] When asked what he thought the future of social work looked like, he said that it was the people of Jordan that could bring it back to where it was 30 years ago. Dr. Mashaqbeh expressed that the more recent concept of individualism has pushed social work to the side. He believes that the media and newspapers could play a larger role in developing social work to its full potential and that the integration of this field of work into students curriculum could bring it back to the status it used to hold. In his opinion, community centers in general are

a great way to create awareness about social work, understand the problems that exist in communities, and generate income projects.

Just as the foreign NGO sector of the Ministry of Social Development has criteria for successful service-based organizations, so does the General Union of Voluntary Societies. As it is the their job to evaluate voluntary works organizations they have a certain list of factors they look to in judging whether an organization is successful. The criteria for such an organization is focused around their budget, their concentration of work, the region in which they are located, and their annual schedule. Out of these, Dr. Mashaqbeh believes that an organizations annual schedule tells a lot about both their mission and how they are working to achieve it.

Dr. Mashaqbeh, while president at the General Union of Voluntary Societies, also holds a Ph.D. in political science and teaches at the Middle East University. After discussing the main themes of civil society in the west, Dr. Mashaqbeh spoke of whether or not it has a place in the Middle East. In his opinion, civil society definitely has a place in the Middle East and, more specifically, in Jordan, however, the distinction needs to be made between the civil society that exists in the west and the civil society that exists in Jordan.

Dr. Mashaqbeh, after explaining that civil society is the space that exists between the government and society, outlined two specific differences. The first, being an organizations dependence on the government. In the west, people more fully understand the concept of the separation between people and the government; a factor that is very important in creating a civil society. However, here in Jordan the government is still involved with most aspects of life, if not all. The second distinction, according to Dr. Mashaqbeh, is that the concept of freedom does not exist here yet; by freedom he means the freedom from traditional values.

This distinction is also one of the main factors in slowing the growth of civil society to reduce inequality in Jordan, and because of this, certain changes must be made before the concept is possible. Dr. Mashaqbeh believes that it could take one to two generations until traditional values begin to shift to more modern values; modern values that would support a more healthy civil society. In an example given by Dr. Ameen, if a woman does something here that is not accepted by society, it effects the entire family. Women, among others, are not yet free from traditional values and Dr. Mashaqbeh believes that until they are, a true and well-functioning civil society would be hard to exist.

After my interviews with both an employee from the Ministry of Social Development and Dr. Amin Mashaqbeh, certain trends in the information I gathered began to surface. A successful organization, whether it be a foreign NGO or a voluntary works organization, or possibly both, is highly dependent on its budget, the way it decides to use its money, and its knowledge of the region in which its located. Also, the idea of civil society, although different from the west, is still present in Jordan and has a future here. The most important trend found in my interviews with non-beneficiaries, however, was that it is when the people running the organizations are Jordanian the chances of societal inequalities reducing are highest.

C.   Internal Non-Beneficiaries

The next step was to gather information from the people who knew the workings of the Community Development Center the best, the staff and employees. I deiced to interview a female employee who had a large role in the center and the Director of the two, McGill funded community centers in Amman. Through these interviews I was able to gain well-rounded

information about the community center as a whole, the mission it stands for, its goals for the community, and the specific programs it has implemented.

According to Mahmoud Al-Hadid, the community centers head director, there are three overarching factors that contribute to the make-up of the Community Development Center; volunteers, community mobilization, and issues of law. Because of their "storefront" approach, people from the community feel comfortable coming in and speaking with representatives. Al-Hadid explained that the first time someone comes to the community center they are directed to someone who can analyze their case. Depending on the case at hand, the person is either given legal help, a counselor, or more information for government and social support. However, the support doesn't stop here.

One aspect that came across repeatedly in the interview was the feeling of both cultural and social sensitivity. As Al-Hadid explained, the staff does not want to replace the community, rather create a place where community members can learn about their rights and participate in making the community in which they live a happier one. When speaking to the director about the concept of teaching civil society to reduce inequality, he made several distinctions to what the center's goals were. The community center does not want to be become a disconnected town hall. Civil society is not just about informing people of their rights.

The way in which Al-Hadid defined civil society was, when a community and its people live in harmony and recognize and address their needs in a democratic way. He believes that there isn't a perfect civil society and that each country has its own form. However, the thread that runs through every healthy civil society is when a community starts to prioritize and solve its own problems and when the community works towards a common goal. The Community

Development Center tries to act as the place where community members can join together and adhere to the same process when addressing their problems.

Al-Hadid believes that the community center is not there to give handouts to the people either. While at times this is necessary and a good way to get attention for their programs, they believe that handouts only go so far. He wants the community center to help their members realize their responsibilities as residents of Ashrafiyah. During our interview, he quoted John F. Kennedy, 35th United States President, in his inaugural address in 1961 to further explain the feeling of responsibility they try to bestow on their community members, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country."[xxxiv] Al-Hadid believes that this concept should also be felt throughout the community of Ashrafiyah. He wants to be able to empower their members to not just attend a few programs but to realize the responsibility they have towards each other.

Both Al-Hadid and other employees I spoke with expressed the independence the members of the community center have. Al-Hadid described a time where he, and the rest of the staff, had a weeklong conference in Tel Aviv. The women from the Women's Club ran the entire center for the week they were gone. My female source described the women as, "figure-heads in the community". These groups of women have established a network in Ashrafiyah and have become the people that neighbors go to for advice. The most impressive part is that these women had no experience with this type of work before they came to the center. Since they began volunteering they have learned new skills that they use everyday.

Through speaking with the staff at the center I found that they regularly networked and joined forces with both local and governmental organizations to gain support for their programs. Some of these organizations or bodies consist of the Amman Municipality, Jordan's Ministry of

Tourism, local churches and mosques, and the Madaba Municipality. The staff at the community center often works with different communities to try and offer something to the members that they might not have gotten the chance to do otherwise.

These programs are offered to everyone in the community however mostly attended by women, children and the elderly. Because of the diverse make up Ashrafiyah the center hosts programs for both Christians and Muslims and encourages participation of all religions. They believe that it is through the participation of inter-religious programs that the people of the community can learn more about where they are living, their neighbors, and themselves.

If there was one thing I could take away from the interview with the staff of the community center it could be summed up in something that Mahmoud Al-Hadid said in relation to what he wants the members of the community center to take away from their time spent there; "Think that behind you there are thousands of people." The community center is not just about teaching people the rights that were given by the government but also the accountability they have towards their fellow human.

D.   Beneficiaries

I collected all of my data of beneficiaries through a focus group at the Community Development Center. The focus group consisted of 4 women, spanning from the ages 30-49, all members of the Women's Club. I used a female translator to conduct my research. We met on a weekday in a classroom at the Community Development Center and spent about an hour and a half speaking with each other. My main objective for the focus group was to find out their

opinion of how the center was run, what they had learned, if anything, their amount of participation, and if this center had improved inequalities they have been met with in life.

I sat down with these women over a glass of tea and a piece of pistachio cake. I had been welcomed continuously by Ithar, Reema, Ghada, and Fatima and made comfortable by their dynamic. One of the women had achieved a university degree and the rest only held high school diplomas. They all were very charismatic and open to speak with me freely, despite the language barrier. Immediately after we began discussing the community center I heard positive aspects each one had experienced. The women who only held high school diplomas said that the community center gave them an opportunity to become more educated through lectures and programs offered. The community center has also given them a social network and family away from home.

The women were very proud of how active they are in the planning of programs and events. They listed various actives they had planned, such as lectures on breast cancer and acupuncture, as well as a chess club for kids, a child's photo exhibition, and holiday events such as Christmas, Eid, and Mothers Day. They explained their roles in the community center focusing on family, kids, the elderly, and people who are suffering and without support. They expressed the feeling they had that they have total control over the programs and that the staff was only there to guide them. They described the staff as people they could trust and look to for advice, but it was clear through their interview that they were the leaders of the social movement in Ashrafiyah.

One woman in particular opened a new light to the effect the community center has on its members. Fatima, 49, is divorced and used to work in the military sector of the government. In response to the question of how the community center has helped her, she said, "I now know

how to define myself." The community center has given her strength and has helped her see things in a different light. Being in the Women's Club has effected her character for the better and she feels that she can control anything and deal with anyone. When describing the programs they have planned and administered she said, "They are like a garden full of flowers, each one more beautiful than the other."

The other women have also been effected by the community center. Reema said that the lectures offered at the center have helped her communication skills. Ghada expressed that the programs have taught her to ask about her rights as a Jordanian citizen. When asked to elaborate, she said that since she has been to the center she has learned about things such as labor rights that she didn't know before. Ghada is now aware that their may be more rights that she doesn't know about and the community center has given her the knowledge and awareness to ask about them.

I posed the question to the women whether or not some of their immediate needs had been addressed through their volunteering and attending the community center. I heard a unanimous 'yes!' from all four of the women. Fatima, for example, has always enjoyed embroidering and since coming to the community center she has been able to perfect her skills. From the knowledge she gained through lectures and activities Fatima has been able to slowly create her own business by selling her work from her home. Ghada is a schoolteacher and she says that, from leading the trips offered to kids by the community center, she has improved her skills in dealing with children.

The dynamic between the four women was one of sisterhood and strength and you could see their feelings of independence and pride shine through with every answer they gave and new piece of information they shared. When asked to rate the effectiveness, on a scale of one to five,

of the community center in making a significant difference in the women's lives they all answered with five, 'highly effective'.

E.   Recommendations

After the completion of my research and the assessment of the programs offered at the Community Development Center in Ashrafiyah there are a few recommendations to be made in reference to its future. It seems as though the system and methods that the community center employees have positively effected the community as a whole. The women, children and elderly are the main target groups for the center and through interviews with various members the programs offered there to do a good job of reaching out to those groups. Although it would be a great deal more difficult in the society that exists in Jordan and the certain gender roles assigned here, I believe it would be extremely beneficial to try and develop more programs that reached out to the men of the household.

Reaching out to the men of the community would prove to be a challenging task. Not because of their lack of interest, but more so because of their work schedules. Through interviewing various employees I was told that the times that would work best for the men of the community would be after work sometime around 7:00pm. Many are tired would rather be home. While it would take some definite planning and creative ideas to draw them in, I feel that involving men, on a more consistent basis, would make the community center stronger because it would involve the entire family.

Due to the apparent success of the Community Development Center it would be extremely beneficial to consider spreading their methods to other communities. Granted, while the power of the center lies in the hands of a university located in North America, the funding

from McGill may cease to exist after this year. It would then be in the hands of the people running the center in Ashrafiyah to consider expansion. If the programs prove to be as empowering and independent granting as they claim then the members of the community center could head the project of expansion in other areas of Amman.

My final and most pressing recommendation would be to the pre-existing social organizations in Jordan. If the Community Development Center does lose funding from McGill University the goal they set out to achieve and the progress they have already made would be completely undermined. The idea of teaching and building a civil society is surrounded around the belief that they are teaching a life long skill. The existence of a community center is meant to create a safe haven and a permanent place of refuge and opportunity to develop these skills. Pulling funding from a center that has only existed of two years would be a tragedy.

For those organizations that already exist in Jordan, I would hope that they would recognize the significant achievements of the Community Development Center and the positive effect it had on its members. With this realization the existing organizations could work to keep the Community Development Center alive and running.

V. Conclusion

A. Is the Community Development Center effective in teaching civil society to reduce inequality?

The main objective of my study was to rate the effectiveness of teaching civil society to reduce inequality. I hypothesized that the Community Development Center in Ashrafiyah would be effective in carrying out this method. The way in which I would measure the effectiveness

was based on the following factors; if organizations support their poorest members to increase and achieve development options, if NGOs support participatory processes, if staff uses their professional skills and expertise to enable the poor to control development programs, if grassroots organizations and NGOs reduce their own role and do not try to reinforce dependency, if there is minimal bureaucratic intervention, and if the organization networks with various grassroots organizations that are previously established within the community.

After extensive research and data collecting, I have come to the conclusion that the Community Development Center does meet each one of these criteria and can therefore be deemed as an effective civil society organization that works to, and does in fact, reduce inequality in the area of Ashrafiyah. This small town in East Amman has a population of 8,200 people and in the year 2009 the Community Development Center had a total of 5,768 participants in programs and events offered.[xxxv] That means that that the Community Development Center reached approximately 70% of the population of Ashrafiyah. That's more than half of the population that was given and accepted the opportunity to learn more about their rights as a Jordanian citizen and reduce the inequality they suffer from.

To further my data conclusion I have created a chart in which to measure the effectiveness of a civil society organization, specifically for Jordan. The following chart is based off of the factors of effectiveness gathered from Diana Mitlin's article *Civil Society and Urban Poverty-examining complexity;*

Measures of Effectiveness	Community Development Center in Ashrafiyah
Organizations support their poorest members to increase and achieve development options	▪ The Community Development Center supports all of the members of Ashrafiyah, especially, the women, children, elderly and orphans. ▪ According to a Poverty Update from the World Bank, "If a governorate has a high share of the poor but a low incidence of poverty (e.g. Amman) it is easy to reach the poor (because they are geographically concentrated)"[xxxvi] ▪ Last year, the Community Development Center reached its members by offering approximately 585 activities all based on the concepts of education, development, family issues, legal issues, and the reevaluation of their own center.
NGOs support participatory processes	▪ Last year approximately 5768 people from Asrafiyah participated in the Community Centers programs.
Staff uses their professional skills and expertise to enable the poor to control development programs	▪ The Women's Club was founded in 2008 on the basis of teaching women in the community valuable leadership skills so that they may control and run the programs available at the community center. Last year there was more than 300 beneficiaries from the Women's Club programs. ▪ When asked personally, the women said that they have about 90% control over the planning and administering of the programs at the community center.
Grassroots organizations and NGOs reduce their own role and do not try to reinforce dependency, powerlessness and exclusion	▪ When asked what she thought of the community center as a whole, Fatima, a 49-year-old member of the Women's Club, stated, "It has helped me to be stronger. To know my rights. I can control anything and deal with anyone." ▪ The employed staff had to travel to Israel for a conference for one week last year. They left the control in the hands of the Women's Club and they successfully ran the community center for an entire week.
Minimal bureaucratic intervention	▪ The government gives aid in the fields of health, education, transportation, and different works through the municipalities. Other from the aid given, the government has little, to no, say over the workings of the community center.
Organization networks with various grassroots organization previously established in community	▪ Over the course of last year alone the Community Development Center teamed up with other, previously established organizations for 15 different activities.

B.   Implications of my Study

Through my research process I found that the field of civil society was not one that was talked about often. This is not surprising due to the fact that civil society is originally a western, democratic concept. Then why, if at all, is it important to study civil society in a place like Jordan? I found this answer throughout my observations of the focus group at the Community Development center.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is currently going through extreme changes, both politically and socially. With the elections of Parliament approaching, the constant surge of media from the west, and the ever-changing world we live in, many believe that the democratic route is currently the best path for Jordan. Now this is an entirely different research project in itself, however it is something else that makes the application of a democratic idea work so well in a non-democratic region of the world. The core concepts of democracy are founded on the idea that it is a "government by the people".[xxxvii] While this may not apply to the overall political climate of Jordan, it does find a way apply to civil society organizations, just on a smaller scale.

The Community Development Center is so successful in Jordan because it is focused on the immediate needs of the people and addressed by the people who know them best; Jordanians. When sitting around the table with the four women in my focus group I could feel the energy they exuded when talking about their responsibilities and control over programs. Jordanians, after interacting with citizens from all different areas, all want the same thing, on the most basic level they want to know they are part of something larger. So when in the west civil society might focus more on individualism, it is the community that powers civil society in Jordan. Knowing your rights, having independence, and having control over your own life are some of

the most important aspects to civil society and in Jordan the outcome of these skills is for the benefit of the whole.

On another note, this research is important for a more pressing issue. When speaking with the staff at the Community Development Center it was uncovered that the funding from McGill University might cease to exist at the end of this year. With the lack of funds from McGill the community center has no solid source of funding and might have to close its doors. However, Mahmoud Al-Hadid claims that he will try, with all of his power, to not let that happen.

After spending just a few short weeks researching, interacting, and speaking with the staff and, especially, the members of the center I can say that it would be a tragedy to area of Ashrafiyah to see their community center go. Their programs have educated its members and their attitudes have given the community a reason to hope.

One of the most important aspects to Jordanian life is the family and it is this concept that makes the community center and civil society work so well in Ashrafiyah. We can only hope that, if they were to ever lose funding, existing organizations in Jordan can see the value of the Community Development Center and always remember, as Al-Hadid said, "Think that behind you there are thousands of people".

C.   Future Research

Some questions that arose during the course of my research that could prove to be interesting points to research in the future would be the place for democracy in Jordan. Also the study of what that democracy would look like in the Jordan because it would be very different from that of the west. I think it would also be beneficial to look into the future of civil society organizations in Jordan.

Another aspect of my research was that of social work. As I found out through interviews it held a higher status 30 years ago. It would be beneficial to research the reasons for its high status 30 years ago and the factors, such as individualism, that has made it fall to the status it holds today. This study could also delve into the steps that could be taken to make social work a more significant factor in Jordanian society.

Further research could be done on the role of community centers in the Badia compared to their role in Amman. While more people are concentrated in Amman there are different inequalities that people living in the Badia face. This research could discuss what these differences are and the ways in which community centers must adjust to their changing environments. Stemming from this study could be the study of cultural attitudes towards poverty in Jordan and the different ways in which organizations must become cultural sensitive to their surroundings.

After completing my research I have found that there are many options for further study. The field of social work and the concept of poverty, while addressed by major organizations aren't spoken about as much with the average citizen. These topics are very significant to Jordan and to people studying in Jordan because in order to immerse yourself into the culture of the whole country you must know all of the different types of people who make up the Hashemite Kingdom.

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[i] MMEP: About
[ii] Jordan Poverty Update I (pp. 3)
[iii] Jordan Poverty Update I (pp. 6)
[iv] MMEP: RBCP
[v] Carnegie Trust

[vi] Carnegie Trust

[vii] Mitlin (pp. 151)

[viii] Carnegie Trust: Civil Society

[ix] Carnegie Trust: Civil Society

[x] Carnegie Trust: Civil Society

[xi] Carnegie Trust: Civil Society

[xii] Carnegie Trust: Civil Society

[xiii] Carnegie Trust: Civil Society

[xiv] Norton (pp. 5)

[xv] Norton (pp. x)

[xvi] Norton (pp. x)

[xvii] Norton (pp. xi)

[xviii] Norton (pp. xi)

[xix] Norton (pp. xii)

[xx] Norton (pp. xii)

[xxi] Yacoub (pp. 2)

[xxii] Yacoub (pp. 3)

[xxiii] Yacoub (pp. 4)

[xxiv] Yacoub (pp. 5)

[xxv] Yacoub (pp. 5)

[xxvi] University of Manchester

[xxvii] University of Manchester

[xxviii] Mitlin (pp. 151)

[xxix] Mitlin (pp. 154)

[xxx] Mitlin (pp. 151)

[xxxi] Government Ministries and Entities

[xxxii] Government Ministries and Entities

[xxxiii] Merriam-Webster: social work

[xxxiv] John F. Kennedy Library and Museum

[xxxv] Tageo

[xxxvi] Poverty Update I (3)

[xxxvii] Merriam-Webster: democracy

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Employee from the Ministry of Social Development

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VII. APPENDICES

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INEQUALITY IN JORDAN: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ASHRAFIYAH

Mary-Katharine Johnson, Loyola University, Baltimore, Maryland, United States
School for International Training – Jordan: Modernization and Social Change

Instructions:
Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the project. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing a descriptive analysis of the effectiveness of teaching civil society to reduce inequality in Jordan.

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

Date   **Participant's Signature**

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   **Participant's Printed Name**

_____   _____

Thank you for participating.
Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:
Dr. Raed Al-Tabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director, Deafallah Olimat, Academic Advisor
Telephone (962) 077 7176318
Email: raed.altabini@sit.edu

Civil Society and Inequality in Jordan: A Study on Community Development in Ashrafiyah

A.   Community Development Center Beneficiaries Focus Group

➤ Name

➤ Age

➤ The village, town, or city of current residence

➤ Marital Status (Single; Married; Widowed)

➤ Number of kids

➤ Would you consider yourself:

(Very Poor)   (Poor)   (Average)   (Rich)   (Very Rich)

➤ What is the amount of knowledge you have gained about your rights as a Jordanian citizen?

➤ What is the amount of new skills gained after coming to the community center?

➤ Do you feel very dependent on community leaders, or do you feel that you could plan

    programs by yourself?

➢ How much control and leadership over community development programs do you have?

➢ How much say do you have in the programs or way in which programs are carried out?

➢ How much do you feel like you can trust the people running the community center?

➢ How would you rate the effectiveness of the Community Center on addressing your long-term needs (1 being not effective and 5 being completely effective)

➢ Why did you decide to come to the community center?

➢ How many programs do you participate in? Please state the average amount of hours per week spent at the community center or dealing with members and leaders of the community center.

➢ Would you recommend this community center to other people? Why?

➢ Do you feel that your most immediate needs are being addressed? If not, how could that be changed?

➢ Explain one of your favorite programs organized by the community center.

➢ What has being a member of the Community Development Center changed in your life?