This document is part of a series exploring the USAID Jordan Cities Implementing Transparent, Innovative and Effective Solutions’ unique approaches to strengthening capacity and commitment through enhanced, inclusive local governance. See companion documents at http://chemonics.com/citieslearning.
About the cover photo
Residents attend a town hall meeting in Ma‘adi municipality, where the government disclosed its financial report and current financial status.
Jordan CITIES: Governing Together

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, citizens have traditionally been recipients of government mandates rather than partners in designing policies. Jordan is no exception.

The USAID-funded Cities Implementing Transparent, Innovative and Effective Solutions (CITIES) project is a five-year effort implemented by Chemonics to exploit the historic opening created by Jordan’s recent decentralization law and maximize citizens’ newfound agency to amplify their priorities, work with officials to address their concerns, and hold government officials accountable through new elections and oversight mechanisms. CITIES seeks to expand the pathway for citizen engagement to include traditionally marginalized populations including ethnic and religious minorities, gender and sexual minorities, and the country’s growing refugee population.

Contextual Challenges and Internal Evolution

Situated amidst endemic conflict and transnational terror networks, while sharing borders with Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Jordan serves as both a bulwark against expanded regional violence and a haven for millions of its displaced neighbors. Yet while Jordan has remained a critically important ally to regional hegemons, served as a Middle East peace broker, and maintained a relatively smooth relationship with Western leaders, it has struggled to avoid internal pitfalls. From wealth concentration to corruption, the traditionally centralized power structures of Jordan have left many Jordanians feeling neglected. Historically, Jordan’s constitutional monarchical system has concentrated power at the top, resulting in a centralized, bureaucratic system of government preventing widespread, meaningful citizen participation in the decision-making process. However, in 2015, the Government of Jordan passed a decentralization law to dislodge power from the center, enhance democratic accountability, and improve the quality of governance on the community level throughout the country’s 12 governorates.1 Additionally, Jordan passed a municipalities law to set the parameters of capital and municipal administration.2 In addition to grievances about the misuse of power, Jordanians have expressed frustrations about ineffectual governance. Because of insufficient service delivery, unnecessarily onerous bureaucracy, and other governance shortcomings, Jordanians began demanding reform. Further compounding domestic tension, recent regional conflicts have added increased pressure on the Government of Jordan by intensifying security concerns and flooding the country with refugees from

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1 For the text of the 2015 Law on Decentralization, see: https://iec.jo/sites/default/files/6DecentralisationLaw2015EN.docx%20%281%29_0.pdf
2 For the text of the 2015 Law on Municipalities, see: https://iec.jo/sites/default/files/5MunicipalitiesLaw2015EN.doc%20%281%29_0.pdf
Syria and Iraq. These unplanned influxes of people have burdened already strained services, particularly in Jordan’s northern governorates and in greater Amman.

To address citizen demands for more agency and for government reform, the Government of Jordan passed the Laws on Decentralization and Municipalities. While Jordan’s progress toward power disbursement has allowed for more citizen engagement, the Jordan CITIES project has assessed the country’s political economy around the decentralization process and uncovered a litany of hurdles to widespread, institutionalized decentralization. The assessment concluded that decentralization as a concept was highly politicized. Beyond widespread confusion over the functional definition of Jordanian decentralization — despite the newly codified parameters — municipal and governorate-level officials are tangling in long standing power contestation with informal power brokers and tribal leaders. This clash is most prominent in managing tenders and accessing resources against a backdrop of historic clientelism.

**Jordan CITIES as a Catalyst for Government-Citizen Partnerships**

Jordan CITIES is leveraging the existing, albeit fraught, political opening for decentralized power to support the Government of Jordan’s decentralization agenda and meet citizens’ calls for meaningful participation. CITIES is helping build the local capacity required to actualize ongoing reforms and to institutionalize the government-community partnerships required to realize their promise. From governance competency to proactive citizen engagement and targeted communication efforts, CITIES’ support is geared to equipping new local officials with the capacity to partner with citizens and improve the overall quality of local governance in municipalities throughout the country.

CITIES’ four goals represent the basis for a holistic, participatory government-citizen feedback loop that is critically important for sustainable citizen-centered governance. In the three years since its inception, CITIES has progressed toward these goals resulting in various government-citizen partnerships that are improving local governance throughout the country. CITIES has strategically injected technical assistance for municipalities on human resource management, financial management information systems, legal and regulatory analysis, development of private sector engagement frameworks and specific investment feasibility studies, municipal asset management, council orientation sessions, and other activities that underpin strong municipal function and sustainability.

**Goal 1: Identify, develop, and support innovative and sustainable solutions to improve service delivery**

Service delivery is typically the most visible form of responsive local governance. When these activities suffer from poor execution, it is often the first sign to many citizens that the government is neglecting its duties. Delivering quality, equitable services in communities is particularly critical for the newly empowered Jordanian local government in light of the four-year-old Decentralization Law. To support local officials in making good on their part of the social contract, CITIES has strengthened the systems and capacities required for responsive service delivery in municipalities. The wide array of community challenges warranted a more thoughtful, systematic, and multipronged approach to assessing and addressing service delivery gaps and developing appropriate solutions — accordingly, CITIES introduced service delivery field assessments to identify the most
pressing service delivery shortcomings as an initial step toward improving the quality and timeliness of service delivery in project municipalities.

To supplement the service delivery assessments, CITIES introduced the Municipal Institutional Capacity Assessment (MICA) framework and Service Delivery Improvement Planning (SDIP) methodologies to focus on all 29 services delegated to municipalities under Jordan’s decentralization laws. Supporting service delivery improvement by understanding both the gaps in actual delivery and the capacity of the institutions charged with delivery, CITIES’ multipronged approach has resulted in improved local development planning, solid waste planning, feasibility studies for municipal solar energy systems, street naming and numbering, and vehicle fleet maintenance.

Goal 2: Increase the sustainability of municipal operations, including newly decentralized responsibilities

Longstanding, informally decentralized power structures do not always align with newly codified decentralization requirements, resulting in a clash between sanctioned decentralization and parallel local authority entities. The asymmetric political dynamics involved, coupled with the expected administrative hurdles for newly empowered local officials, has complicated the systemization of Jordan’s ongoing decentralization process. CITIES has helped partner municipalities and the Government of Jordan understand, evaluate, and operationalize the legal, policy, and institutional frameworks that drive effective local governance through the creation of a Decentralization Advisory Unit. CITIES has also helped partner local governments improve the systems, regulations, and policies that support effective municipal government

### Cooperative Community Development

As a critical aspect of promoting open, collaborative governance, CITIES has helped establish Municipal Community Outreach Groups (MCOGs). MCOGs are multi-sectoral groups of citizens and local government officials that jointly plan and prioritize local development initiatives. MCOGs also serve as an avenue for citizen involvement in local resource allocation to support cooperative community development priorities. These cooperative development groups have helped undermine historic, exclusionary processes and norms — such as wasṭa (nepotism and favoritism) — leading to more inclusive, democratic practices.

### Field-Tested, Localized Assessment Tools

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<th>MICA</th>
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<td>Developed and used first in Moldova to assess municipalities’ performance and citizen perceptions of local authorities, the Municipal Institutional Capacity Assessment (MICA) was adapted to the Iraqi context to assess the capacity of local officials and identify primary assistance entry points. MICAs have been tailored to the newly decentralized Jordanian context.</td>
<td>In Iraq, Chemonics designed Service Delivery Improvement Planning (SDIP) methodologies to operationalize standards-based solutions to municipal challenges prioritized by SDIP committees comprised of local officials. SDIPs have been adapted to Jordan’s newly empowered local officials to develop service delivery plans that tackle the most immediate needs in the community through solutions tied to clear, regularly checked metrics.</td>
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function and sustainability. As local authorities grapple with the proper wielding of newly diffused power, CITIES has concentrated support on systems improvement, capacity building for staff, and improved understanding of the mandates for newly established elected councils. Additionally, CITIES conducted orientation sessions on the roles and responsibilities within Jordan's new governance structure of elected councils. The complexity of multiple elected councils at the local level resulted in confusion about responsibilities and governing authority from both the council members and community members; CITIES developed orientation materials and training to clarify authority expectations and parameters. Further, CITIES supported the financial management information systems and human resource reforms at the municipal level.

The project also provides technical assistance to municipalities on cost recovery and budgeting as well. Partnering with the Ministry of Local Administration, CITIES helped develop clear definitions of municipal roles and responsibilities that were circulated by the ministry. Nearly half of the municipalities of focus under CITIES have adopted this circular and its proposed structure and staffing requirements. After walking municipal officials through multiple trainings and guided technical assistance, CITIES supported municipal officials in the creation of needs lists and development plans. Subsequently, CITIES provided on-the-job training and targeted technical assistance to ensure municipal officials met their objectives. As local officials' operationalization of technical assistance has improved, so too has customer service and relations between municipal government and community members.

**Goal 3: Enhance engagement between community members and the government**

Jordan has a fraught history of citizen-government relations that has seen an uptick in protests and citizen dissatisfaction over the past decade. Regional upheaval following the Arab Spring led to a string of intermittent protests, most recently in 2018 over the rise in prices and taxes. Much of the dissatisfaction has been exacerbated by limited, unproductive engagement between citizens and government officials. Jordan’s longstanding challenges with establishing healthy citizen-government relations prompted CITIES to adopt a more supply-driven approach to cultivating a healthy, productive partnership. Much of the challenges with citizen engagement in Jordan stem from a tradition of tribal, client-patronage relationships in most communities throughout the country. Jordan’s historically centralized power has cordoned off demand-side actors from meaningfully

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3 Local councils, municipal councils, and governorate councils were established in the 2015 Law on Municipalities in addition to the executive council which represents the directors of ministry directorates at the governorate level.
participating in or leading policy prioritization and development. To reorient rather than overhaul the legacy of supply-only governance, CITIES has introduced and proliferated the use of town hall meetings (THMs) as a vital means of building communication bridges between citizens and municipal government. THMs’ supply-driven approach capitalizes on existing power structures and encourages outreach to the traditionally excluded citizenry by creating legitimate avenues for productive discussions about community priorities. THMs have been a driving force in establishing effective partnerships to support development planning, ensure financial transparency, and support public-private activities, including establishment of markets and implementation of local social and cultural events. THMs have also provided a rare, critical platform for women community leaders to voice concerns and play a role in community development. The newfound platform for women to meaningfully participate in community planning is discussed in more detail in a complementary learning piece on gender and social inclusion titled “Active Partnerships for All.”

CITIES has recognized the long-term nature of citizen engagement and has helped partner municipalities build substantial roles for their youth. In Greater Jerash, the municipal government has extended the reach of the successful CITIES-supported THMs to reach the often-neglected community of people with disabilities. A local citizen with hearing loss now broadcasts THMs and other municipal news on Facebook and various video channels to the local community in sign language, helping build effective bridges to one of Jordan’s most marginalized communities.

**Goal 4: Foster community cohesion**

Domestic and regional tumult has manifested a number of roadblocks to Jordan’s progress in recent years. Government reshuffling and domestic acts of violent extremism, coupled with the spillover of conflict in neighboring countries, has exacerbated existing tension in many of Jordan’s communities, challenging cohesion and stability. Further, the Syrian refugee crisis has hit Jordan disproportionately hard, straining already weak service delivery and fostering resentment among Jordanian host communities who identify the refugees as the primary cause of resource and service scarcity. In light of these dynamics, CITIES has placed programmatic emphasis on strengthening linkages between partner municipal governments and the broad array of citizens they serve to bolster cohesion amongst an evolving social fabric.

CITIES has helped promote community cohesion through a focus on identifying and ameliorating threats to community cohesion. Born out of the CITIES-supported “Al Dhulail Gathers Us” Initiative of 2017, a culture of trust and cooperation has been cultivated between the Al-Dhulail municipal government and its community. Al-Dhulail has effectively built upon this foundation of trust to identify, prioritize, and address threats to community cohesion and resilience through innovative application of social media and YouTube. In Sahab, Syrian refugees have been embraced as constituents and have been involved in developing the municipality’s strategic plan, extending the CITIES-supported partnership model of local governance to this vulnerable community. In addition to improved targeting of services, this has served to insulate against potential shocks to community cohesion.
In addition to fostering cohesion amongst disparate segments of partner municipalities, CITIES has also been a visible factor in helping extend political, economic, and social rights to women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other traditionally marginalized populations. CITIES grantee Al-Qantara Centre for Human Resources Development has helped the municipality of Al-Karak position its large and growing youth demographic at the forefront of local governance. Through ongoing support to Jordan’s first Youth Council, Al-Karak has established a key sustainability anchor for partnership-based governance. For more information on CITIES’ strides in sustainably streamlining gender and social inclusion efforts, see the accompanying piece, “Active Partnerships for All.”

With its preponderant focus on the institutions of local government, CITIES is a case study in how to steadily reorient local authority to incrementally expand the meaningful participation of all citizens and create a governance system that institutionalizes citizen partnerships. Implementing local governance programming in contexts with deeply entrenched, informal nonstate governing structures — against a backdrop of historically centralized authorities — warrants a closer examination of CITIES’ methods for harnessing and repurposing supply-side actors to be the initiators of reinvigorating the supply-demand feedback loop. Along with establishing basic structures, institutionalizing participation mechanisms, and cultivating trust, CITIES is now expanding dissemination of technical assistance and targeted resources, further demonstrating the gradual process of decentralization and its benefits to citizens.