

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Case Study #17

Country Jordan

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STAND UP WITH THE TEACHERS CAMPAIGN | Juman Abou Jbara |

The involvement, strategies and tactics of Jordanian civil society in improving female teachers' labor rights in the private education sector

BACKGROUND

In October 2013, the Jordanian National Steering Committee for Pay Equity (NSCPE) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) published a report¹ indicating that the income gap between male and female workers in the private education sector had reached 42 percent. The report also revealed that 75 percent of those who work in the private education sector, whether they are teachers or administrative and support staff, are women. These statistics sparked a discussion amongst civil society actors concerned with women's rights and specifically labor malpractices faced by female teachers in private schools.

Several historical and social factors have influenced the status of today's educational system. In 1957, the Jordanian regime imposed martial law and dissolved the Suleiman Nabulsi cabinet². This announcement was accompanied by the dissolution of the Teachers' Syndicate as well as the National Students' Union. During that period, some political and union leaders were arrested or exiled, and the number of unions fell from 39 in 1955 to 16 in 1961³. It was not until 2011, after several previous attempts, that the Jordanian Teachers' Syndicate (JTS) was legally re-established, albeit with a diminished jurisdiction compared to its predecessor.

¹International Labour Organization. "Towards equal pay for work of equal value in Jordan". (2013, May 22). International Labour Organization Publications. Retrieved March 10, 2019, from https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multi-media/video/institutional-videos/WCMS_213844/lang-en/index.htm

²This government later became the first and only elected parliamentary government in the history of Jordan.

³Solidarity Center. "Justice for all: The struggle for worker rights in Jordan". Solidarity Center. (2005, December). Retrieved March 10, 2019, from <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Jordan-JFA.pdf>

The absence of a professional body to regulate teaching as a profession over the course of 54 years allowed any community-college or university graduate to become a school teacher⁴. Additionally, there is a cultural tendency to consider teaching as a model job for women⁵, especially working mothers, which adds insight to the dominating percentage of women in the education sector. The deregulation of the teaching profession, coupled with cultural expectations contributed to an increase in the number of 'qualified' teachers, thus creating a disparity between supply and demand in the private education job market. This imbalance rendered thousands of potential candidates, who are in need for jobs and facing high unemployment and inflation rates, vulnerable to accept employment terms that violate the Labor Law.

⁴Community college degrees (diplomas) are no longer considered an acceptable qualification at public schools but are still acceptable at private schools.

⁵Haj Ahmad, N. (2017, January). "Stand up with the teacher campaign: An experience of collective voice in Irbid, Jordan". International Labour Organization Publications. Retrieved March 10, 2019, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-arab-states/-ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_548867.pdf

TIMELINE AND THE JOURNEY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

The NSCPE was founded in 2011 and comprised 23 national bodies and civil society organizations. Its work is supported by the ILO, and its coordination is based on a joint effort between the Ministry of Labor (MoL) and the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW). Lobbying and advocacy work to improve legislation and policies vis-à-vis pay equity was and still is one of the primary mandates of the NSCPE since its conception.

Furthermore, the General Union of Workers in Private Education (GUWPE) had been the chief labor union demanding better implementation of fair labor policies for workers in private schools. Since 2010, the GUWPE had been using collective bargaining to implement a Unified Labour Agreement across private schools in Jordan.

However, by 2015, a new approach was needed not only to address the outcomes of the 2013 report but, more importantly, to address the legal loopholes that enable private school owners to violate the Labor Law and the terms of the Unified Agreement. That was when the MoL, NSCPE and ILO sought to partner with Ahel; a local community-based organization (CBO) specialized in supporting constituency-led social change through community organizing. Ahel was commissioned to build, launch, and expand a grassroots campaign that would be led by and for female teachers in the private sector towards protecting and improving their working conditions. This journey would later result in the formation of 'Stand Up with the Teachers' campaign in April 2015⁶.

According to Reem Manaa⁷, Campaigns Manager at Ahel, they began by finding leadership from within the constituency most impacted by this issue. After several attempts, with the help of NSCPE and members of the newly reinstituted JTS, Ahel recruited 37 female teachers from the city of Irbid⁸ to participate in a workshop, but only eight of them were willing to take the lead⁹. Thus, the core leadership team of the campaign was formed. Hiba Abu Ghuneim and Najah Al-Natoor, core team members of the campaign, explain the reasons why this endeavor was successful only after multiple attempts. They note two main challenges in recruiting teachers to take the lead. First, teachers feared "being stigmatized by schools as troublemakers or accused of affiliation to a political party,"¹⁰ which would pose a high risk for their employment prospects. Second, many teachers "did not believe that there was potential for real transformation because they were doubtful of the executive's power to enforce the law or offer them the needed protection."¹¹

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The campaign employed a story-based strategy to identify the issues and goals of the campaign. Public narrative was employed to expand and maintain leadership and relationships. Al-Natoor asserts that relationships were instrumental in building trust, and are "what holds the campaign together until today."¹² Through sharing stories, it became clear that pay inequity was one of at least 14 other labor violations that female teachers in private schools are susceptible to during the course of their employment. A critical violation that came to surface through stories was that some teachers' salaries were below the legal minimum wage¹³, and Abu Ghuneim was one of them¹⁴. The exact percentages of each kind of violation remain unknown, but the campaign has developed a 'hotline unit' that documents, tracks, and coordinates with the MoL inspection department around violations reported by teachers.



Instead of attempting to tackle the manifold violations simultaneously, the campaign identified wages and working conditions as high priority issues and set incremental goals accordingly. While the teachers reviewed their strategy every two years, four main elements formed the backbone of their strategy. These were: raising awareness on legal rights in order to identify and track violations; establishing efficient governmental inspection mechanisms to ensure the implementation of fair labor policies; collectively organizing teachers to confront violations at a grassroots level; and finally, providing professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' skills and qualifications.

In 2015 and 2016, the campaign began by lending a grassroots voice to the Unified Labour Agreement negotiations and tracking its implementation locally. The tactics they used here included phone banking the teachers' database, local workshops for teachers, coordinating with local inspectors on reported violations, and lobbying the MoL, the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the Social Security Corporation (SSC) to publicize the agreement through banner hangs, leafleting, social media, and various communication methods.

Two years later, in 2017 and 2018, the objective would then become to amend the bylaw concerned with regulating school licenses. Some private schools paid salaries in cash, which enabled them to circumvent the minimum wage requirement by making teachers sign on a contradictory payslip for filing purposes. Schools were not required by law to pay salaries electronically. Based on those conditions, the campaign sought and later succeeded in convincing the MoE to amend the bylaw, rendering school licensing conditional upon transferring legal wages to teachers via a bank or e-wallet account. This demand was one of the solutions envisioned by teachers to confront the legal loophole around the minimum wage. The tactics employed by the campaign to achieve this objective included offline and online awareness-raising efforts, a listening drive with teachers to ensure that the campaign's demands were connected to the broader constituency, and advocacy as well as pressure tactics geared towards the MoE so as to find a legal pathway that would fulfill their demand.

Now, following the amendment, the focus of the campaign for 2019/2020 is to ensure the implementation of the amended bylaw across schools nationally and to confront practices by employers who manipulate the new bylaw. For example, in February 2019, the campaign mediated a dispute between 43 teachers and their employer who had delayed their wages for three consecutive months. The campaign succeeded in resolving the dispute, whereas the employer eventually transferred full earnings via electronic transfer as demanded by the campaign¹⁴.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Irbid is the second largest city in Jordan and has one of the highest rates of female teachers working in private schools.

⁸Manaa, R. (2019, Jan 16). Personal interview via video chat.

⁹Abu Ghuneim, H. (2019, May 12). Personal interview via video chat.

¹⁰Al-Natoor, N. (2019, May 12). Personal interview via video chat.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Abu Fara, A. (2016, Apr 3). "معلميات يعقدون إذعان". Arij. Retrieved March 10, 2019, from arij.net/report/%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A5%D8%B0%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86/.

¹³Abu Ghuneim, supra 9.

¹⁴Al Sarayra, R. (2019, Feb 8). "قم مع المعلم تحصل أجور 43 معلمة لم يتقاضين رواتبين منذ 3 أشهر". Al-Ghad Newspaper. Retrieved: May 12, 2019, from: <https://alghad.com/%D9%82%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%B1-43-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%8A/>

INFLUENCING FACTORS

One of the approaches adopted by the campaign included building partnerships with governmental, quasi-governmental bodies, and individual allies inside those bodies. The involvement of the MoL in the campaign, through the Head of Economic Empowerment Division and the support of the secretary-general and the two consecutive ministers, can be considered a significant influencing factor. This cooperation gave the campaign direct access to relay developments, challenges, and concerns directly to the various arms of the ministry, including the inspection liaisons. According to Abu Ghuneim, those leading members in the MoL “had a clear conscience and genuinely believed in our [the teachers’] cause, which led them to be actively involved in the campaign.”¹⁵ The campaign also built relationships with the Central Bank of Jordan, the SSC, and the MoE. Al-Natoor explains that the campaign’s close coordination with those official bodies coupled with its “mounting successes in resolving labour violations gave [our constituency] a boost of confidence to trust the campaign and overcome the fears and doubts that we initially faced.”¹⁶

Furthermore, the direct involvement of NSCPE – qua a quasi-governmental body – amplified the campaign’s demands across official platforms as they were able to follow up with key actors within different state institutions. Another factor that was instrumental in making the campaign’s demand in 2017 a top priority for the MoE was the appointment of Omar Razzaz as the new minister of education – who was convinced by the strong case put forth by the teachers. Lastly, it is important to mention that the support of the ILO as donors but also as allies with extensive history and experience in labor rights advocacy was amongst the key influencing factors.

TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS

One of the campaign’s demands was to oblige private school owners to transfer salaries electronically as a protective measure against minimum wage manipulations. The first interaction by the then-minister of education was endorsing the campaign’s demand on his social media accounts in 2017. This endorsement gave the campaign a sign of hope that it would soon begin to reap the fruits of its work. Despite this signal, the campaign continued organizing in pursuit of the demand for e-transfers, including efforts directed towards the MoE, spanning over more than six months, until the minister officially announced the amendment of the bylaw.

In June 2018, the then-minister of education was appointed as the prime minister following a national strike and popular mobilizations against a draft income tax bill. In his capacity as prime minister, Razzaz designated the amendment of the MoE bylaw as one of 16 policy issues that the new government promised to address within the first 100 days of its tenure. The bylaw was officially amended and came into force in September 2018.

POLICY OUTCOME

The first policy outcome in which the campaign played a part was the amendments to the Unified Agreement in 2015 and 2017 led by the GUWPE, under the supervision of the MoL and MoE. The Unified Agreement passed for the first time in 2010 and must be renewed every two years, but it was not until 2015 that it became compulsory across all private schools in Jordan.

The second policy outcome led by the ‘Stand Up with the Teachers’ campaign was the amendment of Article 16 of the MoE bylaw, which now makes it mandatory for private schools to pay all salaries via bank or e-wallet transfer as a way to monitor employers’ compliance with the minimum wage requirements. According to the amendment, private schools’ failure to comply with the bylaw would result in the rejection of their license renewal application for the next academic year. While those policy amendments have been celebrated by the campaign, according to Manaa’, private school owners “tend always to find a leeway” to escape legal obligations.¹⁷ Thus, the question remains whether a broader reform of the education system and its enforcement mechanisms are needed at the executive level to resolve labor violations and other challenges facing teachers today.

¹⁵Abu Ghuneim, *supra* 9.

¹⁶Al-Natoor, *supra* 10.

¹⁷Manaa’, *supra* 8; and see Salameh, D. (2018, Nov 27). “استلمي الراتب ورجعي الفرق: هل يُلزم؟” “تحويل الرواتب إلى البنوك المدارس الخاصة بالقانون؟”

7iber Media. Retrieved: May 12, 2019, from: <https://www.7iber.com/society/bank-wages-transfer-violations-in-private-schools/>



CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

Even though they are demanding labor rights guaranteed by the law, the teachers' involvement and leadership in the campaign is a risk. Risks range from social pressures labelling teachers as trouble-makers to loss of employment opportunities. In the early stages of the campaign, three teachers¹⁸ were arbitrarily dismissed from their jobs by their employers due to their involvement with 'Stand Up with the Teachers'.¹⁹ Some employers asked teachers to end their affiliation with the campaign while others questioned members of their cadre for 'liking' the campaign's page on Facebook²⁰. Despite those risks, most of the active teachers remained part of the campaign. However, those measures infused fear amongst teachers who were not yet involved in the campaign, making them less willing to join, which in turn posed an organizing challenge to the campaign's attempts to expand.

The campaign developed an entry pathway that could be perceived as a predecessor to action, which was the popular education program, to address the problem of fear. Popular education is a pedagogy rooted in concepts of self-liberation through a collective and critical co-learning process²¹. Slowly, more teachers were willing to join the popular education pathway, and by the end of it were more willing to become active in the campaign's actions. From 2015 to 2019, the campaign has grown from 8 to 70 active teachers, and has spread from one city, Irbid, to four cities across Jordan.

It is possible that, in addition to the popular education program, the two policy changes achieved as well as successful mediation efforts could have further contributed towards the campaign's ability to mobilize and confront fear amongst private school teachers, especially with an increasing number of teachers reporting violations through the campaign hotline, which continues to operate today.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

GUWPE	General Union of Workers in Private Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
JNCW	Jordanian National Commission for Women
JTS	Jordanian Teachers' Syndicate
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoL	Ministry of Labor
NSCPE	Jordanian National Steering Committee for Pay Equity
SSC	Social Security Corporation

INTERVIEWS

Hiba Abu Ghuneim (2019, May 12), *Teacher and Core Team Member of Stand Up With The Teachers' Campaign*. Personal interview via video chat.

Najah Al-Natoor (2019, May 12) *Teacher and Core Team Member of Stand Up With The Teachers' Campaign*. Personal interview via video chat.

Reem Manaa' (2019, Jan 16), *Campaigns Manager at Ahel Association*. Personal interview via video chat.

¹⁸Nareeman Al Shawaheen, An'am Odeh, and Hiba Abu Ghuneim. All three teachers filed lawsuits against their schools for arbitrary dismissal in 2015. Court proceedings are still ongoing at the time of writing this paper, despite labor cases being legally designated as expedited cases that should resolve within six months from filing. This is yet another dimension on challenges facing teachers who suffer from labor violations and is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁹International Labour Organization. *People's Voices: Campaigning for Pay Equity and Childcare in Jordan* (2017). International Labour Organization Publications. Retrieved March 25, 2019, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_615714.pdf and Ibid, supra 10.

²⁰Abu Ghuneim, supra 10.

²¹Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.

BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid- 2018, the “Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World” program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project “Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making”. This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project’s goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media’s expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) is an independent, research-based, policy oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab region. The Institute is committed to expanding and deepening knowledge production and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society actors, and policy makers.

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