

The atmosphere of the Arab Spring has amplified the importance of youth enfranchisement and engagement in all parts of the Arab World, including the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The events that took place in the region in 2011 contributed substantially to the public's realization that youth need to be encouraged and empowered. At the same time, social media opened the eyes of youth in Jordan to their peers' efforts throughout the region. Soon Jordan was bubbling over with new initiatives harnessing some of this energy for positive changes in Jordan. Jordanian youth feel that the sky is the limit in the demands they have for their country and futures. This dynamism is palpable in a country where 77% of youth believe that the best days are ahead of them (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2013).

One of the cradles of this energy in youth life is the university. Years spent in university serve as a formative period for every Jordanian, and the university itself acts as an essential part of community life in Jordan. Jordan is renowned in the Arab World for its educational standards and its efforts to develop its human resources for a knowledge economy. Today, Jordan ranks number one in the Arab World in education, having made great strides and significant reforms since the mid-1990s (Al-Shalabi, 2012). Jordan has 10 public universities, 17 private universities and more than 60 community colleges (EHEA, 2013). The education system has undergone rapid expansion over the past few decades, and the gross enrolment rate for the 18–25-year-old population has steadily increased since 2001. These achievements reflect a government that has supported a strong education policy and developed its human capital, which it regards as the principal source of its wealth. These are significant achievements for a country that has experienced such rapid population growth (the Jordanian population having doubled since early 1990) and absorbed waves of refugees from conflicts in the region (World Bank, 2011).

Jordan is among the top 30 countries in the world with a youth bulge (Ortiz and Cummins, 2012). Well aware of the consequences of unaddressed, jobless youth, decision-makers

in Jordan were already conscious of a need to tackle this issue prior to the Arab Spring. However, the energy of the past two years has increased the focus on youth, especially at the university level. During his speech for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the University of Jordan, His Majesty King Abdullah II (2012) declared:

It is my unshakable conviction that the youth are the engine that drives the development process; they are the vehicle and the purpose of development. Therefore, we should continue investing in the youth through education and training to equip them with skills and expertise that will nurture their creativity and enable them to excel.

This past spring, University of Jordan President Ekhleif Tarawneh also called on student bodies to launch initiatives and organize activities and events aimed at serving the university and local communities (University of Jordan, 2013). Initiatives focused on harnessing youth energy to lessen the unemployment rate, build entrepreneurial and leadership skills, and encourage greater youth participation have been prominent among government recommendations. Their importance can also be seen in various Royal Initiatives and projects initiated by The Higher Council for Youth, We Are All Jordan Youth Commission and universities, as well as in foreign donor projects funded by the United Nations, European Union and USAid (personal interview, Amman, Jordan, June 20, 2013).

Perhaps the intensified focus on youth initiatives and enfranchisement is due to the fact that the overall engagement among Jordanian students is still considered to be low. However, the rate of increasing initiatives and openness to youth engagement are promising signs for Jordan's future. One of the challenges is the scarcity of opportunities and initiatives in the various governorates in Jordan; youth opportunities tend to be centred in Amman and Irbid, and are few and far between in less densely populated governorates such as Ma'an in the south and Ajloun in the north. In focus groups conducted in these areas, youth who admitted their lack of

engagement stated that they would be more motivated to join if they were more aware of programmes running in their governorates. The test now will be to meet the needs of Jordanian youth and provide leadership skills for young people in every corner of Jordan to activate their potential.

Nonetheless, Jordan thrives with hundreds of new initiatives. Students are bridging the gap in awareness through social media, taking advantage of Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools to spread their campaigns and messages, as well as to organize public events. Listed below is a selection of initiatives by university students and administrators that reflect the diverse interests of Jordanian youth. The ingenuity and vision displayed by these initiatives are not only inspiring but also infectious, which bodes well for the future of Jordanian civic engagement and for the Kingdom.

**LIMIT CHILDREN IN LABOUR INITIATIVE DESCRIPTION**

This student initiative from Hashemite University, Zarqa, was formed to tackle the issue of child labour in Jordan. It aims to apply pressure on decision-makers and officials through an online campaign to ensure children's rights in Jordan and advocate for the application of the Jordanian labour law to those businesses utilizing child labour in Jordan. The students also produced a video campaign and published it on their Facebook page. The campaign aims to reach the Jordanian parliament with this initiative and has already forged a deal with a female member of parliament to adopt the initiative and propose it as an item at an upcoming parliament session. The students also conduct numerous field activities, including a mural-painting event in a public garden in Zarqa.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/LIMIT.CHILDREN.IN.LABOR>.

**LAB ON WHEELS**

This initiative runs country-wide at: Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Amman; Al-Balqa'a Applied University, Salt; Applied Science University, Amman; German Jordanian University, Madaba; Hashemite University, Zarqa;

University of Jordan, Amman; Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid; Princess Sumaya University for Technology, Amman; and Yarmouk University, Irbid.

#### DESCRIPTION

Lab on Wheels is a project that aims to provide young school students with the practical science experiments that are missing from many schools in Jordan, and to involve students in the demonstrative and interactive implementation of exciting projects, supplementing their theoretical learning with much-needed practical experience. This initiative is supported by a nationwide collaboration of universities and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, a global technical professional association dedicated to advancing technological innovation and excellence for the benefit of humanity.

*Link:* <http://www.gjuieee.com/lab-on-wheels-nationwide>.

#### UMI 'MY MOTHER' CAMPAIGN

This is located at the American University of Madaba, Madaba; University of Jordan, Amman; and German Jordanian University, Madaba.

#### DESCRIPTION

The Umi Campaign grew from a partnership of four university students, three graduates and an established non-profit organization (Our Seven's World), formed to raise money for mothers in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. During a visit to the Al Husn refugee camp in the winter of 2012, the seven female university students and graduates became acquainted with families, especially those with mothers raising children in the camps who had no financial means. The girls decided to start a fundraising campaign to help these mothers, who were the pillars of their families. As Mother's Day approached, the Umi Campaign was founded, enabling the public to donate needed items directly to families in the camps or to buy personalized Mother's Day cards for 3 dinars apiece. In the end, the Umi Campaign fulfilled the camp's entire wish list and raised over \$22,000, which was used to renovate seven homes in the camps and provide a seminar for the mothers in the camp.

*Link:* <https://www.facebook.com/oursevensworld>.

#### IRBID CITY DEVELOPMENT

This initiative is based at the Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid; and Yarmouk University, Irbid.

#### DESCRIPTION

The Irbid City Development project seeks to transform Irbid into an advanced city by improving its infrastructure and public services, especially those dealing with waste management. Through Irbid City Development, student volunteers and associations come together to beautify their city. One of their major events was the Irbid Clean Up Marathon, where for a period of several weeks volunteers cleaned several areas of the city. The initiative will expand to reach more areas of Irbid and launch a new project named The Perfect Neighborhood.

*Link:* <https://www.facebook.com/irbid.youth.volunteers>.

#### STEP BY STEP

This is found at the Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid; and Yarmouk University, Irbid.

#### DESCRIPTION

The Step by Step initiative seeks to create a positive school atmosphere that inspires, motivates and excites students about education. The initiative offers extra-curricular and after-school activities such as photography, cinematography and weekly sports tournaments to strengthen the bond between students and their schools and promote a love of learning. The programme is working to create a structured curriculum that encourages students to excel alongside their studies throughout the school year.

*Link:* <https://www.facebook.com/irbid.youth.volunteers>.

#### SHABABSHARE

This initiative is country-wide in Jordan.

#### DESCRIPTION

ShababShare is a social media initiative that aims to spread a culture of 'social pioneering' and voluntary work within communi-

ties in Jordan. This initiative directs various activities that help to instil and foster these concepts within youth through social media that feature new communities, initiatives, corporations and organizations concerned with providing voluntary services and charitable work to young people. ShababShare allows representatives of youth initiatives to reach larger audiences, while enabling youth to become acquainted with their activities and achievements and facilitating the process of joining them.

*Link:* <https://www.facebook.com/ShababShare>.

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