



## YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL POLICIES PROCESS MAKING IN JORDAN

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### ABSTRACT

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The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is entering its second millennium with a decisive will for development and prosperity, depending on its youthful society; since youth in the age group (12-30) years comprise (61%) of the population. This fact implies that the developmental policies drawn by policymakers in the country must address the needs and inspirations of young people. This study aimed to analyze youth participation in the process of developmental policymaking from the perspective of the concerned directors of the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) in terms of importance and implementation. The study adopted a qualitative approach and used semi-structured interviews to collect data from (10) directors. The study concluded that youth participation in developmental policy-making was considered to be crucial and essential for achieving development in Jordan. However, the current participation is considered to be weak and tokenistic. The study recommended more engagement of youth in policy-making.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study is an original and innovative study, first of its kind to tackle youth participation in developmental policy-making from the perspective of senior planners in Jordan. Its results will be reflected in better policies for engaging youth in developmental policy-making.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is entering its second millennium with a decisive political and popular will for development and prosperity where his majesty King Abdullah II asserted on several occasions that entering the new era of Jordan must be accompanied by patriotic and devoted efforts from all Jordanians towards achieving the developmental goals of Jordan. Development is considered to be an improvement, whether it is qualitative, quantitative or both, in the use of available resources (Pearson, 2000). Policymaking refers to the process of proposing courses of actions of government, or guidelines to follow to reach goals and objectives, and is continuously subject to the effects of environmental change and influence (Roux, 2002). It is therefore crucial to work in a participatory manner, which means including all segments of the society in drawing policies and planning for development. The policies and plans produced in this manner may affect the present and the future of the whole society. Jordan is considered to be a youthful country, where according to the Jordanian Department of Statistics (DoS), youth in the age group (12-30) years comprise (61%) of the population, which is around (6.6) million out of an estimated (10.8) million by the end of 2020 (source: [www.dos.gov.jo](http://www.dos.gov.jo)). The youth participation includes efforts by

young people to organize events around issues of their choice, by adults to involve young people in community agencies, and by youth and adults to join together in intergenerational partnerships (Checkoway, 2011). The above-mentioned fact implies that the developmental policies drawn by policymakers in the country must address the needs and inspirations of those young people. It is necessary to engage the young decision-makers of tomorrow in the developmental decisions of today. Therefore, youth participation in the policymaking process is considered to be an action-oriented process involving young people in institutions, initiatives, and decisions, and affording them control over resources that affect their lives (World Bank, 1994). The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), which out broke in 2019 and is still ongoing all over the world and affecting all aspects of human life, has been a challenge for all countries - including Jordan- to address the pandemic related implications without consistent and comprehensive developmental policies; which emphasized the necessity to have resilient developmental policies that can absorb any sudden shocks. In fact, addressing the accelerating needs of youth who are considered to be the backbone for the efforts towards achieving sustainable development, being the largest segment of population requires more consideration and attention from the side of policymakers to be given to including this segment in policymaking and planning. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) is considered to be the official body for making developmental policies and plans in Jordan, and it has been working since its establishment in 1984 on formulating economic and social general policies, and developing programs and plans that are needed to translate these policies into actions. This study came to analyze youth participation in developmental policies making from the point of view of Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation's concerned directors in Jordan, to make sure that MoPIC's efforts are by good practices in engaging the stakeholders in developmental policies making. It is therefore crucial for this study to investigate youth participation in making developmental policies made by the ministry from the perspective of the concerned directors.

### *1.1. Novelty and Importance*

The novelty and importance of the study is evident in its focus on studying the methodology used in making developmental policies by the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC). It is considered to be one of the few studies concerned with studying the extent of youth participation in the developmental policymaking in Jordan. In addition, its recommendations would enhance the participation of Jordanian youth in future development plans and programs prepared by the MoPIC.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the qualitative approach, which is considered to be a form of social action that stresses the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals (Zohrabi, 2013). The qualitative approach uses interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions, and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyze, and interpret the data content analysis of visual and textual materials and oral history (Mohajan, 2018). In this study semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data from the concerned directors in MoPIC, who were responsible for making developmental policies and plans, where (8) senior officials were interviewed to address the following research questions:

1. *Does MoPIC engage youth in making developmental policies?*
2. *What is the importance of engaging youth in making developmental policies?*

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Neuman (2002) asserts that a literature review is a critical and vital starting point for establishing a research inquiry and to determine its focus. This study based its arguments over the review of published literature on youth participation in policymaking, especially within the Jordanian context. It is worth mentioning here that the concept of youth participation, in general, has gained importance and momentum since the mid of 90s in the 20th century.

That was due to the endorsement of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond in 1995; which called for a full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and decision-making (United Nations, 1995; Wood, 2015). Participation is considered to be a democratic concept, where the underprivileged have an impact on decisions affecting their lives as well as the privileged (Sakil, 2018). Collins et al. (2016) assert that youth have the potential to promote positive growth and development of their communities (Collins, Augsberger, & Gecker, 2016). By reviewing the literature, this study found that several previous studies sought to achieve goals similar to the general objective of the current study in terms of analyzing youth participation in decision making, whether in planning or policymaking. The following are a few major studies that have been reviewed for this study.

Arif (2014) aimed to define the concepts of community participation in light of participatory governance and democracy, given that the citizen is a major actor in society. The study relied on the descriptive analytical approach, to review the literature about the experience of the European Union in involving society in decision-making through governance. The study concluded that there were controls for citizen and civil society participation in decision-making and that participation must be within institutional frameworks, and the study recommended the need to empower citizens through governance, to increase their participation and contribution in the decision-making process, provided that this is done through institutional frameworks.

Shukairs's (2013) study aimed to increase knowledge related to the social and political integration of youth in Arab countries based on previous experiences of research and regional initiatives on "participatory democracy", in addition to providing a practical look at possible paths for social and political inclusion of youth. The study followed the method of content analysis and case study. The study examined the positive responses of civil society organizations and the government towards social inclusion by providing a detailed presentation of 22 initiatives across the Arab region. The study concluded that there is a large tendency among youth in the region to participate in the decision-making process, and it recommended the necessity of increasing the participation of young people in political decision-making within a democratic climate as a guarantee of an effective and constructive participation process. Head's (2011) study aimed to create a conceptual framework to understand the different models of youth participation in public life in Australia. The study followed the descriptive approach and the content analysis method to analyze the interventions of (100) Australian youth within the age group (24-15) years, who participated in the work of Youth Summit in 2008. The study concluded that the several participation models cannot be applied to the ground due to political and cultural considerations. Achieving full participation of young people may not be feasible in every task or project, but at the same time, participation models provide an opportunity for young people to have a voice in the public life of society. These young people have different degrees of voice, in addition to the fact that the benefit that society can derive from their participation. The study recommended to divide the age groups of young people into segments and fix the degree of participation according to each segment. The study also recommended that participation of young people should be maximized in situations where this participation is welcomed by the decision-maker. This requires strengthening the mentoring process for young people.

Frank (2006) reviewed previous studies related to young people's participation in the planning process in the United States of America. The study adopted an age classification for young people under the age of eighteen, and analyzed the content for the study. The sample comprised (18) empirical studies conducted during the period (1987-2003). The study concluded that youth had benefited from participating in planning due to increasing awareness of decision-makers about the problems facing young people and how to address them. The study recommended the need to focus on the process of involving young people in the political and social context of their societies through the planning process, away from traditional planning patterns that exclude youth from participation.

Checkoway, Allison, and Montoya (2005) identified the participation of young people in drawing up public policy at the municipal level. The study relied on the case study approach. The San Francisco Youth Authority in the United States of America was taken as a case study, focusing on the age group (12-23) years. The study concluded that young people can participate in public policy, and this participation will have a positive impact on

several levels. However, participation depends mainly on the support provided to young people by the decision-makers. The study recommended the necessity of recognizing youth as a constructive element in society and working to involve them in drawing up public policy at the municipal level, through the existence of institutional frameworks that facilitate such participation. Ngai, Cheung, and Li (2001) studies China's youth policy formulation and youth participation. It aimed to explore Chinese youth participation in formulating youth policy in China; since contemporary China's youth policy is primarily ideological and penetrating to develop young people as faithful and moral patriots. In this regard, 53 Chinese youth policymakers, youth work theorists, youth workers, working youth, university undergraduates, and secondary school students in Beijing and Guangzhou participated to express youth's desire for policy participation. Their data revealed that the youth perceived the insufficiency of channels for participation in the formulation of youth policy. The study recommended the institutionalization of proper channels between the government and youth bodies for more engagement in youth policymaking. The current study is different from the previous studies as it studied the age group (18-30) in Jordan in addition to tackling the issue of youth participation from the perspective of concerned directors in the official body of planning and developmental policymaking in the country. Youth participation in policymaking has a lot of benefits for youth themselves and the society as a whole; where the decision-makers became more familiar with youth issues and how to address them (Frank, 2006). There are several models for youth participation in decision-making, and political and cultural considerations limit and narrow that participation (Head, 2011). However, youth participation depends mainly on the support provided to young people by the decision-makers (Checkoway et al., 2005). There are also efficient and effective communicative channels between youth and policymakers (Ngai et al., 2001). As for youth around the Arab World, there is a strong tendency among them, to participate in the decision-making process, there have not been any practical steps from the governments towards engaging them in the process of policymaking (Shukairs, 2013).

#### 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The focus of this study was on youth as the main stakeholder of the developmental policies made by MoPIC, to measure and assess their participation in the process of making policies. To that end, the study adopted Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation. This section provides more elaboration and discussion about the main topics (e.g., youth, participation, developmental policy, MoPIC) of the study from the Jordanian perspective.

##### 4.1. Youth in Jordan

According to the Arab Human Development Report, youth is in the transition phase from dependency to independency (United Nations Development Fund, 2016). Jordan is considered to be a youthful country with (61%) of the population in the age group (12-30) years, whereas according to the United Nation's statistical categorization of youth, the age group (14-25) years old consist of (19.8%) of the population. However, for this study the age group (18-30) years old was adopted; since according to Act (43) from the Jordanian Civil Law 1976, age 18 was considered to be the legal age for voting ([www.lob.jo](http://www.lob.jo)). Meanwhile, the age of 30 is the end of youth phase according to the National Youth Strategy 2019-2025 (Ministry of Youth, 2019).

Like other youth around the globe, the Jordanian youth have a lot of inspiration and dreams for the future. They have a lot of concerns and doubts regarding their future as well. The main challenge that the Jordan youth faced was how to engage youth as an integral part of the country, and how to make them protagonists of change and development rather than antagonists of society (Al Sabaileh, 2021).

Another challenge that the youth face in Jordan is the highest unemployment rates, which has been below 25% for the past three decades (OECD Development Centre, 2018). However, it rose to 50% in the fourth quarter of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2021). These horrible percentages require immediate action from the policymakers to address this severe and structured problem. This was the major rationale for studying the youth participation in this research.

#### 4.2. Participation

Participation is important from the perspective that people have a natural right to be an integral part of making decisions that will affect their lives directly. This requires their direct involvement in the decision-making process in order to determine the quality and directions of their future. In this regard, participation has several definitions and concepts. However, for this study we will outline some of the most prominent definitions for participation:

- *“The process of sharing decisions that affect the life of the individual and the society in which he/she lives in, it is how democracy is built and the standard by which democracies should be measured, and it is the main right of citizenship” (Hart, 1992).*
- *“The process of individuals voluntarily contributing to the work of interest to the group, and increasing its opportunities to make and exploit resources; that would lead to the development of their living conditions.” (Qinawi, 2017).*
- *“The individual's mental and emotional involvement in the matter of the group, which encourages him/her to contribute to the group's goals and share the responsibility for achieving those goals.” (Newstrom & Davis, 1997).*

Based on these definitions, participation in its developmental concept can be seen as revolving around the contribution of a large segment of the population. It focused on marginalized groups, youth, and women, in selecting, preparing, implementing, and following up on developmental policies, plans, and programs that are targeting these groups; which would eventually improve their living standards.

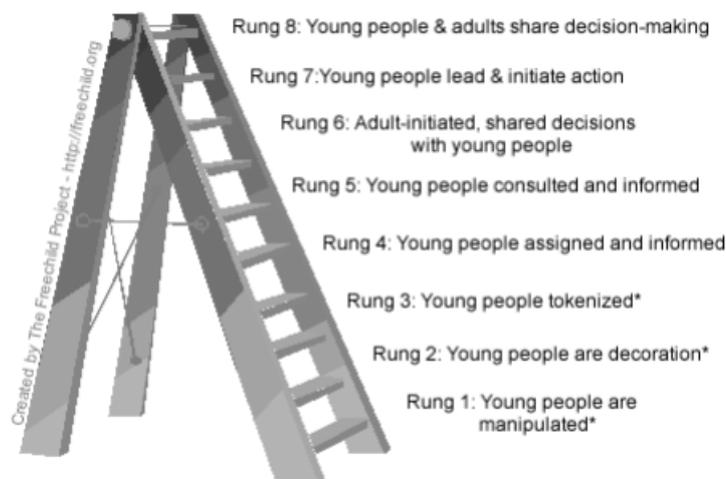
#### 4.3. Levels of Participation

There are many global models used to determine the levels of participation, which may reach up to (28) models (Barros et al., 2020), however, we will focus on Hart's (1992) ladder model which measures the real participation of young people in any public sphere (Figure 1), and consists of eight rungs as follows:

1. Manipulation occurs when young people do not understand why they are participating and what their exact role is.
2. Decoration occurs when young people participate in public event, performance, or any other activity organized for a specific purpose, however, they do not understand the meaning or intent of their involvement.
3. Tokenism occurs when young people are given a voice but have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions.
4. Assigned but informed occurs when young people understand the intentions of their participation. They know who makes the decisions concerning their involvement and why. It also has a meaningful role in planning and implementation as well.
5. Consulted and informed occurs when young people act as consultants for adults in a manner that has great integrity. The project is designed and run by adults, but children understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously.
6. Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Youth. This occurs when adults initiate participatory projects but they share decision-making authority or management with young people.
7. Youth -Initiated and Directed This occurs when youth conceptualize and carry out complex projects by working cooperatively in small or large groups, while adults may observe and assist the children, they do not interfere with the process or play a directive or managerial role.
8. Youth -Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults. This occurs when youth share decision-making authority, management, or power with adult partners and allies (Hart, 1992).

It is noted from Hart's ladder (Figure 1) that the actual participation of young people begins when young people are viewed as an important and necessary element in the decision-making process that will affect their lives and their future, as this participation reaches its highest levels when young people are viewed equally with adults. The following Figure 1 demonstrates Hart's ladder of youth participation:

## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



**Figure 1.** Hart's Ladder of young people's participation.

**Note:** Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation.

**Source:** Adapted from Hart (1992). Children from tokenism to citizenship florence: UNICEF Innocenti research centre.

### 4.4. Importance of Participation in Policymaking

The importance of participation stems from the fact that it gives voice to the voiceless, and it is worth mentioning here that participation as a new paradigm in policymaking and planning has appeared in the second half of the Twentieth century, (Holmes, 2011). However, the main benefits of participatory policymaking are having better-informed policies, more equitable policies, strengthened transparency and accountability, strengthened ownership, enhanced capacity and inclusion of marginalized groups, enhanced government capacity, and common understanding (Rietbergen-McCracken, 2020). In this regard, participation of youth in policy-making process has a lot of benefits for the youth as well as the society. Due to its benefits, engaging youth in the policymaking process falls under the concept of "nothing about us without us" (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005).

### 4.5. Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and Developmental Policies in Jordan

The role of MoPIC in making developmental policies is significant since it is the official body responsible for making developmental policies in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Therefore, it is important to address the establishment of MoPIC, its functions, and the law under which it operates, and here will rely on what is mentioned on the ministry's website ([www.mop.gov.jo](http://www.mop.gov.jo)). The Ministry of Planning was established in 1984 as the successor to the National Planning Council, and it operates under the Planning Law No. 68 of 1971. The Ministry of Planning was renamed "the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation" on October 25, 2003, to operate with the contents of the same law, functions, and duties.

### 4.6 MoPIC's National Goals

MoPIC contributes to the achievement of Jordan's national goals, which are included within Jordan's 2025 document, as follows (MoPIC, 2016):

1. Achieving sustainable growth rates to ensure a good standard of living for all citizens.
2. Creating an attractive investment environment capable of attracting foreign capital and encouraging local investments.
3. Maintaining financial and monetary stability, controlling the budget deficit, and building an efficient and low-risk financial system.
4. Reducing poverty and unemployment levels and building an effective social protection system.
5. Improving the level of services provided to citizens and fairness in their distribution.

6. Building a generation capable of creativity and innovation with high productivity.
7. Achieving a developmental balance between the governorates in light of the application of the decentralization approach.
8. Raising the efficiency of the judicial system and enhancing its independence and integrity.

To achieve the national goals, MoPIC's functions around two main areas: (i) Planning and Follow up: to participate in the formulation of the economic and social general policy, and to develop the programs and plans that are needed to implement it, and (ii) International Cooperation: to formulate policies and procedures that are meant to enhance and develop relations with donors and international financing institutions in coordination with the relevant stakeholders, emphasizing the pivotal role of the ministry in this regard.

#### 4.7. Achievements

Many achievements were realized in the areas of development and planning at the national and local levels, the most important of which were (see: [www.mop.gov.jo](http://www.mop.gov.jo)):

1. Three development plans were produced for the period (1973-1985).
2. A series of development plans and executive programs such as "The Economic and Social Plan for 1993-1997" were prepared.
3. In 2001, the program of economic and social transformation was prepared to complete a package of laws that would speed up the process of reform and modernization and prepare the private sector to be a genuine partner in the development process.
4. The three-year plan for economic and social development for the period (2004-2006) was also drawn up to adopt economic policies and measures.
5. The 2007-2009 Executive Program and the 2011-2013 Development Executive Program were also prepared based on the "kluna al'ardun" (We are All Jordan) initiative and the national agenda that identified Jordan's national priorities for the next 10 years 2006-2015.
6. The 2013-2016 government action plan and 2013-2016 governorates development programs were prepared based on sectorial strategies as well as royal guidelines and initiatives aimed at enhancing the local community's role in the decision-making process.
7. In 2015, MoPIC held and managed the meetings of the seventeen sectorial technical committees that were formed to lead the development process of the "Jordan Document 2025", and to put the outputs of the document into practice, it was agreed to prepare medium-term implementation programs, the first of these programs covers the years 2016-2019, so the executive development program for 2016-2019 has been prepared.
8. A road map was prepared for implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which represented in community awareness and setting priorities of the goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda, linking it with national priorities, and integrating it into national plans and the executive development program 2016-2019.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study used semi-structured interviews to obtain data from the concerned directors in MoPIC, who were responsible for making developmental policies and plans, where (8) senior officials were interviewed. The following two research questions were addressed by the concerned MoPIC's directors:

### 1. Does MoPic Engage Youth in Developmental Policymaking?

According to the mission statement of the ministry, the participatory approach is the adopted approach for planning and making policies. However, when addressing the concerned directors to indicate the extent of youth participation and engagement in making developmental policies, according to Hart's ladder of participation, the responses were divided on the degree of youth participation. A total of (45%) of the concerned directors indicated

that youth participation was within the fifth rung of the ladder, which is consultation and information, where youth were consulted in the decisions that would be taken, and they were also informed about how to use their interventions in the decision and the consequences of that. Meanwhile, another (45%) of them indicated that participation was within the third rung of the ladder, which is symbolism, and in this degree, it appeared that a voice was given to young people. However, the truth of the matter is that the space given to them was very narrow and they do not have the choice to participate or how to participate. While the remaining percentage (10%) indicated that participation was within the second rung of the ladder, which is decoration, or formality, where young people were also used to serve adult issues in a relatively indirect manner. It was not claimed that the cases were inspired by the young. According to the interviewees, youth do not engage in the process of making developmental policies for two reasons, subjective and objective. A total of (30%) referred to subjective reasons concerning youth themselves of being frustrated and negative while (70%) of the interviewees referred to objective reasons concerning the ministry and the environment as a whole. The following were the reasons:

- i. The absence of real institutional representation of youth, and the inability of the Ministry of Youth (MoY) to force itself as a representative.
- ii. Lack of desire among policymakers to engage youth in the process.
- iii. Lack of legislation that forces youth participation in policy-making.
- iv. An environment that is not prepared to encourage youth participation, whether from home or educational institution.

## 2. *What is the Importance of Youth Participation in Policymaking?*

The respondents agreed on the importance of youth and stated the following reasons:

- i. Young people constitute the largest percentage of Jordanian society, as the percentage of young people within the age group (12-30) years is about (6.6) million people, constituting (61%) of the total population.
- ii. The future is for young people, and the ideas of young people are better than the ideas of other groups; because they respond to their needs directly, and they have a perspective that is closer to reality and addresses challenges better.
- iii. The main problem that the Jordanian economy suffers from is youth unemployment; accordingly, developmental policies aim to solve this problem, and therefore the voice of young people must be heard regarding the proposed solutions to their problem, as their participation gives vitality to the planning process, as they carry a new idea.
- iv. Youth participation enhances the sense of belonging and ownership among young people, as the invitation to participate means that there is interest in young people as decision-makers.
- v. Youth participation is very important; to build their capabilities and prepare them to be future leaders.

Although there was consensus on the importance of youth participation, there were some reservations about this participation. Whereas (30%) of the interviewees indicated that the involvement of young people in policymaking should be controlled; since young people are characterized by excessive enthusiasm, and therefore this enthusiasm may lead to hasty and unthoughtful decisions. Within this context also, (60%) of the interviewees indicated that young people may not have sufficient maturity to participate in developmental policymaking. Hence, benefiting from previous experiences, planning should not be neglected. In addition to the lack of awareness among young people regarding the concept of development, there is a need for programs to raise awareness among young people regarding policymaking. Similarly, there is also a need for the importance of developmental plans and programs and how to effectively participate in them.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the study findings regarding youth participation in developmental policies making in Jordan, the authors recommend the following in order to enhance youth participation:

- i. Building youth capabilities in the field of planning and policymaking through technical programs.
- ii. Advocating for legislation and regulations that mandate youth participation in policy-making.
- iii. Facilitating and advocating the establishment of youth-led organizations to work as a link between youth and policymakers.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study analyzed youth participation in developmental policymaking from the perspective of MoPIC's concerned directors. Findings revealed that there was a consensus among policymakers on the importance of youth participation in policymaking. However, this participation should be managed and controlled in a manner that maximizes the benefits and minimizes deficits. The study also revealed that regarding youth participation in developmental policies in Jordan, the participation by Hart's ladder of participation, was perceived by MoPIC's directors to be within the rungs of consultation and information (45%); symbolism (45%); and decoration (10%). The reasons behind youth disengagement were subjective because of frustration and negativity from the side of the youth, and objective concerning the ministry and the environment as a whole. This was due to the absence of real institutional representation of youth, and the inability of the Ministry of Youth (MoY) to force itself as a representative. Besides, other reasons included lack of desire among policymakers to engage youth in the process; lack of legislation that forced youth participation in policymaking; and an environment that was not prepared to encourage youth participation, whether from home or educational institution. The study recommends enhancing youth participation in developmental policies making in Jordan, through building youth capabilities in the field of planning and policymaking through technical programs. It advocates legislation and regulations that mandates youth participation in policymaking and facilitates the establishment of youth-led organizations to work as a link between youth and policymakers. Finally, policymakers in Jordan must express more seriousness and interest in tackling the issue of youth engagement in policymaking; especially in developmental policymaking; since youth have the power for change.

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