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Participation in Water Management in the Mena Region – Perspectives from Refugee-Hosting Communities in Rural Jordan

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Abstract

At an annual water supply of 145 m³ per capita, Jordan is categorised by the UN as a country with extreme water scarcity. The ongoing influx of refugees from Syria into Jordan is placing a heavy burden on its already strained water resources. This brings existing deficiencies in water supply to the forefront, leading to frequent, sometimes aggressive protest among the population – refugees and Jordanians alike. The Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation and GIZ have initiated a project which should introduce participatory elements into local water management processes, hoping that this might channel the populations’ discontent into collaborative improvement efforts. The northern Jordanian villages of Samar, Kharaj and Foa’rah had been chosen for testing the new approaches and hence for this preparatory study. Main objectives are an understanding of stakeholders’ current practices and experiences in water management as well as proposing suitable forms of public participation as an approach to increase the satisfaction of water users. A special focus is on vulnerable groups (e.g. women, people with special needs). 71 semi-structured qualitative interviews and transect walks through the villages have been conducted. Refugees, local community members and representatives from the local water company were interviewed. Particular attention, also during analysis, is given to understanding social relations within the communities, water supply and demand, as well as people’s willingness and capacities for participation in water management, or limitations thereof. The tailor-made analytical framework has been developed based on Esser’s adaptation of Coleman’s Macro-Micro-Model, integrating elements of Ostrom’s CPR theory as well as theories social capital and public participation. Research results show that strong family ties are central in community life and in dealing with problems, including those related to water. Syrian refugees often remain outside these connections for various reasons. Water shortage is perceived as a major issue and refugees are particularly vulnerable to it. Jordanians use personal relationships to employees of the water company for pressing their issues. Experience with public participation is minimal. However, possible strategies for future public participation were identified within the existing social structures. Conditions for their implementation and possible limitations are discussed, too.

Keywords: Institutions, Middle East, natural resource management, public participation, water governance