Scaling Up the Masahati Students' Clubs Program in Jordan: A Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

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October 8, 2021

Executive Summary

This case profile explores how the Madrasati Initiative enhanced its scaling up strategy for the Masahati Students' Clubs program by analyzing the stakeholder ecosystem. At the school level, the Madrasati team saw that they could deepen and extend the program by engaging with parents and with "school champions" within each school's administration or faculty as partners in school improvement efforts. Looking at the national educational system, the team identified two further levels for engagement. First, they decided that working with Jordan's Ministry of Education's (MoE) field directorates could play a critical role in connecting MoE policy and action with the work with schools at the local level. Second, they identified key administrative units at the central level where collaboration around improved information could support the MoE and better enable program scale-up.

As a central part of their strategy to engage with and better serve schools and the school system, Madrasati will work to help make useful data more readily available. Madrasati decided to co-develop, with selected schools and school champions, a data dashboard that could help all schools identify and address priority concerns and provide an avenue for engagement, including regarding data about the Masahati Students' Clubs. Outcome data at the school level can in turn help increase demand for the Masahati program. Likewise, Madrasati plans to partner with the MoE's field directorates and administrative units on data, monitoring and evaluation. The new data



Figure 1: Masahati Summer Camp (2018) (Photo Credit: Madrasati Initiative)

dashboard will serve as an important resource and a way to demonstrate the power of evidence in informing effective interventions.

Context and Program Overview

The Madrasati Initiative is a non-profit organization with a mandate to support Jordan's public schools. The current context is challenging, as an already strained system has had to cope with a major influx of students because of the Syrian refugee crisis. Increased bullying and conflict occurred following the arrival of Syrian refugees; some schools adopted a double-shift system where Jordanian students attend school in the morning and Syrian students attend in the afternoon. In this environment, there are concerns about teachers feeling overstretched, undervalued, or demotivated, and students becoming disengaged from school. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has been working to address such school climate challenges, yet there is limited data available to guide the response. Madrasati seeks to build on its longstanding relationship with the MoE to collaborate around effective solutions.

Extracurricular activities, including sports, art, and music are a recognized part of Jordan's education system, but their availability is limited, particularly in the context of the refugee influx.[1] Madrasati hypothesized that supporting schools to address this problem could provide new engagement opportunities for students, improve social cohesion in the schools, and enhance learning and educational outcomes. In 2015 Madrasati developed Masahati Students' Clubs, offering inclusive after-school programs where students from both school shifts and different nationalities and backgrounds can explore their interests with participating teachers. Topics include human rights, sports, photography, and creative writing, with social and emotional learning and common values (e.g., equality, respect) embedded in all the clubs' activities. Madrasati provides capacity building and training for teachers on how to run inclusive and intersectional clubs, and the teachers in turn co-create and manage the clubs at their school. The chance to work together around shared interests

[1] Morrice, L., Salem, H., Al Nahi, S. and Delprato, M. (2020) Learning and Social Cohesion in Schools in Jordan. Centre for International Education, University of Sussex, UK.

can be motivating for both teachers and students; Madrasati sees it as a pathway to foster community for students and teachers and to improve academic outcomes as well.

> *"I participated in the theater club. Among the other club participants were groups of girls who previously had many hassles between each other. As we learned acting, these groups of girls put their differences aside and became friends."*
>
> - *13-year-old student in Al Dafyaneh mixed secondary school (2017)*

Madrasati has successfully engaged with 87 schools to set up Masahati Students' Clubs. The early piloting work was evaluated in 3 two-year cycles, comprising 45 schools in all. These early, small-scale evaluations showed promising results in areas such as:

- students' interpersonal acceptance, rejection of violence, and sense that their voice mattered
- school attendance
- grades (among low-performing students)
- teachers' job satisfaction.



Figure 2: Students in Engineering Club (2018) (Photo Credit: Madrasati Initiative)

Madrasati is now seeking to scale the program to more students and schools in Jordan. To achieve their goal of reaching one million students in Jordan by 2034, Madrasati will need to introduce Masahati Students' Clubs in approximately 2,500 schools, about 60% of Jordan's public schools.

> *"As a teacher in the students' clubs, I am now closer to my students. I learned more about their real personalities... their joys and sorrows... their hobbies, and some of their parents."*
>
> - *Um Manee Primary Mixed School in North Amman's Masahati Students' Clubs Coordinator (2018)*

Scaling Up in a Large System: Changing Perspectives on Stakeholder Engagement

Even before examining the stakeholder system more fully, Madrasati knew that achieving scale at levels like one million students will require:

- acceptance and enthusiasm at each school, for example because teachers are critical to the program;
- full support from the MoE, as every school needs permission from the MoE to participate in unofficial programs like Masahati; and
- increased demand for after-school activities, not only from the MoE, but also from the MoE's partners who support extra-curricular activities and safe schools.

However, Masahati's emphasis on social and emotional learning, and on non-academic content, may intuitively seem to be a poor fit with a school system that views academic achievement as the top priority. While the MoE has become increasingly open to new programs and approaches following the influx of Syrian refugees to the school system, neither schools nor the MoE have access to current data on evolving school climate problems. Considering these challenges, Madrasati asked: how can we engage with the Jordanian public-school systems to extend Masahati to students and schools across Jordan?

Madrasati took this question to a workshop on stakeholder engagement, where they were encouraged to look at the larger ecosystem of the public schools. Madrasati used to focus on their direct relationship with schools and how the MoE could support them in offering and growing the after-school clubs. Now, in the workshop, the Madrasati team examined how different players within the MoE and the school system interacted, with Madrasati itself no longer in the centre of the picture. This new perspective enabled them to identify a pivotal group within the MoE – the field directorates – as part of the solution to their scaling challenge. As Noora El Wer, an evaluation expert working with Madrasati, explained, "Once we were able to take a step back from [our] stakeholder map or sideline ourselves, we understood that the field directorates can take on [our current] role and that could be a good pathway to scaling."

Jordan's MoE has 42 field directorates, who support, mentor, and supervise schools based on their geographic location and connect the schools with the MoE. While decision-making

in the MoE is historically quite centralized, the field directorates are part of School and Directorate Development Program, a decentralizing reform. The field directorates are both close enough to the schools to observe the beneficial impact of Masahati Students' Clubs and influential enough in the system to communicate this to central decision-makers at the MoE. Madrasati has worked closely with the field directorates on other programs but had not yet involved them in Masahati. Based on these past collaborations, Madrasati had seen decision-making flowing from the MoE to the field directorates and down to the schools and to Madrasati itself. From their new system-based perspective, they began to view the directorates differently, as potential connectors for two-way influence. Madrasati saw an opportunity to build a stronger link between what is happening in the schools and policymaking at the MoE through the field directorates. If the field directorates can serve as connectors, they could inspire change throughout the school system. They could gain understanding of school climate challenges in specific schools and Masahati's success at the school level, build support within the MoE, help introduce Masahati to more schools, and help deepen the impact of the program in schools where it already operates.

From their new "stakeholder ecosystem" perspective, Madrasati saw they could align this strategy with the incentives facing field directorates. Field directorates are important to the MoE's decentralization reforms and are motivated to demonstrate good school performance to the MoE. As Tala Sweis, Madrasati's Executive Director, put it: "Our perspective or the way we saw the whole room also changed."



Figure 3: Students in Music Club (2019)
(Photo Credit: Madrasati Initiative)

Madrasati's New Stakeholder Strategy

Instead of viewing the public school system at two levels – schools and the MoE – Madrasati now saw three: the schools, the MoE's field directorates, and the central administration at the MoE. To support sustainable impact at scale, Madrasati developed a strategy to engage at all three levels.

1. School Level: Engaging Program Champions and Parents

Through their past implementation cycles, Madrasati learned that most participating schools have a "school champion" who serves as the point person for the clubs. During this scaling up phase, Madrasati wants to strengthen and further develop the champion role. To accomplish this, Madrasati plans to have the school champions co-design the clubs in their school and help with monitoring and evaluation. The champions know which indicators would be of interest to their schools and can help Madrasati develop tools that will be useful for the schools.

> *"I am always ready to open the school doors for any student at any time, even if there are no funds for Masahati. I am willing to volunteer and put all the time and effort needed for my students"*
>
> - *Jaber Al Sarhan School for Boys' Masahati Students' Club Coordinator (2017)*

Another theme of the stakeholder workshop was to identify ways to better engage and raise respect for socially undervalued stakeholders. From their past work with parents, Madrasati knew parental participation would add grassroots accountability for the schools, deepen public interest in the quality of education, and energize efforts to decentralize the education sector. Once parents become involved, they can help students, schools, and administrators improve outcomes. As part of their engagement with schools around monitoring, evaluation, and programming, Madrasati will work with parents on identifying and addressing school challenges. Madrasati will encourage including parents on relevant school and directorate committees.

Madrasati believes that as schools face the challenge of the refugee influx, they lack usable data on the school climate and on possible responses. As part of the school engagement strategy, Madrasati is developing a "data dashboard" that will help schools rapidly identify

emerging problems, develop solutions, track progress, and make suitable adjustments. Madrasati sees the dashboard as a service to schools, a concrete way to help schools directly address their pressing concerns, and thereby also as an avenue for stronger relationships for Madrasati at the school level. In particular, Madrasati plans to work directly with selected school champions in the initial design of the new data dashboard.

At the school level, the new strategy for stakeholder engagement will strengthen Madrasati's relationship with school champions, parents, teachers, and principals, and help them to both recognize Masahati's value and deepen its impact. Engaging around the dashboard can draw more teachers and principals into the program and motivate parents to encourage their children's participation. With teachers, parents, and administrators all working with the same information, together they can discover ways to improve the school's implementation of the program to achieve better student outcomes.

2. Intermediate Level: Engaging Field Directorates

Madrasati now sees the field directorates as playing a pivotal role on the path to scaling up Masahati. Madrasati will engage with the field directorates on monitoring and evaluating the Masahati program and on using the school-level data dashboard. By making data readily available to field directorates and by joining the field directorates on a journey to discover how to improve school climate and school results, Madrasati hopes to build a collaborative relationship with the directorates that can reinforce improvement efforts. As a result, they hope the field directorates will recognize Masahati as a school improvement initiative. In their role as connectors, the field directorates can then communicate school-level success to the central administration.

The data dashboard will include school-level information, both outcome data and stories. To ensure the indicators are salient for field directorates and the MoE, the data dashboard will align with the four key areas of the national School and Directorate Development Program: community engagement, leadership, teaching and learning, and school environment. Madrasati is designing the dashboard so that field directorates will have the same information for all their assigned schools. This can help them make evidence-based decisions to improve school quality and demonstrate improved performance to the MoE.

3. Central Level: MoE Administrative Units

At the central MoE level, Madrasati will work with administrative units including the Supervising and Training Administration, the Education Quality and Accountability Unit (EQAU) office, and the Minister's Office. EQAU, for example, is a special unit designed to add accountability and improve the quality of education in Jordan. Supporting EQAU in developing and accessing information from the field, including via the dashboard, could provide EQAU with valuable data without requiring additional MoE resources for data collection. In turn, EQAU can support Masahati scaling efforts by recommending the clubs and the use of the dashboard upon completion to the MoE.

The school system engagement strategy – with schools, field directorates and the central administration – is in turn part of a broader stakeholder strategy including, for example, the media. To strengthen their relationship with national media outlets, Madrasati envisions providing data and human-interest pieces about schools participating in Masahati, or about the value of extracurricular activities and social and emotional learning more broadly. Particular stories and supporting data will be a natural result of the data and monitoring strategy Madrasati is using with the school system. Media partnerships can support Madrasati's scaling efforts throughout Jordan by fostering demand for the program and highlighting participating schools' achievements, which will reflect well upon school and MoE staff and leadership.



Figure 4: Student Leadership Committee setting up the space for Masahati Students' Club (Photo Credit: Madrasati Initiative)

"Helping make my school look better gave me such a good feeling. This club was not like anything else we do in school, and I was so drawn to it. What I learned from the teacher is so important to me and gave me a feeling of appreciation for everything and belonging to the land, and I told my parents at home everything the teacher taught us."

- 11-year-old student and agriculture club participant from the Al Mafraq School for Boys (2018)

The work of the Saving Brains Learning Platform Team to engage with this innovation and prepare this profile was made possible by the support of Grand Challenges Canada (funded by the Government of Canada), Porticus, and the Saving Brains Partnership.

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We extend a thank you to the **Madrasati Initiative** for sharing their story. For more information about their work, please visit their website: https://www.madrasati.jo/

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