

Madrasati

Madrasati is a non-profit organization working to help transform educational experiences in Jordan. It was founded by Queen Rania in 2008 to support the country's most vulnerable and underperforming public schools.

In 2015, Madrasati had a turning point in its operational model with the creation of Masahati Students' Clubs. Madrasati had seen that valuable, memorable experiences in schools often arise from personal relationships and extracurricular activities. The Masahati program developed student clubs as inclusive spaces where all students, regardless of nationality and background, feel welcome and can explore their interests with participating teachers. Topics include human rights, sports, photography, and creative writing, with socio-emotional learning and values of equality and respect embedded in all clubs' activities. This work is also rooted in a recognized national priority: social cohesion. In 2015, Madrasati also developed the "Proud to Be a Teacher" initiative. This program builds and reinforces teachers' motivation and capacity by showing them appreciation, giving them new professional development opportunities and encouraging engagement in the issues their schools face.

The current context is challenging, as an already strained system has had to cope with a major influx of students due to the Syrian refugee crisis. Increased bullying and conflict occurred following the arrival of Syrian refugees; the government of Jordan adopted a double-shift school 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 about students becoming disengaged from school. Madrasati seeks to build on its longstanding relationship with Jordan's Ministry of Education to collaborate around effective solutions.

Madrasati has reached over 16,000 children and 87 schools through the Masahati program. The early piloting work was evaluated in three two-year cycles, comprising 45 schools in all. These 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; and
- teachers' job satisfaction.

Madrasati is now seeking to scale the program, with the goal of reaching one million students by 2034. This will require introducing Masahati Students' Clubs in approximately 2,500 schools, about 60% of Jordan's public schools.

Madrasati was developed in a collaboration with the [Jordanian Ministry of Education](#) and local public schools. Its work is supported by the [Humanitarian Education Accelerator](#) and the [European Commission](#). The development of this case example was supported by [Porticus](#). For more on Madrasati please see: <https://www.madrasati.io/>

Highlights from Madrasati’s scaling experience and its relationship to the “Emerging Perspectives on Scaling Whole Child Development in Adversity”:

Theme 1: Connect Widely

“Align and mobilize the wider stakeholder ecosystem – including organizations and people inside and outside of those organizations – to deliver core program benefits to families, as well as specific value to all stakeholder groups relevant to scaling.”

Madrasati delivers its program through Jordan’s public schools, so good relations with the school system are important to success. In setting strategy for implementation and scaling, Madrasati has worked to take account of the priorities and motivations of relevant people, from students, parents and teachers to principals and Ministry administrators. In this way, Madrasati shares ownership of the program’s extracurricular activities.

- Rather than relying on “pushing” the program to the schools based on central Ministry policies, Madrasati develops strong relationships at every school, so that there is “pull” for the program from children, parents, teachers and school administrators. For example, teacher participation, like school participation, is voluntary, and Madrasati trains and supports teachers to develop activities based on their own students’ interests. Madrasati thereby taps into teachers’ motivation to help create a better school environment in challenging times. Attention to students’ interests means that they are also energized, and student responses in turn reinforce teacher motivation.

Challenge identified

Since Masahati’s after-school programming must be implemented within an academic year, there is always time pressure to make program decisions. As much as Madrasati seeks to engage community and other stakeholders beyond the school in the process, time constraints make this challenging.

- Madrasati’s staff members are assigned to approximately four schools each. They spend 80% of their time in the field, visiting their partner schools and engaging in a supportive way with school staff. Madrasati’s name (“My School” in Arabic) signals its commitment to each school. Typically, there is a “school champion” for the program (for example, a student or a teacher), a role Madrasati encourages. The team also works closely with each school principal to understand and support their often distinctive priorities for their school.

- Principals' priorities are not always the same as those more generally set out by the Ministry of Education. Working with the Humanitarian Education Accelerator, Madrasati identified the mid-level Ministry of Education regional field directorates as potentially pivotal in reconciling these two perspectives. Madrasati is exploring collaborations with the directorates to assure that they feel supported in their work as well. In sum, Madrasati distinguishes, and attends to, three levels within the school system: the schools themselves, the field directorates and central Ministry leadership.

Theme 2: Discover, Learn and Adapt

“Harness discovery, learning and adaptation as a primary engine of scaling and capacity building. Base learning on a combination of rigorous approaches to data, continuous tracking and analysis of outcomes, and inclusive, peer-to-peer community and family engagement.”

Madrasati's program has continuously evolved, based on qualitative and quantitative feedback. Madrasati aims to tailor program content to the particular context of each community and school, although this decentralized approach must be reconciled with the generally centralized structure of the school system.

- In some communities, there were high drop-out rates because of child labour. Madrasati adapted its program to address this problem, for example by recruiting working children, offering them academic programming after school to avoid drop-out, and working with children and parents on advocacy (including through arts programming).
- When evidence of domestic violence, gender inequality and related problems emerged, Madrasati shaped their program content to tackle disparities between women and men, for example by including human rights and gender equality themes in club activities, providing examples of female role models, and using community events to reflect on gender equality and parenting practices.

Challenge identified

In developing or supporting monitoring and evaluation systems, it has been challenging for Madrasati to find an equilibrium between a decentralized approach tailored to each school and application of standards recognized by the Government. Frameworks, indicators and outcomes important to the government may also be different from those that matter to external donors. Promoting communities of practice might help to align the expectations of donors and the government.

Theme 3: Empower Leadership

“Unlock, build and empower leadership locally, and across the delivery system, to mobilize communities and assure local accountability for impact.”

Madrasati encourages leadership by teachers and principals. Madrasati’s training for teachers enables them to take initiative, complementing principals’ leadership; as noted above, teachers design their own activities, and Madrasati staff work directly with principals to support their priorities.

- It was principals who solved a daunting challenge for the student clubs: how to schedule what are normally after-school activities once the government had introduced doubled-shifted school days. This way of organizing the school day separated Jordanians and Syrians and left only one hour between shifts. School principals managed to reschedule classes to create more time between shifts; they organized student clubs during that period and on Saturdays. Importantly, Jordanians and Syrians could then participate together.
- In a school where the program was operating but without full support from the school, one teacher in particular was convinced of the clubs’ value. She spent almost a year working to convince the school community to fully embrace the program; she even marshalled support from outside the school. But her tenacity paid off. This teacher is now recognized as a leader by her colleagues, and students at the school are enjoying the full benefits of Masahati. To give greater recognition to teachers leading extracurricular activities, Madrasati is now working with the Ministry of Education to include Masahati training in teachers’ professional accreditations.
- Some Masahati clubs that focus on human rights, specifically women’s rights and equality, have faced opposition from more conservative parts of the community. However, Madrasati is committed to challenging traditional perspectives. Although this process can be at times difficult, it has also been rewarding. Children and some teachers have developed their own understanding of gender equality based on their own experiences. Over the years, Madrasati has shifted away from using technical language about human rights to make these clubs more acceptable locally. Today, gender equality is approached by focusing on the sheer well-being of children, pointing out what equality means for them and how it can benefit their future. These messages are in turn embedded within Masahati activities. This methodology was developed by a Madrasati team member pursuing a master’s degree in Women’s Studies; it was funded by UN Women.

Theme 4: Rebalance Roles

“Rebalance and renew roles of the front line (direct contact with families) and back end (support, management and program development functions) to build the agency, and align with the priorities, of local communities and stakeholders (at the front end), and to strengthen a culture of ‘collaborative leadership’ (at the back end).”

Rebalancing roles is a priority for Madrasati as they scale up. Madrasati staff have been deeply involved in implementing Masahati since 2016 and have considerable ownership in the program. The team knows that to reach 2,500 schools they need to work out how to pass this ownership to more people. This will include reconsidering people's roles and promoting local responsibility for outcomes.

- During their scaling journey, Madrasati has always worked to empower people at the front line: children, teachers, parents and Madrasati staff members. More recently, the work with field directorates to scale up the program has underscored the importance of agency at the level of each school. In this new phase, Madrasati is reducing Masahati's mandatory components by replacing them with modular elements that schools can adapt based on their own needs and preferences.

Theme 5: Play a Long Game

“Treat scaling as a living, evolving process aimed at reshaping relationships through large and diverse systems over the long term. Reaching population scale across geographies can take years, and both during and after scale is achieved circumstances and delivery contexts change. This, along with cost pressures, can lead to impact degrading over time if the program is simply transferred to a large implementing organization, without allowing for active management of its on-going evolution. Ideally, innovators should plan to continue to support the scaling journey in new roles, working to embed the program in large systems, supporting on-going learning and adaptation, and innovating to solve the new challenges that scale imposes at different stages.”

Since 2008, Madrasati has cultivated a partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE), a relationship that has placed it in a strong position to scale up the Masahati program. Over the years, Madrasati has been rethinking its role with the MoE and conducting diverse experiments to adapt Masahati to arising challenges and the ever-evolving demands of targeted populations. Currently, the organization is pursuing the vertical and horizontal expansion of Masahati, while addressing with the MoE the remaining barriers to the program's expansion.

- Many of Madrasati's team members have been with the organization since 2008, maintaining a longer relationship with the MoE's team than some of MoE's high-level leaders, who usually rotate annually. The resulting stable support from middle managers has helped

Madrasati introduce its programs to new heads of administration. Few other non-governmental organizations have developed such longstanding collaborations with the MoE.

- When Masahati was launched, the plan was to establish four clubs in each school, two managed by teachers and two by experts from civil society. While this approach was successful at the beginning, it created its own set of challenges. Civil society participants became dependent on Madrasati's funds, and the model was expensive to implement. To overcome these difficulties and enable sustainable scaling, Madrasati introduced a new model based on building teachers' capacity to lead student clubs and manage the full program.
- However, this teacher-centered approach also encountered a funding challenge: Although the MoE supports Masahati and intends to scale it following this approach, they lack the financial resources to compensate teachers for their involvement in extracurricular activities. Since teachers are civil servants, they cannot work outside regular hours without compensation. The MoE has helped address this challenge by authorizing schools to dedicate two weekly slots during regular school hours for extracurricular activities. Madrasati is also testing a way to leverage teachers' time by having students step up to leadership roles in the clubs. Under this model, teachers remain involved by working with student leaders during regular school time.
- Because of funding and time constraints, Madrasati cannot reach all schools in Jordan at once. Instead, they planned to start with the lowest-performing schools. These schools are also generally priorities for the MoE. Working with MoE field directorates, the program selected 100 schools by starting with an open call and then narrowing down based on factors such as high drop-out rates, low performance, and high levels of violence or bullying. The funds to reach these 100 schools were granted by the EU.

The Foundation

Focus on recognizing and building human dignity, respect and agency of the people the program aims to serve, and of everyone involved in delivering, supporting or enabling the work.

Masahati is all about human dignity. In recent times, a gap has opened up between private and public education in Jordan. One way this manifests is that children from wealthier families, in private schools, benefit from a rich range of after-school activities. Masahati is addressing this gap by providing opportunities for all children, specifically including the most vulnerable, to co-design after-school programming, develop new skills, and express themselves in their own voice. In this way, Masahati directly promotes children's agency and dignity.