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Public Policy



SALAR International 

Book Launch and Expert Discussions

The Governance and Local Development Institute (GLD) of the University of Gothenburg and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR International) invites you to join us in discussions and the book launch for *Decentralization, Local Governance, and Inequality in the Middle East and North Africa* edited by Kristen Kao and Ellen Lust.

Date: April 22, 2025
13.00 – 16.30

Venue: Online

[Register your online participation](#)

Decentralization in the MENA Region

Decentralization is seen as a way to bring government closer to citizens, strengthen accountability, and enhance efficiency. It is expected to improve information flow, transparency, and civic engagement, enabling local leaders to better address community needs. By encouraging competition between localities and increasing citizen influence, decentralization can enhance governance, promote fair resource distribution, and help reduce national inequalities. However, critics argue that these benefits are not always realized, particularly in developing contexts where key conditions for success may be lacking.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, decentralization has been a relatively recent topic of discussion and implementation. The states that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s established highly centralized regimes aimed at driving social and economic transformation. However, the 2011 Arab Uprisings revealed deeper economic disparities and weaker central political control than previously assumed, highlighting the need for governance reforms, including decentralization.

Volume Overview

Many scholars, policymakers, and development practitioners expect decentralization will increase participation, strengthen political representation, and improve social welfare, but little is known about the experiences of communities in the context of decentralization – particularly in the Middle East and North

Africa. This volume directs our attention toward the ways in which decentralization is “lived locally” by citizens of the MENA region, underscoring the simultaneous influences of individual-level factors (e.g., gender, education) and local context (e.g., development levels, electoral institutions) on governance processes and outcomes.

A group of international scholars brings together methodologically diverse, original research in Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia to expand the decentralization literature. Following a preface by Hicham Alaoui, the empirical chapters are arranged into three thematic sections: subnational variations in the relationships between central and local actors, citizen engagement with state and non-state institutions, and the extent to which representatives reflect their local communities. Together, these sections provide important insights into governance, participation, and representation in the MENA and open new questions for furthering the study of governance and local development. Only by unpacking perspectives and governance experiences at the micro-level can we understand how decentralization policies affect citizens’ everyday lives.

SALAR International experience from the MENA Region

SALAR International is the international cooperation arm of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, working to strengthen democracy and good governance at the local level and has long experience from working in MENA Region. A core competence of SALAR focuses on the advancement of decentralization reforms and inclusive governance, which it has supported in different parts of the world for the last 25 years.

SALAR has developed a range of methodologies to support conflict-sensitive and locally-led resilience and recovery in different country contexts, including most recently in Ukraine (recovery planning in conflict affected municipalities) and Türkiye (roadmaps for recovery in earthquake affected municipalities).

SALAR was a partner of the EU-funded Decentralisation and Local Development programme in Syria until 2011. It is currently implementing the Sida-financed Resilience in Local Governance (RESLOG) project in Lebanon and Türkiye, as a part of Sweden’s response to the Syria Crisis, as well as the Inclusive Local Governance (INLOG) project, which targets five countries in the MENA region – Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Syria.

SALAR has recently also implemented the Sida funded Local Governance Development in Iraq (LOGDEVI) and the Tunisian Local Governance Programme.

Goals:

The launch is an opportunity for attendees to learn about the book and discuss the findings and their implications. Specifically, we will:

1. Consider how the findings resonate with others’ experience
2. Explore the practical implications together with SALAR International and their experience in the region
3. Identify remaining open questions to be answered

Programme

Time	Agenda
13.00- 14.15	<p>Session 1: Overview of the book and its findings, with clarifying Q&As only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brief introduction and overview – Kristen Kao and Ellen Lust - Decentralisation and boundary-making in Tunisia – Intissar Kherigi - Citizen-Candidate linkages in municipal elections, Tunisia – Alexandra Blackman - Gender and representation in municipal elections, Morocco – Marwa Shalaby - Local elections and service provision, Lebanon – Christina Parreira - Gender and service provision mosques – Steven Brooke
	<p>*Note: we will record these presentations but not the following discussion.</p>
14.45-15.00	Coffee break
15.00 – 16.15	<p>Panel discussion with practical experiences from working in Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia and elsewhere in the MENA Region, and the strategic value of engaging in fostering decentralisation, local governance and local sustainable development in the MENA-region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction and overview of SALAR Internationals work in the MENA region – Ryan Knox, Managing Director of SALAR International - Stories from Lebanon and local government in crises management – Souraya Hammoud, SALAR International - Stories from Iraq and working with decentralisation from below – Gunnar Andersson, SALAR International - Stories from Tunisia and SALAR Internationals work supporting the decentralisation reform – Mohamed Rachid Esseghir <p style="margin-top: 20px;">Ellen Lust will moderating, discussing resonance with practitioners, additional implications, and open questions.</p>
16.15 – 16.30	Final thoughts from the audience and wrap-up

