



Iraq Foundation  
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United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)  
بعثة الأمم المتحدة لمساعدة العراق (يوناميس)

# Strengthening Women's Political Participation in Iraq

A Project Supported by  
United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI)

## Narrative Report

Phase Two  
April 1, 2020 - November 15, 2020

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## **Introduction**

As part of phase 2 of the project "Strengthening Women's Political Participation in Iraq", being implemented by the Iraq Foundation with support from the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and in cooperation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), a specialized training course has been organized targeting a group of women and girls, active in political and civic affairs in Iraq to help them acquire better skills that would empower them to play political roles. The training material has been developed based on the study prepared by the Iraq Foundation in early 2020 about the challenges facing women's political engagement in Iraq, with these challenges highlighting many levels related to the cultural system, laws, the economic condition of women, in addition to other obstacles. Based on the recommendations suggested by the study, there is a need for promoting the legal and political environment, conducive to activate women's participation, and working on the social and cultural environment and stereotypes, in addition to developing women skills that are instrumental for effective political roles.

Hence, the Iraq Foundation and its affiliate, the Iraq Foundation for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights, worked on this last need by organizing specialized training for a group of women activists who are active in both political and civic affairs in Iraq to help them acquire better skills that would enable them to have political roles in a manner that ties this training to the needs of the group.

### **This brief report shows:**

- 1) Course of preparation for the training
- 2) About the training
- 3) Training workshop agenda
- 4) The most significant challenges the training team had faced
- 5) Success stories
- 6) The most prominent remarks provided by the training team about the participants
- 7) Recommendations of training participants

We should note that the delivery mechanism for the TOT and the training had to be altered because of COVID 19. Whereas the original plan envisaged the regional expert meeting with the trainers for two days in the Kurdish region, the TOT was instead conducted via an online platform.

Similarly, the Foundation had planned for the four-day training to be held for the entire group of trainees in the Kurdish region, these plans needed to be changed because of COVID 19, which imposed travel restrictions on the women and restrictions on larger gatherings. Instead, trainers traveled to the provinces and

trainings were held in each province for smaller groups of women with no more than 11 at a time.

These measures meant that there was far less travel involved in Phase Two of the project, and the Foundation was able to strictly observe safety measures without loss of quality to the training.

### **1) Procedures in preparation for training:**

Phase Two of the project relied on the findings and recommendations of the Needs Assessment Report of Phase One, which stressed the need to provide training for young women leaderships in defined areas.

In preparation for the training, the Iraq Foundation carried out the following:

1. Selecting a regional expert to prepare training materials
2. Designing the training package
3. Selection of trainers
3. Training- of- trainers for those who will be delivering the training to young women participants.
4. Selection of young women from several provinces to participate in the training

Iraq Foundation selected and signed a contract with Ms. Manar Zaiter, a regional expert from Lebanon, to prepare the training materials. The Foundation also contracted with Dr. Bushra Al-Obeidi as the project's Iraq expert. ESCWA assisted the project by consulting with the regional expert and providing a regional perspective on such trainings. The Iraq Foundation provided the regional expert with a copy of the Needs Assessment Report from Phase 1 of the project. Based on this, the regional expert developed the training package in cooperation with the local gender expert and the Iraq Foundation's team in Baghdad, in addition to the team of selected trainers. The topics of the package were chosen based on the needs of women who participated in Phase One of the project, and who stressed the need to promote their skills in four areas: leadership, advocacy, media, and communication. Hence, the package includes these four themes.

The Iraq Foundation solicited resumes from Iraqi trainers who are known for their training expertise, some of whom had worked with the Foundation previously. The Foundation selected five trainers from the pool of resumes, based on subject matter knowledge and training experience.

At a later stage, the Foundation cast a wide net to identify young women for the training. In cooperation with UNAMI, the Foundation developed criteria for the potential trainee candidates and an application form. Also in cooperation with UNAMI, the Foundation developed a list of NGOs and individuals in several provinces who were then asked to nominate young women activists. The Foundation reviewed and evaluated applications and selected applicants on the strength of their past

engagement in civic life and the prospects of their using the training for future activism.

## **2) Training Content:**

**The first theme is about leadership.** It aims to build the women activists' capacities related to leadership and areas of conflict management, participation in and influencing public affairs. The theme provides a framework for the roles expected of leadership in connection with transformations, needs and public problems and then the attributes and standards that would build effective leaderships. The theme addresses a framework related to the importance of political awareness in the buildup of leaderships. Finally, the theme stimulates the energies of young women so that they can engage in public work.

**The second theme is about communication with decision-makers and the public.** This theme enhances the female trainees' skills in arts, techniques and means of communication with the local community and the decision-makers. The theme also provides skills specific to the pre-communication stages, i.e. in relation to owning the issue and being familiar with it, to knowing the context and its problems, knowing the audience, and accepting diversity.

**The third theme addresses mobilization and advocacy issues.** This theme seeks to enable the female trainees to identify the needs of the local community and interact with them and design demand-driven campaigns for these issues in addition to the skills of devising mobilization and lobbying initiatives around them. The theme provides an approach to advocacy, its reasons, and the importance of the principles of effective advocacy, and then it focuses on issues related to advocacy steps and the track of the advocacy plan. This theme also focuses on the context of alliances and networking and their importance in public life in general and for women leaders in particular.

**The fourth theme is related to media communication** in terms of enhancing the female trainees' skills in communication, whether traditional or social media, and in effective interaction with the various platforms.

The four themes were based on a four-day training program held from nine A.M to four P.M. The same approach to training was followed throughout, with a variety of activities and exercises that included the following elements:

- The objective of the session.
- The time allotted for the session (usually 90 minutes), but still leaving it up to the trainer to set and handle the time according to the circumstances of each session.
- The package includes an introductory knowledge-based framework that helps the trainers and the trainees explore concepts and facilitates the training.

- Each session includes one or more exercises to make the training as interactive as possible.
- Proposals on exercises that could be used, pursued, or used in similar training workshops have been included in some sessions.
- The sessions included some questions that helped the trainers to open and deepen discussions on related issues.
- Attached to the package was a template for the daily evaluation form that helps in developing training based on the trainees' feedback and suggestions.
- In addition to the four themes, the training package includes some preliminary information and basic directions to help use the training package.

It is important to note that the design of the package aimed at providing guidance and assistance in facilitating the training and not as a list of instructions, especially as the training team is highly experienced and has already cooperated with the Iraq Foundation.

In order to develop the training package and ensure training consistency, the Iraq Foundation organized a two-day training-of-trainers with the regional expert to discuss the draft package and take account of trainers' comments thereon in terms of both form and content. At the end of the TOT, the regional expert, in cooperation with the local Iraqi expert, worked on developing the package based on the outcomes of the discussions with the trainers and on their oral and written remarks.

### **3) About the training:**

The training targeted a group of young women who are active in public life in Iraq. The training workshops were organized during September 2020 and extended until the first week of November. The trainings covered the governorates of Najaf, Nineveh, Salahuddin, Basra, Baghdad, Diwania, and Kirkuk. The Foundation cooperated in this regard with a number of local organizations operating under the umbrella of the Iraq Foundation in those governorates.

Each workshop spanned four consecutive training days, and the training was facilitated by a training team that had received the TOT or with whom the Foundation had previously cooperated. They are specialized in training on the four training themes.

The training team included: Dr. Fouad Al-Rubaie, Professor Haider Al-Awadi, Professor Hogar Jetoo, Dr. Asma Al-Qaisy, and Professor Khidr Domali.

The change of delivery mechanism due to COVID 19 resulted in savings in the travel and per diem budgets. Consequently, the Foundation was able to add two provinces, Diwaynia and Kirkuk, to the original five designated for the training. We were thus able to increase the number of trainees from the 40-45 projected in the proposal to 67 young women who completed the training.

The Iraq Foundation was very pleased to host Ms. Alice Walpole, UNAMI Deputy SRSG, and Dr. Yousra Kareem Muhsin, Director of the Office for Women's

Empowerment, on the first day of training in Baghdad, November 4, 2020. Both the DSRSG and Dr. Muhsin addressed the trainees and observed the morning training session.

Governorate	Date	Number of trainees
Najaf	16 - 19 September 2020	9
Salahuddin	8 - 11 September 2020	11
Basra	23 - 26 September 2020	10
Nineveh	23 - 26 September 2020	9
Kirkuk	26 - 29 October 2020	9
Diwaniya	19 - 22 October 2020	9
Baghdad	4 - 7 November 2020	10

### Training workshop agenda

Day 1	
Opening session: Introductions, work program and training rules	
The first session: Introduction to leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling the participants to grasp the concept of leadership.</li> <li>○ Enhancing the participants' knowledge of leadership requirements in terms of qualities and skills</li> </ul>
Coffee Break	
Second session: Women as political actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling the participants to analyze the challenges that preclude women from playing leadership roles.</li> <li>○ Enabling the participants to know the mechanisms of addressing these challenges.</li> </ul>
Lunch	
Session Three: Impact on Public Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling the participants to understand the importance of playing a leadership role.</li> <li>○ Enhancing the participants' abilities to understand and influence public policies.</li> </ul>
Day 2	
The first session: Introduction to advocacy and lobbying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enhancing the participants' knowledge of the concepts of advocacy and lobbying.</li> <li>○ Enhancing the participants'</li> </ul>

	knowledge of the advocacy process steps.
<b>Coffee break</b>	
Session Two: Steps in the Advocacy Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowing the steps of the advocacy process.</li> <li>○ Enhancing participants' skills in planning an advocacy campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Lunch</b>	
Third session: An application session on the advocacy track	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing participants with basic skills for planning advocacy campaigns</li> </ul>
<b>Day 3</b>	
Ice-breaking communication exercise	
The first session: The concept, elements, and strategies of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling the participants to grasp the concept, elements, and strategies of communication</li> </ul>
<b>Coffee break</b>	
The second session: The target audience and the message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling the participants to interact with the audience targeted by the message</li> </ul>
<b>Lunch</b>	
Third session Presentation of the message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing the participants with basic skills in effective communication with the public.</li> </ul>
<b>Day 4</b>	
The first session: Interaction with traditional and modern media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling participants to grasp the importance of dealing and interacting with traditional and modern media</li> </ul>
<b>Coffee break</b>	
The second session: Formulating a media plan with traditional media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling participants to interact with the traditional media in the context of the advocacy campaign on the issue of women's participation in political life in Iraq</li> </ul>
<b>Lunch</b>	
The third session: Drafting an electronic media plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling the participants to master the skills of formulating an electronic media campaign within the advocacy plan for the issue of women's political participation in Iraq</li> </ul>
Evaluation and conclusion	

#### **4) Challenges and obstacles:**

The workshops faced a set of challenges:

- Trainers felt that more days were needed because the knowledge content is extensive and the dense material would have benefited from additional time.
- COVID-19 and the associated restrictions presented challenges for travel and movement.
- Some young women were hesitant to participate due to the security conditions, especially in the southern governorates.
- A few trainees had to withdraw just before the training day because they contracted the COVID virus.

#### **5) Success stories:**

- A change of heart towards running for elections on the part of some young women who previously refused to run, especially those who were active in the protests.
- The participation of some ladies with political affiliations and others being party members, and their positive interaction with the other female participants and among themselves, despite the difference in political orientation and beliefs.

#### **6) Trainers' evaluation of the trainees:**

Trainers had the following evaluation:

- Trainees were active participants in the training, enriching it with personal examples and experiences
- Trainees were successful in simulation and role-playing exercises
- Trainees requested increasing the workshop time and wanted to be trained on “who will run for the elections” and how the prospective candidate will lead her election campaign, because there are some female trainees who had the desire to run, but their age does not permit that at the present time.
- The workshop was characterized by energetic interaction and communication between the participants themselves and with the training in an organized and continuous manner, and they responded very well to exercises and role -playing, especially in how to deal with the media through the various applications that were implemented
- The workshop was characterized by the presence of women who were extremely interested in leadership and who had come to learn how to exercise leadership. We noticed that some of the female participants already possessed some leadership skills, and the workshop was a unique opportunity for them to develop their skills in an appropriate manner.



- The female participants are active and self-motivated and can have a role in the future.
- The female participants had good cultural backgrounds and civic engagement.
- The selection of the female participants was highly professional and objective.
- The selection of two new governorates to be covered by the training schedule was the right choice.

## **7) Recommendations of the trainees and experts:**

- Engaging men in such trainings.
- Organizing training workshops for both men and women from political parties.
- Activating and urging civil society organizations to press the issue of women's participation in politics.
- Scaling up this project to include all Iraqi provinces.
- Increasing the duration of the course to (5) days.
- Singling out the top participants in the courses and enrolling them in advanced central leadership courses.
- The team of trainees needs to keep on communicating and thinking about mechanisms to continue their work on the issue of women's participation in politics.
- Establishing an electronic platform or holding regular meetings every 3 or 4 months, continuing to organize workshops for women and forming a team of female participants to defend women's political rights and participation in public life.
- Conducting advocacy, awareness, and educational campaigns to enlighten the community, including women, on how to involve women in political and public life and to run for elections.
- Activating the role of the media in raising awareness about the issue of women's participation in the political process.
- Working on the cultural and social context as change is closely linked to the process of democratization, respect for human rights and the correct concept of citizenship.
- Seeking to amend and rescind laws that discriminate against women.
- Working on fairer and less biased electoral laws. One of the basic means to achieve this is the quota system as the application of quota is one of the mechanisms for changing the rules of the political game.
- Organizing trainings on electoral laws and political parties' law.
- Creating mechanisms for communication and exchange of experiences between female participants from the governorates.

- Organizing in-depth trainings on enhancing political awareness for women and building political leaderships.
- More specialized training on interaction with the media.

**Regional expert's remarks:**

- Organizing the two-day training with the local training team had an impact on developing the training package, and it is good for this interaction to continue.
- It was also good to build the training and design the training package based on the needs of the women targeted for training
- The training team is extremely proficient and highly experienced, noting that there was some variance between the male/female trainers
- It is true that the package deals with issues not directly related to women's rights, but it still aimed at women. It would have been better if one training day was organized for the team on women's rights, discrimination, and violence against them. This would cover topics on women's rights in the training.
- It is good that the Foundation works with the training team on selecting the outstanding trainees in order to continue working with them.
- It is necessary to take into account the recommendations of the female trainees to work in the coming periods.
- It is necessary to expand the base of women beneficiaries of training and the training package
- Partnerships can be organized with local associations in the governorates to benefit from the training package and to organize local trainings accordingly.

**Local expert's remarks:**

- The workshop was excellent for the purpose of qualifying young women as beginners in their first steps into the world of politics to be successful activists, and this workshop was a golden opportunity for them.
- The workshop showcased the importance of methodical and practical steps in political work and the importance of building the capabilities of young women- to create a different future for the country and politics.
- The workshop laid down the first foundation for political engagement by young women and put them on track for further action. It taught them that successful political engagement is not just “random work”, but rather organized work that is subject to rules and procedures, and that whoever deviates from these rules can no longer be a political activist or a leading citizen.

**In order to develop this distinguished work and activity, we suggest the following:**

- The days of the workshop were short compared to the agenda which was compressed to fit into the days allocated to it, and it is better to increase the number of training days to accommodate the content.
- Increasing the number of young women participants to ensure that as many of them as possible benefit from the courses.
- Dedicating independent workshops to the topic of communication and its skills, due to its great importance, as there was not enough time and items allocated to this topic in this workshop.
- Within the series of developing the women participants' capabilities and empowering them, it is advisable to have an activity dedicated to testing those who make more progress in the program and achieve more successes. The test can comprise asking each of them to design an electoral manifesto, a political program for running an institution, a government program for running a state agency, a political program for a party, and so on. This will test the extent of their capabilities following the skills-building workshops and help them in developing their political vision.

#### **8) Project's sustainability and communication channel:**

- Based on recommendations from participants for continuing communication, the Iraq Foundation created a WhatsApp group for each training group before the training, and communication is still ongoing.
- A Telegram group was created at the end of the training, including all the female trainees in the seven governorates with representatives of partner organizations as well as trainers.
- These platforms will be a means of networking and continuous communication between the female trainees, the Iraq Foundation team and the training team. It will serve as a means for exchanging learning experiences and information.
- The project team at the Iraq Foundation believes that it is necessary to hold regional meetings with the young female trainees during the coming period to find out to what extent they have benefited and what their plans are.
- Several recommendations from participants, trainers, and experts, stressed the importance of building on the training provided, especially for the most successful participants. The Foundation will follow through on this, initially by maintaining the network and the contacts, and later by involving some of the participants in future activities and programs.