WOMEN IN THE COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES

LESSONS LEARNED AND CASE STUDIES REPORT

The following report details the lessons learned from Iraqi Incoming Women Parliamentarians (IWPs-PEDP Project) based on their experiences in the Council of Representatives from their election in March 2010 through July 2013. The report serves as a best practices and case study report.

Best Practices for Iraqi Women Parliamentarians

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Background Information

Institutional Collaboration

The Iraq Foundation and the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars collaborated to assist in building the capacity of Iraqi women parliamentarians (IWPs) who were elected to the Council of Representatives (CoR) in March 2010. The institutions organized a meeting/workshop for IWPs and two meetings for IWPs and regional women MPs. The Incoming Women Parliamentarians Program (IWPs) is part of the Post Election Democracy Promotion Project (PEDP) that is implemented by the Iraq Foundation (IF). The IWPs Program is implemented by the Iraq Foundation in collaboration with the Wilson Center.

Regional Meetings

The Iraq Foundation and the Wilson Center held a workshop for IWPs in Beirut, Lebanon from July 18-22, 2010. The meeting included 19 IWPs from various provinces and most political parties. Trainers and speakers included a Moroccan MP and Lebanese MP as well as regional and international experts (from Lebanon and the United Kingdom). Topics covered policy analysis; conflict resolution, consensus building, and negotiation; public speaking and leadership; research and administration; committee operation; constituent relations; and the oversight of executive branch agencies.

The Iraq Foundation, the Wilson Center, and UN Women held the first regional meeting with IWPs and regional women MPs on "Women's Political Participation" in Amman, Jordan from June 9-11, 2012. The meeting included 13 IWPs and seven regional MPs, and six facilitators and experts from Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The topics covered included women MPs' relations with political parties; women's alliances in parliament; strengthening women's leadership; constitutional guarantees for women; overcoming social and political challenges to leadership; women's caucuses and electoral lists; communication with constituents; and forming a cross-regional network.

The Iraq Foundation and the Wilson Center held the second regional meeting with IWPs and regional women MPs on "Women Leaders in an Era of Change" in Amman, Jordan from May 30-June 1, 2013. The meeting included 24 participants, facilitators, and international experts from eight countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United States). The themes covered were constraints and opportunities for women MPs in the region, how women can capitalize on opportunities, and how women can maximize impact.

Method and Materials in Report Analysis

The Wilson Center produced this report using materials provided by the Iraq Foundation and additional sources identified by the Wilson Center, which are footnoted. The Iraq Foundation provided English translations for questionnaires filled out by IWPs: baseline questionnaire from July 2010, spring 2011 questionnaire,[1] summer 2011 questionnaire,[2] and spring 2013 questionnaire.[3] The Wilson Center cross analyzed the results of these four questionnaires to determine trends, using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The report also includes details from the regional meetings as well as case studies from interviews conducted with IWPs and regional MPs. These case studies highlight how individual women MPs from Iraq and the region are impacting parliament and overcoming obstacles.

Historical Overview of Iraqi Women MPs

Women in Iraq have a long history of political involvement since the early 20th century. After the creation of the Iraqi state in 1920, women gradually became more involved in national affairs and interested in changing their status in society. This period is referred to as an **"awakening" or "revival" because of women's active and public participation in addressing women's issues**. Women were politically involved in women's organizations, public debates, and demonstrations. Though they would not receive the right to vote and compete for national office until 1980, women in Iraq found alternative ways to be involved in Iraq's political scene.

Iraqi women would acquire some representation in the country by the mid-20th century. Starting in the 1940s, **they formed formal political parties to secure women's political rights and improve women's status**. Women's political organizations flourished and their activism intensified as women become more visible in the public arena. In 1959, Naziha al-Dulaimi was appointed as a cabinet minister for Municipal Affairs—the first female minister in Iraq and the Arab world. That same year, Zakia Hakki was appointed as Iraq's first female judge. With the introduction of the Personal Status Law in 1959, after more than a decade of debate, **Iraqi women gained one of the most progressive sets of rights for women in the Middle East**. Only one woman, Minister al-Dulaimi, worked on drafting the law. Iraqi women gained rights related to issues of marriage, child custody, divorce, and inheritance. The Personal Status Law was an essential mechanism in improving women's overall status in Iraq.

Women in Parliament, 1980-2010

Iraqi women won the right to vote and compete for national office in 1980. For the next two decades, women won approximately 10 percent of seats (without a quota system but more than other countries in the region). During the 1980 campaign, Saddam Hussein was often seen with women parliamentary candidates.[1] All of the 19 women candidates were elected to the 250-member National Assembly, representing 7.6 percent of parliamentary seats.[2]

In the 1984 National Assembly elections, 46 women candidates competed for seats and 33 women were elected (13.2 percent of parliament).[3] Iraq ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986, with some reservations.[4] The following National Assembly elections were postponed until 1989 because of the Gulf War. Sixty-five women candidates competed and 27 women were elected (10.8 percent).[5] This parliament, whose term was extended twice, ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994.[6]

Year	% of women MPs (number of women)
1980	7.6% (19)
1984	13.2% (33)
1989	10.8% (27)
1996	6.4% (16)
2000	7.2% (18)
2005 (Jan.)	31.6% (87)
2005 (Dec.)	25.5% (70)
2010	25.5% (82)

In the 1996 parliamentary elections, 689 total candidates competed for the 250 seats in the National Assembly. Sixteen women won seats, which represented a low of 6.4 percent women in

parliament.[7] The 2000 parliamentary elections had 25 women candidates and 18 women were elected, representing 7.2 percent of the National Assembly.[8]

After the 2003 Iraq War, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) set up an election for the Transitional National Assembly in January 2005. With a 25 percent quota in place, 87 women were elected to the 275-member transitional parliament (31.6 percent).[9] During this transition period, **the State Ministry for Women's Affairs was established, as an office not a full ministry**.[10]

When Iraq's new constitution was approved by referendum in October 2005, elections were set for the Council of Representatives (CoR) in December 2005. Seventy women were elected to the 275-member parliament (25.5 percent).[11] As a result of the quota, "the first women elected in 2005 have had little effect, analysts and women who are members of Parliament say."[12] Women MPs became more active in committee work, however, and attended more committee meetings than their male colleagues.[13] The State Ministry for Women's Affairs' limited funds and functionality led to the resignation of Minister for Women's Affairs Nawal al-Samaraie in February 2009.[14]

Prior to the 2010 CoR election, a group of women formed their own political party founded by Jenan Mubarak, a women's rights candidate. Following the campaign, 82 women were elected to the 325-member parliament, representing 25.2 percent of seats.[15] Analysts indicate these **women MPs elected in 2010 were more qualified than previous MPs**, "many of whom were party apparatchiks."[16] Despite their qualifications, only one woman was selected to head a ministry, the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Evolution of Quotas

The **number of women in Iraq's parliament increased significantly from 2000 to 2005 as a result of the quota** mandating 25 percent representation for women. Although women served in parliament prior to the quota, these women were often selected by political parties or male MPs to advance specific interests. This practice has continued to a lesser extent through the 2005 and 2010 elections. After the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, **women's groups proposed a 40 percent quota for women in parliament but settled for a 25 percent quota** in the interim constitution of 2004. The National Assembly approved a permanent constitution in October 2005 with an article stipulating the 25 percent quota. Women won 19 percent of seats in the December 2005 election, and additional seats were allocated to women to meet the 25 percent quota.[17] The quota article was amended in November 2009, changing the quota system "from a rank-ordered candidate list quota to a results-based 'best loser' quota," meaning that among the women candidates, those who receive the most votes (up to 25 percent) are elected even if male candidates receive more votes.[18]

In 2010, five women MPs were elected without the quota.[19] A number of women allied with Muqtada al-Sadr, an Iraqi Shi'a cleric, were elected to their seats outside the quota system.[20] An electoral law specifies party list structure: "No fewer than 1 out of the first 3 candidates on the list must be a woman, no fewer than 2 out of the first 6 candidates on the list must be a woman and so forth until the end of the list."[21]The remaining women were selected from party lists according to a complicated legislated candidate quota system.[22] **Discussions continue about whether Iraq's quota has helped or harmed women's advancement in the political process**.

Regional Country Comparison

The Arab world has the lowest level of women parliamentarians in lower and upper houses in the world at 13.8 percent. (In lower houses, the Arab world is slightly above Pacific Rim countries).[23] This is a significant increase from the 1995 rate of 4.3 percent in the region.[24] Currently, the world average is about 20 percent. In 2012, **women candidates continued to win more seats when quotas were in place**. Twenty-two countries held elections with quotas: "With legislated quotas, women took 24 percent of seats and with voluntary quotas they gained 22 percent. Where no quotas were used, women took 12 percent of seats."[25]

Experts discuss "the 30-percent threshold considered necessary for women parliamentarians to have an impact on decision-making," a threshold Iraq has yet to meet.[26] Algeria is the only Arab country above the 30 percent threshold of impact, which was achieved in 2012. Algeria's 146 women MPs represent 31.6 percent of seats and the highest proportion of women MPs in the region. The country's Electoral Law "requires variable quotas of between 20% and 50% of the candidates for parliament to be women," according to constituency size.[27]

Country	% of women MPs (number of women)
Algeria	31% (146)
Tunisia	27% (58)
Iraq	25% (82)
Saudi Arabia	20% (30)
UAE	17% (7)
Libya	17% (33)
Morocco	17% (67)
Jordan	12% (18)
Syria*	12% (30)
Bahrain	10% (4)
Kuwait	6% (4)
Lebanon	3% (4)
Egypt*	2% (8)
Oman	1% (1)
Yemen	<1% (1)
Qatar	0% (0)

http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm (July 2013)

The figures to the left represent a country's lower or only house of parliament (data is collected from the Inter-Parliamentary Union). Tunisia has 58 women MPs (27 percent) in its Constituent Assembly and an electoral law that requires alternation of male and female candidates.[28] Saudi Arabia has 30 women in its Consultative Council. Women were first appointed to the council in 2013. Saudi King Abdullah issued a Royal Order requiring the Council (Shura) to be comprised of at least 20 percent women.[29]

The UAE has seven women MPs, representing 17.5 percent of the Federal National Council, and no quota for women. Libya has 33 women in its General National Congress (17 percent). Its quota requires alternation of male and female candidates in a zipper-list fashion, alternating vertically and horizontally, for 80 seats.[30] Morocco has 67 women MPs (17 percent) with a quota that provides 60 seats for women.[31]

Jordan has 18 women in parliament (12 percent). Jordan's quota system reserves 15 seats for women, according to the 2012 electoral law reform.[32] Prior to Syria's turmoil, the country had 30 women MPs, representing 12 percent of seats, and no quota for women. Bahrain has four women MPs (10 percent) and no quota system.

In Kuwait, four women MPs represent 6 percent of parliamentary seats. The country's first women MPs were elected in 2005, and Kuwait has no quota for women. Lebanon has four women MPs (3 percent). The country does not have a quota system for women but does for religious groups.[33] Before Egypt's People's Assembly was dissolved in June 2012, eight women MPs represented two percent of total parliamentarians. Egypt's reserved seat system in the 2010 election was discarded and replaced with a system that requires parties to nominate one woman to their candidate lists.[34]

Oman and Yemen each have one woman MP in parliament and no quota for women. Qatar has no women parliamentarians. Ongoing changes in the region may alter these figures.

Current Status of Iraqi Women MPs

Effecting Policy Change

The Iraqi women parliamentarians elected in 2010 have been introducing policy change by influencing the legislative agenda, social and political attitudes, and their constituents. IWPs achieved notable accomplishments during their time in the Council of Representatives, including actively engaging in committee work, changing public perceptions about women leaders, and maintaining communication with constituents, among other achievements.

Impact on the Legislative Agenda

Women in the Iraqi parliament impacted the legislative agenda through their involvement in parliamentary sessions and committee functions and through their work on women's issues. Most IWPs report actively participating in the adoption of laws. They work on laws that directly affect the lives of Iraqi citizens; examples of specific accomplishments are listed below.

IWP Iman Abdul-Razzaq said the most important aspect of being an MP is contributing to the ongoing process in the debate of laws—the writing and re-writing of draft legislation. **The large majority of IWPs said their primary goal was to draft (or amend) laws that serve the country and improve the lives of citizens**. Others indicated they wanted to monitor the implementation of legislation, fight political sectarianism, and ensure women's political participation and defend women's issues. [3]

IWPs ranked **security concerns and economic issues as most important, then social services, women's issues, party loyalty, foreign policy, and re-election**. [3] IWPs were actively engaged in the following legislative initiatives: 71 percent on women's issues, 57 on social services, 36 percent on security concerns and economic issues, and 21 percent on foreign policy issues. [3]

IWPs' Greatest Accomplishments in Parliament

- **Drafting, voting on, and ratifying laws** (on health services, education, literacy, welfare, smoking ban, retirement, justice and accountability, amnesty, property seizure, journalists' rights, compensation, and specific laws for ministries, etc.)
- **Providing service to society and representing Iraqi people**
- **Joining a women's bloc** to consider women's issues
- **Expressing political opinions through the media**
- **Contributing to committee work and attending parliamentary sessions**
- **Chairing a committee and being bloc spokesperson**
- **Standing against sectarianism** and calling for unity
- **Following up on development and service projects**
- **Obtaining trust of other MPs**
- **Unveiling human rights violations in Iraq**
- **Providing a good example for women** through impact in media and leadership
- **Calling for gender balance** and women in executive positions
- **Participating in conferences of Inter-Parliamentary Union**

A few IWPs said they did not believe the current parliament has achieved anything notable, though there are attempts to cooperate on adopting some important legislation.

Along with drafting and passing legislation, **most MPs also worked with other women and served their constituencies**. In 2011, 59 percent said they served their constituency; 59 percent helped pass legislation; 53 percent worked with other women; 53 percent helped draft legislation; and 24 percent negotiated and formed coalitions.[2] In 2013, IWPs ranked their accomplishments in order of importance: (1) helped pass legislation, (2) worked with other women, (3) helped draft legislation, (4) served the constituency, and (5) negotiated and formed coalitions.[3] These rankings from 2011 to 2013 were the same except "serving the constituency" moved from the most important accomplishment in 2011 to the fourth-ranked accomplishment in 2013.

One IWP, for example, said she held sessions to discuss how to adopt a national strategy to combat violence against women, how to activate UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and how to cooperate with international institutions and colleagues in parliament. Another IWP helped draft the smoking ban legislation with a majority of votes. One IWP noted she was a major factor in shaping the attitude, both political and legislative, of the political bloc to which she belongs.[3]

IWPs noted **their ability to influence legislation was affected by their relationships with their parties, male and female colleagues, and committees**. Most IWPs (77 percent) said they had good relationships with their parties, while close to one-third said they had good relationships with parliamentary leadership.[3] In addition, 62 percent have good relationships with members of other parties and 86 percent have good relationships with committee members.[3] Half of IWPs reported good relationships with government officials, while the other half was split in saying the relationship was fair or poor.
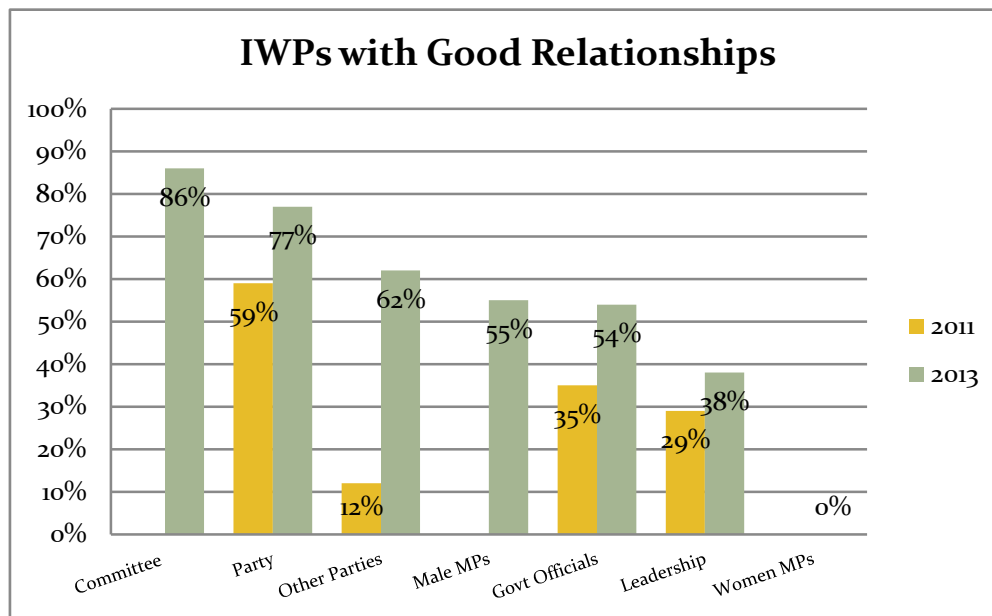
Overall, **IWPs have better relationships with all their colleagues in 2013 than in 2011** (for which data is available).[35] Most notably in 2013, however, no IWPs said they had good relationships with other women MPs—most said the relationship was only "fair."[3] Meanwhile, about half of IWPs said their relationships with male MPs were good.[3]

Attiya has good relations with peers in her party, which she feels provides "effective and constructive guidance" for its members and holds gender concerns "at the core of the social issues." She made many contributions to the party and feels that **her involvement in the Badr Organization allows her to have an effective role in parliament**. She feels strongly that there is no difference between male and female Iraqi MPs, and no discrimination within the parliament; she works easily alongside male and female colleagues. Attiya **supports the idea of women's quotas for leadership positions**, believing that more women need to be promoted to decision-making positions on social and political issues. She thinks **one of the best things a woman MP can do to support women's rights in Iraq is to support the efforts of fellow women leaders.**

IWPs said **good relationships are essential for effectively working as an MP**—positive interactions and teamwork are more fruitful. Such relationships also facilitate the creation of alliances that led to the adoption of laws. The MPs noted **good relationships with committee members is most important**, followed by parliamentary leadership, other women MPs, members of other parties, male MPs, their political party, and government officials.[3] Most IWPs (64 percent) said officials and government agencies are somewhat responsive to inquiries, and 43 percent said it depended on the agency.[3] Most IWPs (85 percent) said they work with MPs from other parties weekly.[3]

Committee Work

Committees are where most parliamentary work is accomplished and where most IWPs were able to contribute and make a difference. IWPs report relationships with committee members as most important, and also as noted above, 86 percent of IWPs have good working relationships with fellow committee members.

All interviewed IWPs serve on committees, including **two IWPs who serve as deputy chairpersons and one IWP who serves as a committee chairperson**.[3] IWPs serve on a range of committees including Foreign Relations, Culture and Media, Health and Environment, Economy and Investment, Expatriates and Displaced Persons, Martyrs and Political Prisoners, Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, and Religious Affairs and *Awqaf*. For most IWPs (80 percent), their committee work fits with their expertise.[3] **More than half of IWPs said their most useful contribution was suggesting topics for discussion or contributing their opinions**, while less than one-third of IWPs said their most valuable contribution was drafting legislation.[3] Along with their committee work, 77 percent of IWPs said they speak monthly in a plenary session, and 15 percent said they speak weekly.[3]

Women's Issues

Another of IWPs' contributions to the legislative agenda was their work on advancing women's issues in parliament. Some women MPs formed alliances for a specific cause, such as the parliamentary coalition to support women. While **IWPs have yet to formally establish a women's caucus, the majority of IWPs indicated there is an informal association of women MPs**, but it is inactive or ineffective.[3] In the previous parliament, women MPs formed a bloc with a number of objectives that supported women's issues, created unified positions, found common ground for constructive dialogue, and enhanced parliamentary efficiency.

Most IWPs (76 percent) said their legislative platform focused on local problems, but **more than half said their platform focused on women's issues**.[1] All IWP respondents said education was a priority for women. In addition, 84 percent said employment, 76 percent said health, 60 percent said family laws, and 56 percent said political participation were priority issues for women.[1]

While many IWPs focus on women's issues, in 2011 most (88 percent) said their colleagues do not pay enough attention to women's issues.[2] Moreover, almost all IWPs reported that their colleagues have neither advanced nor hindered women's issues.[2] In 2013, again the majority of IWPs (93 percent) indicated their colleagues (male and female) do not pay enough attention to women's issues, and most (57 percent) said women's issues are perceived as marginalized in parliament. However, **by 2013 more than half of IWPs said their colleagues have advanced women's issues** while others said colleagues have neither advanced nor hindered women's issues.[3]

Despite these positive developments, women remain marginalized in decision-making roles and have **no presence in any ministry except for the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs**, which has a small budget and does not function as a full ministry. Furthermore, some women on the legal committee objected to the "women-friendly" amendments presented by the women's and children's committee (because of their conservative, religious views). And quotas for women's seats in parliament, while necessary, are insufficient—**women must be empowered to use their seats in parliament effectively.**

Impact on Social and Political Attitudes

Along with impacting the legislative agenda, women MPs also impact social and political attitudes in the public. IWPs can influence such attitudes by voting, providing their opinions, seeking solutions to problems, making decisions according to priorities, ensuring rights without discrimination, narrowing the gap between divergent opinions, embracing plurality and community, and following up on responsibilities.

The majority of IWPs said the most important way to impact attitudes is to serve their constituencies. Additional activities include, in rank order of importance, cooperating with other women, passing legislation, being visible in the media, and, lastly, cooperating with male MPs.[3] One MP indicated that women MPs cannot change the situation unless they form a parliamentary bloc, regardless of party, which has not occurred yet. Another indicated that implementing a law

Zala Naftachi
Iraqi Turkmen Front
(Iraqiya)

Naftachi is a member of the Committee on Foreign Relations, which she chose based on her background in political science. She is involved in proposing and studying legislation on foreign policy, working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She **values the exchange of views involved in committee work and emphasizes the importance of following up with government branches after legislation has passed**. Among her recent accomplishments are the passing of the federal budget law for 2013 and enacting a law on Turkmen rights. Though men and women work well together in parliament, Naftachi feels "the culture of gender equality is still absent" from Iraqi leadership. She believes that all MPs can be more effective **by discussing important issues in the media, negotiating and forming coalitions, building relationships with government officials, and forging partnerships with members of other political parties**.

Women as Decision-Makers: Women's Leadership in Government

Iraq was the first country in the Arab world to appoint a woman minister. In 1959, Naziha al-Dulaimi was appointed as Minister for Municipal Affairs, representing the first female minister in Iraq and the Arab world. In 1984, Iraq had seven women ministers. **Women's representation in ministries has steadily decreased over the years**: from six of 31 (2005-2006) to four of 31 (2006-2010) to even fewer. **Currently only one minister in Iraq is a woman** (Minister of State for Women's Affairs).

In the MENA region, there are 30 women cabinet ministers, representing about six percent of total ministers. Syria and the UAE have four women ministers. Algeria and Bahrain have three each. Egypt, Kuwait, the Palestinian Authority, Oman, Tunisia, and Yemen all have two. Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Qatar each have one woman minister. Lebanon and Saudi Arabia have none.

IWPs said the **factor that most contributes to the small number of women in leadership positions is lack of education**—followed by cultural perceptions and lack of interest/motivation.[3] They said the best way to increase the number of women in leadership positions is to encourage women to run for leadership positions. Others suggested changing cultural perceptions, implementing a quota for women's leadership positions, and improving access to education.[3] **To improve perceptions of women leaders, women must highlight their accomplishments**, support other women MPs and leaders, encourage young women to become involved in politics, and appear in the media.[3] **Women MPs can increase the number of women in leadership positions by passing legislation on a quota for women's leadership**, demonstrating leadership skills in committee work, increasing knowledge of issues, among other strategies.[3]

to eliminate violence against women and change the economic situation of women would improve attitudes toward women MPs.[3] One IWP used the media to show the inaccuracy of recent studies in Iraq that significantly underestimated the country's problem of illiteracy.

One-third of IWPs reported that the public perceives them as role models, while the remaining respondents were split between saying the public thought women MPs serve a needed purpose, women MPs should hold more traditional jobs, and it is the citizen's decision how they perceive women MPs.[3]

When asked how they perceive the work of MPs of the opposite sex, most IWPs (69 percent) said the opposite gender is ineffective, like my gender; 23 percent said the opposite gender is effective, like my gender; and 1 IWP said the opposite gender is effective, unlike my gender. Sixty percent of IWPs are likely to cooperate with male MPs, while 40 percent said they may be willing to cooperate with male MPs.[3] In the spring and summer 2011 questionnaires, **the majority of IWPs said they felt accepted by their peers**, 84 percent and 76 percent respectively. Smaller percentages said they felt ignored or undermined by colleagues.[36]

Communication with Constituents

IWPs impact the legislative agenda and public perceptions, as well as their constituencies by maintaining contact and communication. From the beginning of their campaigns, these women were focused on the needs of their constituents. IWPs said their biggest achievements during the campaigning process were: 68 percent who said it was their platform; 60 percent said it was the good messages for the Iraqi voters; and 36 percent said it was a new face.[1] Moreover, **IWPs consistently report the importance of serving their constituencies**: 59 percent of IWPs said their greatest accomplishment was serving their constituency.[2]

> **The best way for women MPs to impact public perceptions is to serve their constituencies.**

Intisar Hassan
State of Law Coalition Party

Hassan strongly supports women's quotas in parliament and for leadership positions. **Although there are "agreements among women MPs," most caucuses are based on political parties and ignore such gender issues**. She feels male and female MPs are treated equally within government, but a patriarchal society means "men monopolize the leadership positions." She believes that **laws or quotas that push women into higher posts will increase the chances a woman becomes a minister or ambassador, make these women more capable leaders, and increase public credibility in the ability of women to lead well**. She hopes that cooperation with local organizations can establish leadership quotas and address the patriarchal culture that more broadly keeps women out of government. More will need to be done to change public perceptions about women's right to hold decision-making positions.

During the campaign, the majority of women (76 percent) said the campaign process was very challenging, and they faced a number of obstacles during the campaign: 48 percent said the main problem was lack of funding; 32 percent lacked interest from voters during the campaign; 24 percent said it was lack of organization; and 20 percent had difficulty traveling to their constituencies.[1] When asked how they promoted their campaigns, the majority (84 percent) said they used print advertisements, about half also used radio (52 percent) and television (44 percent), and **only 20 percent used new media like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs**.[1]

The large majority of IWPs (86 percent) said their primary constituents are all Iraqi citizens, while some said all the individuals in my province or specific social groups like women, minority groups, or rural communities, etc.[3] In 2011, IWPs said their constituents' priorities were: 84 percent said employment was most important; **64 percent said their constituents' priority was women's issues**; 60 percent said the economy; and 56 percent said security and education.[1] In 2013, IWPs report their constituents find the following issues most important (on a scale of 1-5, with one being most important): security: 1.73; social services: 2.6; economy: 2.66; employment: 2.77; education: 3.88; and women's issues: 4.33.[3] **By 2013, women's issues had fallen from second most important to least important for constituents**.

Most IWPs have met with their constituency: **88 percent said they meet with their constituency at least once per month**; 12 percent said at least once per quarter.[2] More than half have met 1,000 or more of their constituents; 21 percent have met 500-1,000; and 14 percent 200-500 constituents.[3] In spring 2011, 28 percent of MPs did not have an office in their constituency.[1] By summer 2011, the majority (88 percent) of IWPs had offices in their constituencies.[2] **By 2013, all IWPs have offices in their constituencies**, which most (84 percent) say is vital for MPs.[3]

The majority of IWPs have a website (88 percent) to connect to their constituents. More than half (59 percent) have a database or other mechanism for tracking communication with constituents, and 65 percent of IWPs have a follow up system.[2] **Public meetings and regular visits as the most common ways that IWPs maintain contact with their constituents**, followed by social media, television appearances, and newsletters (very few use radio announcements).[3] Most also say that face-to-face meetings are the most effective way to communicate with their constituents, followed by public meetings, social media, television appearances, newsletters, and radio announcements. Thus, IWPs implement the forms of media and communication they believe to be most effective.[3]

Some MPs use research offices in their electorates to conduct training courses and workshops to discuss laws and understand constituents' opinions. Face-to-face meetings are also the best way for constituents to contact MPs—then phone calls, email, website, constituency offices, social meetings, and town hall meetings.[3]

IWPs also face challenges in dealing with constituents—35 percent of IWPs said the most challenging part of the parliamentary process was lack of interest from constituents.[2] IWPs also report that **constituents are frustrated by MPs because of the lack of social services and resolutions to problems**. MPs are losing voters because of the continuing unstable political situation.

Most IWPs said they maintain communication with CSOs and believe it is important to have sustainable communication with CSOs. IWPs said **relationships with CSOs are important because it allows them to communicate with their constituency as CSOs represent a link with citizens**; approach different segments of the Iraqi society; and develop talents and skills as well as learn about other countries' experiences.[2] **More than half of IWPs said they appear in the media once a month**, to communicate with constituents, while one-fourth said they appeared once per week, and one said every few months (one said once a year).[3] All IWPs said they have a specialized communications team—most (85 percent) said it was vital, and some said it was somewhat useful (15 percent).[3]

Comparison of IWPs and Regional MPs

The status of Iraqi women MPs and other women MPs in the MENA region is comparable. Most women parliamentarians in the region have **impacted the legislative agenda through committee work and dedication to women's issues**; they have drafted and passed legislation and contributed to parliamentary debates. Most also **influence public perceptions of women leaders**, to varying degrees. They understand the **importance of interacting with their constituents and maintaining communication with their communities**. Many women MPs in the Arab world experience similar opportunities and challenges that IWPs experience.

In some countries, regional women MPs are more involved in leadership and decision-making roles than IWPs are. In a 2010 interview with former Kuwaiti MP Rola Dashti, she discussed women's prominent role in committees: "the male members started complaining that 'you women are taking over the committees,' because on every major committee—finance, legislation, foreign affairs, health, education—there was at least one woman."[37] The four Kuwaiti women MPs were present in about 80 percent of committees because they lobbied and were selected for multiple committees, including two women who headed committees. Male MPs had

Shatha'a Al-Obaidi
National Iraqi Alliance

Al-Obaidi would like to see an increase in the parliamentary quota and the application of **a new quota for women's leadership positions, which can be achieved through a women's coalition in parliament working together with CSOs**. She feels women are currently present in decision-making positions and do have a major role to play, but would like to see the number and influence of these roles increase. **She values communication with her constituency through a local office, which focuses on listening to citizens' priorities and following up by bringing their issues** to the relevant parliamentary committee. She feels female MPs can be even more effective by taking the time to review draft laws before voting, consulting with other women MPs, and seeking the advice of jurists specializing in the relevant field of legislation.

Safiya Al-Suhail
MP, Independent
State of Law Coalition

She said: "Drafting and amending priority laws serving Iraqis and meeting their basic needs, such as the Social Security and Health Insurance law, the retirement law, and the fundamental rights related to public and private freedoms, women being the main beneficiary.
-Monitoring the work of all public institutions and ensuring women's participation with a reasonable percentage, compared to women's proportion in the community, their efficiency and their maturity. The law of political parties and women's share in that law at the level of leadership not less than 25%; the law to establish the Independent Women Commission.

to negotiate with women MPs to be chairpersons because it was seen as shameful for a committee to be headed by a woman.

Women's alliances or caucuses are important for IWPs and regional MPs. **Several countries have informal women's alliances, and very few have formalized women's caucuses**. Libya, for example, formed a cross-party women's bloc in early 2013.[38] Women's caucuses in parliaments around the world are beneficial resources to advance women's issues. In the pre-revolutionary Egyptian parliament, there were too few women to form an alliance. Many countries in the region are also experiencing attacks on laws pertaining to women, particularly in countries where parliament is controlled by Islamist parties. **Some countries, including Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia, have discussed (or are in the process of) lifting reservations on international conventions like CEDAW**.

Lebanese MP Nayla Moawad helped draft parliamentary laws that extended social rights to women: "A Lebanese woman married to a non-Lebanese man also could not pass her social benefits to her family (children or husband) without the law I have pushed through the Parliament. Furthermore, we have given women the right to travel without the authorization of their husbands, to open a business without written approval of their husbands and a woman now has the right to have her own passport separate from her children's and/or husband's."[39] **Regional MPs and IWPs have also drafted and passed legislation that helps women**.

On accomplishments and perceptions, Moroccan MP Mbarka Bouaida said her greatest accomplishment was that she was not treated any differently by her male colleagues because they said, "'she was elected just like a man.' And yes, they do accept me much better."[40] Bouaida was elected outside the country's quota system for women, which is a proportional representation system.[41] **Different quota systems affect how colleagues and the public perceive women MPs who were elected with a quota**. Some IWPs said they feel less respected than male colleagues because they gained their seat as a result of a quota.

Iraqi and regional MPs expressed frustration that they are unable to provide deliverables and necessary services to constituents. Despite such difficulties, women MPs agreed on the importance of sharing their work and experiences with constituents to increase communication and understanding. Former Kuwaiti MP Rola Dashti said, "It is premature after only six months to say how much women have contributed to society's advancement as parliamentarians, but I think

we are moving in the right direction."[42] **The same could be said of IWPs, who have had limited time in parliament to accomplish all of their goals.**

Obstacles in Parliament and Beyond

During their time in parliament, **while Iraqi women MPs have successfully effected policy change in a number of ways, they have also faced numerous obstacles that limit their effectiveness and success.** Many IWPs and regional MPs note problems related to male-dominated parliaments, the influence of political parties, and the negative perceptions of women leaders as significant challenges. Women MPs throughout the region are addressing these obstacles by forming alliances and coalitions, using the media to share their agenda, and implementing legislation and international conventions on women's issues.

IWPs have experienced many challenges, most notably a lack of influence and a lack of support—in 2011, **71 percent said getting things done in parliament was very challenging** and 29 percent said it was somewhat challenging.[2] They said the most challenging aspect about parliament was the opportunity to influence policy (59 percent). Another 35 percent said it was interest from constituents and support or funding, 24 percent said organization, and 18 percent was training.[2] **In 2013, IWPs again said the inability to influence or pass legislation was the most challenging aspect of parliament**. They ranked other challenges according to difficulty as follows: inability to influence policy/pass legislation, lack of organization, inability to serve constituents, political gridlock, lack of information and data, inability to contribute to committee work, and, lastly, inability to cooperate and collaborate with colleagues.[3]

Along with these challenges, **women and women MPs in the MENA region also face greater political, economic, and physical insecurity as a result of changes in the region**. There are now fewer women in parliament in several countries and fewer women in leadership and government positions, as discussed earlier. Many women MPs are working to overcome these and other obstacles to advance the current status of women and the progression of women's rights.

Parliament as Male-Dominated Arena

Most women MPs indicated that **because parliament is male-dominated, it inhibits women's opportunities to advance**. Parliamentary processes and male colleagues often exclude women from decision-making, and many parliaments in the region lack women's committees. Although women's quotas exist in several parliaments, they are insufficient to effectively empower women MPs, who lack the opportunities that male MPs have. The use, or perhaps misuse, of religion can also contribute to the perpetuation of male-dominated parliaments.

Male and female MPs are not given the same opportunities to advance or lead in parliament, according to 69 percent of IWPs; 23 percent said they were somewhat given the same opportunities.[3] Most said the main reason for the differential treatment was that men are more respected. IWPs ranked the reasons according to viability, as follows: men are more respected, men are more assertive, women are more assertive, and there is no difference between male and female MPs.[3]

Most legislative processes bypass women because women rarely hold leadership positions and because drafting processes belong to specialized committees where women's voices are often marginalized. Iraq has a structure (similar to other countries in the region) in which draft legislation is discussed within specific political blocs where a party or coalition leader makes decisions; **women are rarely even included in these discussions**. Because these discussions occur behind closed doors, women find it difficult to learn about the details of draft legislation. The majority of legislative decisions ultimately come from executive positions.

Women MPs are also not consulted on issues— 64 percent of IWPs said they experience this; 48 percent are challenged as a woman; 28 percent are ignored in decision-making; and 24 percent feel marginalized.[1] Later in 2011, **IWPs reported some nominal improvement in challenges they face**: 59 percent said they are not consulted on issues; 53 percent are ignored in decision-making; 41 percent are challenged as a woman; 12 percent said feeling marginalized is the greatest challenge as an MP.[2] The percentage of women ignored in decision-making, however, increased slightly. Thus, **nearly half of IWPs feel challenged as a woman**.[1]

While women MPs are formally as equally prepared as men, they lack the culture of political networking that men have. Women MPs do not have adequate opportunities to network and, thus, advance. For example, the 82 current **IWPs have not been able to meet all together** in one venue in the past several years.

Parliaments are male-dominated because **many Arab parliaments lack "women's committees," ministries, or coalitions to provide coordination on women's issues and support other women MPs**. Those women's ministries that do exist have little effect, as in Iraq and Tunisia. Issues brought up by these ministries are often sidelined, as are its members—ministries are usually underfunded and understaffed. Moreover, women MPs are often only given roles in "women's issues" areas, or other "soft issues."

Parliamentary quotas can help women MPs overcome some obstacles related to male dominance in parliament. However, women's quotas are often seen as "window dressing," designed solely to present a positive image but without parallel political allowance for women to use their reserved seats to enact change. Some perceive the quota for Iraqi women as imposed by Western ideas. Most IWPs are in parliament because of the parliamentary quota, and **although the quota system has shortcomings, IWPs respect the system**. Quota systems must be well-designed, well-implemented, and temporary to be effective. While quotas alone are not enough, they are necessary to ensure women have a chance to pursue political participation in the first place.

Nada Al-Jubouri
Iraqi National Dialogue Front (Iraqiya)

Al-Jubouri believes the government could benefit from women's quotas for leadership positions. Currently, **"if women are present in decision-making positions, it is for issues related to women"** only. The inclusion of more women in decision-making roles would require legislation; **women are held back from political participation "because the society is patriarchal and the culture is narrow-minded."** She posits that women in parliament can be more effective if they rotate committee and caucus chairmanship with men. Together with increased representation, she feels **Iraqi perceptions of women leaders can be improved by showing evidence of their actions, competence, and participation**. She aims to be a leader in gender decision-making with an impact on such issues as service projects, pension laws, and social security.

Suaad Al-Najafi
State of Law Coalition Party

Al-Najafi said the existing parliamentary quota has done nothing to change Iraqi perceptions of women, because the **legislative and administrative process depend on political party affiliation, which eclipses women's contributions and limits potential for working together to solve issues**. Similarly, most caucuses are issue-based; "**women are working on forming women caucuses but they are not effective because they cannot move away from their parties**." She believes women should be able to obtain more leadership roles in government, but political parties nominate the men they think will be most influential rather than whoever is most competent. She undertakes field visits to tribes and households to listen to voters' proposals and problems. She hopes a united Iraqi government can safeguard human rights and women's leadership roles through the efforts of empowered women.

For example, although the Moroccan constitution allocates around 20 percent of seats to women, no women lead political blocs or committees, limiting their role in drafting legislation. **Despite Iraq's parliamentary quota, there have not been significant changes in women's leadership roles.** Egypt's pre-revolution women's quota did not necessitate that women campaign, so when the quota was repealed under the new government, women candidates had little electoral support or experience running campaigns. In Tunisia, a zipper-list system helped women get elected, but they received minimal help from their parties in promoting their campaigns or providing technical training.

Male dominance and other cultural traditions, customs, and religious interpretations contribute to women's obstacles in parliament. A traditional patriarchal Arab society limits women's political opportunities and leadership potential. Men sometimes believe the presence of women in parliament reduces men's power and domination. Ideologies such as Islamic fundamentalism and a **rise in Islamist governments have led to greater marginalization and made it more difficult for women MPs to reach leadership positions** and furthered male dominance. The political changes resulting from a rise in Islamism has negatively affected women's participation, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia.

Role of Party Influence

Political parties play an important role in providing women MPs with opportunities and challenges. Such challenges relate to the exclusion of women in leadership and decision-making positions, the limitations of inter-party conflict and loyalty to the party agenda, and the effect of party lists on women's positions.

IWPs said political parties provide MPs with a platform and set of positions (43 percent), a network of colleagues who respect me (36 percent), an opportunity to advance (29 percent), and education/training (14 percent).[3] They also indicated that **only 40 percent received help from their party learning their way around parliament**.[1] Most IWPs (73 percent) said their party guides them but they decide their own positions, and more than half of IWPs said the party has no impact on their actions while 33 percent said the party strongly influences their actions.[3]

When asked about relationships with their parties, IWPs recounted largely positive interactions: 88 percent said they are invited to express their views; perhaps more significantly, **88 percent of IWPs said their parties take their views into consideration**; and 82 percent participate in party meetings. Despite this, only 59 percent said they feel they have influence in their party.[2]

Most IWPs (62 percent) report that men receive preferential treatment within parties; 23 percent said women get preferential treatment; 15 percent said men and women were treated equally.[3]

Political parties, theoretically, provide women MPs with opportunities to reach decision-making positions, yet most political parties do not have women in leadership positions, often as a result of discrimination against women's political participation. While most women believe they need to be involved in a political party to succeed in parliament and obtain decision-making positions, **women MPs often are excluded from certain functions within their political parties**. Upward mobility is often based on proximity to party leadership and not experience. Although parties include women as members, parties rarely invite—or even allow—women to participate in decision-making.

> **Political parties, theoretically, provide women MPs with opportunities to reach decision-making positions, yet most parties do not have women in leadership positions.**

Challenges also come from the weakness of the political domain and institutionalized values inherited from a nondemocratic culture. For example, women were previously unable to participate at the decision-making level, which has created obstacles to women's political experiences. Iraq lacks institutions in political parties to support women, and parties lack research to establish women's leadership or push for women candidates. Furthermore, Iraq has limited experience with political parties, as in numerous countries in the region, and these political parties are not encouraged to include women in their leadership. Therefore, **political parties appear to simultaneously marginalize and support women MPs.**

Another challenge relates to how the conflicts between political parties make it difficult for women MPs to work together**. Such divisions among parties have negatively impacted MPs' opportunities and achievements on women's issues.** Women MPs also have difficulty working as peace-makers when their political parties are also parties to conflict. It is problematic for women MPs to extract themselves from their parties to participate in peaceful projects or movements. Regardless, the majority of IWPs (85 percent) said they are likely to work with MPs from other parties, while the rest said they may be willing to work with MPs from other parties.[3]

It is **difficult to form women's blocs because women MPs are expected to implement their party's agenda**. Parties may marginalize MPs who address women's rights, accusing them of not representing the party. Some MPs note the competition among women MPs was created by political parties, making it difficult for women to work together. There is a **tension of working within their parties and working with women MPs outside their parties**—some MPs note that maintaining good relationships with the party is more important, particularly because of leadership opportunities. Thus, the challenge of mediating party influence is significant.

Women's placement on party lists also affects their leadership potential. While some countries require that women be placed on party lists in a certain manner, some party lists have no such requirements. Therefore, some parties put women on the bottom of their lists. Some MPs advocated for women-only electoral lists and others said women's list placement is sufficient to support women candidates. In Basra, Iraq, there was an all-female list for the April 2013 governorate election, but they did not receive any votes. There is also a women's electoral list being formulated in Iraq, but it faces obstacles such as dominant political parties and minimal financial resources.

Because of the obstacles resulting from political party influence, **women MPs must be lobbying forces within their own parties**. Women MPs need to be active in their party, impose themselves on party leadership, push for a presence, and compete for leadership positions. They must fight battles within their parties to make a difference in parliament.

Public Perceptions of Women Leaders

Along with challenges inside parliament from male colleagues and political parties, women MPs must also face obstacles stemming from public attitudes toward women leaders. Women MPs are often perceived as less capable than male MPs, because of culture or traditions or because of the influence of the media.

In many parliaments in the region, **women MPs are dealt with as not fully capable and usually receive token positions**, if at all. Women MPs are sometimes excluded from decision-making and legislative processes because they are perceived as less competent than their male colleagues. Culture and ideology convince some individuals that women do not have the ability or capacity to successfully serve in the political arena. **Oppressive and traditional cultures that view women as less capable are also to blame for the lack of women in leadership positions**. With traditional perspectives in male-dominated societies, voters may not support women in politics. Women voters also may not necessarily support women candidates because some say the region lacks a culture of women supporting women. In the most recent elections in Iraq, women voted more often for men than for women. Women MPs said it is their responsibility to prove themselves and their capacities to gain more respect.

Certain interpretations of religion can also constrain women's participation, which vary among communities. While some interpret Islam to support women's rights, some MPs said their communities followed interpretations that oppose women's political participation. MPs from rural or tribal communities discussed the difficulty of gaining constituent support—some had supportive families who encouraged their campaigns; others had family members who discouraged their participation.

Huda Sajad
MP, Iraq
State of Law Coalition

MP Sajad mentioned:" Women are participating in decision making process. This has become an indicator that identifies the level of democracy development in societies. Many nations pay attention to this issue, they established many governmental and nongovernmental women committees and association that claims demanding for women rights, and demanding to rescue women from violence and marginalization that suffered from.

Women MPs must also battle a media that portrays negative stereotypes of women. The **media often depicts women in traditional ways that marginalize women's roles and negatively influence women's advancement**. Moreover, the media sometimes attacks women MPs for their lack of political experience, portrays women MPs who discuss women's issues in the media as sectarian, and presents women MPs as ineffective leaders. Thus, using the media presents several challenges for women MPs trying to shed light on issues or share their messages. In many countries, there are poor relations between MPs and the media; the media often blames parliament for problems in the government. Some said it would be worse for women MPs to try to defend themselves—MPs would be considered liars if they appeared in the media frequently.

Despite these negative perceptions of women leaders, the public also holds some positive stereotypes about women leaders. Some believe that women MPs inherently provide different (and valuable) viewpoints than male MPs and that women are generally less corrupt than men. **Public perceptions of women leaders have improved somewhat following changes in the region because more women's voices are now more accepted.** Women are able to express themselves and share their views, sometimes for the first time. This change improved some women MPs' confidence, improving their performance and ability to lead. Greater freedom of media, resulting from regional changes, allows women MPs to use the media to promote their agendas and communicate with constituents. **With better access to a freer media in most countries, MPs are able to combat stereotypes and demand equality for women**.

How Women are Addressing Obstacles

Although women MPs face numerous obstacles in parliament and elsewhere, **they are implementing a number of strategies to address such obstacles**. Women MPs are forming alliances with other women, men, civil society organizations (CSOs), religious leaders, and others to improve their effectiveness. They are also using the media to combat negative stereotypes and misperceptions about women leaders. Furthermore, women MPs are working to amend existing legislation, introduce new legislation, and implement international conventions to improve women's rights. Specifically, IWPs have done the following to address challenges they face in parliament: 36 percent discussed issues in the media, 36 percent negotiated with party leaders, 21 percent formed coalitions/networks outside their parties, 14 percent negotiated with their committees, and one IWP formed coalitions/networks within her own party.[3]

> **Women's caucuses are one of the best mechanisms to support women and exert pressure on the government.**

Developing alliances inside parliament is an important way to activate the work of women MPs and increase their effectiveness in parliament. Alliances, whether formal or informal, are one of the most important measures for women MPs to employ. Iraq and other countries in the region have informal women's coalitions. Alliances assist women MPs in pushing forward legislation; without alliances, it would be difficult to introduce or amend legislation. Women's coalitions facilitate cooperation on women's issues, prevent competition among women MPs, keep women informed on political issues, and empower fellow MPs.

Formalized **women's caucuses are one of the best mechanisms to support women and exert pressure on the government**. Women's caucuses, or blocs, are difficult to establish because of numerous challenges related to coordination, commitment, communication, and political will. Wherever parliaments have formed women's caucuses, they have become a strong vehicle for action. Several countries in the region, including Iraq, have attempted to form women's blocs. MPs in Algeria formed a women's caucus that was able to push for a women's quota inside political parties. Jordan's women's caucus has provided a chance for women MPs to achieve certain joint objectives. **Women-only parties, however, would marginalize male colleagues and not help achieve objectives**. While women's parties may be formed with goodwill, they are rarely able to achieve substantial change historically.

Informal women's alliances have been effective, and easier to establish, in some parliaments. Issue-based alliances are especially effective in bringing together MPs—**uniting around a common issue is a necessary first step in developing alliances with women MPs**. Despite differences of political party, bloc, or ideology, women MPs are coordinating on issues to implement strategies and introduce legislation. Coalitions within parliament help women MPs advance further and advance the ambitions of other women in the political sphere. **Such coalitions include not just women but also male MPs, CSOs, the media, and religious scholars, among others**.

In addition to forming women's alliances, **women MPs are working to create alliances with their male colleagues in parliament** to achieve their goals. Male champions for women's rights inside parliament are important as a means of creating a connection between women and men. Regardless of political party, male MPs can be allies, which several countries in the region have seen. Working with men and women is vital for women MPs to identify potential opportunities.

Along with establishing alliances inside parliament, women MPs understand the importance of forming alliances with groups outside parliament as well, such as CSOs and religious leaders. **CSOs represent necessary partners outside parliament that can assist in promoting women's issues**. These collaborative relationships, as well as work with women activists and voters, help women MPs raise awareness about relevant topics. CSOs can help women gain support, run campaigns, and organize protests, etc. **Women MPs are also working with progressive judges and religious scholars to improve the status of women**. Religious scholars can assist with jurisprudence and interpreting *shari'ah* as it relates to legislation. In Iraq, the women's and children's committee worked with religious scholars to determine which laws in the country's

Shlair Aziz
Kurdistan Alliance

Aziz works best when working with other members of her party, as they all believe in the party's goals, which include supporting women with helpful legislation.
 She **supports the implementation of a women's quota for leadership positions, perhaps by women's caucuses and civil society organizations**. She would also like **to see a more efficient women's caucus in Iraq's parliament, as the current one has a "lack of convergence in ideas and opinions about the program."** She feels there are so few women in government because MPs remain attached to their positions, leaving no room for new candidates— women among them—to break into politics. Many leadership positions are appointed not because of experience but by party or affiliation; **most women in government lack the connections or clout to receive such positions**. Aziz interacts with her constituency through her office's Facebook page as well as field visits to voters.

Iraqi women recommend changes to existing legislation to reinforce the framework of women's rights enshrined in the constitution

The Iraq Foundation's Women for Equitable Legislation Project (WEL) aims at reinforcing the framework of women's rights by; promoting and facilitating stronger and more effective legislation that protects those rights enshrined in the constitution and in line with shari'ah as well as international human rights standards. The project began with examining major areas where gaps exist in Iraqi legislation relative to the constitution, shari'ah and human rights law, and in consultations among parliament, judiciary, CSOs and legal experts. Prioritizing these laws and determining which laws need to be amended or repealed. In addition to drafting new legislation based on their impact on women and their social, economic, financial, and political repercussions. They met with experts from the region who had done similar work in: Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, in order to view how these countries built consensus, campaigns and mobilized popular support as well as identify the successes to overcome cultural barriers and political resistance to reform. After determining which laws needed to be changed, legal experts drafted recommended amendments to four articles in the penal code, as following:

- Article 41: stipulated possibility of a man punishing his wife-requested cancellation of item 1
- Article 128: related to murder under pretext of honor killing-requested amendment
- Article 380: related to adultery-requested amendment
- Article 409: related to wives' punishment for adultery-requested amendment to include equal punishment for men and women

They also looked at Iraq's Personal Status code and labor code suggesting cancelations or amendments of laws related to marriage, divorce, harassment in the workplace, and provide state shelters for women after age 18, etc.

The draft laws used simple language for readability. IF promoted advocacy campaigns in 15 governorates throughout Iraq which includes media and signature campaigns in order to enhance understanding of the rationale behind the reform measures, build up support for the suggested improvements and to pressure parliament

constitution and penal code were incompatible with *shari'ah* and negatively discriminated against women (discussed in greater detail on the following page).

Women MPs also form coalitions to address constituent issues. They engage with their constituents to build trust and mediate between constituents and political officials. Many MPs have established follow-up systems to address constituent concerns. Women MPs are focusing on issues that matter most to their community; this way they prove they are effective politicians who can make a difference. The more women show their effectiveness, the more they improve public perceptions of women leaders.

Another important way **that women MPs are overcoming obstacles is using the media to effectively promote one's agenda, share messages, and influence public opinion**. Women MPs benefit greatly from the media because of its ability to influence the public. By adopting strong positions, issuing bold statements, and defending important issues, MPs are able to draw media attention. It is most useful to determine what attracts media attention and tailor messages accordingly. Messages must be clear and focused with a defined goal. **Maintaining contact with the media is essential—MPs can establish a media or communications office to work with the media**. Women MPs could hold also press conferences and issue press releases to announce achievements on women's issues.

Women MPs also address challenges by implementing legislation and international conventions on women's issues. Women MPs are using their roles to integrate or enhance international conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) in their

countries. Women MPs understand they **can challenge their governments to address the increasing marginalization of women with CEDAW and UNSCR 1325**. Algeria, for example, created a National Women's Council that promotes dialogue and conducts assessments on all issues related to women. In Egypt, CEDAW was implemented before the revolution and included changes in the civil code on women's custody of children, the age of marriage, and other related laws that were amended due to CEDAW's implementation. One MP said CEDAW is currently the only thing protecting women's rights in the country.

> **Batool Farouk**
> MP, Iraq
> State of Law Coalition
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> Batool referred that her primer goal as a parliamentarian is to follow up the legislations, including Parties Law, Women Laws, Social Welfare Law, and laws relevant to Culture and Media. In one of her responses about making an effect on the legislative program, **Ms. Farouk emphasized that women should have solidarity among themselves for any project.**

In 2012, Iraq put a bill in place to establish a national committee to combat human trafficking, an issue addressed in article 6 of CEDAW (Iraq recently lifted its reservation on article 9, which deals with nationality). Iraq's parliament is also discussing a bill on protection against domestic violence. In Iraq, CSOs started campaigns to raise awareness about UNSCR 1325 and to build confidence among women MPs. Although human rights conventions have an unfavorable reputation in the Arab world, **CEDAW is still the best and most comprehensive framework for achieving equality and eliminating discrimination against women**. Women MPs know that parliament has a vital role to play in monitoring and enacting legislation related UNSCR 1325, CEDAW, and other international conventions. Women MPs can also develop National Action Plans on how to implement UNSCR 1325.

Women MPs from Iraq and the MENA countries have also been involved in drafting constitutions and new legislation. Constitutions are not enough to improve women's rights, however—the interpretation of constitutions and MPs' involvement and follow-up are equally important, if not more so. **Women MPs are drafting legislation and providing a roadmap for the empowerment of women**. Tunisian women have secured their rights and, thus, seek to preserve and build upon them with the country's new constitution. Morocco's Moudawana family code included some of the most progressive measures on women's rights in the region, including raising the age of marriage, permitting polygamy only with the consent of the first wife, and improving ownership rights for women, among other changes. Women MPs are also working as peace-builders in conflict situations. For instance, Algerian women have acquired many positions because of their involvement in peace-building.

Along with forming alliances inside and outside parliament, using the media to share messages and change perceptions, and implementing legislation and conventions, women MPs understand they have many more tools at their disposal. For example, women MPs suggested implementing **quotas that are administered across the board—ministries, government, private sector, education, etc.—not just in parliament**. They also discussed broadening the scope of existing women's ministries in MENA countries to frame gender policies as an interaction with other national issues, like health, agriculture, education, etc., to show the utility of such a ministry

would also be beneficial. Additional recommendations from and for women MPs in Iraq and the region follow in the next section.

Sanaa Saeed
Former MP, Egypt
Egyptian Social Democratic Party

Saeed said her party expected her to represent them and their constituents and to be united in the positions of the party. She said her impact is **most effective when she works with her own party because she progresses and finds support through her party.** There are presently no quotas in the Egyptian election system, though there was a parliamentary quota for women in the pre-revolutionary government. There are **so few women in government because the culture looks down on women and uses women just as a decoration.** She said quotas are important because they give opportunities to compensate for women's lack of previous participation. She noted that **women can reach more leadership positions if political parties enable them to be in leadership positions in the party**.

Magda Elnoweshy
Former MP, Egypt
Al-Wafd Party

Elnoweshy said her **impact was more effective when she worked with other parties in parliament especially when she cooperated with other parties about issues in her own constituency**. She said party leadership does not treat men and women MPs equally. She believes the quota should be for a provisional period in order to change the culture in the Egyptian society. Elnoweshy said there are so few women in government because people in power already have a set role for women in the decision-making process. Egypt's parliament did not have a women's caucus because of the low percentage of women representation
She believes **women can reach more leadership positions through increased political awareness, changing the cultural understanding of the society, and nominating women for advanced positions.**

Abla Abu Ulba
Former MP, Jordan
HASHD (Jordanian Democratic People's Party)

Abu Ulba earned her party's respect by working on the grassroots levels with constituents and by producing tangible results. **While caucuses exist in Jordan's parliament, she explained that they are not solid and are not based on political parties, so it is easy to change their structure** and positions. She said **quotas are necessary temporarily until laws are amended to treat women as equal citizens.** She said that one can push for quotas in parliamentary leadership and the government by lobbying through civil society, political forces, and the media. She said she **would like to have political party caucuses to promote the performance of the parliament according to the demands of the public**. Abu Ulba has acted as a model for advancing women's role in politics and defended her point of view assertively.

Recommendations for Women MPs

These recommendations were compiled and consolidated from the regional meetings as well as suggestions from IWPs and regional MPs. The recommendations relate to the following: enhancing the role of women MPs (on legislation, alliances, leadership, constituents, the media, and CSOs), urging governments to act, and requesting assistance from international organizations.

Enhance the Role of Women MPs to:

Legislation

- Bridge the gap between the *de facto* and *de jure* laws and legislation by monitoring, evaluating, and following up on implementation;
- Promote enlightened and women-friendly interpretations of *shari'ah*;
- Propose draft laws to address CEDAW articles and withdraw all reservations thereon;
- Demand action plan to implement UNSCR 1325;
- Follow up on relevant legislation to ensure its implementation;
- Clarify CEDAW in parliament and the public to increase awareness and gain support;
- Draft legislation and provide a roadmap for the inclusion and empowerment of women in peace-building and negotiations;
- Promote positive discrimination measures (i.e., quota systems);
- Compile data and information on the status of women and other issues of concern by conducting research, surveys, and opinion polls to support positions, proposals, and draft legislation;

Alliances/Networks

- Build strategic alliances to champion women's issues with religious leaders and scholars, politicians, male and female MPs, the media, and CSOs;
- Mobilize women MPs and caucuses around specific topics;
- Communicate with former women MPs to exchange expertise outside parliament;
- Build women's alliances/caucuses to facilitate cooperation, prevent competition, and empower women;
- Network with the women MPs' chapter attached to the League of Arab States;
- Increase communication between the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and women's committees, rather than create a new women's organization;
- Ensure that women MPs are allocated special meeting halls and spaces within parliaments to discuss issues of common concern;
- Establish a virtual regional network of female MPs to network, exchange experiences and good practices for enhancing the role of women MPs;

Leadership

- Identify good and failed practices worldwide for promoting women's leadership in decision-making positions, including in political parties;
- Push for women's participation in all sectors: parliament, government, business, education, etc.;
- Broaden the scope of women's ministries to include interaction with national issues;
- Lobby within political party to achieve objectives and improve leadership opportunities;
- Work to improve women MPs' confidence to improve performance and leadership skills;
- Encourage political parties to provide support through training and other educational opportunities;
- Create a critical mass of women for assuming leadership and decision-making positions in the political arena;

Constituents

- Conduct opinion polls, studies, surveys, questionnaires to address concerns and interests of constituencies;
- Focus on the specific needs of constituents to earn respect and support;
- Establish an advisory office for citizens;
- Incorporate different forms of outreach into their constituent plans;
- Undertake regular field visits to remote areas for outreach and effectiveness ;

Media

- Hold press conferences and use modern mass and social media to raise gender awareness and highlight the pivotal role of women in nation and peace-building;
- Establish a personal webpage on the Internet and a media office in parliament to disseminate success stories;
- Seize opportunity to appear on all media channels to share specific, targeted messages;
- Draw media attention by adopting strong positions and defending important issues;
- Establish a communications office to work with and maintain contact with the media;
- Utilize multi-media communications to shed light on success stories of women MPs;
- Make use of new social media (Internet, Twitter, Facebook, etc.);
- Document success stories and good practices of women MPs in order to disseminate and market them in various ways and means;

CSOs

- Coordinate with CSOs to support work of women MPs;
- Increase effectiveness and efficiency through work with CSOs;
- Raise awareness in constituencies with CSO outreach;
- Change negative/stereotypical image of women in society with help of CSOs;

Urge Governments to:

- Review and amend laws and legislation in order to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure harmonization with international instruments and conventions;
- Build, maintain, and disseminate sex-disaggregated databases in all sectors and in line with international guidelines;
- Provide national mechanisms for women and children with the requisite human and financial resources;
- Review the curricula in order to ensure gender-sensitive civic education and avoid reproduction of a patriarchal culture among the new generation;
- Adopt a "women-friendly" electoral law to enhance women's representation in parliament;
- Publish international conventions like the CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 in official newspapers; ensure wide dissemination via mass media; develop effective mechanisms for full implementation, and withdrawal of reservations thereof;
- Adopt affirmative action measures such as temporary quotas for women at all levels and in all sectors including government committees, legislative, executive, and judiciary bodies;
- Offer political parties incentives for nominating a higher percentage of women on their electoral lists but also punishments for failing to do so;
- Cooperate with CSOs and the media to raise gender-awareness and exert serious efforts to change mindsets and avoid conflating religious principles with customs and traditions;
- Subsidize campaigns for women candidates;
- Set up specialized regional monitoring center for complete analysis about women's issues;
- Establish national center for women's studies to complete studies on women;
- Develop an Arab network to track changes and developments on women's issues;

Request Assistance from International Organizations to:

- Convene seminars, meetings, and capacity-building and training workshops for leaders of political parties, parliamentary blocs, judges, security officials, policemen, and others concerned to employ international conventions like CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 to eliminate discrimination and violence against women;
- Convene a seminar and expert group meetings on gender-specific concepts and gender-sensitive terminology, drafting women-friendly constitutions, project proposals, and draft gender-sensitive parliamentary laws and legislation, and on human rights;
- Organize capacity-building workshops for women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship including training sessions on micro-credit financing;
- Establish national observatories with sex-disaggregated statistics on the status of women;
- Exchange good practices and failures to enhance the effectiveness of women MPs;
- Convene special workshops to sharpen skills on how to deal with the media in its various forms, including social media, and to learn how to negotiate and create alliances;
- Organize a workshop on how to submit project proposals to the United Nations and its specialized agencies for technical or financial assistance;
- Conduct national and comparative studies on: using media to increase women's visibility; amending laws and legislation to eliminate discrimination against women; constitutions in the Arab countries; evaluating, assessing and highlighting the effective role of female MPs for publicizing it, among other goals.

Conclusions

Iraqi women have a notable history of political participation, which they have continued to strengthen since they gained the right to compete for national office in 1980. IWPs have become more active in the parliamentary process, face ongoing obstacles, and use strategies to overcome challenges. The IWPs elected in 2010 have actively engaged in committee work, worked to change public perceptions about women leaders, and connected with constituents and their concerns, among other achievements, during their time in the Council of Representatives. IWPs drafted, voted on, and suggested amendments to legislation in parliament; contributed to committee work; established an informal women's alliance; and represented Iraqi society and constituents. IWPs have better relationships with all their colleagues in 2013 than in 2011, and by 2013 more than half of IWPs said colleagues have helped advance women's issues.

While Iraqi women MPs influenced policy change in a number of ways, they also faced numerous obstacles. IWPs and regional MPs said problems of male-dominated parliaments, influential political parties, and negative perceptions of women leaders were significant challenges.

In understanding women parliamentarians' experiences, it seems **challenges often outweigh opportunities for women MPs**, who repeatedly indicate the most challenging aspect of parliament is the inability to influence or pass legislation. Political parties, theoretically, provide women MPs with opportunities to reach decision-making positions, but most parties do not have women in leadership positions. While women MPs are formally as equally prepared as men, they lack the culture of political networking, which provides opportunities for advancement.

There are few women in leadership and decision-making positions in the region. Iraq's only female minister is the Minister of State for Women's Affairs. In the MENA region, there are only 30 women ministers total, representing six percent of cabinet ministers. Moreover, **women MPs struggle to work together collaboratively**. In a recent questionnaire, no IWPs said they have good relationships with other women MPs, further contributing to the difficulty of forming a women's caucus. Political parties can inhibit women MPs' abilities to form alliances as well.

Despite these challenges, women MPs are implementing a number of strategies to address such obstacles. They are forming alliances with other women, men, CSOs, religious leaders, and others. In addition, they are using the media to combat negative stereotypes and misperceptions about women leaders. They are also working to amend existing legislation, introduce new legislation, and implement international conventions to improve women's rights. **Women MPs continue to seek ways to overcome the myriad obstacles they encounter in parliament and beyond**.

Best Practices

These best practices for IWPs and regional women MPs originate from their experiences in parliament, recommendations, and case study comparisons. Many women MPs in the region are utilizing the following best practices and discussing how to best implement these strategies within their countries.

While quotas assist women in gaining parliamentary seats, **women must be empowered to use their seats effectively**. One of the ways to accomplish this is for women MPs to established **issue-based alliances**, which require uniting around a common issue as a necessary first step in developing alliances with other women MPs. Moreover, formalized **women's caucuses** are one of the best mechanisms to support women and exert pressure on the government. **Women MPs must also be lobbying forces within their own parties**. Some countries have discussed lifting reservations on international conventions like CEDAW and implementing UNSCR 1325 to advance women's issues.

Because women MPs must deal with negative public perceptions, they say the **most important way to impact public attitudes is to serve their constituents**. They must also **highlight their accomplishments to improve perceptions of women leaders**. In addition, women MPs can increase the number of women in leadership positions by passing legislation on a quota for women's leadership, supporting efforts of other women MPs, increasing political awareness, changing cultural and societal perceptions, and nominating women for advanced positions.

Furthermore, women MPs can improve their effectiveness by discussing important issues in the media, consulting with other women MPs, negotiating and forming coalitions, building relationships with government officials, reviewing draft legislation and using resources, and forging partnerships with members of other political parties.

Future Training Opportunities

Throughout the meetings and questionnaires, IWPs and regional MPs expressed their preferences for future training opportunities and areas for improvement.

Information

- Iraqi constitution, bylaws, and parliamentary procedure
- Regional constitutions, and international laws on women's issues and human rights
- International conventions: CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, etc.
- Committee operation
- Constituency relations/communication with voters
- Background on pending legislation
- Background on Iraq's relationship with neighboring countries and international treaties

Skills

- Negotiation and communication
- Conflict management and resolution
- How to face and use the media and use the media to facilitate parliament's work
- Lobbying and advocacy
- Perseverance, self-confidence, commitment, assertiveness, imposing presence and visibility, seizing opportunities
- Providing a foundation for women to make more solid and robust policies

Endnotes

[1] Suad Joseph, "Elite Strategies for State Building: Women, Family, Religion and the State in Iraq and Lebanon," in *Women, Islam & the State,* ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991)," 185.

[2] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/IRAQ_1980_E.PDF

[3] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/IRAQ_1984_E.PDF

[4] http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

[5] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2151_89.htm

[6] http://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iv-11&chapter=4&lang=en

[7] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2151_96.htm

[8] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2151_00.htm

[9] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2151_05.htm

[10] http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=82820

[11] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2151bis_05.htm

[12] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/17/world/middleeast/17iraqwomen.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&

[13] "Men missed 26% of the sessions in the term that ended in August, compared with 19% for women, according to the parliament's administrative office," http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2008-10-26-iraqwomen_N.htm

[14] http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124687123

[15] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2151_A.htm

[16] http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125996804

[17] http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1090/1/WRAP_Pratt_0873082-150709-al-ali_pratt239final.pdf

[18] http://content.lib.utah.edu/utils/getfile/collection/qip/id/454/filename/455.pdf

[19] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/world/middleeast/13baghdad.html?ref=iraq&_r=0

[20] http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/03/23/90932/complicated-quota-system-helps.html#.UYKikcpCjc8

[21] Electoral Law, Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 96, Section 4 (3): http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=IQ

[22] "Achievement of this quota is ensured through a complex set of procedures set out in this regulation, which provides for rules for determining the number of women each governorate will have to elect. According to Election Law No.16, 2005 as amended by the No.17, candidate's certification- 2009, paragraph 1/C, the proportion of women in the candidate lists cannot be less than 25%." http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=IQ

[23] http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

[24] http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP2012e.pdf

[25] http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP2012e.pdf

[26] http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP2012e.pdf

[27] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=66

[28] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=220

[29] http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2373_A.htm

[30] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=137

[31] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=138

[32] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=113

[33] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=128

[34] http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?country=69

[35] IWPs said most of them have good working relationships with their parties (59 percent) compared to 35 percent with government officials, 29 percent with parliamentary leadership, and 12 percent with opposition members. Most said relations with opposition members were fair (59 percent) and only 12 percent said relations were poor [summer 2011].

[36] In the spring 2011 questionnaire, 12 percent said they felt ignored and 8 percent said they felt undermined. In the summer questionnaire, 12 percent said they felt ignored and 12 percent said they felt undermined.

[37] http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/03/09/interview-with-dr.-rola-dashti-member-of-kuwaiti-parliament/6bft

[38] http://www.awid.org/Library/Libya-A-Revolution-for-All

[39] http://globalpolitician.com/2973-lebanon-interview

[40] http://www.blog.learningpartnership.org/2010/10/morocco-mbarka-bouaida/

[41] "The reserved seats for women are filled by winners elected through a proportional representation system based on nation-wide closed party lists." http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?ul=en&country=138

[42] http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/03/09/interview-with-dr.-rola-dashti-member-of-kuwaiti-parliament/6bft