

Australian Iraqi Forum (AIF)

NGO Capacity Building Project- Iraq

Report by

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May 2005

Preamble:

Australian Iraqi Forum is developing a Capacity Building Project for non government organisations (NGOs) in Iraq. The overall objective is to empower Iraqi NGOs to work more efficiently and effectively and develop their role and contribution in building the New Iraq.

Initial action was undertaken in Amman, Jordan between 24 April -13 May 2005 to collect information about the state of NGOs in Iraq, current activities and training programs, issues of concern, and what training programs must be offered in the future.

Several meetings and discussions were held with representatives of Iraqi NGOs who are working in Baghdad. These included Human Rights NGOs, Iraqi Women Independent, Iraqi Contractors Federation, Friends of the Iraqi Museum, and Community Based organisation. Other meetings and discussions took place with representatives of UN Agencies which are attending to Iraq: United Nations Human Settlements Program (HABITAT), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). I also had the chance to meet with Iraqi Officials from the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Housing and Construction who were in Amman for “Slum Upgrading Strategy for Iraq Meeting” Which was organised by UN-Habitat between 26-27 April 2005.

The main questions which guided the discussions and meetings were the following:

1. Could you tell me about your work/ activities /projects in Iraq?
2. What is the present state of the NGO Sector in Iraq?
3. What are the major issues facing NGOs? What skill and resources are needed to tackle these issues?
4. In your opinion, what must be done to develop a strong and active NGO Sector in Iraq?

Current and ongoing training programs:

UN Agencies have been providing training for Iraqi NGOs, including “training of trainers” since early 2004. They have been working with civil society organizations, as well as government institutions. Main training programs and activities in the area of civil society and governance are focusing on:

- Empowering civil society organizations in the areas of human rights, gender, child protection, media, and environment.

- Strengthening and modernising central agencies and ministries with economic and social portfolios and key local administrations in order to better deliver social services and respond to the needs of their communities.
- Strengthening policy planning, coordination, management and institutional, organisational and human resource capacity of key institutions.
- Mainstreaming gender equality in national policies and promoting a mentality change within Iraqi society in support of gender equality and women's rights.
- Supporting the emergence of a free and respected media, by strengthening its capacities and enhancing dialogue with national institutions.
- Advocating child protection needs. Developing child rights-based systems and policies and expanding child protection mechanisms at governorate levels.
- Addressing drugs and crime in a holistic manner-frameworks, legal regime, international conventions, training, oversight and accountability, information systems, and management, monitoring, treatment, and rehabilitation.

Current Activities of NGOs:

According to an official at the Iraqi Ministry of Planning “the number of NGOs in Iraq registered with the Iraqi Ministry of Planning under Association Law Number 45 is 4000 NGOs. Very few are active and working effectively”.

Representatives of some NGOs stated that their work is in Baghdad and some parts of small cities in the south. They provide literacy classes, English classes and computer skills. Some women's NGOs seek to provide funding and technical support to women engaged in micro enterprise projects. Human rights NGOs are providing awareness sessions on democracy, constitution and women's rights. They also organise lectures on violence against women.

Issues of Concern:

In discussing the state of NGOs in Iraq with UN Agencies and officials of the ministries of Planning and Housing, they identified the following issues of concern :

- NGOs lack of clearly defined mission.
- No clear objectives.
- Lack of experience /capacity.
- Lack of management and Planning.
- Lack of coordination.
- Some NGOs work only within a specific region and some work only for specific groups.
- Most of the current training programs are directed to particular NGOs and in particular areas (i.e. human rights) where there are other areas which need training (i.e. needs assessment, primary health care, violence against women, economic empowerment, slum upgrading).
- Lack of financial support, equipment and resources.
- Poor national communication systems.
- Lack of key written materials.
- Last, but not least, lack of security.

What Training Programs Must Be Offered?

The following are main training programs identified by NGOs representatives in Amman:

- Needs Assessment;
- Human Rights (i.e. governance, constitution, women's rights. Political participation, democracy, child rights);
- Gender mainstreaming;
- Illiteracy training;
- Primary health Care;
- Project management ;
- Housing Renewal and Urban Rehabilitation;
- Writing Reports and Proposals.

In this difficult transitional period Iraq is encountering, the role of local NGOs must be more active and effective in rebuilding the new Iraq. Much more training programs are needed to empower human resources and build their capacities to achieve the required change and development.

More information about NGOs activities and projects and contacts are expected to be sent to AIF in the near future.
When adequate background information and projects reports are provided, AIF can be a well placed facilitator for seeking and obtaining in Australia support and aid for the present needs of Iraqi NGOs.