

Economic and Political Empowerment of Women in Iraq

1. Prepare a proposal to the parliament (National and Kurdistan Regional Government) to pass legislation that encourages women in business. Consult with women's organisations and women in business in preparation for the drafting of such legislation and undertake training and consultation seminars bringing together women in decision making from all fields as part of the consultation process. One element of such legislation might be the awarding of at least 10 percent of contracts to women-owned companies. Another aspect of such legislation might be to follow the example of Norway and propose at least 40% women or men on the Boards of all public liability companies. The legislation might also include the setting up of institutional mechanisms to assist women entrepreneurs.
2. Prepare a proposal to parliament to encourage women owned companies to donate to NGOs or to establish charity programs to reduce poverty and implement Corporate Social Responsibility within their own companies, and be exempted from tax payment for this. Such a proposal would highlight women are pioneers of CSR, thus gaining further support from the wider community. (Currently the lack of community support is one of the barriers that face women in business). In preparation for such legislation conduct seminars and consultation events. One element of such legislation might also be tax credit for those businesses that donate to women's civil society organisations.
3. Establish an "Office for the advancement of women" in each province whose aim is to facilitate work for women owned businesses and provide feedback to project owners through data. Such an endeavour would build on the work undertaken in Iraq through the programme leader Azza Humadi, who assisted Iraqi women owned businesses to win US government contracts as part of the "women initiative". Develop a sustainability programme for these offices and relevant training programmes.
4. Develop an integrated media strategy utilizing to the full extent, TV programs, newsletters, internet and 2.0 communities, in order to promote the legislation and instruments above.
5. Create and publish a tool-kit for women entrepreneurs including a directory of women owned businesses, a road map of how to register a company, financial information, a directory of supportive agencies such as NGOs, international donors and government departments, a directory of those NGOs working for women who would benefit from charitable donations and cooperative activities once the companies are in a position to undertake charitable activity.

6. Establish sustainable micro-finance institutions and work with partners to establish an Islamic bank for women and women owned businesses. Devise a media programme to encourage women in need of seed funding to access micro-finance.
7. Establish a business centre of excellence in the region providing capacity building programmes for business management, sales and marketing, business finance and budgeting, business planning, and other relevant programs. This centre would develop training programmes to be used throughout the region under licence. The centre would develop a core of trainers who would be able to undertake training across the region. The centre would also develop as a residential training centre where entrepreneurs and other business women could undertake a variety of personal and professional development programmes. Develop a sustainability programme for the centre. The centre would also provide consulting services to assist women entrepreneurs prepare business plans, provide coaching and mentoring, and technical support for starting successful businesses.
8. Establish a research center to collect and analyze data in regard to these projects in order to measure the success of the initiatives and to make recommendations on improved sustainability and progress.
9. Develop a series of training and mentoring programmes for women in parliament and regional government to assist in both awareness of international instruments in regard to women and children, but also the skills to lobby and advocate for positive change.
10. Develop the network of NGOs working in the field of capacity building of the electorate and female candidates
11. Undertake a series of parallel activities to raise awareness of CEDAW in order to eliminate discrimination and enable women to be ready for economic empowerment. These will include the development of a core of trained trainers to undertake awareness raising in the public, private and civil society sector on the rights of women. This will also include a related media awareness campaign.
12. Develop an integrated campaign working with civil society, the judiciary, the police and legislators to amend the penal code and raise awareness to ensure successful prosecution for rape and violence against women. This would include support for survivors of violence and rape to move forward from trauma but also to build case studies and potential witnesses for rape cases to be brought to court. This builds on successful work that has already taken place with the Iraq High Tribunal judges in the implementation of CEDAW and 1325 (the prosecutors comments in the Anfal case included charges of rape and the definition within the ICC statutes).

Success indicators and time lines

- An indicator might be the number of participants involved in the consultation on legislation plus any amendments to existing legislation or creation of new legislation.
- An indicator might be the number of women owned companies in the region.
- An indicator might be poverty reduction for women
- An indicator might be increased job opportunities and net sales made by women owned businesses
- An indicator might be the increase in charitable activities and donations undertaken between the private and third sector
- An indicator might be the number of women providing evidence regarding violence and rape
- An indicator might be the increase in police protection and support for survivors of violence and rape
- An indicator might be the inclusion of modules at the police academy on gender issues and international instruments in regard to the advancement and protection of women
- An indicator might be the inclusion of modules in law schools on gender issues and international legal instruments in regard to the advancement and protection of women using international human rights norms
- An indicator might be the number of women in decision making in particular the national parliament voting for legislation to advance and protect women and girls
- An indicator might be an increase in the number of rape cases taken to court and success in prosecution of the perpetrator and protection of the survivor
- The project will have a 5 year time frame. It will be a multi-stakeholder project and will include the collaboration between local civil society, women in decision making and international technical assistance, working with key men as champions for the advancement of women and bringing to bear best practice in other countries in the region. It will build on the projects and experience of civil society organisations and ensure an holistic vision for the region, working with other actors. The consortium of civil society and international organisations working on the project have proven experience and a very wide range of networks within Iraq, with the Diaspora and within the Middle East and thus able to bring to this project best practice from elsewhere.