



# Women in Peace-building

## From Grassroots to National Reconciliation



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Iraq's long path to build an inclusive, stable society is a complex undertaking that has been fraught with challenges.

A decrease in violence is the first step toward fostering lasting peace. This process must be for both men and women, as both are affected by violence in unique ways and thus have distinct roles in the reconciliation process. Such a process must begin at the grassroots before it is visible at the national level.

### CHALLENGES

Women's participation in politics, society, and the economy have been severely limited by daily economic struggles, access to resources, widespread gender-based violence, systematic discrimination, and a lack of effective legislative and grassroots empowerment.

- A prolonged stretch of wars and sanctions caused the loss of many Iraqi women's husbands and children, and a large number were left as the sole breadwinners in their households.
- Sectarian and communal violence has had a destabilizing and equally tragic impact, with violence at times focused on women.
- Women are caught between the demands of tradition and the realities of their current situations. Cultural norms often prevent women from leaving their homes without a male guardian. These women are currently heavily dependent on the state or extended family networks.

### HOW VIOLENCE IN IRAQ AFFECTS WOMEN

More than one out of every three women have either had a family member who has suffered devastating violence including sexual assault, domestic violence, kidnapping, and assault or experienced such violence themselves.<sup>1</sup>

An increase in violence is common in a post-conflict setting where the rule of law is weak and there is high unemployment. Rape is often used as a tactic to humiliate women and their families.

Human trafficking, which disproportionately involves female victims, thrives in areas of high displacement such as Iraq.

Iraqi women feel that violence against them is increasing. 38% said they believed that incidences of rape are increasing. Over 30% were concerned that trafficking of women is on the rise.<sup>2</sup>

*Women understand personally how violence impacts a country on a large and small scale, but are not usually the perpetrators of violence, therefore women are in a unique position to act as facilitators of peace, from household to community and ultimately, to national issues.*

### UNDP'S STUDY

To better understand these issues, UNDP produced a study on the women of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Regional. The study details the current state and effect of violence in Iraq on women.

It analyses several interventions designed to empower women and assesses their impact

The report also makes connections between these interventions and peace-building across Iraq, and makes recommendations on how to extend these interventions into broader peace-building efforts.



Photo by UNDP Iraq

<sup>1</sup> "In Her Own Words: Iraqi women talk about their greatest concerns and challenges - A Survey" March 2009

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

## PEACE-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

The private sector, government and non-governmental organisations have implemented various peace-building interventions after the fall of the previous regime in 2003. A combination of widespread sectarian fighting and an increase in domestic violence throughout Iraq led to the development of various peace-building-related interventions. These interventions covered several categories, including:

- Conflict Resolution Training
- Domestic Counselling and Awareness Programming
- Women's Leadership Development
- Political Participation Training
- Inter-communal Exchange and Dialogue Programming
- Women's Rights Courses
- Human Rights Courses
- Pre-marriage Counselling
- Personal and Public Health Programming
- Self-expression through Art Activities
- Remedial Education Courses (e.g. improving literacy)

## MOVING FORWARD

UNDP Iraq has prescribed several paths to improving the peace-building effects of these interventions, including:

- Securing the buy-in of male community leaders for the peace-building process
- Improving the Iraqi legal system
- Improving funding allocation and transparency
- Targeting aid to vulnerable populations

## The United Nations Development Programme

*UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 177 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.*

## BUILDING PEACE THROUGH COMMUNICATION - RADDIA'S STORY

Raddia, a woman in her mid-thirties from Basrah was illiterate for most of her life. Her marriage was the result of a traditional tribal reconciliation process: her tribe was considered guilty of wrongdoing in a tribal clash, and she was offered for marriage to the victim's family as a form of compensation. Her husband, with whom she has three children, subjected her to a great deal of physical abuse and poor treatment. She describes her role in the household as that of a slave, not a wife or partner.

Raddia was very surprised when her husband allowed her to enroll in an adult literacy course, which she could attend because her in-laws cared for her children in her absence. Her husband's side of the family placed great value on these children as a continuation of their bloodline, an issue which would later benefit Raddia.

In addition to a notable improvement in her literacy, Raddia also learned basic skills in conflict resolution and problem solving. She noted that this empowered her to convince her husband not to abuse her as he had previously. Using the lessons she learned, she explained that the manner in which he treated her negatively impacted the development of their children. Exposure to violence in the home, she explained to her husband, would increase the chances that their children would be involved with violence as they grew older. With the various violent paths available to young Iraqis, this argument was enough to persuade Raddia's husband to improve his behaviour, and greatly improved her and her family's quality of life.



Iraq, 2012. Photo by Safen Ahmed

*The images are not of the actual beneficiaries\**