

UNDEF



The United Nations
Democracy Fund

**PROVISION FOR POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
DEMOCRACY FUND
Contract NO.PD:C0110/10**

EVALUATION REPORT



UDF-IRQ-09-309 – Campaign for Stressing Community Concerns and Seeking Political Resolutions in the South and South Center of Iraq

17 February 2014

Acknowledgements

The evaluators wish to express their appreciation to Iraq Civil Action Network (ICAN), its Director, Mr Waai K. Hamza and his staff, for their assistance and support in arranging meetings for the National Consultant and for the time they dedicated to providing inputs to the evaluation. Thanks are also due to Mr. Basim Keshash and members of the survey team, project participants and trainers, as well as members of the Provincial Councils in Babil and Karbala, local political representatives in Karbala and to representatives of ICAN's implementing partner organizations, for making themselves available for meetings with the National Consultant.

All photographs used in the report were provided by ICAN.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

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Table of Contents

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT	6
III. PROJECT STRATEGY	10
i. Project strategy and approach	10
ii. Logical framework	13
IV. Evaluation findings	15
(i) Relevance	15
(ii) Effectiveness	16
(iii) Efficiency	21
(iv) Impact	22
(v) Sustainability	23
IV. CONCLUSIONS	25
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	26
VI. ANNEXES	28
ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS	28
ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED	29
ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS	30
ANNEX 4: LIST OF ACRONYMS	31

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Project data

The project entitled *Campaign for Stressing Community Concerns and Seeking Political Resolutions* was implemented over a two-year period, from January 1, 2011 to December 30, 2012, with a budget of \$200,000. The project was implemented by the Iraq Civil Action Network (ICAN), along with nine implementing partner organizations, one in each of the provinces in the South and South-Centre Regions of Iraq where project activities took place. The project's overall objective was to establish a robust civil society, which demands a democratically accountable government that is able to effectively involve citizens in decision-making. The project sought to achieve this by:

- Enhancing the capacity of political parties and independent community leaders, along with civil society representatives, in the South and South-Central regions to focus on citizen needs and community priorities, and to bring these priorities to the attention of decision-makers;
- Enhancing the capacities of local leaders in the South and South-Central regions to advocate with government authorities and parliamentarians for improved community involvement in decision-making;
- Establishing common ground among civil society, political parties and other activists in the South and South-Central regions in the effort to build a continuing process for non-violent resolution of community problems.

(ii) Evaluation findings

Relevance: The objectives of the project – enhancing the capacities of civil society, local branches of political parties and community leaders to make a more active, informed and effective role in identifying and acting on local priorities – were directly relevant to ongoing efforts to address some major deficiencies in democratic practice in Iraq. All of the project stakeholder groups confirmed that the project represented a response to a felt need for practical knowledge on playing an effective role in the political process and on how to become involved in decision-making.

The project design was built, in part, around the central role of a group of 18 facilitators, drawn from nine member organizations of the ICAN network, each of them based in one of the target provinces, and selected as the implementing organization to take the lead in coordinating the project in its home province. The continuing role of both the facilitators and the nine implementing organizations ensured that the project's central ideas were well-adapted to the requirements of the local context in each province. ICAN's experience in organizing activities to strengthen local leadership and build up the knowledge and skills of representatives of local organizations, including political parties, proved to be an important asset in supporting a project strategy which fitted well with overall objectives, as well as the priorities of beneficiaries.

Effectiveness: The project was effective in implementing its activities as planned, in achieving its 3 sub-objectives and in contributing positively to its long-term development objective. This solid performance was built on strong organization, a competent team of trainers and content matter experts, excellent local knowledge derived from the partnership with its nine local implementing

agency partners, one in each of the target provinces, drawn from ICAN's extensive network of member organizations, and a good understanding of gaps in current democratic practice in Iraq.

The project achieved its targets for the numbers of those trained and participating in all activities in all 9 target provinces. These included: 540 young people and 270 representatives of civil society organizations, political parties and local leaders, who took part in focus groups; more than 1,000 participants who were involved in 36 civic forums, and 500 individuals who took part in 9 provincial conferences. Finally, 20 selected individuals in each province, 180 in total, were trained in advocacy techniques and were then involved in advocacy meetings with parliamentarians from their home provinces. One disappointment was the project's uneven performance in securing the participation of women participants. However, it is apparent that considerable efforts were made to ensure the prominence of women as facilitators, panelists and experts.

Overall, the activities delivered succeeded in providing beneficiaries with practical knowledge and experience in how to identify issues of general concern to their communities. They also built their capacity to collect information, analyze situations and work with other parties in coming to a consensus view in establishing priorities and in understanding how to bring such issues, along with proposed consensus solutions, to the attention of decision-makers.

The civic forums, provincial conferences and advocacy meetings between groups of community representatives and decision-makers, were notable in bringing citizens and elected officials together to consider community priorities and what might be done to address them. It is a testament to the effectiveness of the project that many of the issues raised have subsequently been addressed, or put on the agenda for practical action to follow.

A particularly innovative feature of the project was the planning, implementation and effective utilization of the findings from a large-scale public opinion survey, based on a random sample of 3,000 individuals, drawn from the population in the 9 target provinces. The report on the survey provided essential input to discussions on local priorities and barriers to relying on non-violent methods in dispute resolution, and was a positive factor in the success of three of the major activities of the project: the local focus groups, civic forums and provincial conferences. A second factor was the continuity provided by a group of 18 facilitators, staff members selected from the nine provincial implementing agencies and trained by ICAN. They played an essential role in all activities throughout the project, and their contribution was rated very highly by participants.

Efficiency: Given the results accomplished, the list of activities completed, the large number of participants, and the geographic range (9 provinces) of the project, it may be concluded that funds were spent efficiently and economically in service of the specified objectives. Overall, ICAN was careful in planning its expenditures and ensuring that unit costs for training programs were reasonable. The provincial implementing agencies played a significant supporting role in the project, but they did so, for the most part, on a voluntary basis, hence keeping costs down.

The project was well-managed, and institutional arrangements proved to be both effective and efficient. The provincial implementing agencies provided solid support in terms of logistics and local organization, and in securing participation of beneficiary groups. Together with the implementing agencies, ICAN did well in managing relationships with government and provincial councils, as well as political parties and parliamentarians.

Impact: To devote a large part of a project's resources to focus groups and forums does not usually constitute a recipe for achieving impact, but this initiative proved to be an exception to the rule. The overall objective of the project refers to an Iraq featuring "a robust civil society" and "a democratically accountable government". Progress in the development of democracy has been disappointing, and the country may be a long way from achieving either of these two features, characteristic of a fully-functioning democratic society. Yet, the project succeeded in achieving its sub-objectives and has, arguably, had a modest impact on the bigger picture through strengthening civil society in the South and South Centre Regions, in improving government-citizen relations and communications, and in stimulating greater responsiveness on the part of decision-makers at local and national level in listening to and addressing the priorities of citizens and local communities.

Bearing in mind the constant threat of outbreaks of violence and terror facing Iraqis, a particularly important contribution made by the project at a local level was to provide training and practical experience in negotiation, consensus-building and methods for finding common ground where disagreements occur. In this way, the project was able to emphasize and demonstrate the effectiveness of non-violent methods for dispute resolution. The involvement of local branches of political parties in this process was of particular value, given that many are linked directly to armed militias. A number of project participants were able, subsequently, to initiate action in resolving local disputes and in developing common ground within their communities as a basis for launching advocacy initiatives with government to address urgent local priorities.

Sustainability: There remain many barriers to public participation in Iraq. Yet, despite this, it is apparent that, through the UNDEF project and other initiatives, ICAN and its partners have succeeded in nurturing a strong level of interest on the part of citizens, community leaders and CSOs in the South and South Centre Regions of Iraq in becoming engaged in public life. There is evidence now of a strong commitment to build on experience gained to date, along with a willingness of other donor organizations to fund the work

ICAN itself continues to provide assistance in democracy-and civil society-building in all nine of the provinces which featured in the UNDEF-supported project. There is a particular focus on 5 of the 9: Babil, Karbala, Basra, Qadisayah (also known as al-Qadissiya) and Wasit, where the provincial councils are collaborating with ICAN and its principal local partner organizations in promoting community participation and In addition, following the project, ICAN has responded to requests to provide training to build the capacity of the executive committees of the provincial councils in five provinces.

Under the circumstances, the prospects for sustainability for what was accomplished through the project are reasonably good.

(iii) Conclusions

- The project was well-organized, with the grantee, ICAN, making effective use of its network of provincially-based member organizations in ensuring that activities were adapted to the local context and in broadening the base of participation.

- Despite the obvious difficulty of holding public events and meetings in a country where the threat of violence is a constant, ICAN managed risk effectively and ensured that all activities were completed, with some adjustments made to timing and location.

- The project was highly relevant in addressing gaps in public life at a local level in Iraq, and responded to felt needs of beneficiaries. All project activities seem to have achieved their objectives, and the sequence of moving from focus groups to civic forums and provincial conferences, and on to national advocacy meetings seems to have worked well in building knowledge and skills and providing opportunities for participants to put them into practice.

- By facilitating the engagement of local community leaders and NGOs with decision-makers (provincial council members and parliamentarians), the project also modeled the kinds of interaction so essential to a vibrant democracy.

- In South and South-Central Iraq, the project contributed to strengthening the capacity and self-confidence of civil society, while also facilitating a greater willingness on the part of decision-makers and political parties to engage with civil society organizations and local leaders and to respond to community concerns.

- The performance of political parties as effective actors in the political process in Iraq has been disappointing. Hence, the effort by ICAN to engage the local branches of the parties in project activities, demonstrating to them the benefits to them of engaging with, and listening to, citizens, community leaders and CSOs, was a particularly positive feature of the project.

- In terms of sustainability, it may be worth noting that much of the work begun through the project is continuing through other donor-financed initiatives. In addition, there is substantial evidence that civic action and engagement in public life in many areas of the two regions where project activities took place have moved to a higher and more active level.

(iv) Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- ICAN refines its methodology of project design to give greater attention to continuity of involvement by project participants and trainees from the “lowest” (most local) to the “highest” level (provincial or national) –in the case of this project, from focus groups to national conferences and “advocacy committees” - in order to reinforce the capacity development dimension of its projects.

- In view of the problems with service delivery identified in the focus groups and civic forums, along with the absence of quality control by government, ICAN seeks to secure financial and technical support to assist civil society organizations in introducing community score cards and other techniques, which will enable local communities to monitor and document government performance in this sphere.

- Consideration be given to planning further initiatives with local branches of political parties. Particular attention might be given to supporting them in developing methods for

consulting with local communities and civil society organizations in identifying gaps in service delivery and in formulating practical proposals to be taken to central party authorities for further action.

- Given ICAN's highly effective use of a public opinion survey in the project, further consideration be given to employing surveys and reports on their findings in future work.

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

(i) The project and evaluation objectives

The project entitled *Campaign for Stressing Community Concerns and Seeking Political Resolutions* was implemented over a two-year period, with a budget of \$200,000, including \$20,000 for UNDEF monitoring and evaluation. The project was implemented by the Iraq Civil Action Network (ICAN), along with nine implementing partner organizations, one in each of the provinces in the South and South-Centre Regions of Iraq where project activities took place. The nine were: The Sufraa for Development Foundation; the Al-Khair Humanitarian Charity Organization; the Iraqi Al-firdaws Society; the Ather Center for Development; the Awareness Cultural Association; the Organization for Democracy and Civil Society Support; the Cultural Foundation for Development and Human Rights; the Kut handicap Association; and, the Al Nahrain civil Society Organization.

The project focused its efforts on nine provinces in two regions of Iraq, the South and South-Centre. These are predominantly Shia areas, which, in the past were excluded from decision-making by virtue of their religious affiliation and ethnicity. As a country, Iraq is still in the early stages of democracy-building, and democratic practice is still very new to these two regions, in particular. The project's overall objective was **to establish a robust civil society, which demands a democratically accountable government that is able to effectively involve citizens in decision-making**. It sought to achieve this by:

- Enhancing the capacity of, political parties and independent community leaders, along with civil society representatives, in the South and South-Central regions to focus on citizen needs and community priorities, and to bring these priorities to the attention of decision-makers;
- Enhancing the capacities of local leaders in the South and South-Central regions to advocate with government authorities and parliamentarians for improved community involvement in decision-making;
- Establishing common ground among civil society, political parties and other activists in the South and South-Central regions in the effort to build a continuing process for non-violent resolution of community problems.

This evaluation belongs to a larger set of evaluations of UNDEF-funded projects from Rounds 2, 3 and 4. The purpose of these evaluations is to “contribute to a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project, which will in turn help UNDEF to develop future project strategies. Evaluations are also to assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved”.¹

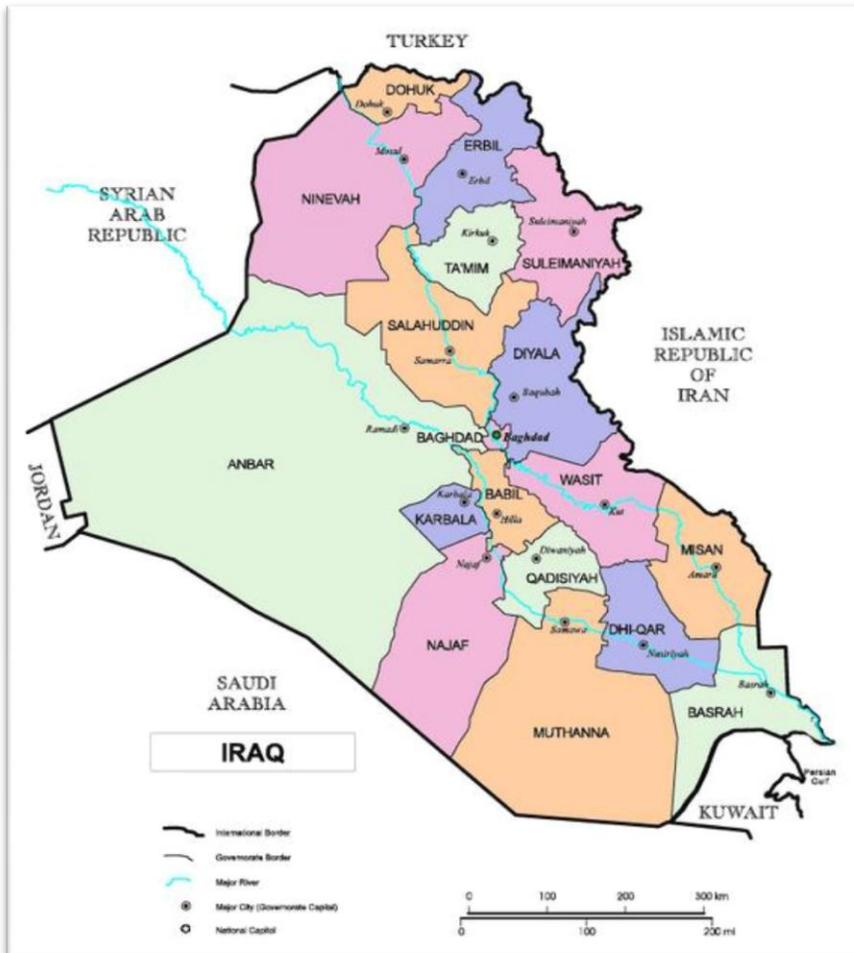
(ii) Evaluation methodology

The evaluation took place in December 2013 with field work done in Iraq from 3-13 December 2013. The evaluation was conducted by an international expert and a national expert. The UNDEF Rounds 2, 3 and 4 evaluations follow a standard set of evaluation questions that focus on six critical issues: the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and

¹ See: Operational Manual for the UNDEF-funded project evaluations, page 6

any value added through UNDEF funding (see Annex1). This report follows that structure, with a chapter on each evaluation issue.

Following consultations among UNDEF, Transtec and the international consultant, it was agreed that, because of current conditions in Iraq, the evaluation would be managed remotely by the international consultant. In turn, he would direct the field research, providing written guidance notes, along with informal advice, to the national consultant, who would conduct the research in Iraq. The evaluation followed this plan.



The evaluators reviewed basic documentation on the project and on the Iraqi context. Additional documentation in Arabic was obtained by the national consultant, who translated and summarized selected materials. Given time limitations and difficulties of domestic travel in Iraq, it was decided by the Evaluators that the field mission would be restricted to three of the nine provinces in which project activities were implemented. Initial interviews were held with the grantee and its project team, following which interviews and small group discussions took place involving implementing partners, and a cross-section of all project agents and participants. These interviews and group sessions took place in

three locations: Babil; Najaf; and, Karbala. Each of the three cities is the capital of the province which bears the same name. The provinces are located to the south of Baghdad (see map, above). ICAN is based in Babil. The list of persons interviewed, with locations, along with an indication of the role played in the project by each individual named, is provided in Annex 3.

Among the issues highlighted in the interviews and discussions were the following:

- The relationship between the UNDEF project and others completed and planned by ICAN;
- The role of the implementing partner organizations, and the qualities they brought to the project;

- The impact of the security situation on the project;
- How the public opinion survey, a key component of the project, was planned and conducted, and its place in supporting project objectives;
- Follow-up by ICAN to reinforce the achievements of the project (*a set of questions raised by UNDEF*);
- The value of participation in project activities for participants, including local leaders;
- The extent to which the project has empowered participants to play an active role in public life beyond the project;
- The extent of women's participation in the project, and its level of success in engaging with ethnic minorities in the predominantly *Shia* provinces in which the project was implemented;
- The contribution of the 18 facilitators who were trained by the project to take a leading role in all project activities in their respective provinces; the practical value of the training provided by ICAN;
- The degree to which there was integration among the various project activities and continuity among project participants in taking part in the sequence of activities;
- The contribution of each round of activities to the accomplishment of project objectives.

The list of persons interviewed is provided in Annex 3.

(iii) Development context

It is now over ten years since the invasion of Iraq (March 2003) and the overthrow of Saddam Hussain. However, the country has yet to establish a stable government with legitimacy in all regions and among all ethnic and religious groups. The violence which characterized the aftermath of the invasion continues, while international military forces have withdrawn (the last US troops left in November 2011) and international development assistance is much reduced.

Although Iraq has succeeded in holding what have been regarded as largely free and fair elections, democracy in a broader sense remains elusive. The effort to undertake the extraordinarily difficult transition from an authoritarian, repressive state to a democracy, responsive to the needs and priorities of its citizens, initiated under the most unfavorable conditions, has been unsuccessful thus far. Political leaders exploit ethnic and sectarian divisions in the struggle for power and have failed to work towards an inclusive democracy and society. The current *Shia*-based government has marginalized Iraqi *Sunnis* and closed off opportunities for dialogue and engagement.² Political participation in decision-making and in the political process is restricted and increasing sectarian violence discourages the building of a strong and engaged civil society.

Corruption is widespread and offenders have little fear of prosecution or other consequences.³ According to the US State Department, "family, tribal, and religious considerations have significantly influenced government decisions at all levels", while "bribery, money laundering, nepotism, and misappropriation of public funds are common."⁴ Iraq has been described as one of the most corrupt countries in the region, as well as globally, with corruption deeply embedded

² International Crisis Group (ICG), "Make or Break? Iraq's Sunnis and the State": *Middle East Report 144*, September 14, 2013.

³ "Iraq", *Freedom in the World 2013* Washington D.C., Freedom House; "Iraq: Ten Years Later is Less Threatening but Riven by Turmoil", Editorial Board, *Washington Post*, March 22, 2013; Salah Nasrawi, "Can Iraq be Saved?" *Al Jazeera*, November 14, 2013.

⁴ US State Department, "Iraq", in *Country Reports on Human Rights 2012*, p.34.

in all public institutions, and was ranked 169 out of 176 countries surveyed in Transparency International's *2012 Corruption Perceptions Index*.

As a result of heavy political and sectarian pressure, the courts are unable to pursue major criminal cases, including those concerning corruption, even where a strong case has been prepared. The police are seen as corrupt, and, in the absence of what are perceived to be effective mechanisms for conflict resolution, citizens are likely to turn to traditional authorities or local militias to settle disputes. While women enjoy equal rights under the constitution, in practice, they face significant social and economic discrimination, and rape and domestic violence remain pervasive. Despite this, women have taken a stronger role in public life in recent years, with 25 per cent of seats in the parliament reserved for them.⁵ Following the 2010 Election, there were 81 women of a total of 325 members of Parliament. However, there was only one female cabinet minister (of a total of 29), and reports suggest that women parliamentarians are often marginalized in decision-making.⁶

Political discontent grew during 2013, as the state proved unable to cope with rising levels of violence, stimulated by the continuation of the Syrian Civil War. The UN reported that 7,818 civilians were known to have been killed in 2013, marking it the worst year for fatalities since 2008.⁷ The porous Syrian/Iraqi border has allowed for a regular flow of arms and fighters into Iraq and the strengthening of local Al Qaeda affiliate groups, while the war has provided encouragement to *Jihadis* at local level in many parts of the country. Beyond this, popular alienation from government has grown in the face of gross deficiencies in service delivery, whether in security, electricity supply, garbage collection, or basic social services.⁸ According to UN data, 25 per cent of the population lacks access to safe drinking water, while a national survey conducted in 2011 found that 79 per cent of the population rated the reliability of electricity supply as very poor, with the average household receiving only 7.6 hours of electricity each day.⁹



Facilitators' Training, Babil, June 2011

⁵ See: *Freedom in the World 2013*; International Crisis Group (ICG), "Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government.", *Middle East Report*, September 26, 2011.

⁶ See: US State Department, Iraq, 2012.

⁷ International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch 125*, January 2, 2014.

⁸ "A Look Behind Surging Violence in Iraq", *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2013; Toby Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change: the Rise of a New Authoritarianism", *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, 2, 2013.

⁹ Information summarized in Toby Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq", p. 253.

Citizen concerns over these matters have been raised repeatedly by Parliamentarians, but to no avail. More fundamentally, Parliament has failed to exercise its oversight responsibilities, and, as a result, the government exercises its powers free from fear of being held accountable.¹⁰

Under these conditions, a well-prepared initiative to encourage cooperation among local leaders and activists across ethnic and sectarian lines, and seeking common ground among political factions, while ambitious, has much to recommend it. Given the stagnation at national level, beginning from the base of the local community and working upwards may be a more promising way to seek both a consensus on reform and a means to build pressure for the establishment of a more open and responsive system of governance. The absence of an engaged citizenship and civil society is one of the factors which enhances the effectiveness of violence by *Jihadis* in undermining the prospects for a working democracy. In principle, the concepts and assumptions underlining project design were quite relevant in addressing the deficiencies of democracy and public life in Iraq.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

i. Project strategy and approach

The Iraqi Civil Action Network (ICAN), an NGO established in 2005, describes its mission thus: *to build an independent and active civil society that contributes to a democratic political process and transition in Iraq. ICAN's mission is to develop Iraq's civil society groups through capacity building trainings including organizational development and advocacy campaigns, and provide a forum for information exchange on best practices that lead to their growth and development.*

ICAN is an umbrella and network organization, representing, and providing support to, more than 150 local and provincial-level NGOs in the nine provinces of the South and South-Central regions of Iraq. Member organizations focus on a wide range of activities, including social service delivery, education and training, legal advice and services and humanitarian assistance. ICAN has 16 members of staff, seven of whom are members of the management team; the 16 include seven women.

The organization prepares funding proposals on behalf of, and in cooperation with, member organizations, and manages those projects which secure funding. In the years since 2005, it has built up experience in completing a series of projects in the training of community and civil society leaders and in working closely with civil society and political parties in its two target regions, and more widely. One of its larger current projects, funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, NED (\$350,000), focuses on building civil society capacity by coordinating the development of a 5-year national strategy, training civil society organizations (CSOs) from Kirkuk and Mosul in organizational development. The project is also providing training to 140 CSOs from 14 provinces on advocacy campaigns and coalition building. Building on the experience of the UNDEF project, ICAN will also coordinate 16 provincial and national level advocacy campaigns on topics chosen by local CSOs.

¹⁰ See: *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2013; ICG, "Failing Oversight."

The UNDEF project built on the experience of earlier initiatives, funded by other donors, just as the NED project builds on the lessons of the UNDEF-funded project. To achieve the principal objective, along with the three more specific sub-objectives listed above (see Chapter II. i, above), activities were organized under two components, one much larger than the other. The first, smaller in scope, but critical to the design of the project, took place at the first stage of implementation and focused on *capacity development* through the training of 18 facilitators who would play a key role in all subsequent activities. The trainee facilitators were drawn from nine selected NGOs, one in each of the nine provinces (governorates) in the South and South-Central regions of Iraq. The role of the trained facilitators would be to organize, lead and facilitate subsequent project activities, including focus groups, civil forums and conferences. The second component included *public awareness- and advocacy-related activities to assist community leaders in raising awareness among community members of critical issues facing them and in identifying practical solutions to them*. It also had a capacity development dimension, in that it was intended to build the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) – the member organizations of ICAN involved in the project at provincial level - by providing them with training on methods of facilitating civil forums, coordinating and leading focus groups and improving their skills in undertaking advocacy work on behalf of their communities. At the same time, the project offered political parties and local leaders practical opportunities to integrate input from their constituencies into their decision-making.

The principal elements of this strategic component were:

- Conducting and reporting on a *public opinion survey* in the nine target provinces intended to identify those factors which constitute barriers to citizens taking part in public life and local decision-making. The survey also sought to: identify respondent views on the role of political parties and CSOs, as well as Provincial Councils, in solving problems experienced by citizens; and, to compare the roles played by political parties, CSOs and Provincial Councils in problems-solving in comparison with the contributions of other social and official institutions, including: the family, friends, tribal elders and religious leaders, the judiciary and the police and government officials.
- Holding *Focus Group meetings* at provincial level with a) political parties and local officials, and b) community leaders. Two sets of group meetings were held for each set of participants in each of the 9 provinces. The group meetings were intended to identify the most critical local issues and to devise recommendations for action to be taken to address them. These recommendations, in turn, would be brought forward at subsequent forums and conferences for further consideration;
- Following the completion of the Focus Group phase of the project, some 45 round tables (36 civic forums, 4 in each province, and 9 provincial conferences) would be held to take forward the dialogue on the findings of the opinion survey and the recommendations arising from the Focus Group sessions. The round tables were to conclude with the formulation of resolutions to provide a focus to advocacy work, which would follow;
- The final activity of the project would be the preparation and training of small, multi-stakeholder teams (“committees”) to undertake advocacy work with national decision-makers, drawing attention to the most critical local issues and advocating for actions to be taken by national government to address them. Members of the teams would be selected from those who participated in both the Focus Groups as well as in the Civic Forums, with attention to inclusion of women, youth and minorities. The plan was to hold nine advocacy and dialogue sessions at national level, with a committee for each

province (governorate) meeting with a representative of its own governorate in the Iraqi House of Representatives.

The project drew on the services of professional trainers with prior experience with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and other international organizations to plan and conduct the training-of-trainers exercise for the facilitators (component 1). The curriculum and training materials were drawn from a training manual developed by ICAN under an earlier grant from the national Endowment for Democracy. Experienced professionals were also contracted to conduct the public opinion survey. The focus groups and round tables were organized by the designated ICAN member organizations based in the 9 provinces and delivered by the trained facilitators, along with ICAN network trainers.



Karbala Civic Forum, June 2011

ii. Logical framework

The chart is based on detailed information included in the project’s results table and Final Report. A difficulty encountered in preparing the chart is that the outcomes (Medium-Term Impacts) set out in the Project Document and Final Report overlap with one another, while the relationship of the outputs to the outcomes is not specified. In most cases, outputs relate to more than one outcome, and the chart below reflects this state of affairs. For all this, the links in the logical framework, relating activities and intended outputs to higher-level results, are reasonably clear.

Project activities	Intended outputs/outcomes	Medium-term impacts	Long-term development objective
<p>Selection of facilitation trainees, drawn from NGOs in the 9 selected provinces; recruitment of trainers; A 5-day training-of-trainers (ToT) workshop for facilitators drawn from the 9 target provinces is conducted, given by experienced trainers, focusing on facilitation and organizational skills, along with adult learning skills and good practice;</p> <p>A training curriculum on facilitation and organization of community civic forums and focus groups is developed and training materials prepared;</p> <p>Recruitment of a team of facilitators to serve the project.</p> <p>Preparation and implementation of a public opinion survey to be administered to a random sample of citizens in the South and South-Central regions, focusing on key issues of concern to citizens and barriers to community participation in the political process;</p> <p>Collection and analysis of survey data and preparation of survey report; distribution of the report in the selected provinces;</p> <p>Recruitment and training of survey team and expert analyst group.</p> <p>Organizing and conducting the first round of Focus Group meetings targeting young men and women in the 9 selected provinces, focusing on key problems in local communities and in the region, identifying possible solutions, and the role of youth in acting to bring them about;</p>	<p><u>Supporting Medium-Term Impacts 1 & 2:</u></p> <p>18 facilitators are selected and complete their ToT training; The training curriculum is delivered affectively and training materials and manuals are provided as a basis for future activities;</p> <p>The successful trainees are recruited by the project.</p> <p>Survey instruments prepared, sample drawn, survey team trained and questionnaire administered to 2,000 respondents in the target regions;</p> <p>Survey data is analyzed and a report prepared by an expert team; Survey report printed and 2,000 copies distributed in the 9 target provinces; the findings of the report presented at the Focus Group sessions and civic forums.</p> <p>Nine Focus Groups held, with 30 participants in each meeting, including young people, 17-30 years-old; different ethnic and religious groups are well-represented;</p> <p>A series of recommendations was produced by each group, which provided an input to the agenda of the subsequent Civic Forums.</p> <p>Nine Focus Groups held, with 30</p>	<p>1. The capacities of political parties, civil society and community leaders in the South and South-Central regions to focus on the needs of citizens and priorities of local communities, while also bringing these issues to the attention of decision-makers, are enhanced.</p> <p>2. The capacities of local leaders in the South and South-Central regions to</p>	<p>Establishing a robust civil society, which demands a democratically accountable government that is able to effectively involve citizens in decision-making</p>

<p>For each meeting, selection of a 30 young people, broadly representative of the local population.</p> <p>Organizing and conducting the second round of Focus Groups, with particular attention to political party and provincial council members, and representatives of civil society, religious organizations, as well as traditional leaders;</p> <p>For each meeting, selection of an appropriate mix of qualified participants.</p> <p>Organizing and conducting Civic Forums, 4 in each province, involving political parties, civil society organizations and community leaders;</p> <p>For each meeting, selection of a balanced group of participants.</p> <p>Planning, organizing and conducting 9 Provincial Conferences, with at least 50 participants in each.</p> <p>Organizing and conducting “an Advocacy Campaign” at national level;</p> <p>Training 9 groups, one from each province, to meet with Iraqi Parliamentarians;</p> <p>Selection of those to be trained and to take part in the Advocacy activity.</p>	<p>participants in each meeting. Each group is broadly representative of the local population and of the targeted participant groups;</p> <p>A series of recommendations was produced by each group, which provided an input to the agenda of the subsequent Civic Forums.</p> <p><u>Supporting Medium-Term Impacts 2&3:</u></p> <p>36 Forums held, with 25-30 participants in each, featuring cooperative and constructive dialogue among political parties, administrators and citizens’ representatives, concerning the identification of solutions to core political, economic and social problems;</p> <p>The forums produced a series of recommendations to be taken up at the Provincial Conferences.</p> <p>9 Conferences held, with a total attendance of around 500. Those represented in presentations and dialogue included: local community leaders; political party members; provincial council members; provincial lawmakers; and, citizens. Participants included some of those who took part in the Focus Groups and Forums; dialogue focused on the recommendations emerging from the Focus Groups and Forums;</p> <p>In turn, the Conferences also produced sets of recommendations.</p> <p><u>Supporting Medium-Term Impact 3:</u></p> <p>9 groups were organized, one from each province, with 20 participants in each, and each group met with an MP and made proposals on local priority issues;</p> <p>Each group include young people, women and ethnic/religious minorities. Provincial Council and media representatives also participated.</p>	<p>advocate with government authorities and parliamentarians for improved community involvement in decision-making are enhanced.</p> <p>3. Common ground is established among civil society, political parties and other activists in the South and South-Central regions in the effort to build a continuing process for non-violent resolution of community problems.</p>	
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IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation is based on a framework reflecting a core set of evaluation questions formulated to meet the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The questions and sub-questions are listed in Annex 1 of this document.

(i) Relevance

Development of the practice of democracy is at a very early stage in Iraq. Whether the focus is on senior government ministers and officials, elected representatives at all levels, or civil society organizations, none have the experience or knowledge that they need to build the communications and connections between government and citizens to energize public life and support responsive decision-making.

The objectives of the project – enhancing the capacities of civil society, local branches of political parties and community leaders to make a more active, informed and effective role in identifying and acting on local priorities – were directly relevant to the effort to fill in some critical gaps in democratic practice in Iraq. Beyond this, the South and South Central Regions of the country, which constituted the geographic focus for the project, are predominantly *Shia*. As such, they and their representatives had been systematically excluded from decision-making under the *Ba'athist* regime. Hence, there is an enormous learning deficit to be made up in these two regions in building the knowledge of how to build two-way communications and cooperation between government and citizens. All categories of project stakeholders, including the trainees and participants in its principal activities, indicated that the project represented a response to a felt need for practical knowledge on how to play an effective role in the political process. The project was well-adapted to the national and regional context and to the particular priorities of its principal beneficiaries.

The project design was built, in part, around the central role of a group of 18 facilitators, drawn from nine member organizations of the ICAN network, each based in one of the target provinces, and selected as implementing organization to take the lead in coordinating the project in its home province. The continuing role of the facilitators and the nine implementing organizations contributed to ensuring that there was an effective adaptation of the project's central ideas to the particular requirements of the local context.

ICAN's experience in organizing activities to stimulate local leadership and build up the knowledge and skills of representatives of local organizations, including political parties, proved to be an important asset in devising the project strategy. The project design featured a variety of methods to engage with the direct beneficiaries and encourage their participation in dialogue and decision-making, including local focus group sessions, civic forums and provincial-level conferences.

Particularly innovative was the commissioning of a specially-commissioned, and relatively extensive, public opinion survey, with a representative sample drawn from the population of the nine provinces. The survey questions were highly relevant to the matter at hand, soliciting the views of respondents on issues in economic and political development of concern to their

communities, along with barriers to political participation and issues concerning alternatives to violence in dispute resolution. The findings were then utilized as a basis for establishing common ground and reference points in discussions, and for informing proposals taken forward into advocacy work.



Media Interview with Panelist, Karbala Civic Forum, June 2011

organizations drew on their web of connections with local, provincial and national leaders and political party officials to ensure that they were well-informed concerning the project and persuaded of the value of taking part in it.

(ii) Effectiveness

The project's strategy was related very directly to the effort to achieve its objectives, and this contributed to its success in completing its entire program of activities as planned. The grantee, ICAN, made very effective use of the strength and local roots of its network of member organizations in ensuring the presence of a solid administrative base in each province for project activities. It took care in the selection of the provincial implementing agencies from its network, choosing, on the basis of a set of transparent criteria, nine (one in each province) of the 45 member organizations which had applied, following the distribution by ICAN of 50 letters of invitation.

Those organizations selected were expected to contribute to the delivery of project services, while also demonstrating that they were capable of benefiting from the opportunity to build their own capacities in the promotion of political engagement, dialogue and partnership. They were expected to be: well-respected in their home province, with a reputation for political neutrality; and, to have good connections with both local communities and elected officials. They were also expected to have relevant prior experience and to have a commitment to promote active participation at community level, with particular attention to the involvement of minorities, young people and women.

The principal risk to the project, as for all public initiatives in Iraq, was security and the threat of violence. While there were a number of security challenges, these proved to be manageable. In some cases, the project team was obliged to delay the initiation of activities. In others, arrangements were made to move the venue for an event to a neighbouring province. Ultimately, the project's risk management strategy proved effective and all activities were completed.

A second risk identified was that of the possible reluctance of decision-makers and policy-makers to participate in civic forums and provincial conferences, or to meet with the advocacy groups organized by the project. To mitigate this risk, ICAN and its network of member

While all project activities were important to the achievement of overall objectives, three were at the heart of the project's effectiveness. These were:

- The training and preparation of the facilitators;
- The planning and holding of focus group sessions; and,
- The planning, implementation, reporting on and utilization of, the public opinion survey.

As noted above, the facilitators were a presence throughout the project and provided for continuity and a direct link between the professional direction of the project, the implementing partner organizations and the beneficiary groups within their respective provinces. The focus groups provided important inputs to the forums and conferences, while some participants also took place in the subsequent meetings and events. The opinion survey ensured that the concerns and experiences of ordinary citizens in the 9 provinces were taken into account, while the findings were a second key ingredient, along with the outputs of the focus groups, in informing and directing the dialogue at the forums and conferences, as well as in providing background information for the later advocacy sessions.

In order for the project to have impact, it was important that recommendations and proposals arising from the civic forums and conferences, and put forward in the advocacy meetings with elected officials, were seen as credible and as representing the views of local communities and their leaders. Accordingly, considerable attention was given by project management and the implementing partners to the selection of project participants. As may be judged from the review in the following paragraphs of the procedures followed to ensure representativeness in the three activities listed above, the project was generally effective in the strategies it adopted to address these concerns.

One limitation was the uneven performance of the project in securing the participation of women in all activities. Given the emerging barriers to women's involvement in public activities in Iraq, this is not surprising. The photographic record on meetings, along with participant lists, demonstrate that, in some cases, for example, the Misan Civic Forum of November, 2011 (no women), the Conference held in DiQar in June 2012, observed by the project monitor, and the Karbala Civic Forum of June 2011 (1 woman attendee each), activities were entirely dominated by men.

Facilitators on their Training and its Effectiveness: "Before the project, we had a general idea of how to deal with local leaders and government officials in trying to resolve problems concerning citizens –but we lacked any idea of theory or of the procedures and methods that will bring better results...because of the training, I became more confident in dealing with such important individuals and learned how to support problem-solving and consensus-building...training on communications, and understanding the importance listening skills were most valuable to us, and things that we lacked...We were encouraged to analyze problems and search for our own solutions... We were exposed to new techniques which later helped us to deal better with negotiations and achieving successful results. The training raised our standards, and now we are all confident and capable of taking on the role of facilitator."

Source: Paraphrase and Summary of Conversations between Sabah Mohsen, a Trainee facilitator from Diwanyia, Qadisiyah Province, and the National Consultant, and the National Consultant.

The 18 facilitators were chosen by interview by a selection committee from a longer short list, in accordance with a set of pre-announced criteria. Each of the nine selected organizations was asked to nominate four candidates, two men and two women. Those selected were expected to be well-educated, to hold recognized positions in their communities, and/or to hold relevant professional positions (many chosen were teachers and lawyers). They were also expected to demonstrate the appropriate attitude and approach to working with others facilitating group discussions and participation. Following the initial selection, a further check was provided by an appraisal by the training team for the facilitators' program. On the basis of their assessment, a decision was made to replace two of those selected because of their inadequate educational and professional background, as well as a perceived absence of the right balance of social skills and a respectful approach to working with, and listening to, others. As a result, these two trainee candidates were replaced.

In the case of the focus groups, there were two parallel programs, with nine sessions for each, one in each province. The first program was designed for younger people, aged between 17 and 30, with particular attention in selection of participants to ensuring that there was a good representation of women, as well as of different ethnic and religious minorities, including Sabians, Christians, Sunnis and Kurds, as well as the majority Shiites. The second program was aimed at representatives of political parties, including smaller ones, members of Provincial Councils and CSOs, as well as religious leaders and tribal elders. According to participants and facilitators interviewed, the project succeeded in the case of both programs in attracting a cross-section of the relevant social groups and organizations, as intended.

For the public opinion survey, while working within some obvious constraints, considerable efforts were made by the survey managers to ensure representativeness of those included in the survey. A large random sample of 3,000 residents of the nine provinces was selected. For reasons of access and incomplete and outdated records, there was an under-representation of women (16.4% of the sample) and of residents of rural areas (8.3%). However, the representation of women among the numbers of those in the sample who

**Karbala Focus Group (Youth, Women and Minorities):
Agenda and Community Issue Summary**

The group session followed an agenda similar to that employed in all other focus group meetings in the project. **Key topics** included:

- Description and Explanation of kinds of conflict situations ;
- Methodologies for conflict Resolution;
- The role of NGOs in resolving political disputes peacefully
- Relevant inputs from the ICAN public opinion survey;
- Writing recommendations.

Summary of Community Issues (Selected):

1. The absence of a Law on Political Parties is a major problem, which has caused many problems for local communities, particularly women and young people;
2. The erratic policies and performance of parties is directly related to the influence of surrounding countries; the absence of any policy by the parties for improving service delivery;
3. There is no trust between citizens and politicians, and among politicians of different parties;
4. A lack of attention in the mass media to social issues and the concerns of young people;
5. The Province's budget for services is inadequate to meet social needs. Neither the Provincial Council, nor the Governor, has announced a plan to address the problem; there is no monitoring or evaluation of the adequacy of services, and no interest in accountability to citizens through public meetings.

actually responded was somewhat higher: 686 of 1884 respondents, reflecting a successful effort by the survey team to achieve a less skewed gender ratio. There was a good spread of representation of the population by age-group, roughly in accordance with the demographic profile of the South and South-Central Regions: 32.8% in the 17-27 age group; 34.4 % between 28 and 38; 12.3 % in the 39-49 % age range; and, 9.8% aged 50-71.

As to education, 28.7% of the sample had a college degree, 15.3% were intermediate school graduates and 19.3% primary school graduates. In terms of occupational background, 42% were public sector employees, 22.5 % were independent workers, engaged in small business or tradespeople; 2.9% were military personnel. A further 15.4% were students, and 3% described themselves as unemployed, while 1.8% were retired, and 12.3% were housewives. Presumably for reasons of sensitivity and security, no breakdown by ethnic group or religion was given. Given the focus of the survey, respondents were asked if they had any political affiliation. Only 10.6% gave an affirmative answer.

Project activities were well-crafted as components of a logical sequence of events leading to the achievement of overall objectives. The project reached its targets for numbers of those trained and participating in all activities in all 9 target provinces. Hence, 18 facilitators were trained, with all active throughout the project; 540 young people and 270 representatives of CSOs, political parties and local leaders, took part in focus groups; more than 1,000 participants were involved in 36 civic forums, with 500 people taking part in 9 provincial conferences. Finally, 20 selected individuals in each province, 180 in all, were trained in advocacy techniques and were then involved in presentations and dialogue with parliamentarians from their home provinces.

The evaluators have concluded that, not only did the project succeed in delivering its intended outputs, but that, with some limitations, it was also able to achieve its objectives, all of which were realistic and realizable. This result was built on strong organization, with excellent central-local working relations, professional planning and preparation, sound local knowledge and attention to detail within a well-thought-out strategic framework for project delivery.

The public opinion survey was designed to provide objective information to political parties, CSOs and local community leaders, as well as provincial councils, on public attitudes and opinion in the two regions on key topics. These included views on the relevance of political parties, CSOs and provincial councils as sources of support in problem-solving and dispute resolution, in comparison to what in an Iraqi context represented more established institutions: family and friends, traditional leaders, the clergy, and the judiciary and police.

The survey report provided important information on the challenges facing both political parties and CSOs in making themselves both credible and relevant to citizens. Key findings included the fact that Iraqi citizens are unlikely to turn to political parties or political movements for support or advice in solving problems and disputes of all kinds. This reflects, in part, the absence of party programs relevant to citizen needs and the lack of links between citizens and parties. The survey findings indicated that citizens are most likely to turn to (in order): friends and family; the judiciary and police; and, traditional and religious leaders, for assistance. Together, these institutions accounted for 83 per cent of responses. Only 15 per cent of respondents report having turned to

“modern” institutions for assistance: political parties, CSOs and representatives of provincial councils.¹¹

The International Evaluator has reviewed a number of UNDEF-supported projects which have commissioned surveys of various kinds to support other activities. There is often a problem in properly integrating the survey findings into other aspects of the project. This was not the case on this occasion, and the project may well represent “best practice” in effective planning and utilization of a public opinion survey as a core element of the program of activities supported. Findings were used very well as an input and stimulus to discussion in all other activities, and attracted considerable interest in the media and from decision-makers.

Overall, the activities delivered proved effective in providing beneficiaries with practical knowledge and hands-on experience in how to identify issues of general concern to their communities. It also built their understanding of how to bring such issues, along with proposed consensus solutions, to the attention of decision-makers. Focus group participants from Karbala, Muthanna and DiQar, were positive about their experience of project activities. They explained that they had felt able to share concerns and problems



Facilitators’ Training, Babil, June 2011

with others in the group and that they were able to resolve disagreements. All indicated that they had had no previous opportunity to take part in similar activities before, and that they were keen to continue with their involvement in public dialogue and efforts to resolve community problems.

Feedback from participants confirmed that the facilitators played a positive role in focus groups and other activities. The facilitators themselves reported that they had increased substantially their repertoire of practical skills in managing and leading group exchange and dialogue, and that they now felt confident in their ability to continue with such work in the future.

Local leaders and political party representatives were also extremely positive in commenting on the value of the project, and particularly of the civic forums and conferences. Party representatives made specific mention of the importance of the project in enabling those from different parties to come to an accommodation in addressing issues of central concern to their communities.

A number of issues brought forward by community representatives and citizens in the focus groups and subsequently discussed during the civic forums and conferences were noted by

¹¹ Information on findings taken from ICAN, “The Role of Political Parties and Civil Society Organizations and Councils of Government in Solving the Problems of the Citizens”, Report on the Public Opinion Survey, not dated.

elected officials and government officers in attendance and have been acted upon. Some of the issues raised, including those brought forward in the advocacy sessions, have been placed on the parliamentary agenda for action in the context of revisions to legislation, including the Personal Status Law and the Agricultural and Land Tenure Law. Other matters raised concerned local disputes, and several of these have now been resolved, some with the active participation in a mediating role by individuals participating in the project, drawing on the new knowledge and skills acquired through it.

The project's approach to capacity development was generally good. However, more attention to allowing for continuity of participation of a core group from focus groups to the civic forums and conferences, as well as the advocacy sessions, would have been beneficial. A wrap-up session at community level to sum up lessons learned and reinforce the practical knowledge acquired, while setting an agenda for next steps, would also have strengthened this component of the project.

(iii) Efficiency

The project represented very good value for money, with solid results achieved with a budget that was relatively modest, given the scope of activities and the numbers of actors and the geographic range of sites involved. It is quite apparent that ICAN made a very careful effort to plan its expenditures with great attention to detail. While the provincial implementing agencies played an important role in the project, they did so, for the most part, on a voluntary basis, as is reflected in the budget. This was an important factor in keeping costs down.

A detailed examination of the budget suggests that, given the long list of activities completed and the complexity of relationships managed, salary and travel costs were entirely appropriate. The costs incurred for the planning and implementation of the public opinion survey, and for analysis and reporting on survey data were exceedingly low. Meeting costs represented a very high proportion of overall costs (\$104,500 of a total project budget of \$180,000, excluding \$20,000 for UNDEF monitoring and evaluation costs). However, once again, given the character of the project, such expenditures were entirely justified. Unit costs for all activities were modest and reasonable.

The institutional arrangements for project management and delivery of activities proved to be both effective and efficient. Full responsibility for all aspects of project management rested with ICAN. However, the nine implementing partners (IPs) also performed a valuable role within the framework for administration of project activities.



Babil Civic Forum, September 2011

(iv) Impact

The overall objective of the project concerned the creation “of a robust civil society, which demands a democratically accountable government that is able to effectively involve citizens in decision-making.” Iraq’s progress in putting in place a democratic political system has been uneven, to say the least, and, in many ways, disappointing. The country is a long way from enjoying the presence of either a robust civil society or a democratically accountable government. Yet, as was noted earlier in the chapter on *Effectiveness*, the project succeeded in achieving its sub-objectives and has, arguably, had a modest impact on the bigger picture through strengthening civil society in the South and South Centre Regions, in improving government-citizen relations and communications, and in encouraging a more responsive disposition on the part of decision-makers at local and national level in listening to and addressing the priorities of citizens and local communities.

Quite understandably, all Iraqis are preoccupied with the constant threat of violence in their lives. An important contribution of the project at a local level, simple as it may sound, was to provide training and practical experience in negotiation, consensus-building and methods for finding common ground where disagreements occur. In this way, the project was able to demonstrate the effectiveness of non-violent methods for dispute resolution. The involvement of local branches of political parties in this process was of particular importance, given that many are linked directly to armed militias.



Babil Civic Forum

According to interviews with project principals and participants, the project has had an impact in encouraging those who took part to become active in the mediation of local disputes, which might readily lead to violence. As an example, there is the case of Laith Farhan, a participant from DiQar who took on an active role in resolving a chronic dispute between local landowners and the provincial university, drawing on knowledge and experience acquired from the project.

The university planned to expand illegally onto private land. The landowners blocked the development, which was put on hold for 3 years. Farhan brought the two sides together, and, over time, a solution was agreed to, whereby the university agreed to employ the owner and his unemployed relatives in the construction process, with some continuing as long-term employees. This resolved the dispute.

Further, at a time of growing sectarian conflict, the project demonstrated that those of different ethnic and religious backgrounds could work constructively together. It also showed that more effective results could be achieved where women took part in discussion of community concerns alongside men, and where young people had a voice.

Local leaders, along with civil society participants in the civic forums and conferences reported that the project had made a difference in improving relations between civil society organizations and local communities, on the one hand, and elected officials, on the other. They note a greater interest on the part of officials for initiating contact with citizens and an improved sense of trust

on both sides. Elected officials are now far more visible as participants in community activities and events relating to the provision of services in education, health and other fields.

The advocacy process also had an apparent impact, following the effort of advocacy committees, organized and trained by ICAN, to draw the attention of the authorities to major problems affecting their communities. Among issues raised on which action was taken were the presence of squatters in government buildings and practical problems concerning education and youth unemployment.

One joint initiative taken by the advocacy committees of Babil and Karbala focused on the denial of opportunities for education and employment for women, often through a refusal by male members of the family to permit their daughters, sisters and wives to attend classes or take up paid work. Following a series of meetings between the committees and representatives of relevant government bodies, the Director-General of the Ministry of Education in Baghdad announced an initiative to open some 30 illiteracy centres for women in the two provinces, as well as in many others facing similar challenges. This enabled girl students to resume their education in a protected environment, while allowing some women to return to work, with a number taking up teaching positions in the new centres. Developments of this kind give real encouragement to the advocacy committees to continue their work. They also support cooperation across social and organizational groups (a feature of the advocacy committees), while also demonstrating that civil society initiatives can make a difference in enhancing the responsiveness and accountability of government.

Advocacy Training

(From Interviews with Participants):

“The training was held in Babil Province, and conducted by two experts, along with ICAI management staff... We were trained on the basis of an established ICAN curriculum. explained: what advocacy is; and, what are the most modern techniques for advocacy on behalf of citizens and their needs for public services. The trainees commented that: “having gone through the training, we succeeded in bringing citizens’ problems to the attention of the responsible authorities...all the recommended solutions put forward were approved and adopted.”

(From Interviews with Trainers): “The project was successful in preparing the participants who were already active in this field, but lacked detailed knowledge of planning and implementing advocacy campaigns.. We can now easily see the difference in their abilities following the training. They are now active in contacting, and communicating with, people in their communities... Most of them have now received requests from political parties to represent them in their communities.”

(v)Sustainability

As noted above, the UNDEF-funded project took its place in a sequence of ICAN activities, supported by various donors, and aimed at supporting democratic development and the strengthening of civil society’s role within the democratic process. While there is an absence of any prospect of domestic funding for NGO work of this kind, there is a very strong commitment on the part of ICAN and its member organizations to continue their engagement in democracy-building.

At the time of writing, ICAN continues to provide assistance in this sphere in all nine of the provinces which featured in the UNDEF-supported project. There is a particular focus on 5 of the

9: Babil, Karbala, Basra, Qadisiyah and Wasit, where the provincial councils are collaborating with ICAN and its principal local partner organizations in promoting community participation and partnership in problem-solving. Further, following the project, ICAN was asked to provide training to build the capacity of the executive committees of provincial councils in five provinces: Basra, Karbala and three additional provinces.

Meetings between citizens, community leaders and civil society organizations, on the one hand, and elected officials, on the other, are continuing to take place in some provinces, though not all, building on the experience of the project. In October 2013, ICAN was invited by its principal local partner organization in Basra to offer assistance in resolving a problem which had arisen between citizens in one sub-district and the provincial council. The citizens were blocking the work of a local construction firm which had been contracted to extend a water pipeline through a stadium and surrounding sports fields, which were highly valued by the community. Through the intervention of ICAN and the local partner, the plan was modified by the council and the firm adjusted the route of the pipeline to avoid the demolition of the stadium.

More formally, between January and August of 2013, some seven major meetings were held in the nine provinces, involving a range of local stakeholders, as well as provincial councils and elected officials, following the practice begun in the project. Two were held in Basra, and one each in Misan, Najaf, Diwanyia (Qadisayah Province) and Wasit. In addition, a number of civic forums have been held, with the most recent in Babil Province on November 30, 2013, and another in Basra Province in August, 2013.

Despite the barriers to public participation and the difficulties of daily life in the country, it is apparent that a strong level of interest in becoming engaged in public life on the part of citizens, community leaders and CSOs in the South and South-Centre Regions of Iraq has been nurtured by ICAN and its partners through the UNDEF project and other initiatives. There is evidence of a strong commitment to continue to build on experience to date, along with a willingness of other donor organizations to fund the work. Under the circumstances, the prospects for sustainability for what was accomplished through the project are reasonably good.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

(i) The project design and strategy for implementation were well-crafted and highly relevant in addressing gaps in the preparation of civil society organizations, community leaders and citizens, as well as local branches of political parties, to play an effective role in public life.

(ii) The project was well-organized, with the grantee, ICAN, making effective use of its network of provincially-based member organizations in ensuring that activities were adapted to the local context and in broadening the base of participation.

(iii) Given the obvious difficulty of holding public events and meetings in a country where the threat of violence is a constant, ICAN managed risk effectively and ensured that all activities were completed, with some adjustments to timing and location.

(iv) The project was highly relevant in addressing gaps in public life at a local level in Iraq, and responded to felt needs of beneficiaries. All project activities seem to have achieved their objectives, and the sequence of moving from focus groups to civic forums and provincial conferences, and on to national advocacy meetings seems to have worked quite well in building knowledge and skills and providing opportunities for participants to put them into practice.

(v) By facilitating the engagement of local community leaders and NGOs with decision-makers (provincial council members and parliamentarians), the project also modeled the kinds of interaction so essential to a vibrant democracy.

(vi) Participants in focus groups and civic forums were able to achieve consensus in identifying community priorities, many of which related to inadequate and erratic service delivery

(vii) A limitation of the project was its uneven performance in involving women as participants. However, even in those locations where women's participation was minimal, a strong effort was made to involve women as facilitators or speakers.

(viii) The public opinion survey commissioned by the project was managed and reported on very professionally. Its findings were utilized effectively in supporting dialogue and stimulating public discussion throughout the project. Its findings on the limited salience of civil society organizations and political parties for ordinary citizens as they seek to address local issues were of particular interest.

(ix) The budget was modest, given the project’s ambitions and the scope and geographic range of its activities. Funds were well-managed and the costs for all elements of expenditure, including salaries and travel, were reasonable.

(x) The overall objective of the project, “a robust civil society”, capable of holding government to account and effectively involving citizens in decision-making remains something to be hoped for in the future. However, operating in the South and South-Central Regions of Iraq, the project made a solid contribution in moving in this direction and succeeded in achieving its sub-objectives. It has already had an impact in strengthening civil society’s expertise and self-confidence, while also contributing to enhancing government-citizen relations and encouraging greater responsiveness on the part of decision-makers to community concerns.

(xi) Political parties in Iraq are part of a pattern of dysfunctional democracy, and it would seem that most do a poor job in building links across issues of concern to citizens, political programs and the decision-making process. The effort by ICAN to engage the local branches of the parties in project activities, and to utilize the public opinion survey to point out the negative perception that citizens have of the value of political parties, while also showing the benefits to them of engaging with, and listening to, citizens, community leaders and CSOs, was a particularly positive feature of the project.

(xii) Much of the work begun through the UNDEF-funded project is continuing through other donor-financed initiatives. In addition, there is substantial evidence that civic action and engagement in public life in many areas of the two regions where project activities took place have moved to a higher and more active level.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

(i) Based on conclusion iv, ICAN refines its methodology of project design to give greater attention to continuity of involvement by project participants and trainees from the “lowest” (most local) to the “highest” level (provincial or national) – in the case of this project, from focus groups to national conferences and “advocacy committees” - in order to reinforce the capacity development dimension of its projects.

(ii) In view of the problems with service delivery identified in the focus groups and civic forums, along with the absence of quality control by government, ICAN seeks to secure financial and technical support to assist civil society organizations in introducing community score cards and other techniques, which will enable local communities to monitor and document government performance in this sphere (based on Conclusion v).

(iii) Perhaps in cooperation with the National Democratic Institute, or other international organizations with a mandate to support the building of the capacity of political parties, consideration be given to planning further initiatives with local branches of political parties. Particular attention might be given to supporting them in developing methods for consulting with local communities and civil society organizations in identifying gaps in service delivery and in formulating practical proposals to be taken to central party authorities for further action (based on Conclusions v, vii and ix).

(iv) Given ICAN's highly effective use of a public opinion survey in the project, further consideration be given to employing surveys and reports on their findings in future work (based on Conclusions vii and x).

VI. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value-added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc.). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Project documents:

Project Document, UDF-IRQ-09-309

Mid-term Progress Report

Final Report

Memorandum of Understanding

Milestone Verification Mission Report, June 2011

Monitoring Report, June 2012

Project report on the Public Opinion Survey: *“The Role of Political Parties and Civil Society Organizations and Councils of Government in Solving the Problems of Citizens.”*

Other Documents and Reference Materials:

“A Look behind Surging Violence in Iraq”, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2013

International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch 125*, January 2, 2014.

International Crisis Group (ICG), “Make or Break? Iraq’s Sunnis and the State”: *Middle East Report 144*, September 14, 2013.

“Iraq”, *Freedom in the World 2013* Washington D.C., Freedom House.

“Iraq: Ten Years Later is Less Threatening but Riven by Turmoil”, Editorial Board, *Washington Post*, March 22, 2013;

Salah Nasrawi, “Can Iraq be Saved?” *Al Jazeera*, November 14, 2013.

Toby Dodge, “State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change: the Rise of a New Authoritarianism”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, 2, 2013.

US State Department, “Iraq”, in *Country Reports on Human Rights 2012*.

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

5 December 2013 Babil – Initiation of Interviews by National Consultant, Meeting at ICAN	
ICAN Project Management: Waai K. Hamza, Head of ICAN : Emad Lutfi, Deputy Program Manager	
8 December 2013 Babil -Survey Team:	
Basim Keshash, Planner, Designer and Team Leader; Survey Team Trainer; Husain Adil, Survey Specialist; Sudad Hasan, Assistant Team Leader; Survey Team Trainer Ali Saad, Survey Technician; Saeed Haqi, Survey Technician;	
9 December 2013 Najaf –Program Participants (Youth & Female Activists)	
Salwa Husian Laith t. Farhan Hadi Radam Baqir Mahmood Nasha'at Faeq Ameera Ali	From Diyala, NGO activist From DiQar, NGO activist From Muthanna, teacher From Najaf, Human Rights activist From Maysan, Youth and Sport Worker From Najaf, Women's Organization, Activist
9 December 2013 Najaf – Facilitators & their Trainers	
Tahani Jawad Salah Sachit Sabah Mohsen Salwa Talgany Raheem Khulaif Muhanad Mahmood	Trainer, Babil Trainer, Najaf Trainee Facilitator, Diyala Trainee Facilitator, Najaf Trainee Facilitator, DiQar Trainee Facilitator, Muthanna
10 December 2013 Babil –Meeting with Provincial Council Members	
Suhail Abbas	Provincial Council Member
Aaqeel Al-Rubaie	Provincial Council Member, Vice-President
Ahmed Al-Guraibawi	Provincial Council Member
11 December 2013 Karbala –Meeting with Program Participants (Local Politicians, Local Leaders)	
Nasir Al-Rubaie	Politician
Mohsen Kareem	Politician
Lafta Kareem	Community Leader, Tribal Sheikh
11 December 2013 = Karbala –Meeting with Provincial Council Member	
Elad Al-Sendi	Provincial Council Member
12 December Karbala –Meeting with ICAN Implementing Partners	
Name Not Known, Civil Activists' Foundation, Karbala	
Razaq Jabir, Sufraa for Development Foundation, Babil	
Nafea Jamil, Awareness Cultural Association, Najaf	
Ali Al-Khalidi, Humanitarian Association for Youth Care, Diyala	

ANNEX 4: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
ICAN	Iraq Civil Action Network
IP	Implementing Partner
MOU	Memorandum Of Understanding
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	Non-Government Organization
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
US	United States