

Addressing Citizen Concerns with Inclusive Policy Recommendations

Iraq | 2017





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Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) began working with reform-minded Iraqi politicians in 1999, and formally established its in-country presence in 2003. NDI's programming goal in Iraq is to strengthen policy-oriented political institutions with improved professional legislative capacity, policy-based political discourse, credible oversight, accountability and transparency. For more information about NDI, please visit www.ndi.org.



INTRODUCTION

The policy recommendations put forth in this report were developed by members of multi-party policy working groups comprised of women, youth, and minority representatives from 11 political parties and five civil society organizations (CSOs) in Iraq. These young political actors from across Iraq's political landscape joined together to craft policy solutions to address the pressing concerns of the country's marginalized communities that often go unanswered.

Policy recommendations were devised through a consultative process with key constituents and leading experts. Beginning in October 2016, working groups consulted with over 2,250 stakeholders, citizens and policy experts in 13 governorates representing nine groups (Assyrian, Christian, Chaldean, Kurds, Shia, Sunni, Syriac, Turkmen, Yezidi) on pressing concerns and feasible policy solutions. Through this process, the working groups identified six policy recommendations on key issues of concern to citizens:

1. **Modernizing the Agriculture Sector**
2. **Addressing School Dropout Rates Among Young Women**
3. **Improving Primary School Curriculum**
4. **Countering Fundamentalism**
5. **Addressing Corruption through Accountability and Civic Action**
6. **Increasing Employment Opportunities for University Graduates**

These recommendations were developed to provide policymakers, political parties, and elected representatives at the national and local level with insight as to the needs and priorities of all Iraqis. The analysis and policy prescriptions outlined in this publication are also targeted to support the efforts of party officials responsible for selecting candidate lists and drafting election platforms, as well as those in the policy and research units of political parties.

As parties and candidates begin to plan for the upcoming elections, working groups are also prepared to work with key decision-makers in political parties and candidates to integrate these recommendations into election platforms and legislation following elections. These recommendations would be an effective tool and resource for election candidates and elected officials--particularly first time candidates and newly-elected representatives--to help them develop and prioritize citizen-centric and solution-oriented campaigns and policies.

The policy working groups will continue to shed light on these issues of concern to citizens and bring them to the forefront of policy discussions and political and election debate to influence the legislative agendas of parliament and the provincial councils.





ABOUT THE POLICY WORKING GROUPS

From October 2016 through March 2017, 55 young activists from across the political spectrum gathered in a series of intensive trainings on policy development to identify key issues of concern to historically underrepresented communities, such as youth, women, minorities, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Through consensus-building exercises, working groups selected six priority issues and formed sub-groups that would analyze their causes and effects. Following the initial training, members of the working groups returned to their home constituencies to solicit input and feedback from key stakeholders and citizens impacted by these issues to help inform their policy prescriptions. To finalize these recommendations, each sub-group worked with a subject matter experts to help them synthesize the feedback gathered from citizens and develop specific recommendations targeted to the various government institutions responsible for addressing these issues.

The process the working groups followed to devise these recommendations demonstrates the value of following a policy development process that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of citizens. It also serves a model for citizen outreach and the development of policies by building consensus and setting aside the sectarian rhetoric that has long colored the Iraqi political landscape.

MEMBERS OF THE POLICY WORKING GROUPS

Policy working group members represent the country's diverse political, religious, and ethnic components, including Shia, Sunni, Kurd, Christian, Turkmen, and Yezidi individuals. Members also travelled from across the country to ensure that their communities' specific needs were represented during the process, including from Baghdad, Dohuk, Diwaniya, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Missan, Sulaymaniyah, and Wassit.

Mr. Rebaz Abbas	Mr. Omed Khidhir Hameed	Ms. Layla Mohammed
Mr. Abbas Hayas Abbas	Ms. Zaynab Hatam	Ms. Ghusun Mukhebi
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Mr. Ammaz Ghanim	Ms. Shamel Sahab Matar	Ms. Khalat Jameel Mohammed
Mr. Muntadhar Hamza	Mr. Salih Mohammed Mirza	Ms. Hajar Alomary





POLITICAL PARTIES REPRESENTED

- Al-Watan Gathering
- Assyrian Democratic Movement
- Gorran Movement
- Iraqi National Accord
- Iraqi Turkmen Front
- Islamic Da'wa Party
- Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
- Kurdistan Democratic Party
- Kurdistan Islamic Unions
- Mutahidun
- Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED

- International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- Nukhbat Al-Nukhba
- Salam al-Shabab
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Yazda

As part of the process to develop realistic and achievable policy recommendations, working group members consulted subject matter experts. These experts provided members with deeper analysis as to the core causes of the issues they identified, as well as guidance on their policy prescriptions to ensure that they were specific, targeted, and provided both short-term and long-term solutions.

The policy working groups would like to thank the following subject matter experts for their guidance and support through the process:

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

- Dr. Hazim Badri Ahmed, Project Manager at the Democratic Center for Awareness and Good Governance; Professor at the Teacher's Institute for Higher Studies
- Mr. Sadiq Jaafar, Deputy-Head of Agricultural Engineers organization, CEO of Rural Women at Council of Ministers
- Mr. Alaa Sabah al-Rubae, Mayor of Al Furat District, Chair of the Illiteracy Eradication Committee
- Dr. Mizher Jassim al-Saedi, Chairman of Madarik Foundation's Board
- Mr. Abbas al-Sharifi, Head of the Civic Center for Legal Studies and Reform
- Mr. Hamid Tarish, legal expert on good governance



MODERNIZING THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

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Diversifying Iraq’s economy is essential to the country’s economic growth and prosperity. Currently, the economy is dependent on the oil industry, with over 60 percent of Iraq’s gross domestic product (GDP) generated by the oil sector. Oil makes up nearly all exports and fiscal revenue.¹ With the decline in oil prices since 2015 and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) insurgency interrupting extraction and refinement in oil-rich regions of the country, Iraq’s economy faces significant challenges. Low oil revenues coupled with increased costs for humanitarian assistance and security have greatly contributed to the country’s deficit.²

While the agricultural sector is still a major contributor to the country’s economy (second after the oil industry), its contribution to the GDP has been in a steady decline since 2002. As a result, the lack of prospective employment has led people to flee to urban centers, putting pressure on service delivery in cities and increasing urban poverty. Additionally, the decline in agricultural productivity has led to the country’s dependence on food imports and made Iraq a major importer of agricultural products. Government loans are in place and are meant to support agricultural projects and production; however, stakeholders interviewed by policy working group members reported that they are not allocated appropriately and are often misused. In discussions with local farmers, the working groups members learned that those who are eligible to apply for state funding are either not aware that loans exist or do not know how to apply.³

Given Iraq’s economic challenges and substantial financial needs, the government should explore ways in which to reinvigorate the agricultural sector. With viable resources at its disposal—skilled farmers, water, and fertile land—the government has the opportunity to rehabilitate and revitalize the sector into the major source of income and employment for the state it once was. During the consultation process, stakeholders and affected citizens proposed a variety of solutions to strengthen and modernize the agricultural sector, which were later adapted into the recommendations outlined below. If implemented, these recommendations would contribute to the short-and-long term development of the agricultural industry. In the long term, the working group anticipates that these recommendations would contribute to: building the skills of farmers to better meet the consumption needs of Iraqis; creating a competitive industry that can contribute to the national budget almost equal to the oil sector; and addressing the water situation in northern regions. In the short term, the recommendations have the potential to provide farmers with modern irrigation and farming techniques and tools, and facilitating better practices for issuing government loans.

Primary Reasons for the Stagnation in Agricultural Productivity

- Security situation
- Poor economic planning
- Lack of clear import/export policies
- Negligence to the sector
- Lack of oversight

Main Consequences

- Unemployment
- Dire financial situation
- Poor service delivery in urban areas
- Stalled projects
- Corruption and misuse of funds

¹ “About Iraq.” UNDP in Iraq. UNDP, 2017. Web. 30 April 2017.

² “Overview.” Iraq. The World Bank, 2017. Web. 1 May 2017.

³ Lucani, Paolo. Iraq: Agriculture Sector Note. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2012.

Stakeholder Input & Methodology

As part of their field work to assess the agricultural industry and to inform their policy recommendations, the group met with government officials, such as a members of Provincial Councils in Dohuk and Sinjar, and other members of local government. Group members also coordinated policy discussions with the local party branches in Dohuk and Wassit where individuals from the agricultural industry, farmers, engineers and political activists to discuss how to strengthen the agricultural sector and support farmers. Additionally, the group consulted with senior party leaders and officials, including Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

The working group on agriculture also conducted informational interviews with local farmers around Baghdad to analyze current conditions and challenges they face, and with local university students from agriculture departments to assess their understanding of the current situation and the impact of a potential tax on agricultural goods. They also interviewed local experts, such as engineers and representatives from the farmers associations in Wassit, as well as academics from the College of Agriculture at Baghdad University, College of Administration and Economics at Iraqiya University, and the College of Agriculture at Wassit University.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- 1 Raise awareness and build the capacity of farmers to apply for government loans to support their agricultural projects.
- 2 Streamline the loan application process, and work with unions, syndicates and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to conduct follow-up assessment of projects.
- 3 Strengthen oversight mechanisms to monitor project and loan distributions.
- 4 In close collaboration and coordination with unions, syndicates, and NGOs, provide trainings and coaching on modern agricultural practices.
- 5 Increase the level of support to areas impacted by the insurgency, including additional irrigation projects.
- 6 Address the agricultural sector's legal framework, including amending the investment law and implementing the national production protection law.
- 7 Conduct an assessment on the viability of imposing taxes on imports and exports on agricultural products.
- 8 Improve the industry's marketing standards to increase promotional efforts around agricultural projects and products.

Long-Term Recommendations

- 1 Conduct an intensive study to assess the challenges currently facing the agricultural sector and identify solutions grounded in evidence-based research.
- 2 Provide regular support and technical training to farmers on modern agricultural techniques and processes.
- 3 Bolster media marketing, and facilitate provincial and/or national conferences to develop the skills and networks of farmers.

Responsible Governing Institution or independent Body

- Provincial Councils
- Political Parties
- Civil Society
- Media
- Academic Institutions & Think Tanks



ADDRESSING SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

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While significant progress has been made in recent years, girls remain disenfranchised and disadvantaged in education systems in Iraq and around the world. Educating young women is imperative to achieving development goals, ending the cycle of violence and poverty, and most importantly an intrinsic human right. Girls and young women who are educated have a greater awareness of their rights and are empowered to make decisions that affect their lives. Various factors prevent girls from continuing their schooling including poverty to traditional social norms.⁴ Young women and girls in rural areas often face greater social and cultural barriers, as well as what is known as “distance penalties” that keep girls out of school -- meaning that with an increase in distance to the school, there is a decrease in girls’ enrollment.⁵

In Iraq, education has become a casualty of ongoing conflict, poor service delivery, and budgetary constraints. This is acutely felt among young women and girls as the quality and access to education has declined in recent years, particularly in more conservative rural areas and areas impacted by violence. While there is often little substantive information on the situation of girls’ education in Iraq, a 2013 UN report estimated that approximately 75 percent of girls drop out during or by the end of primary school. Moreover, 28 percent of girls 12 or older are illiterate, and increases significantly to a rate of 33 percent for young women (aged 15-24) living in rural areas. Like many countries around the world, traditional cultural and social factors continue to be an obstacle to improving access to education for girls in Iraq. A 2013 study conducted by the Ministry of Planning noted that a primary reason for why girls and young women do not complete their education in Iraq is due to the refusal by their families (40.8 percent), inability to continue (20.3 percent), early marriage (13.1 percent), economic factors (11.7 percent), and long distances between their homes and the school (6.5 percent).⁶

For certain regions or communities in Iraq the low retention rates among girls or young women is not necessarily always due to traditional social or cultural practices, but rather it is a result of “distance penalties” and poor service delivery. During fieldwork conducted by the working group, stakeholders reported that Yezidi girls and young women in rural communities in the south are less likely to attend school if they are inaccessible due to distance or safety concerns. In interviews with families, the group discovered that parents want to support their daughters’ education but they are concerned for their safety, given the distance between their homes and the school, and the often volatile areas children would need to cross.

Primary Reasons for School Dropout Rates Among Young Women

- Schools in remote/unsafe locations
- Poor service delivery in rural areas
- Low standard of living
- Lack of awareness of its impact
- Traditional cultural and social norms
- Gender-based discrimination

Main Consequences

- Higher rates of early marriage and birth rates
- Lack of awareness among women about their legal and human rights
- Limited opportunities for women to participate in decision-making
- Abduction and enslavement by extremist groups

⁴ The Cost and Benefits of Education in Iraq. Baghdad: UNICEF, 2015.

⁵ Education and Health: Where do Gender Differences Really Matter? World Bank, 2012.

⁶ Gender Summary. New York: United Nations, 2013.

Stakeholder Input & Methodology

To engage stakeholders and affected citizens and to examine and test their policy recommendations, the group facilitated policy discussions in coordination with local party branches in Baghdad, Dohuk, and Diyala. During the policy discussions, attendees – which included students, teachers, activists and political figures – discussed the decline in educational levels, particularly in rural areas. To shed light on the current situation, academics and a representative from the Association of Teachers presented their analysis of common trends leading to the decline in education levels during a policy discussion. Similarly, group members in Diyala organized a forum for the Diyala Lawyers association, members of the Provincial Council, and civil society organizations to discuss how to support young women and girls' education in liberated areas. Group members also consulted with school principals, teachers, and students; interviewed subject matter experts and academics; and met with local civil society organizations, and political and social activists.

The working group on school dropout rates among women also utilized questionnaires to solicit input and feedback on their proposed policy recommendations. Questionnaires were distributed following the policy discussions, and shared with school principals, teachers, and students. Working group members in Baghdad conducted a 400 person questionnaire on educating young women and results were later discussed and analyzed by party leaders and members of the Iraqi National Accord. Additionally, the group consulted with senior party leaders from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Iraqi National Accord, including Vice President of Iraq Ayad Allawi.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- 1 Through media promotions, encourage girls to attend school and families to prioritize education for young women.
- 2 Organize media campaigns and educational forums through community-based civil society organizations. Use these tools to teach parents and family leaders about the importance of education for young girls.
- 3 Recruit educated volunteers to teach women between the ages of 15 and 45 who have dropped out of school and are ineligible to reenroll.
- 4 Establish educational caravans to provide education in areas where there is a significant distance between schools and residential areas.

Long-Term Recommendations

- 1 Prepare accurate statistics on the number and location of uneducated or undereducated women and girls.
- 2 Comply with the recommendations put forth by the Strategy on Resisting Violence Against Women, and create a new legislative commission to prepare a comprehensive societal response, including support and protection for young women.
- 3 Establish a board in each province focused on the education of women.
- 4 Increase the number of teachers, especially women teachers.
- 5 Build more schools, especially in rural areas.
- 6 Build awareness among women on the importance of education through regional seminars.

Responsible Governing Institution or Independent Body

- Provincial Councils
- Council of Representatives
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Construction & Housing
- Ministry of Labor & Social Affairs
- Ministry of Planning
- Political Parties
- Civil Society
- Media
- Academic Institutions & Think Tanks
- International Organizations



BUILDING A MODERN AND TOLERANT PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Much of what falls under the purview of the Ministry of Education has fallen well below international standards in recent years and is in need of modernizing and reform. Aside from a purge of Baathist ideology immediately following the fall of Saddam Hussein, large portions of the curriculum have remained consistent for decades, and are now far behind accepted international standards for primary and secondary education.⁷

Various commissions have been established and directed to update the curriculum, and the education system itself has been the focus of substantial efforts by international organizations, aimed at reviewing and revising curricula and current textbooks. However, very little progress has been made. Textbooks are outdated and poorly translated, teachers have not been properly trained on the curriculum, and there is a dearth of material on human rights, religious tolerance and sectarian and coexistence.⁸ Experts on education and citizens interviewed by the policy working group noted that, in the absence of a nationwide reexamination of the curriculum, reform efforts have been driven by local actors and have produced overtly religious and sectarian educational materials and training for teachers.

Without a top-down approach to pedagogical reform, focused on modern tools of education, inclusiveness and diversity, local actors will continue to control the education of young Iraqis, potentially driving narratives and worldviews that support their own sects and interests and increasing divisiveness in an already-divided society. With a new Iraqi curriculum, in line with international standards, not only will the quality of education will improve, but there exists an opportunity to teach tolerance and peaceful coexistence to the next generation of citizens.

Primary Shortcomings of Current Curriculum	Main Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated and poorly translated texts • Untrained or poorly trained teachers • Lack of curricula on human rights, diversity and tolerance • Special interest control over reform in the regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorly-educated Iraqi children make for an unprepared and undereducated workforce and citizenry • Increased sectarianism and marginalization of minority groups

⁷ Iraqi Curriculum Framework. Baghdad: UNESCO, 2012.

⁸ Abu Zeed, Adnan. "Iraqi State Education Increasingly Religious." Al Monitor [Washington] 27 January, 2015.

Stakeholder Input & Methodology

To better understand the issue and need for curriculum modification and modernization, and to formulate germane and achievable policy recommendations, members of the policy working group held targeted meetings and consultations with experts and decision-makers, as well as forums and other opportunities to engage with the public. Group members met with officials in the Ministry of Education, including experts on the curriculum and department directors, as well as members of parliament (MPs) and other elected officials. In early 2017, members of the group held a forum with interested parents and members of the community on a radio program in Kurdistan. Throughout the show, listeners called in to share their opinions and ask questions about the curriculum. Other group members held town hall-style discussions sessions in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. More than 100 citizens took part in the events, listening to short lectures from experts on education and sharing their own feedback and recommendations with the group. Members of the policy working group also distributed questionnaires to the members of the audience, providing another opportunity to glean opinions and recommendations from members of the community.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- 1 Open experimental schools to test more radical changes to teaching techniques and curricula..
- 2 Organize in-services and refresher courses for teachers and administrators on the curriculum and new methods of teaching.
- 3 Design and implement a series of government-led seminars focused on modifying the curriculum, and include teachers, relevant education experts, civil society, parents, professionals, and MPs.
- 4 Establish a committee to audit the curriculum before and just after it is printed to ensure it lives up to international standards and has no errors. Particular attention should be paid to the importance of equity between genders.
- 5 Increase institutional oversight in schools, and organize more regular visits by administrators and members of government to ensure the teaching methods and new curriculum are being implemented correctly.

Long-Term Recommendations

- 1 Develop a new and modern curriculum based on international standards, recommendations from the community, and results from experimental schools and other tests.
- 2 Prepare and implement training programs for teachers and administrators on the new curriculum.
- 3 Conduct awareness-raising seminars and conferences in order to educate the public on the new curriculum.
- 4 Regularly audit the new curriculum once implemented, and make necessary changes in a timely manner.

Responsible Governing Institution or Independent Body

- Provincial Councils
- Ministry of Education
- Relevant Parliamentary Committees
- International Organizations



COUNTERING FUNDAMENTALISM

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The threat of fundamentalism and citizen radicalization and the effects of violent extremism are evident in Iraq, and mitigating these risks has become a priority within the country and among the international community, particularly after the emergence of ISIS. The causes of radicalization and extremism are nuanced and germane to context, but they often include a lack of economic opportunities, and a culture or system of injustice and social marginalization. Youth in particular are targeted for recruitment by extremist groups, as unemployment and poverty rates for young Iraqis are high, and groups use enticements such as the prospect of adventure, fame, and material resources.⁹

Another key factor, related to feelings of injustice and marginalization, stem from a perceived or real lack of access to government. This is particularly true in areas of Iraq, where opportunities for political participation are limited and youth are rarely included in decision-making processes. Providing avenues for involvement among populations most at risk for radicalization, particularly youth, can build confidence in local communities and government, and mitigate the appeal of violent extremism. Policy working group members found, through interviews with experts and citizens, that Iraqis have limited trust in the government, both the central government and local authorities, to act on their behalf and in the best interest of the country. Much of this stems from institutionalized corruption and the marginalization of minorities. Under certain circumstances, this frustration can lead youth toward fundamentalism and, in some cases, violent extremism.¹⁰

Iraq is in a unique position. The rise of ISIS has shown that the country is particularly vulnerable to the rise of powerful extremist groups. However, the brutal regime instituted by ISIS and their mounting losses on the battlefield has also demonstrated to Iraqis that fundamentalist regimes often operate under flawed ideology without any sort of divine mandate, and employ brutal and inhumane tactics against both outsiders and the people they claim to govern. Public opinion research conducted by The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and other organizations has shown that the fight against ISIS has unified a country so often divided along sectarian lines. The government and civil society must capitalize on this opportunity to build a sense of Iraqi identity among its population, and particularly with youth. If young Iraqis are provided with a voice in their nation's government and a stake in their country's future, they will turn away from fundamentalism and violence and toward pragmatic and peaceful paths to reform.

Primary Causes of Radicalization and Fundamentalism

- Economic and social marginalization of youth and minorities
- Regional instability and the existence of outside fundamentalist groups
- Lack of access to decision-makers and a perceived or real inability to participate in the political process
- Enticements such as fame, adventure and material resources

Main Consequences

- The spread of violent extremism
- Violence and instability
- Repression of minorities and women
- Social and economic disruption
- Destruction of infrastructure

⁹ Holmer, Georgia. Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective. Washington: United State Institute for Peace, 2016.

¹⁰ Countering Violent Extremism. Washington: United States Agency for International Development, 2017.

Stakeholder Input & Methodology

To better understand the issue of fundamentalism in Iraq and craft pragmatic and responsive policy solutions, members of the group met with journalists, academics, experts in the fields of law, human rights and extremism, as well as political party leaders, MPs, and other members of government. Through these meetings, group members came to understand shortcomings in the current approach to fundamentalism in Iraq. They also learned of international examples of successful approaches to the issue, and incorporated this information into their policy recommendations. Once they had established a base of knowledge, group members gained insight from public events held across Iraq. At policy discussions in Baghdad, organizers distributed questionnaires to the public to gather opinions on fundamentalism and potential solutions. Group members also used these events to build support for their initiative and recruit volunteers, who later participated in campaign activities. These included town hall-style discussions and social initiatives, such as an effort to build a sense of community through planting trees and improving public greenspace.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- 1** Consolidate social and political awareness efforts targeting youth.
1a – Organize workshops and symposiums in liberated areas, or in provinces with a large number of IDPs, focused on citizenship, Iraqi identity, and coexistence.
1b – Use rhetoric of national unity to combat radical media broadcasting extreme ideology.
1c – Arrange meetings with representatives of liberated areas focused on national unity.
- 2** Activate a youth parliament.
2a – Focusing on liberated areas, create youth parliaments that include all sects and identities.
2b – Invite these youth parliaments to visit the Council of Representatives (CoR) to observe its work and provide youth with a chance to meet with elected representatives.
2c – Organize meetings between youth parliamentarians from different provinces.
- 3** Reduce the age of candidacy for parliament from 30 years to 25 years.
- 4** Encourage youth in liberated areas to attend university by lowering admissions standards for youth in areas formerly controlled by Daesh.
- 5** Establish a parliamentary committee responsible for addressing fundamentalism.
- 6** Increase the punishment for promoting fundamentalism.

Long-Term Recommendations

- 1** Establish a permanent governmental institution to combat fundamentalism.
- 2** Government and CSOs should monitor the budgeting process to ensure fair and equal distribution of resources.
- 3** Develop education policy aimed at combating fundamentalism.
- 4** Adopt stricter punishments for those who adopt, promote and fund fundamentalist practices.

Responsible Governing Institution or Independent Body

- Parliament
- Provincial Councils
- Governors
- Political Parties
- The Judiciary
- Ministry of Education
- Media
- Civil Society Organizations
- International Organizations



ADDRESSING CORRUPTION THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND CIVIC ACTION

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Corruption is ubiquitous at every level of the Iraqi government, and limits the state’s ability to provide services demanded by citizens, damages politicians’ credibility, and provides opportunities for potentially violent actors (ISIS, for example) to gain support from the public. In public opinion research conducted by NDI, citizens regularly rate corruption among their top concerns, and Transparency International ranks Iraq 166 out of 176 countries in terms of the perception of corruption.¹¹ Citizens are asked to pay bribes to secure employment or to navigate the country’s bureaucracy, and funds regularly go missing from public accounts.

Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi attempted to stem the bleeding with a promise of reform when he took office, but corruption remains pervasive within the government and society. The Integrity Commission, an independent body within the government of Iraq focused on rooting out corruption, was established in 2004 and incorporated into the Iraqi constitution in 2005. However, according to interviews with experts and citizens conducted by the policy working group, the institution is not transparent and is fundamentally flawed: inspectors are appointed by ministers who can remove them at any time, and are therefore disinclined to pursue investigations that target senior officials. The work conducted by the organization is also hampered by a lack of coordination between investigators and a myriad of administrative hurdles. Reform at the Integrity Commission has been stymied by political forces, and progressive leaders have been repeatedly threatened by government officials and forced to step down.¹²

The current head of the Integrity Commission, Hassan al-Yasiri, submitted his resignation in 2016, just a year after assuming the post. It was subsequently rejected by PM Abadi, and Yasiri still leads the commission. Yasiri’s frustration stems largely from another flaw in the Commission’s organization: the body is dependent on a highly-politicized judiciary to prosecute the cases it investigates. In 2016, the courts took action in only 15 percent of the 12,000 cases of suspected corruption referred by the Integrity Commission.¹³

There exists a system for citizen complaints of corruption—through a hotline, email, or physical boxes where Iraqis can cite a specific incident or report an official. However, few of these complaints are investigated, and even fewer are prosecuted. Many citizens don’t know that these mechanisms exist, and others are fearful of retribution from officials and their families. This fear is not unjustified—several citizens interviewed by the policy working group reported that they were threatened or intimidated until they withdrew their complaint or changed their story in front of an investigator. Based on their research, the group members found that small changes were necessary (i.e. altering the hotline), as well as larger organizational reforms within the Integrity Commission.

Primary Causes of Corruption

- Lack of transparency at every level of government
- Institutions that exist to fight corruption have are flawed
- Years of systemic corruption have institutionalized graft
- Lack of protection for citizens that report corruption

Main Consequences

- Less public money means fewer services
- Corruption in the military can be dangerous when facing a violent enemy (such as ISIS)
- Administrative ineffectiveness
- A decline in institutional justice and rule of law

¹¹ “Iraq.” Corruption Perception Index. Transparency International. 2016. 15 May 2017.

¹² “Failing Oversight: Iraq’s Unchecked Government.” International Crisis Group, 26 September 2011.

¹³ Rasheed, Ahmed. “Iraq’s Anti-Corruption Czar: the job so tough they won’t let you quit.” Reuters, 3 April 2017.

Stakeholder Input & Methodology

In researching corruption in Iraq and crafting policy recommendations, working group members met with a wide variety of political actors and stakeholders, including issue experts, policy makers and citizens. Early in the process, to build a base of knowledge on the topic, members met with officials currently working on combatting corruption in Iraq, including the prime minister, the speaker of the CoR, ministers, and other members of national and local government, as well as the head of the Integrity Commission. The group also gathered information from academics and university officials, legal experts, civil society leaders, international actors, and other issue experts.

Working group members engaged with citizens through public events, often participating in party or tribal meetings and discussing corruption. Many of these meetings were with members of minority populations, as well as young Iraqis. At these events, group members distributed questionnaires to gauge the thoughts and priorities of citizens, and their opinions on a variety of policy options. Group members and a volunteer canvassing team conducted face-to-face interviews on the streets of Baghdad, discussing corruption with more than 100 men and women of varying backgrounds, sects, and age. The group used the information gleaned from experts and members of government, as well as the opinions of citizens, to the following policy recommendations.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- 1 Increase the oversight role of CSOs to monitor prominent cases of corruption.
- 2 Establish a commission to analyze complaints, made up of independent judges and experts in the field.
- 3 Shorten the number for the corruption hotline, and make the number toll-free.
- 4 Allow complaints to be submitted via social media through official accounts.
- 5 Conduct forums, seminars and workshops to spread awareness on the work of the Integrity Commission

Long-Term Recommendations

- 1 Ensure the independence of the Integrity Commission from political influence.
- 2 Establish an administrative court for the Integrity Commissioner to provide an independent judiciary to hear cases on corruption.
- 3 Conduct regular public conferences with employees of the Integrity Commission, political party representatives, and NGOs on the role and progress of the Commission.

Responsible Governing Institution or Independent Body

- Iraqi Integrity Commission
- Parliament
- Provincial Councils
- Political Parties
- Government Ministries
- Civil Society Organizations
- NGO Directorate
- International Organizations



INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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Iraqis consistently name unemployment among their top concerns in polling conducted by NDI, and citizen concern was evident in interviews conducted by members of the policy working group. While it is difficult to give exact figures on Iraq's unemployment rate, there is a consensus among experts that it remains alarmingly high. Recent estimates range from 11 percent to as high as 16 percent.¹⁴ Less opaque is the fact that unemployment in Iraq targets traditionally marginalized groups, including women and youth. Low estimates of unemployment put the figure for women (able to work and actively seeking employment) at 27 percent, and for youth (aged 15-24 and looking for work) at 18 percent to 36 percent nationwide. This number does not include the large number of youth who have stopped actively looking for work out of frustration after years of seeking employment. The rate is higher among youth with advanced degrees. Many Iraqis are underemployed, taking jobs that do not match their skills or education.¹⁵

The Iraqi government is the nation's largest employer, providing 40 percent of the jobs in the country. The process for securing these jobs is often mired in cronyism and personal connections or, in some cases, graft. Citizens interviewed by the policy working group reported being asked for bribes when trying to secure employment at schools and local government offices. Jobs are often filled by unqualified applicants with connections to local officials. As a result, job descriptions are left intentionally vague, providing openings for the well-connected and those willing to pay. Additionally, the government's workforce is shrinking, as oil revenue falls and budget deficits rise, resulting in higher unemployment and fewer job opportunities for new graduates.

More than 50 percent of Iraq's population is below the age of 25, and each year about 400,000 new jobseekers or eligible workers are added to the economy. The majority of these young men and women will have limited access to employment that matches their skills and education. In addition to poverty and other impacts, unemployment can make youth vulnerable to extremism and radicalization, and undermine the security of the Iraqi state.¹⁶

Among the experts and citizens interviewed by the policy working group, many saw the government as the one actor that could stimulate otherwise dormant sectors of the economy and create jobs for Iraq's youth. Through a national strategy focused on transparency, government support for individuals and companies, and targeted awareness-raising and education efforts, members of the group and citizens interviewed see a brighter future for young Iraqis.

Primary Causes of Unemployment

- Lack of economic diversification
- International investment is largely in oil industry, which employs less than 1% of Iraqis
- Falling oil prices has shrunk the government workforce
- Lack of protection for citizens that report corruption

Main Consequences

- High unemployment makes for a weak economy and limited consumers
- A weak economy results in fewer tax dollars and a less effective state
- Widespread poverty
- Disaffected youth could be enticed by extremist ideologies or crime

¹⁴ "About Iraq." UNDP in Iraq. UNDP, 2017. Web. 11 May 2017.

¹⁵ "Fighting Youth Unemployment through Education." UNESCO, 2017. Web. 13 May 2017.

¹⁶ Omar, Manal. "Winning the Peace in Iraq is Bigger than Winning the War." Washington: USIP, 2015.

Stakeholder Input & Methodology

Members of the policy working group solicited feedback from experts, policy-makers, and citizens to better understand the issue of unemployment, explore solutions that had been tried in the past, and test their own recommendations with decision-makers and the people these initiatives would affect. While conducting research, members interviewed academics and other experts to gather information on Iraq's economy, domestic and international factors on various sectors, and potential solutions to the rampant unemployment Iraq is currently experiencing. Synthesizing this information, the group members discussed solutions with policy makers, including MPs in the Council of Representatives (CoR) and Kurdistan Parliament of Iraq (KPI), political party leaders, officials in several ministries, and other relevant members of government. Finally, the group distributed questionnaires to Iraqis, particularly youth, who are disproportionately affected by the lack of employment opportunities.

Based on these consultations, the group members crafted policy recommendations tailored to the Iraq's unique situation. They then tested these recommendations through additional meetings with experts and policy makers, and through town hall-style discussion sessions with members of the community, including the unemployed. Recommendations were then revised based on the feedback gleaned from these discussions.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- 1 Establish centers where the unemployed can learn new skills.
- 2 Establish a database for non-governmental jobs. Digitize job listings for government jobs.
- 3 Provide government-backed loans to the unemployed.
- 4 Establish unemployment funds
- 5 Hold regularly-scheduled awareness sessions on continuing education, employment, and other relevant topics for the public.
- 6 Build transparency into the process of filling government jobs, including clear job requirements and criteria for the selection process.

Long-Term Recommendations

- 1 Develop a national policy for jobs and addressing unemployment.
- 2 Institute a federal law requiring foreign investors to have a workforce made up of at least 50 percent Iraqis, and domestic investors to have a workforce consisting exclusively of Iraqis.
- 3 Increase vocational specializations within educational institutions.
- 4 Amend the law on the retirement age.
- 5 Invest in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors to create new jobs for graduates.

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