



Women's access to public services and education, participation in the work force, and involvement in decision-making varies widely in Iraq. The variables include marital status, educational attainment, socio-economic status and region. Concerns shared by Iraqi women include:

Security: An insecure situation and gender-based violence impacts workforce participation and limits female access to health and education facilities.

Limited political participation: Women have been prevented from expressing their needs and advocating for issues which affect them.

Illiteracy: Iraqi illiteracy rates for women are among the worst in the Arab region.

Unemployed women: A lack of relevant skills, technical training, and confidence leave women with limited abilities for the emerging market economy.

Access to Health: Iraq has a high maternal mortality rate and more than 50 percent of pregnant and lactating mothers are anemic. The fertility rate is 5.4, one of the highest in the region, which indicates the critical need for proper maternal health care.

USAID bases its Iraq women's development programs on the fact that women's consent and active participation matters in politics, economic opportunity, and social settings. Since April 1, 2003, USAID focused on women's equality and empowerment through local government and civil society organizations, bringing the most immediate and direct impact on the lives of women. USAID helped build the social structures needed to support Iraq's women with increased school enrollment for girls and health programs aimed at mothers. Reaction to changes in women's roles in society typically occur about a year after development programs are implemented. This implies that civil society organizations and female leaders will be challenged in 2004. To support women in the second year of development, USAID programs allow for a more measured approach to women's equality. In governance, legal changes will include codifying women's rights, solidifying the role of women in government, and supporting women's civil society organizations. Economic programs which target women and give them new opportunities are also being developed.



USAID addresses women's needs in health, education, infrastructure, water and sanitation, democracy and governance, and economic growth. USAID programs are facilitating opportunities for women to advocate for social justice, promote equality in the workplace, and engage in public policy pursuant to Iraq's democratic transition.

In close cooperation with Iraqi nationals and the Coalition Provisional Authority, USAID is restoring critical infrastructure, improving healthcare and education services, expanding economic opportunities, and implementing good governance.

Iraqi Women Empowered

Special Feature

"I have been principal of Al Fawz for years and have never received administration training," says the principal of Al-Fawz high school for girls. "I was so happy that you gave us training in our specialization. I would like to have more training in administration so I can be a better principal."

Increasing Opportunities for Education

USAID programs promote education for women and girls to allow them to fully participate and benefit from the development of a prosperous Iraq.

In the 2003-2004 school year, female attendance increased from pre-war rates, with 1.9 million girls in primary school (46 percent of all primary students) and 580,000 (40 percent of all secondary students) in secondary schools.

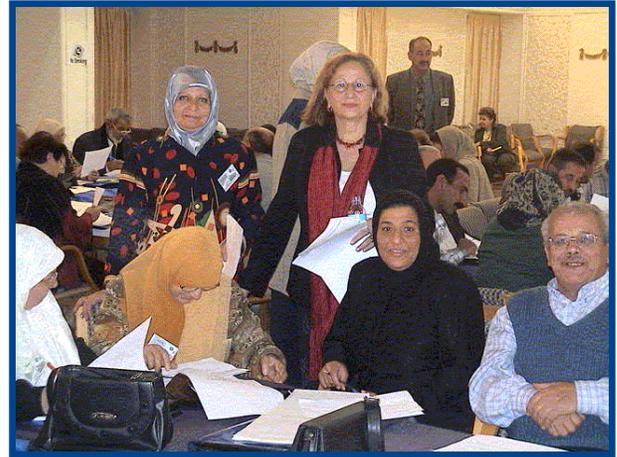
The Ministry of Education and communities rehabilitated more than 2,300 schools to ensure that students learn in a safe, comfortable environment. The work included separation of toilets and dressing rooms for girls and young women. With USAID funds, UNICEF will provide separated bathroom facilities to an additional 1,150 schools in the next year.

The Ministry of Education trained more than 33,000 teachers and administrators, which included more than 17,000 females, in new skills that will improve the quality of teaching in Iraq's classrooms.

Five higher education university partnerships are allowing university students to travel internationally to other universities and participate in training and graduate programs.



USAID



The principal of Al-Fawz high school (center).

New Economic Opportunities

Women's participation in the economy is a crucial factor for Iraq's recovery. USAID's economic growth program is supporting activities which will help reduce women's unemployment, improve marketable skills, and provide access to business capital.

More than 1,000 women received training in the financial, fiscal, utilities and regulatory sectors. Future programs include training and employment services for 1.5 million Iraqi women. Training and employment programs for women and men will take place through seventeen Vocational Technical Training Centers and twenty-eight Employment Services Centers throughout Iraq.

In addition, two U.S. NGOs operate a micro-lending program that has loaned more than \$600,000 for 300 women entrepreneurs. The program's average loan size is about \$2,000.



A recipient of a micro-finance grant in Kirkuk

Quality of Life for Iraqi Women

Special Feature

Health

Iraqi women are benefiting from the restoration of health clinics, hospitals, and laboratories. USAID is assisting the Ministry of Health to renovate 52 primary health care clinics and re-equip an additional 600. High-protein rations have been given to 240,000 pregnant and nursing mothers and malnourished children during 2003. A new program in rural areas provides supplies and training to birthing attendants and will benefit a total of 440,000 women.

In an effort to improve the quality of care provided to women, USAID assisted the Ministry of Health to train primary health care providers with an emphasis on maternal and child health care. More than 700 doctors have been trained in Wasit, At' Tamim, Al Basrah, Karbala', An Najaf, Ninawa', and Dhi Qar Governorates.

Maternal Health

A majority of Iraq's rural women receive healthcare through primary care centers or smaller sub-centers. Many births occur at home in Iraq, without skilled attendants. The lack of skilled attendants accounts for a high neonatal mortality rate and points to an urgent need to improve Iraqis health care.

Emergency Assistance

Emergency programs in Iraq reach displaced families, many headed by women. USAID funded U.S. NGOs that provide food, nutrition supplements, hygiene kits, blankets, and cooking sets to Iraqis. USAID programs provide essential medical equipment and supplies to health facilities, support emergency chlorination of potable water and restore water and sanitation systems.



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A midwife from a primary health care clinic in Turaba, near Al Amarah town in Hawizah marsh.

Marshlands Restoration

The Iraq Marshlands Restoration Program will restore the ecosystem of the ancient southern marshes and assist national and local efforts to provide social and economic assistance to marsh dwellers. Many of these households are headed by women. Program activities target them for income and employment opportunities. Crop and livestock production, fish farming, and reconstructed wetlands will provide access and opportunities for women. The marshlands program works closely with an Iraqi NGO which provides healthcare in the isolated marsh areas through clinics.



Iraqi woman working in the Marshlands.

Iraqi Women Empowered

Special Feature

Women in Local Government

USAID's Local Governance Program strengthens government institutions and works with citizens to help them understand their rights and responsibilities. The LGP has actively recruited women to serve on governorate, municipal, and neighborhood advisory councils throughout the country. In Baghdad governorate, there are two to three women members serving on each of the 88 neighborhood councils and 14 district councils. In Babil, Najaf, Qadisiyah, and Wasit Governorates, there are between one and three women on each neighborhood and district council. Although the percentage of women members serving on new advisory councils is small, their participation is the first step towards increasing female participation in political processes.

USAID funded conferences and training have helped women learn about democracy, human rights, women's legal rights, women's health issues, business marketing, micro-finance and computer skills. USAID supports women's civil society organizations that enable women to advocate for their needs at both the local and national government levels.

Women's participation in politics can be challenging as women in Iraq often are not encouraged to become involved. USAID works with women to gain the support of their families, communities, and government representatives accept their participation in Iraq's political and economic sectors.

Agriculture

Women have a disproportionately larger role in Iraqi rural households than in other Arab countries, due to male casualties in the Iran-Iraq war. This program trains women and men in improved crop and livestock production technologies, market development, financial management skills, business planning and rural credit, and improved resource management.



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Many women's associations teach job-training and sewing skills.

Community Action Program

The five NGOs that implement USAID's Community Action Program (CAP) provide jobs for Iraqi women while involving them in the political process. CAP recruits women to serve on community action groups that identify critical needs and priorities for the community. More than a third of the members of the 138 community action groups in southern Iraq are women.

CAP programs have refurbished healthcare centers and delivery rooms, purchased sewing machines and other equipment for women's associations, rehabilitated women's dormitories at universities, and refurbished youth centers which offer classes for girls.



USAID is working with the Ministry of Agriculture to develop programs to improve agricultural practices for Iraq's rural families, many of which are headed by women.

Iraqi Women Empowered



Candidate Mohammed making a speech at the Najmeh district council (governorate) selections, January 6.

Women's Political Participation

In Baghdad, USAID helped form Women and Child Committees in the nine District Advisory Councils of Amanat Baghdad to focus on women's issues within the district and neighborhood councils as well as the Interim City Advisory Council. Committee chairs meet to formulate common goals among districts, such as how to manage viable nongovernmental organizations and use media and communications. The Women and Child Committees organized regular panel discussions on Women and Politics and The Role of Women in Civil Society.

More than 1,500 women attended a conference in Baghdad on February 26, 2004 on "The Role of Women in the New Iraq". The conference was hosted by the Iraqi Foundation for Development and Democracy, a Baghdad based NGO. USAID invited more than 200 women from 17 Governorates to share their views and concerns for the future of women in Iraq. The women discussed the Iraqi Governing Council Regulation 137, the Personal Code, and helped insert Article 30(C) into the Transitional Administrative Law, which provides 25 percent representation of women in the Transitional National Assembly. A group of delegates visited members of the Interim Governing Council to present their concerns about the role of women in the new Iraq.

Working with Women's Associations

USAID provides support to women's organizations throughout the country. In the south central region, USAID is supporting a women's association of more than 850 women whose husbands and older sons were killed during the former regime, forcing the women to become sole providers for family children and elders. The women were sewing and selling garments on the local market, but after the war, their machines were stolen and the facility was vandalized. USAID provided organizational training, financial support, and 20 professional sewing machines to revitalize the association.

In the north, USAID supported a conference on women's participation in the workforce to encourage Iraqi women to join the workforce and build confidence for businesswomen.

In other areas of the country, Local Governance Teams have conducted democracy workshops for women leaders in the community who are active in human rights associations or women's rights organizations. Teams have helped integrate women entrepreneurs into the business community by creating the Men and Women Business Associations.

USAID funded a train-the-trainer program on trauma counseling and community reconciliation program implemented by a social action center and others. The program trained 60 trainers on skills to help individuals and communities recover from war and internal strife. Over the next two years, these trainers will train an additional 1,200 individuals who will reach 30,000 war-affected persons.

USAID's Iraq Transition Initiative (ITI) provided institutional support to Iraqi women's organizations throughout the country. In some cases, the Local Governance Program assisted the Iraqi women's organizations to renovate and furnish their offices.

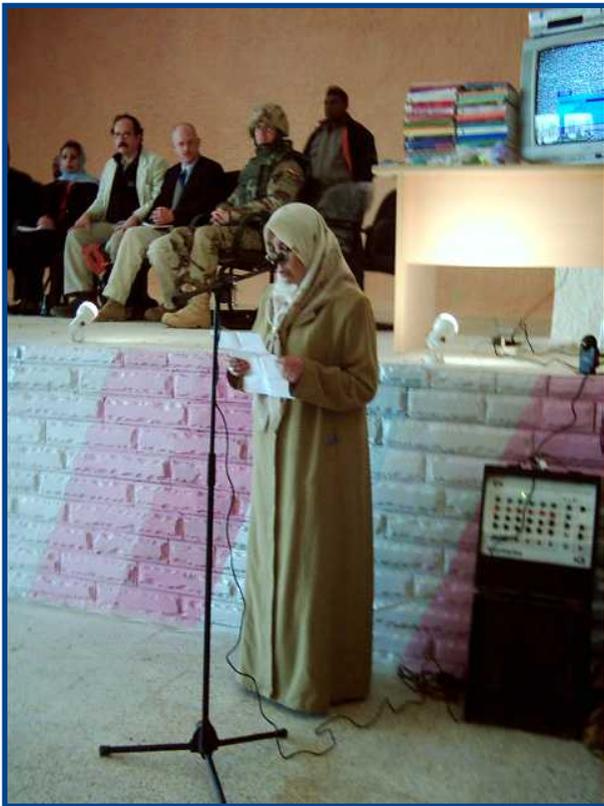
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Women's Organizations

In Iraq, women and girls often lack the tools and support to become active and equal citizens of a democracy. USAID's Iraq Transition Initiative (ITI) will establish 12 regional women's centers that offer literacy classes, job skills, information on health care, legal services, and a sanctuary from domestic violence. Centers have opened throughout the country and more will open in the near future.

In addition to this initiative, ITI also helped the Baghdad Women's Centers Foundation form women's centers in each of Baghdad's nine districts. The first center opened on March 8th, 2004 and a second center is complete and will open shortly. USAID will give books, supplies and equipment to the nine women's centers. The centers will serve as meeting places and training centers to empower women and assist them on the road to financial independence.



Opening of a women's center supported by ITI.



Women preparing for democracy skit

Women's Rights

ITI supported women's rights awareness and democracy education through training courses, lectures and the distribution of materials for women that focus on the fundamentals of democracy and principles of human rights. One way that ITI has conducted these activities is through mobile teams that travel to remote areas of Iraq and provide women with health and social services, crisis and abuse intervention, as well as with information on democracy and civic participation. More than 8,000 women have access to these services.

Women's Conferences

ITI supported several conferences on women's rights and facilitated the travel of a national delegation of Iraqi women to the United Nations 48th Annual Commission on the Status of Women Conference in March 2004.



Women's centers offer literacy and job skills classes and information on violence against women and women's rights.

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