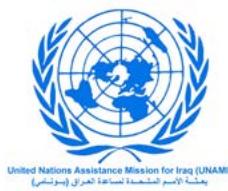




STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
**Women Running for Elected Office in Iraq:  
Needs and Challenges**  
Project - First Phase



Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



Iraq Foundation

المعهد العراقي



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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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# Introduction

The Iraq Foundation is an independent non-governmental organization working in Iraq since 2003. With support from the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) and technical assistance from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Iraq Foundation is conducting a project to strengthen women's participation in political life at the national and subnational levels, and to strengthen the capacity of women seeking public office. The project comprises two phases. The first phase, which ran from 1 October 2019 to 15 February 2020, conducted needs assessments and research aimed at documenting and understanding the challenges and unmet needs of women who run for elected public office. This information will serve as a foundation for strategies and action plans to provide women with training and tools to successfully run for elected office. Five governorates were examined in the first phase, namely Baghdad, Basra, Ninawa, Najaf and Salaheddin. They were selected because they provide a representative diversity in terms of social and political environments. Salaheddin and Ninawa are provinces in the areas liberated from Islamic State; Najaf is a province strongly influenced by the religious establishment; Basra is a southern province that has recently faced unrest and public dissatisfaction; and Baghdad represents the widest spectrum of social, cultural and economic diversity.

The present report, comprising seven sections, documents the findings of the research that was carried out in the first phase of the project. Section one sets out the methodology and limitations of the research, and the tools applied (desk review, individual interviews with MPs and PC members, focus group discussions with different social groups, rankings, and case studies). Section two outlines society's understanding of women's political participation and representation in

Iraq, by providing the findings of the focus group's responses to various questions. Section three identifies the challenges that women candidates face, and presents relevant findings as experienced by the interviewees. Section four describes useful experiences that helped elected women overcome challenges, and win seats outside the quota. Section five outlines the needs of interviewed women to enhance their preparedness for political participation and election. Section six provides recommendations on policies to address barriers and promote women's participation and representation in elected public life. Section seven sets out the concluding recommendations based on the findings of the research and the literature reviewed.



# I. Research methodology

The research is based on the principles of participation, inclusiveness and gender sensitivity. The research adopted a mixed methods approach, including the collection and consolidation of qualitative and resulting quantitative data. While the qualitative approach investigated the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees, the quantitative approach focused on the numerical data derived from the rankings. All the findings from the desk review and from individual and group discussions were triangulated for consistency and validity.

## *Tools*

The information was collected through the following five tools.

### **1. Desk review**

Secondary resources were reviewed, including project documents, studies and background material on relevant research done in other parts of the world.

### **2. Individual interviews**

The project addresses two categories of elected women: female members of parliament (MPs) elected in 2018, and current provincial council (PC) members. The current parliament offers an interesting profile: out of 84 women MPs elected in 2018, 60 are new to parliamentary life, and 19 won seats outside the quota system. One woman, Majda Temimi, who headed the Sa'iroon list in Baghdad and gained the highest number of votes in the province, was interviewed as a case study.

Based on the desk review, research tools were developed to interview the MPs and council members to understand the challenges they faced in their candidacy, how they overcame them, and what actions were still needed to

promote women's participation in elected public life and enhance women's political participation.

A total of 32 one-on-one interviews were conducted. All interviews were semi-structured and participatory in nature, meaning the researcher used guiding open-ended questions that were based on the findings of the desk review (annex I).

### **3. Individual interviews with women parliamentarians**

Nine women MPs were interviewed to understand the challenges they faced in their candidacy, how they overcame them, and the support needed to promote women's participation and representation in public life.

Interviews were conducted with some of the women MPs who won seats outside the quota, to understand the strategies and tools that helped them win and the mechanisms that can be applied to address challenges.

### **4. Interviews with women PC members**

Interviews were conducted with 23 PC members. They were asked to identify common challenges hindering the electability of women in their own right, rather than to fulfil women's quota seats. They also discussed the challenges faced in their previous candidacy, new constraints they may face in the next elections in 2020, and the type of skills-strengthening, knowledge and support they required to meet those challenges.

### **5. Focus group discussions in the selected provinces**

To obtain a counterpoint perspective to supplement and round-off the research conducted with women in parliament and PCs, five focus group discussions were held in five

governorates and attended by 84 persons. The objective was to understand public perceptions of women candidates and attitudes towards women in elected office, and what citizens looked for in a credible woman candidate. The focus groups brought together local civil society organizations, community leaders, women's groups, media groups, religious leaders and activists.

## 6. Case studies

Two case-based studies were conducted with two women parliamentarians who won outside the quota system. The objective was to provide insight on what worked, and to illustrate the mechanism and strategies applied. The two cases, one from Baghdad and one from Nenawa, were asked to describe their own experience throughout the phases of the political campaign (annex II).

## 7. Data analysis

Data from all sources, including desk review, focus group discussions and interviews, were analysed as follows:

- a. The triangulation of data emerging from these divergent sources was used to ensure validity and reliability of the findings. Triangulating information was used to identify similarities and/or discrepancies in data obtained in different ways and from different stakeholders;
- b. Interviews and focus group discussions were constructed in a participatory analytical mode, in which interviewees were guided to assess themselves or the situation and illustrate the problem faced or mechanism applied;
- c. Focus groups discussions were used to identify on a macro level the context of the candidates and illustrate broader findings, while individual interviews were used on a

meso level to describe personal experience. Case studies were used to illustrate the micro level and were purely individual, describing personal experiences;

- d. A ranking analytical and participatory tool was used during the individual interviews with the groups of parliamentarians and PC members. During the interview, the challenges identified in the prepared research framework were presented to the interviewee, who was invited to rank each challenge individually according to the degree of the problem they faced, with justifications for that rank. Another ranking tool was used to rank the still-unmet needs to qualify for election and enhance candidate's proficiency for political participation.

## 8. Sample and sampling design

The total sample in this study includes 116 respondents who were selected intentionally to cover all the desired groups, using a maximum variation sample. From the total stakeholders consulted, the sample included 80 females and 36 males (tables 1-4). To ensure broad coverage, the criteria for sample selection included diversity in terms of stakeholder groups, and MPs and PC members, with and without the quota. The focus group participants were selected to vary in sex, age and occupation. As noted earlier, geographic and socio-cultural diversity were also built into the project through the selection of governorates.

## 9. Research team

The team was composed of 10 female and male researchers from four local non-governmental organizations in four selected governorates, Basra, Nenawa, Najaf and Salaheddin, in addition to the research team of the Iraq Foundation in Baghdad. Following two days of training in Erbil, they carried out the research in their designated locations and sent their output to the Iraq Foundation.

## 10. Limitations

Methodological limitations were encountered and reported by researchers in most governorates, primarily owing to the difficult circumstances in Iraq and the intensity of protests, as described below:

- a. The difficulty of communicating with women MPs and PC members in the country's current situation. In Najaf, for example, the unrest increased tensions between PC members and demonstrators;
- b. In Basra, the deteriorating security situation and the threat to provincial council members led to difficulty in participation, and non-response to communications on interview coordination;
- c. Parliamentary sessions were held continuously due to the current situation and the need for MPs to attend the sessions in Baghdad hindered their presence in the provinces;
- d. The recent dissolution of PCs made communication with the PC members difficult, as many were traveling outside Iraq;
- e. Female MPs and PC members were fearful of appearing in public, so as to avoid any security threats against them;
- f. In Basra specifically, most interviews were conducted over the phone and were often not continued because of fears, busy schedules, or the desire to retreat from political participation.

**Table 1.** Sample size and classifications

Classification	Baghdad	Nenawa	Basra	Najaf	Salaheddin	Sex		Total
						M	F	
Individual	11	6	3	6	6	0	32	32
Focus group	9	18	21	15	21	36	48	84
Total	20	24	24	21	25	36	80	116

**Table 2.** Interviewees according to governorates

Governorate	Parliamentarian	Provincial	Total
Baghdad	4	7	11
Basra	0	3	3
Nenawa	2	4	6
Najaf	3	3	6
Salaheddin	0	6	6
Total	9	23	32

Researchers used all means to circumvent these limitations. Nevertheless, some respondents remained inaccessible and had to be replaced or cancelled. These limitations lowered the number of interviewees that were initially planned, and in some cases

interviews were conducted over the phone or the interviewees were asked to write their own answers, thus lowering the chances of personal participatory interaction and direct communication to clarify responses.

**Table 3. Parliamentarian interviewees with political affiliations**

Governorate	Parliamentarian	Total
Baghdad	Majda El Tamimi Independent (Sadrist Current – Free Bloc –Sa’iroon)	55,251 votes, no quota
	Alia El Amara, Independent	
	Hanan Hanoun Independent, Al Hikma Movement	Previous Candidate
Nenawa	Mahasen Hamdoun Independent (Coalition of Iraqi Forces Bloc)	
	Lilyal Mohamed Ali Al-Fatah Alliance/Badr Organization	2,674 votes, no quota
	Intisar Ali El Jubouri Iraqi Forces Alliance Bloc	President of Nenawa Spring Organization for Woman and Girl
Najaf	Sohad Darwisch Iraqi Communist Party/Sai’roon Bloc	Previous candidate
	Sanaa El Mousawi Coalition of El Fath/Badr Organization	
	Zubayda El Baghdady Al-Jaafari List in 2014 State of Law List in 2018	Previous candidate

**Table 4.** PC member with political affiliations

Governorate	Parliamentarian	Total
Baghdad	Iman El Barzanjy Independent	
	Jasouma Rahim El Azirgawy Al Sadr Movement	Former employee at the Ministry of Education
	Naheda El Tamimi State of Law Bloc	Civil society: Subel El Najaa
	Nawal El Arajy Independent Within the State of Law Bloc	
	Hoda El Aboudy Member of the political Bureau in the National Wisdom Movement	Activist and social researcher
Nenawa	Assin Khalil, Independent	
	Khaleda El Memary Independent Sanad Bloc	Quota
	Kolestan Hassan Kurdistan National Party	No quota
	Fahima Kaso Kurdistan National Party	Quota
Najaf	Sanaa El Aly	Candidate for PC
	Awafaa to Najaf	
	Zeinab El Aly	PC, Member of Mother and Child Committee
	Najlaa Bahr El Iraqia	Candidate for PC
Basra	Anwar El Agoudy El Nahj El Watany Bloc	Former El Fadila Party
	Somaya El Halfy Iraqi National Coalition	Former El Badr Association
	Najla El Tamimi Independent	Former El Hikma Movement and El Mowaten Bloc
Salaheddin	Sadeya El Obaidy National Intimaa Bloc	Former Arab Jamaheer Bloc
	Amna Ahmed El Gamaheer El Arabia Bloc	
	Souad Youssef Independent	
	Ashwak Hassan El Gamaheer El Arabia Bloc	President and founder of El Benaaf for Human Rights
	Amera El Baldawy El Fath Coalition	Former Independent
	Sahar El Naimy El Gamaheer El Arabia Bloc	Two sessions PC, President of the Iraqi Women's Branch/World Women's Union Member of the Arab Federation of Voluntary Action

**Table 5.** Profile of interviewees in the focus group discussions

Governorate	Profile	Male	Female	Total
Baghdad	Women non-governmental organizations, activists, the media, academics, human rights organizations	2	7	9
Nenawa	Nenawa local government representatives, MPs, PC members, academics, university professors specializing in political science, the media, civil society organizations	8	10	18
Salaheddin	Educators, civil society leaders, community leaders (men and women) from non-governmental organizations, the media, academics	12	9	21
Basra	Civil society organizations, the Office of Human Rights in Basra, a Christian minority cleric and a student of the Basra Police Command represented by the Director of Community Police, the media, former PC members, activist, the youth parliament and judicial assistants	8	13	21
Najaf	Women candidates group, a media group, a human rights group	6	9	15
Total		36	48	84

## II. Findings on society's perspective on women's political participation

The present section sets out the findings of the focus group discussions held in the five governorates. The discussions revolved around society's perspective on the role of female candidates from several angles. The discussions were attended by various categories of participants: male and female media representatives of the media, academia, politics, religious groups, and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

### A. What is the public's vision of the candidates? How are they viewed by the public?

According to the findings of the group discussions, the public's vision of the candidates can be grouped into the following five main categories:

- a. External circumstances impede women's performance;
- b. Women candidates play an important role in politics;
- c. Female candidates are useless and submissive;
- d. Society is now more accepting of women's role;
- e. Women are eligible candidates.

The entire list of categories was not put forward in any of the governorates. In each governorate, however, two or three of these categories were discussed. While the first four categories were discussed in three governorates, the last category was only discussed in two governorates.

The view that 'external circumstances impeded women's performance' was the dominant opinion, although it was only discussed in Salaheddin, Nenawa and Najaf. Those external circumstances were found to be due to the electoral law and the Independent High Electoral Commission, or due to the prevailing favouritism, tribalism and the opinion of the parties (Najaf, Nenawa and Salaheddin). Female candidates, it is viewed, are selected on a political basis when, for example, the head of the bloc chooses, regardless of the public's vision, and decides who wins in advance, even if the candidate does not get votes. The performance of female candidates/MPs can be controlled and governed by the party, and can in some cases be exploited. In Nenawa, however, it was viewed that if elections were performed fairly, women were likely to play a greater role. Majda Tamimi is a case in point.

According to a Nenawa PC member: "a woman is able to give but only if she gets some of her rights. No matter what we women do, the man obstructs our work. In my experience, when I was in the council, they imposed a committee on me, though it was not of my qualification, simply because they can control us. But still, I was able to give and exert efforts".

The category with the negative views postulating that 'female candidates are useless and submissive' was put forward in Basra, Najaf and Nenawa. In Najaf and Nenawa, women were found to be controlled and exploited by their parties. In Najaf, one opinion was that "they find women unable to keep up with the political process because they are weak, and this is why they have to be supported by a party or the head of the bloc. Society's view of women is clouded by mockery and denigration, and the majority believes that it is only the parties who choose".

In Nenawa, the discussion mentioned that women's performance was not up to the desired standard, because they only came through the quotas. Even though they play an active role in peace-building, many women have done nothing. In Najaf, one opinion suggested that women were only filling the list, while another claimed that "sometimes she is perceived as a supplement to the number and that her participation is only for her own wellbeing, while it would be much better if she would raise her children". In Basra, the discussions noted that women could not meet the aspirations of their constituents, since they were not independent and only followed their political party blocs. Women were deemed weak because they lacked experience in management and decision-making, and do not have political and legal awareness. Notably, discussions in Baghdad and Salaheddin mentioned no negative views towards women.

Moreover, in Basra, Najaf and Nenawa, discussions supported the view that women candidates play an important role. In Basra's discussion, it was perceived that women must take their part in the political process, because it was not possible to manage a country and legislate a decision or law without women's participation. In Nenawa, discussions suggested that women's presence was important, because they could be strong on several issues, especially on problems women faced. In Najaf, participants said that women should be MPs. Their success depended on empowering other women, and on policies targeting women and families.

Participants in Salaheddin, Baghdad and Basra discussed the view that 'society is more accepting of women's role'. In Salaheddin, it was mentioned that at first there were many reservations, but now with the repetition of the electoral process, there were fewer reservations and citizens now accepted women's candidacy. Likewise, in Baghdad, political awareness was on the rise and a large proportion of women were freeing themselves

from social constraints, increasing the number of women not members of any political party. Society's view of women candidates had become positive. Society had also become receptive to women working within civil society organizations, especially women in independent organizations. As a result, there is increased community confidence in women because they can work in more than one place and at more than one level. In Basra, women have gained a solid popularity, which they acquired through successful experiences, even at the level of their tribe or the locality where they live.

The final viewpoint that 'women are eligible candidates' was discussed in Salaheddin and Basra. In Salaheddin, it was maintained that female candidates were a complement to the political process. Nominating women had many benefits, because they work more than men and are wary of suspicious acts. They understand the plight of displaced populations; they are brave and outspoken in the community; and are more service oriented, honest and less corrupt. In Basra, participants said that women were more tolerant and loyal in their work, and were more able to persuade and influence than men, as their cultural background and political awareness enable them to win.

## B. What affects the choices of voters, especially with regard to women candidates?

Participants in the focus group discussions were asked about the factors influencing the choices of voters, especially with regard to women candidates.

Five different variables are found to affect voters' choices for female candidates, namely her abilities and achievements, her legal and political circumstances, her tribal affiliations, her characteristics, and her physical appearance and femininity.

The first two variables were covered in the discussions of four governorates, while the third on tribal affiliations and the fourth on characteristics were discussed in two governorates. The fifth of physical appearance and femininity was discussed only in Najaf governorate. Surprisingly, in a society that is supposedly dominated by male ideology, 'femininity and physical appearance' is only commented on in one governorate, while 'women's abilities and achievements' is discussed the most.

The variable on 'abilities and achievements' focuses specifically on educational background and efficiency:

- c. Candidates must have an acceptable degree and a scientific approach (Nenawa) that is reflected in their work specialization (Baghdad). Moreover, their background must provide them with competencies, skills and experiences (Najaf);
- d. Candidates' efficiency must be revealed in their ability to serve the community. According to Assin Hamza, PC member in Nenawa, candidates should serve their community, be bold, and support women in improving their status. In her words: "I won without a picture, but I won through my work in villages and provision of services for women";
- e. Candidates' efficiency must also be evident in the electoral programme, such as their effort in launching campaigns (Basra), the extent of their credibility in their electoral platform (Baghdad), the number and quality of the promises made by the candidate to improve voters' circumstances, and promises to solve crises that concern voters (Najaf);

Candidate efficiency must be reflected in fulfilling promises to guarantee the public's confidence in their implementation (Basra). "We want her to be brave because there are conditions in the provinces that are

difficult" (Nenawa). Likewise, candidates' media appearances, the frequency of their communications and their outspokenness reveal their potential to meet the demands made by voters (Najaf).

The other variable also discussed in Baghdad, Najaf, Nenawa and Basra was 'legal and political circumstances', specifically the supporting party candidates belong to, such as the party's strength, its previous experiences and services to the community (Baghdad), and the party rules (number and type) (Najaf). The party candidates belong to strongly influences voters (Nenawa), and the strength of their political affiliation qualifies them to win (Basra).

The variable on tribal affiliation was discussed in Baghdad and Basra, and highlighted candidates' association with clans. The tribal origin of the candidate (Baghdad) and the number of martyrs or political prisoners of her clan, give her greater acceptability among the electorate (Basra).

The variable on candidate characteristics was cited in Nenawa and Basra, including qualities such as charisma and humility (Nenawa). Religious commitment and respect for customs and traditions also constitute the foundations for the selection of female candidates (Basra).

The final variable on 'physical appearance and femininity' was mentioned only in Najaf, which is a governorate known for its strong religious influence. Overall, society is male-dominated, and female candidates can only influence voters through their efficiency in make-up, appearance, cooking and clothing.

### C. What is the citizen's image of a credible council candidate?

Participants were asked to discuss the image that citizens have of a credible candidate. The findings reveal that there are seven variables

that citizens are looking for in a credible council candidate, namely a committed person and keeper of promises, an honest person, a balanced person, a communicator, a server of the needy, someone who fulfils promises, and someone with strong affiliations.

There are three common images that can be found in all five governorates: the candidate as the committed person, the server of the needy, and the achiever. The image of the honest person was cited in four governorates, while the image of the balanced person was cited in three governorates. 'Strong affiliations' was again only mentioned in Najaf. The discussions in Baghdad and Najaf covered six of the seven images. In Salaheddin, Basra and Nenawa, five of the images noted in the discussions. The frequency of the appearances of the images in the discussion reveals their popularity and prevalence in the citizens' expectations of their candidates.

The image of the committed candidate describes her as committed to her electoral programme declaration and to her tasks (Baghdad), and shows her commitment publicly to the audience and in the media (Nenawa). The committed candidate has to verify her commitment (Salaheddin). The commitment of the party itself is also closely linked to the committed candidate because "in Iraq, the credibility of the candidate starts from the credibility of her bloc" (Najaf).

The candidate must be aware of her area's needs (Najaf), and should adopt legislative bills that benefit marginalized groups (Baghdad). She must participate in solving social problems through legislation, law enforcement or pressure on the government (Basra), and should have a long background in public service (Salaheddin).

The candidate should be known for her administrative capacity (Baghdad) and her hard work (Nenawa), especially on women's issues (Salaheddin). She must be strong and persuasive when fighting for rights (Najaf), and must fight exclusion and marginalization (Basra).

The candidate must not be implicated in illegal dealings (Baghdad), should abide by the law (Nenawa), and must not be involved in corruption cases. Specifically, she should be consistent: "We, in Salaheddin, have witnessed constant political fluctuations in positions". She must also be honest with her constituents (Najaf).

The candidate must communicate with the public before and after she wins (Baghdad). She should have an office for meeting with the public (Nenawa), and should keep her door open to the public (Najaf). Her communications must be addressed to all the public, not a specific group (Basra).

The candidate must adopt a civil discourse that is not sectarian, factional or regional (Baghdad); must be stable and not move between political blocs according to her own interests (Salaheddin); and must be able to balance her work between her life and her party (Basra).

Affiliated candidates should be strongly connected to their party, and receive the support of its head (Najaf).

#### D. Does the competence of female candidates match that of male candidates?

Participants were asked to discuss whether the competencies of males and females matched. Responses from each governorate revolved around the limitations placed on female candidates and the areas they excelled in. With reference to the research framework used in the present study, the limitations faced by women mentioned in the focus group discussions are primarily related to socio-cultural constraints, and to structural bureaucratic constraints and low involvement in public systems.

According to the discussion, socio-cultural constraints facing women candidates are either due to prevailing traditional stereotypes or traditional gendered divisions of labour. Participants said that both men and women were competitive, but society perceived men as having higher efficiency than women in all respects, just because men dominate society (Najaf). Most often the public retains an image about women candidates as only supplements or additions (Baghdad). Consequently, many believe the stereotype that women just run for office, while the men behind her control things. There were also controversial statements such as: "Our society is male, and men's efficiency is greater" (Salaheddin).

Moreover, owing to customary stereotypes, leadership is perceived to be more masculine than feminine (Basra). Society in Salaheddin still believes that political action is for men, and that women are merely completing a number. In social upbringing, political action is related to men not women, which in turn grants more opportunities for male candidates to participate in politics (Basra).

On the political level, women's opportunities are limited by quotas (Baghdad). In Salaheddin, participants said: "We believe that men's competence is different from that of women because men have roles that women cannot play, women cannot without a quota".

According to the discussions, structural bureaucratic limitations and low involvement in the State can be noted in several modes. Firstly, the media markets women's role very poorly, portraying a lack of competencies (Najaf). Secondly, female candidates are often excluded from participating in sensitive decision-making, such as State security, or meetings for conflict resolution and negotiations (Baghdad). There is evidence that when an important decision is to be taken, the political bloc may turn to the candidate's husband or brother to negotiate decisions (Salaheddin).

Moreover, women candidates have less opportunities to be involved, because men intervene to a large extent in women's work (Nenawa), and because of scepticism that women are able to make a decision without a man having playing a part (Basra).

Despite these setbacks, the discussions revealed that female candidates excelled in their qualities and their practical actions.

Participants said that women's work competence was higher since their credibility, transparency and efficiency were greater in all areas, owing to their sense of responsibility, integrity and accuracy. Paradoxically, although women have higher efficiency, they are weaker at pleasing the public (Najaf).

Women MPs are more effective than men because they are more disciplined at work and less corrupt (Baghdad). There is always less distrust surrounding women candidates; the perception is that they do not steal and do not miss sessions.

An elected woman is more serious than a man at work. She is measured not only by her statements, but by her work in parliament and the council. However, female candidates need to become braver and bolder (Nenawa). Women MPs are always helpful and service oriented, while a man looks at his office for self-benefit (Nenawa).

Practical experience shows that women have proven their ability to manage sessions, raise topics and prove themselves (Baghdad). Female MPs are said to always engage in consultation before they make any serious decisions (Nenawa).

## E. Qualities of women MPs

Participants were invited to list the advantages they see in women candidates/representatives. Among the 10 listed attributes

of female candidates, only three were found to be common to all the five governorates, namely courage, cultural and educational background, and presence and charisma. It is also interesting that the three assets that are perceived as female, yet are not necessarily considered feminine, are courage and boldness in their presentation and appearance in the media (Baghdad and Nenawa), ability to manage conflicts (Najaf), and strong will against pressure (Salaheddin). The remaining seven assets are commonly seen as typical to feminine nature and hence fit well in the traits valued in female candidates. Moreover, physical appearance was considered as an asset in Najaf, as was the quality of being peace loving: female candidates were said to have the asset of love and peacefulness more than men.

### F. What role can men play in enhancing women candidates' skills in campaigning? And how can they support them to overcome the challenges they face?

Table 6 shows the triangulation done between the challenges identified in the research framework and the findings of the focus group discussions.

Table 6 portrays the role men can play to support female candidates in overcoming the challenges they face in their political participation endeavours. Matching these suggestions to the identified challenge in the research framework, we find a clear belief that men can provide support in all challenge areas, with the exception of political constraints as they seems to be beyond their control. Men were primarily found to have a supporting role in combating the personal barriers related to women's skills and capacities by raising their technical capacities, giving them access, involving them in training, and providing advice.

If these suggestions are implemented, men will not only play an active role, but can become agents of change, providing space for women and recognizing and valuing their role and efforts. The decisive question, however, remains: are men ready to share the space and experiences with women? Will there be challenges for men to accept to do so?

**Table 6.** Men's support for women candidates to overcome their challenges

Personal challenges related to their skills and capacity	
Baghdad	Involve female candidates in workshops, training or media appearances
Basra	Invite women to public forums and events Encourage women to hold small workshops with people to assess problems and needs Provide advice to women
Najaf	Have confidence in women's capacity and organize courses, seminars and workshops to promote the importance of women's role
Nenawa	Encourage women to accept suggestions from politicians
Salaheddin	Correct women's mistakes, and provide counselling and information
Socio-cultural challenges	
Baghdad	-
Basra	-
Najaf	Support of husband and brother to enable women to reach the sheikh of a clan or head of political bloc, so as to reach the council Support women to study community structures and include everybody
Nenawa	Support by husband and family
Salaheddin	Providing an enabling environment
Structural bureaucratic barriers and low participation in State institutions and electoral systems	
Baghdad	Encourage women to attend high-level media meetings and face-to-face meetings with decision makers to benefit from their experiences Involve women in negotiating sessions of the heads of blocs and parties, and encourage them not to limit their role to women's issues
Basra	Support the drafting of women's electoral platform in accordance with legislation and laws
Najaf	Support women in their social and cultural relations in society
Nenawa	Encourage women's party to support them in their capacity as a candidate
Salaheddin	Allow women space to talk in council meetings and respect their opinions And praise them publicly in the media to encourage them to appear in the media and in forums

Violence related to election	
Baghdad	Abstain from negative competition or rivalry with women, and grant them equal chances of winning or losing
Basra	Condemn campaigns and rumours that offend women professionally and morally
Najaf	-
Nenawa	Encourage women to demand their rights
Salaheddin	Abstain from attacking women's attitudes (even if wrong) in front of the media or public
Economic and financial challenges	
Baghdad	Provide women with equal opportunities for funds from their party
Basra	Direct women to the private sector to provide financial support for their campaign
Najaf	Give women confidence to become a candidate, provide support with financial funding, and provide media coverage during the nomination
Nenawa	Support women to receive the media and political funds
Salaheddin	-
Personal ideological constraints	
Baghdad	Support women's political role; support from family members is important
Basra	Link women candidates to the private sector to support them morally by putting their pictures in the media
Najaf	Encourage women to develop their potential, and have confidence in their capacity
Nenawa	Encourage women to overcome their anxiety and self-doubt
Salaheddin	Constantly provide moral support

### III. Experienced and perceived challenges facing female candidates and enforcement mechanisms

The present section moves from the wider perspective of society to the meso level, namely the level of the group of women candidates and their involvement in society. It considers the challenges identified in the research framework, and presents the findings of the assessment of the challenges experienced by women, their unmet needs, and mechanisms they suggested for overcoming these challenges. For each challenge, women's experiences and mechanisms adopted or suggested are cited, followed by the views expressed in the focus group discussions. Adopting the triangulation approach, the present section reveals the close similarity of the data from the two levels, the macro and the meso, or the close similarity between the challenges as actually faced by women candidates and those perceived by the focus group participants, thus confirming the validity of the findings.

Based on the findings of the desk review of the international and local literature, the research framework identified several challenges facing women political candidates who run for elected public offices. The identified challenges were discussed in the individual interviews conducted with both groups of women, parliamentarian and PC members, to assess the importance and level of influence of each challenge and its effect on their political endeavours.

The identified challenges are as follows:

**Political and legal constraints:** the current political landscape in Iraq is shaped by several conflicts and civil unrest. Women, as an essential part of society that has been

marginalized and excluded, have to face these ongoing political obstacles and vulnerabilities in political and electoral processes, and are hence reluctant to participate. Although the Constitution stipulates a quota for the Council of Representatives, there is no provision in the Constitution related to PCs. Law No. 12 (2018) on Governorates, Districts and Sub-district Council Elections does not include a firm commitment to a 25 per cent gender quota. It was left up to the electoral commission to interpret the vague language in the law. This lack of clarity remains a source of mistrust and confusion;

**Socio-cultural challenges:** stereotyping of women, gender bias, conservative traditions and religious taboos create a popular perception that women's leadership will never succeed. Local council membership is often divided among local families, and no one can to interfere. Women who participate in politics, especially women candidates, are often targets of disinformation and hate speech on social media, to pressure them to withdraw from political life;

**Financial and economic challenges:** the inability of women to meet the financial requirements of running for election, including advertising and promotion, are added to the difficulty of movement across the electoral district. Political parties either do not provide funds or provide insufficient financial support to women candidates, even for the ones who won through the quota;

**Structural and bureaucratic challenges and low participation of women in institutions:** gender biases are pervasive in Iraqi institutions, including in judicial and executive

branches of the State, and in electoral systems. There is also the influence of money in politics and reluctance of ministries to disclose information. Political parties also have a long history of not providing sufficient support, networks or resources to women candidates or women in public elected office. There is a lack of women in political party leadership, likewise in the Independent High Electoral Commission. Although the importance of women's inclusion has been recognized, there is a lack of resources for gender equality programmes;

Personal ideology and psychological challenges: from early childhood, Iraqi women are trained to believe that they are lower than men. This indoctrination continues even among educated professionals. Accordingly, women refrain from running for office in the mistaken fear of harming their reputation;

Other obstacles include: election violence and intimidation by the family or society in addition to threats by opponents/challengers; personal challenges related to women's skills and capacities, such as formulating policies, developing strategies, networking, connecting with the electorate, and other requirements of successful candidacy for public office.

## A. Political and legal constraints

### 1. Constraints expressed by women candidates

The political obstacles female respondents mentioned overlap, and revolve around constant political change, corruption, lack of awareness, and confusion about laws.

Constant political change decreases participation. The political climate is new and people in elected office often do not understand the powers assigned to them (Basra PC member). The permanent conflict among political blocs has changed the political climate and the biggest impact falls on women

(Nenawa MP). The change in the political climate and the competition between blocs subjects women to pressures to change their political affiliation (Salaheddin PC member). The continuous political change does not generate stability or a consistent plan of action, and has led to a decrease in the volume of participation (Salaheddin PC member).

Corruption and lack of services hinder attempts to run for election. Citizens are outraged by the lack of services and the Government's lies to justify failure to fulfil promises (Baghdad PC member). Political blocs use money to attract supporters (Salaheddin). Given the high level of corruption and financial blackmail, women especially face many obstacles (Salaheddin PC member). Such obstacles have a big impact on the elections. As a result of corruption and lack of services, voters are reluctant to vote, and women are reluctant to run for election (Salaheddin and Najaf PC members).

Political life is shaped by lack of political awareness and confusion about laws. In Iraq, there is no proper political awareness of the value of participation (Baghdad MP). Women face many political pressures from other political blocs (Baghdad PC member). Owing to the quota system and the vague language in its application, if one female member resigns, priority for the substitute is given to men (Najaf MP).

### 2. Constraints mentioned by the focus groups

The political environment is not supportive of participation. Instead of citizenship, the tribal system and the sect are the predominant affiliations (Basra). The security situation is deteriorating and there is negative rivalry between the parties (Baghdad). The heads of political blocs have complete control and select the winners in advance (Najaf).

The legal context is insensitive to gender equality. Although Iraq has ratified international conventions on women, it does not comply with them because the conventions lack mandatory mechanisms, and are only limited to awareness

raising mechanisms (Basra). There is also no political will to develop laws based on equal rights. The system ostensibly supports equality but it is not implemented by the law (Basra).

Iraq also adopts different religious interpretations from multiple schools of jurisprudence. This leads to the confusion of concepts and, consequently, gender discrimination is perpetuated. As a result, the status of women in Iraq is likely to depend on the implementation of Islamic law and on the priorities, interpretations and preferences of male religious authorities (Basra).

Women make sacrifices just to win the elections. They sometimes have to join a certain bloc without believing in that bloc or its orientations, just to increase their chances of winning (Bagdad), and a female candidate's loyalty is enforced, so they cannot leave their bloc (Salaheddin).

## B. Suggested mechanisms for overcoming challenges

### 1. Mechanisms suggested by parliamentarians

#### a. Raise awareness about creating a healthy election culture

- Awareness starts with culture, and lack of participation in the elections can be solved through the media (Najaf);
- Conduct continuous training courses (Baghdad);
- Raise awareness to create the right election culture (Nenawa);
- Promote awareness in all areas of life that concern women (Baghdad);
- Disseminate a culture that helps dissolve class distinctions among people, and that promotes a view of candidates as individual Iraqi citizens, independent of any family and tribal affiliations (Najaf);

- Spread a culture of voting widely and educate about the constitution (Najaf).

#### b. Provide political support for women

- Political blocs should support women, but women should not be overly influenced by them (Nenawa);
- Promote women's rights in political issues (Najaf);
- Parties need to clarify their policies so that women are persuaded to participate (Baghdad).

#### c. Mechanisms suggested by provisional council members

- With determination and will, women can come up with new ideas that motivate participation (Baghdad);
- It is important for candidates to understand the work of the PCs and Parliament, as well as the laws, by-laws and the constitution (Baghdad).

### 2. Mechanisms suggested by focus groups

- Changing the electoral law to reduce the dominance of political parties and abolishing quotas;
- Preventing social discrimination and limiting the influence of traditions that contradict the principles and rights stated in the constitution;
- Religious fatwas in support of women were also deemed important, especially in persuading men to support women;
- Parties formed by women candidates should be encouraged.

### 3. Effect of political constraints on women candidates

The findings indicate that political constraints affected female candidates the most, according to 72 per cent of respondents, including five of nine parliamentarians. However, three respondents ranked it as

least important because of their strong party support. In Basra and Nenawa, women MPs cited strong political support from their respective parties.

## C. Socio-cultural constraints

### 1. Constraints expressed by women candidates

#### a. Discriminatory norms and traditions in society

- Patriarchal traditions (especially those deriving from tribal culture) discriminate against women and reject women's leadership;
- Candidates for election are often selected by political parties for their tribal affiliations and men are favoured;
- The stereotyping of women is perpetuated by political acceptance of this culture and its incorporation into the political system;
- Some respondents viewed this as a regression from Iraq's recent past, where women were awarded greater respect.

#### b. Limitations imposed on women by family and society

- Parents reject the idea that women can be leaders and work to support marginalized women and defend their rights;
- In some cases, the extended family has to approve of a woman's candidacy, and their views can influence a woman's close family;
- MPs and PC members spoke of having to overcome resistance within their families to run for office;
- An MP from Nenawa described her initial failed efforts to persuade her family;
- A PC member had a somewhat different experience: "I was directly affected by

relatives who were harassing me, but my family and my brothers were the ones who supported me and stood by me to address these customs and traditions in our society. The reason it was difficult when I entered in this area is because I belong to a well-known clan in Mosul city that has influence in the social and political arena";

- Male is the norm: there is lack of awareness about the importance and capacity of women's participation in the political process and hence positions are confined to men (Salaheddin);
- Culturally, society prefers to be represented by males and not females in the PC or Parliament;
- Since masculine culture prevails, political life is conducted in accordance with male norms and values.

### 2. Constraints mentioned by focus groups

The constraints expressed by MPs and PC members were echoed by participants in the focus groups. There are many restrictions imposed on women by social norms and traditions, and lack of parental/family support is a key constraint. There is a long-inherited tradition of gender discrimination in roles and labour, compounded by rules governing tribal affiliations (Salaheddin).

### 3. Mechanisms for challenging the barriers suggested by MPs and PC members

- Spread education deep into villages and rural areas and introduce schools for all;
- Female MPs should explore all their creative and intellectual power;
- Educate parents to abandon stereotyping of women and encourage women to engage in the political process with confidence;
- Strengthen the leadership role of women in all fields;
- Enable women to cultivate a strong personality to overcome challenges;

- Candidates should communicate directly with the electorate to demonstrate their service track record.

#### 4. Mechanisms suggested by the focus groups

Raising public awareness was a primary recommendation from the focus groups, including educating families and communities. In conservative societies like Iraq, the role of historical and religious women leaders should be highlighted. Women voters should have faith in women candidates, and they should be educated and encouraged to promote and support women candidates. Providing services to the community is another mechanism to overcome negative social perceptions of the capabilities of women. Many families believe that appearances by women in the media are socially unacceptable. Families need to be convinced that appearances in public and in the media do not mean abandoning acceptable social norms.

### D. Structural and bureaucratic barriers, and low participation of women in State institutions

#### 1. Constraints expressed by women

- Preference is for men;
- The work of women in politics is still influenced by social and tribal factors;
- Although government departments respect women because they are fair, they only provide information to men;
- Given the predominance of male culture, political blocs impose their dominance on the authorities and there is always a preference for men, even when women have greater experience. Women therefore have fewer chances of advancement;
- Financial corruption is mixed with male power: the principle of “the strong eats the

weak” prevails and the political blocs do not give women the same opportunity as men, especially now when senior positions are sold for millions of dollars;

- Historically, the performance of women in PCs has been perceived as weak, and they have not played a prominent role. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the work of councils. Women need continuous support for professional growth.

#### 2. Constraints mentioned by the focus groups

- Historical gender discrimination patterns of labour and role;
- Structural barriers facing women in public service;
- Male culture tends to intimidate women;
- The entrenched tradition of division of labour means that women are usually appointed to what society regards as “women’s areas of activity”. For example, committees or ministries for women’s affairs or social services, which are regarded as secondary;
- Lack of institutional support;
- Media and public access tools do not support women, especially if they are independent.

#### 3. Mechanisms suggested by women for overcoming the barriers

##### a. Mechanisms suggested by MPs and PC members included

- Acquiring skills and expertise, and being determined to excel, are essential for overcoming bureaucratic marginalization;
- Communication with the community and being educated on issues;
- The ability to negotiate and engage in debate;
- The male-dominated political class needs to be transformed in ways that strengthen

belief in women's capabilities and their political role;

- Awareness-raising campaigns to change public perceptions of women;
- Women should go out to the public and advocate for themselves;
- More networks are needed that support women in public office.

#### b. Mechanisms suggested by focus groups

- Changing the electoral law to reduce the dominance of parties;
- Promote women's organizations to empower women candidates and provide them with skills and knowledge to enable them to assume decision-making positions;
- Encourage and enable candidates and representatives to communicate and interact with the community to increase the candidates' knowledge base and be more credible to voters.

### 4. Importance of structural and bureaucratic barriers for women candidates

This challenge proved to be major for 30 per cent of respondents, especially in Nenawa, Najaf and Salaheddin. For 22 per cent, this problem was not of any importance. Interviewees from Basra did not rank this constraint as most important, and mentioned that they did not struggle with these constraints because they had political support: "I didn't face such difficulties because the (political) bloc respected me and my decisions without resistance". However, according to another PC member: "We can't deny that women face such challenges, but they must have the strength of character and professionalism to be able to overcome them".

## E. Financial and economic constraints

### 1. Financial challenges prevent women from sustaining their campaigns

- Elected women faced financial challenges in covering their expenses for transportation, advocacy material such as printing posters and advertising and for communication during the campaign;
- Political parties provide financial support to their candidates, but the bulk of the funds go to male candidates;
- The lack of or insufficient financial support from the political bloc for their women candidates reduces their access to political networks, media, and communities, which leads to further restrictions;
- Women, more than men, need to provide protection to their families while they campaign. The families of women candidates are more vulnerable to abuse and need greater protection, because of social stigma.

### 2. Constraints mentioned by the focus groups

All focus groups recognized the financial constraints faced by women and the low funding levels provided by political parties to women candidates. This limits advertising capacities, access to the media, and ability to campaign intensively.

### 3. Mechanisms for overcoming barriers proposed/used by MPs and PC members

#### a. Minimize costs and raise funds

- Seeking help from other women, and asking local families and citizens to host events, raises the level of communication while reducing costs;
- Using social media extensively also provides access and reduces cost;
- Election integrity should be monitored to prevent the purchase of votes by candidates;

Candidate should not pay for votes;

- Women who were PC members and wish to run for parliament find it easier to raise funds

because they have already established a track record and relations with voters.

#### b. Other support mechanisms

- The law of the Commission should determine the type of electoral propaganda permitted;
- Cooperate more with the head of the bloc to show your value to the party;
- Always maintain direct contact with the community;
- Design a budget with a plan. Good resource management is essential when funds are limited;
- Raise funds from family members;
- Attend workshops to learn about financial planning and alternative campaign outreach.

#### 4. Mechanisms suggested by the focus groups

The focus groups suggested that Government should provide financial support for candidates and media outlets that run advertising for campaigns. They recommended recruiting volunteers for outreach.

#### 5. Importance of structural and bureaucratic barriers to female candidates

Financial barriers were ranked as highly important by 39 per cent of the respondents, who were from all governorates and included two parliamentarians.

For 26 per cent of respondents, financial constraints were ranked lowest because they were self-sufficient and had enough finances or were funded by their party or family. Candidates who had personal and family financial resources fared best, although some also relied on funding from well-to-do members of their community.

#### F. Violence during elections

This has emerged as a serious problem in recent elections. Candidates were challenged

by different forms of violence that varied by governorates and that differed in prevalence, form and source.

#### 1. Constraints expressed by women MPs and PC members

- a. Intimidation and bullying: this type of violence is spread throughout the governorates and can often be coupled with other forms of violence. For one Najaf MP, this included removal of pictures, and some other threatening behaviour. When this happens, women and their families become more intimidated and emotionally affected;
- b. Threats by family members: in many cases, domestic intimidation against women candidates can be so strong that they cannot overcome this constraint. A PC member from Salaheddin mentioned that her parents were so opposed to her candidacy that her family threatened to disown her, and called her husband several times to make her reverse her candidacy. Another PC member from Salaheddin mentioned that her brother was her strongest opponent;
- c. Social and political projection: this type of violence targets the personal reputation of a candidate and spreads slander. Two women mentioned that they faced this type of violence. A parliamentarian from Najaf who mentioned that she faced many challenges such as political projection, destroying posters and flyers; and a Baghdad PC member mentioned that she faced political projection on social media, where her pictures were published and false accusations were directed at her;
- d. Terrorist threat: Nenawa and Salaheddin are two governorates liberated from Islamic State, yet the social climate appears to be still charged with terror. Several candidates cited their experiences with this type of violence. A Nenawa PC member said

that: “Two days before the election, there was a candidate from a neighbouring villags near Sinjar who tried to intimidate me by gathering people and going to the neighbourhood where I live. He threatened me if I ran against him, but the inhabitants of the area did not listen to him, they told him we have our candidate, whom we are going to elect”. Another PC member from Nenawa said: “I did not suffer from my family, but from the Al-Qaeda terrorist groups through their phone calls”. A Nenawa MP mentioned that there was fierce competition between candidates. At its peak, they tore up her pictures up and drew an X on them to scare her. Moreover, Salaheddin PC members mentioned that they faced significant violence and threats because there was extremism in some quarters against the political process. Types of violence included stabbing and beating campaigns to force women not to run. Often it is women’s husbands and families who support them through this time.

## 2. Threats from voters

One Baghdad PC member complained that the threat came from voters who place impossible requests to give their vote, thus creating difficult situations for the candidate.

## 3. Constraints mentioned by the focus groups

Focus groups confirmed the statements of PC members and MPs. Women may face intimidation and male domination by husbands, brothers, the head of the clan or the head of the party. Social and cultural traditions can give rise to intimidation. Some families refuse to allow women to be seen in public gatherings, or to put their pictures in the streets during the election campaign. Character assassination via social media was also confirmed as a major source of violence against women. Because of social norms, women are especially prone to defamation attacks. Where security is a concern and there are threats of terrorism, women are

especially vulnerable, and families usually do not allow women to run in such areas.

## 4. Mechanisms for overcoming the barriers of violence and threats

### a. Mechanisms adopted by MPs and PC members

- Awareness-raising was seen as an effective mechanism:
- Disseminate public awareness to discourage class segregation;
- Educate the public that candidates should not be chosen according to tribe or clan, but according to their capabilities;
- Promote awareness through social media as well as practical training and awareness-raising workshops;
- Raise awareness to create a fair election culture and a level playing field.

### b. Some PC members described their personal tactics to overcome violence and intimidation

Women were advised to work with loyal people who appreciated their work. One PC member stated: “When I was threatened, I switched phone lines and moved my house to another neighbourhood”. Another asserted: “I did not care and kept working and progressing towards my goal”. Another approach is to cultivate virtues such as honesty and trustworthiness through compliance with laws and regulations, staying away from corruption, and cooperating with security agencies. Maintaining their reputation and preserving their traditions, customs and knowledge, and providing services to the community, are good tools to counter defamation campaigns and establish integrity. According to one PC member, “through good work, integrity, commitment, and staying away from suspicious deals, I was able to gain the support of my family and community”. Moreover, election-monitoring by the United

Nations, cooperation with law enforcement agencies, and adoption and enforcement of laws that penalize those guilty of physical violence, defamation, or intimidation, would be important tools to help women.

### c. Mechanisms suggested by focus groups

Focus groups offered additional approaches to mitigating all types of violence. Women candidates should stay within safe and acceptable areas and stay away from closed areas with political, social or sectarian polarization. We should increase the legal awareness of candidates to protect them from any defamation or threat. Candidates should coordinate and inform security authorities in advance of the visit. Working closely with family members will increase the trust and confidence of male family members. Being honest with the community and informing them immediately about any intimidation or harassment helps build trust. Focus groups advocated greater media discussion of women's candidacy and the challenges women face.

## 5. Level of importance of the challenge of violence to candidates

Violence as a very important challenge was ranked by 31 per cent of candidates from governorates of Najaf, Salaheddin and Baghdad. For 37 per cent of candidates, this challenge ranked as least important. For those cases, we can assume that they did not witness any violence at all. In Baghdad, one parliamentarian mentioned that she had only heard about it happening in remote areas, and another mentioned that it happened infrequently and only in individual cases. The problem appears to be localized, and depends on the social and political dynamics within each community.

For those who did not experience any violence, their party, the community or the family were supportive of them, or they were themselves from families with a political history.

According to a Nenawa PC member, "The family was a main supporter for me and through them I got the position because my father is a politician and always advises me and I hear all his advice. He has a great influence on all parties because he holds a religious position and also he believed in me as a leading woman and also respects the role of women in society".

## G. Personal technical constraints

### 1. Constraints expressed by women candidates

In Iraq democracy is a new experience and there is a lack of political and legal knowledge and awareness. A number of PC members mentioned that the democratic experience is new in Iraq, and it is an undeniable fact that most Iraqi politicians lack sufficient political awareness, regardless of whether it is a man or a woman.

#### a. First time experience for women

For the first time in Iraq, a county with a predominantly masculine culture, the democratic process encouraged some women to participate in the political process and decision-making to convey the voice of women, who suffer from injustice in their public and private lives. As expressed by one council member: "It is a big challenge, because it is the first time we have dealt with politics, and our information has been very, very limited". According to another council member: "Our entry into this field is new and that is why we had difficulties with the political terms and political dealings due to our little experience, although my father has a lot of experience in the field of politics". A third stated: "I had imagined something, but was actually shocked by some of the political interests I did not know about".

### b. Women lack knowledge and experience

Several MPs and PC members weighed in on this topic. Women's poor political and legal awareness, as well as low skills and knowledge, create many problems, as several MPs and PC members in Baghdad and Najaf stated. This minimizes women's chances of gaining leadership positions (Baghdad parliamentarian).

Going into politics needs training. During the first phase after the nomination and during elections, it is very difficult to develop strategies, networking, and communicating with voters, or formulating policies, or knowing anything about laws or strategies. One PC member admitted: "I do not have any knowledge. I am ignorant about political or legal work or about PC work. It is only because of the public's insistence on my candidacy that I was motivated to run".

## 2. Constraints mentioned by focus groups

Throughout the focus group discussions, it became clear that female candidates face personal technical challenges due to external causes, specifically governmental administrative, social and personal issues.

- a. Lack of support from government administration: absence of a strategic vision for women's political development as well as significant lack of activities that confirm their role and the importance of their political participation;
- b. Social restrictions placed on women: restrictions placed by the norms and traditions in society and lack of parental support, as well as the long historical legacy of discrimination arising from the division of labour and the identification of tribal, family and sectarian roles and affiliations; all these place restrictions on women and lead to a lack of faith in women's programmes;

- c. Low personal abilities of women: a few focus groups found that most women had limited experience in leading their campaign, had weak personalities and limited information about politics, and were obliged to balance between family and work.

## 3. Mechanisms to overcome this challenge

### a. Mechanisms adopted by members of parliament

- Provision of services: To overcome this barrier, the candidate can provide services to citizens so that they get to know her and can easily respond to her and communicate with her. She must maintain constant cooperation with the public to fulfil their needs to build on accumulated experience from previous sessions;
- Education and awareness-raising for the community: educating the community on the concept of gender and conducting workshops and seminars to change stereotyping are useful tools. Education should also encourage selection according to performance and presentation, not gender;
- Improve capacities: women should build their capacities by attending courses, conferences, and seeking information and education through Internet resources.

### b. Mechanism adopted by PC members

Additional mechanisms were offered by PC members:

- Women candidates should have self-motivation: they must show determination and a strong will to confront challenges. They must have a strong personality to be able to convince their community, and be well educated to have a career in politics;
- Provision of services to communities: the programme women offers must be realistic, practical and informed about the needs of

society, and they should never refrain from perseverance and provision of services to the community;

- Self-education: several PC members stressed the importance of self-education, which can be achieved through multiple channels. It can be done through “reading books that enabled me to overcome political weaknesses”, “reading about the experience of other successful people in politics”, and “reading about the experiences of successful nations”;
- Learning from others was a key path to education: “Consulting older politicians to learn from their experience”, “continuous communication with the Legal Committee of the PC and consulting with the legal profession”. Training was an important feature as well: “Attending training courses within Iraq”, and “participating in workshops in Iraq as well as in other countries, and in the training provided by political blocs”, “keeping up with the legislative and legal issues”, “reviewing the Law of the Provinces” (Law no. 21 of 2008);
- Learning by doing: engaging actively in politics and practising and experimenting, and learning from their own experiences and the experiences of others; following up on issues that are constantly developing and pursuing practical training;
- Other suggested mechanism included assigning an organization to work periodically and coach each candidate independently.

#### **4. Mechanisms suggested by the focus groups to promote technical skills of candidates**

Focus groups suggested other approaches to increasing the personal capacities of women candidates. These included developing and equipping the capability of candidates to run campaigns suitable to the local context, and raising awareness of female candidates about the relevant laws to protect her from defamation.

Others suggested supporting the media appearances of women to enable them to present their programmes and plans in a clear and effective manner. Developing an education and training policy for women. Continuous training, the appointment of capable advisers, and mentoring were also cited as ways to prepare women for public office.

#### **5. Importance of the personal technical challenge for candidates**

Findings revealed that for 39 per cent of the candidates, this challenge was given most priority for the above-mentioned reasons. For 28 per cent of the candidates, this challenge was perceived as least important, including four parliamentarians. These candidates are found to have had plenty of information, knowledge or awareness from their prior nominations.

A Parliamentarian from Nenawa states: “I had no challenge about political awareness because I went through the political process as a Nenawa PC member in 2013. This helped me to have good experience when I ran for parliament and now, I serve as a member of the Economic and Investment Committee”. Another member in Basra PC mentioned: “I didn’t have any difficulties with political awareness, because I’ve been in politics for years, so I’ve been able to overcome most of the challenges”.

Recommendation: This group of MPs and PC members, who have accumulated experience through their previous engagement, can be invited to become resource persons for newcomers.

## **H. Personal psychological challenges**

### **1. Constraints expressed by women MPs and PC members**

Personal ideology and psychological constraints are common problems in Iraq. In general, most women in Iraqi society face the same restrictions, not necessarily the political candidates only. One PC member said: “Most women in society face this, but with self-confidence and family support, women can overcome it, and that’s what happened to me”.

This challenge is created by society. The social context women are born in, their upbringing and education, all create this constraint for women. According to a Baghdad parliamentarian, “this constraint exists by virtue of the tribal society”. A PC member from Basra confirms this: “These restrictions were outside my family and within the external rural community I grew up in, but within my family, my father was supportive of me and made me a woman confident in herself and her abilities. This gave me the strength to overcome difficulties and succeed”. Another PC member explained: “In the last electoral campaign (2018), this challenge was adopted in a “projection” campaign against female candidates, but they were courageous enough to combat it”. This challenge that is widely induced by society is perceived as the reason why female candidates stop their participation in elections.

The personal psychological challenge is inherent in women and is perpetuated. Several MPs and PC members said that the most important difficulty is that women lacked self-confidence and had a poor estimation of their abilities. According to one MP, “We women suffer from woman’s inferiority, and think we’re always less than men, and we have to submit to men’s orders”. According to another MP, “This was a personal conviction even for me, but it was completely removed due to the seminars given by civil society organizations which I attended, and because of the mixed university I visited. It is then that I realized that there is no difference between men and women, and in fact I recognized that women are more capable than men in many areas”.

Women carry this ingrained inferiority throughout their lives. They themselves can retain negative views towards other women and often also women adhere to and reiterate the social stereotypical role. “Though this does not constitute a problem for me, but I still retain the fear that I might harm the family name or reputation”, said one MP.

## 2. Constraints mentioned by the focus groups

Personal psychological challenges influence women’s political life negatively. The observations made by MPs and council members were repeatedly confirmed by the focus groups, who noted that women doubt their own abilities to manage their roles independently; they lack awareness about the importance of their role, particularly in the political arena. This is a result of their family upbringing and school education. Because of a woman’s lack of self-confidence and belief in their own capabilities, political blocs can manipulate and decide in advance who will win from their bloc.

## 3. Mechanisms adopted by MPs and PC members to overcome personal psychological challenges

MPs and PC members believe these constraints can be solved by:

- a. **Spreading a culture of gender equality**
  - Spreading awareness about gender equality through culture and media and civil society members;
  - Educating the community on the concept of gender;
  - Promoting a culture of non-discrimination between females and males within families.
- b. **Working on personal development**
  - Women should develop a strong, sturdy and courageous personality;

- They should be brave and strong to overcome this challenge;
- Women should break the barrier of fear, and ask themselves why they seek nomination and what is their purpose in running for election;
- Perseverance and determination are essential for a woman candidate.

#### c. Support through family

- Family support is critical for building self-confidence and instilling belief in oneself;
- Parents should be encouraged to teach their children, especially females, freedom of speech and leadership, and encourage ideas that support peace and free will.

#### 4. Mechanisms suggested by the focus groups

The focus groups recommended helping women to examine their abilities and appreciate their role in private and public life. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop a policy for continuous training and education for women, as well as for society in general.

#### 5. Level of importance of the personal technical challenge for female candidates

This challenge was ranked as a most important by 15 per cent of the respondents. This group included three parliamentarians. For 48 per cent of the respondents (16 members), however, this barrier is ranked among the least important. Reasons for this are primarily due to their self-confidence, cultivated through the upbringing of the family, or the support of husbands or experience gained personally. According to a PC member in Baghdad, "The family was supportive. Because of my social environment that does not differentiate between women and men, and believes in gender equality, I did not suffer marginalization as a child. I was rather confident of myself because of the support of my parents". A council member from Nenawa said, "I was

married when I was in the sixth primary grade and I had my children and I did not finish college and yet I had a great desire and was strongly motivated to complete my studies. It is due to the encouragement of my children and support of my husband that I managed to finish my studies and be competitive with men". Another member from the Nenawa PC mentioned that she did not face this challenge because she enjoyed the support of her parents, unlike other women, but also because of the experience she gained from her work with organizations supporting women in Kirkuk governorate.

#### l. the women

During the interview, candidates were asked if there were any other challenges they faced and would like to add. The following three challenges were put forward:

- In public perception, politicians embody lies and theft;
- A specific obstacle faced by women MPs who wear the hijab is that they are not invited when guests visit and do not have the chance to travel;
- Financial support for the candidate is absolutely essential. When a candidate learns that someone will not support her in her campaign and that she has to rely on her limited means, then she will be reluctant to run, no matter how convinced she is. One MP said, "I was a candidate in previous years, and I realized that it was the leaders of the list who determine secretly whom to support financially and whom to leave out".



## IV. Lessons learned and successful strategies and tools offered as advice from experienced female candidates

The present section presents useful experiences and success stories of women who managed to overcome some of the barriers mentioned in the analysis. It starts by presenting several important lessons learned, and then proceeds with presenting some useful strategies and tools that helped them during their election. To illustrate this, the present section refers also to the case studies of the two parliamentarians used in this assessment as evidence (annex II).

### A. Lessons learned

#### 1. On the mindset of political candidates

- a. Be careful about dealing with politicians as they are the first target of defamation and bullying and hence one has to use great wisdom and deliberation;
- b. Forget about the materialistic gains and do not make it one of the goals but instead focus on serving the community, as it will have a big impact on society and be of benefit to all (Case study, Nenawa Parliamentarian).

#### 2. On the preparation for the endeavour

- a. Develop a correct, detailed and well-planned action plan for the nomination phase (Nenawa parliamentarian);
- b. Nobody should venture into the election game without having the needed capabilities and patience and one must also have a clear programme that is well

defined and can be implemented, and be confident that his or her party agrees to this programme;

- c. A study needs to be undertaken to assess the priorities of voters. We live in a changing world, what is needed now is not the same as yesterday, every candidate must be aware of this issue (Case-study, Baghdad parliamentarian).

#### 3. Guidance for implementation

- a. Raise awareness and promote the importance of women's actual role (Baghdad parliamentarian);
- b. Always have perseverance (PC member who won outside the quota).

#### 4. Strategies and tools as support factors that helped political candidates in their election

- a. The women's caucus bringing together Iraqi women parliamentarians was supportive for two parliamentarians from Nenawa and Baghdad;
- b. Degrees or other academic achievements were also a supportive factor for several parliamentarians from Baghdad.

### B. Testimonies from MPs and PC members describe the attributes that led to their success

Likewise the social practical experience supported several parliamentarians from

Baghdad; for Alia Fateh, through serving the Iraqi people both inside and outside Iraq, and Hanan Noury through her volunteer work since 2006 when she joined a large grass-root community and is still continuing to communicate with them.

Being independent candidates and having previous political exposure (for example by serving in the PC) helped parliamentarians from Baghdad and Nenawa in several ways.

A combination of several of those support factors were the key to success for the parliamentarian in Baghdad (Alia El Amara) namely: being an independent candidate, previous political service, academic degrees, and practical social experience and service in and out of Iraq.

Family, relatives and friends were the main supporters, after the candidate had proven her worth through her work on the PC (Nenawa).

Attending regular meetings in which political analysis was provided as well as training courses provided by civil society organizations, helped a parliamentarian from Najaf.

The personal meetings conducted between the candidate and her nominator, were a great psychological support (parliamentarian from Najaf).

Adopting honesty as value in their messages is also a key to success. As maintained by focus groups, this is a favourable asset for female candidates.

First of all, I must clarify who suggested nomination to me: one of the employees who was with me at the university suggested that I nominate myself and he was a resident of Sadr City, where the majority are members of the Sadr movement. The employee informed me that Mr. Muqtada al-Sadr prefers independent academic figures and holders of higher degrees, and indeed I was nominated and won. I was the only one that Mr. Muqtada allowed to run, unlike all those who participated in the previous elections, because of my integrity, and my good knowledge of my work and my role within parliament, and I have no accusations of corruption, and not only that, but I headed the list in Baghdad. I was able to get 55,251 votes without anyone's help. At the beginning of my candidacy, the voters were from the university community, and after being known for my courage and professionalism, I was able to win the confidence of the Iraqi street to get a number of votes comparable to large numbers of men, especially as I am a candidate from Baghdad, and the voters are in Baghdad.

Source: Majda Abdul Latif Mohammed Ali Tamimi.

I had already invested a lot of effort in helping people with stable jobs, and they were one of the assets that left a great impact and helped in creating opportunities for success in Mosul society. I worked intensely to ensure that people who worked as contractors obtained permanent jobs in Nenawa. I worked hard to serve people, the needy and the sick, and to this moment I adopt many families in order to help them financially. People respect me because I never gave false promises and I did not tell anyone that I would help them if I couldn't. I was always transparent. Because of my history and my political work and the support for the job-placement contracts in 2008, people had great confidence and backed me because I had left a mark through my humanitarian and political work.

Source: Mahasin Hamdoun, an MP from Nenawa

I had already been nominated in two election cycles; the first and second for the PC, so the third nomination for parliament was not a difficult decision. Through my team and my wide networks, I knew all the rules of the election. I put in every polling station someone who watched the number of votes so that my votes don't get stolen, and I've been studying the needs of every district and area. I worked to respond to needs whether it was through a service or through a service institution. In terms of funding, I was financially self-sufficient. My two previous sessions as a member of the Nenawa PC, and also from the first session of parliament, meant I could raise a large sum for the nomination again. (Mahasin Hamdoun).

In relation to the election campaign I had previous experience because this was not the first time for me.

Source: Majda Ali Tamimi.

My message is honesty and transparency when working with others. I work in partnership with people to fix defects in state institutions and legislate laws in ways to benefit the public.

Source: Mahasin Hamdoun.

My message to the voters is that I am one of them and I am honest with them; I do not promise them anything that I cannot deliver or that is not part of my work as a deputy. In the last term as MP I had completed a number of housing project in the neighbourhood of El Rahma, and then through legislation I helped poor people own homes. It is through that act that I managed to win large numbers of votes.

Source: Majda Ali Tamimi.



## V. Needs to qualify for election and enhance candidate's proficiency for political participation

The present section provides the outcome of the needs assessed during the interviews. The first part sets out the needs expressed by the members of the PCs in the five governorates, and the second part presents the needs of parliamentarians.

### A. Needs of PC members

The findings of the desk review of literature relating to Iraqi women parliamentarians have revealed that there are many needs expressed for future training opportunities and areas where they need to improve and enrich their skills. The identified needs are

classified into four different categories, namely needs for skills, needs for knowledge, need to expand communication and learn from others, and needs for management and support mechanisms. Tables 7-10 present the findings of the assessment, and list the needs as prioritized by the PC members interviewed.

The tables reveal that in three out of four categories, the highest priority themes are primarily concerned with communication, whether in training, negotiation or interaction with the public, thus pointing to its important function in their lives. The above-mentioned needs can help in counter the stereotypes and promote the credibility of PC candidates in the public arena, and thus help shift public perceptions.

**Table 7. Skills needed**

Themes for skills	Priority	Suggested actors
Negotiation and communication	High	Training institutions, civil society organizations
Formulation of policies and implementation of practical strategies	High	Iraq Higher Election Commission
Use of media to facilitate the work of the Council	Medium	Media Agencies
Mobilization and Advocacy	Medium	Training institutions, civil society organizations
Perseverance, self-confidence, commitment, affirmation, presence and prominence, and exploitation of opportunities	Medium	Training institutions, civil society organizations
Building multi leadership skills and self-confidence to assume leadership roles in their families, communities and public life	Medium	Training institutions, civil society organizations
Mobilization, alliance-building and strategic planning	Medium	Training institutions, civil society organizations
Conflict management and resolution	Low	Civil society organizations
Fund-raising and strategic management of campaign resources	Low	Parties, training institutions, civil society organizations

**Table 8. Knowledge and information needed**

Needs of knowledge and information	Priority	Suggested actors
Iraqi Constitution, internal regulations, parliamentary procedures and constitutional guarantees for women	High	Independent Higher Election Commission
Background on pending legislation	High	Independent Higher Election Commission
Relationships/communication with voters	Medium	Civil society organizations
Regional constitutions and international laws on women's issues and human rights	Medium	International agencies
International Conventions: CEDAW Agreement, Security Council Resolution 1325	Medium	International agencies
Background on Iraq's relationship with neighbouring countries and international treaties	Medium	International agencies
Activities and roles of committees	Low	Independent Higher Election Commission

**Table 9. Mechanisms needed for encouragement and support**

Mechanisms	Priority	Suggested actors
Continuous training in communication and ongoing practice to gain confidence in public speaking, participating in political parties and meetings, and speaking convincingly in their families	High	Civil society organizations, training institutions
Provide a campaign guide to help understand the political environment, (improve the formulation of the personal profile, support women psychologically, increase self-confidence improve time management, target voters, and recruit volunteers)	High	International organizations Civil society organizations
Exchange of International information by reaching out to international organizations	Medium	International organizations
Discuss prominent issues in the media	Low	Media channels

**Table 10. Actions needed to expand communication and learn from others**

Themes	Priority	Suggested actors
Increase contact with the grass roots and ensure communication with civil society and non-governmental organizations	High	Civil society organizations
Form alliances and build relationships with government officials	High	Government institutions
Inclusion of men and women in working groups to train them in implementation of campaign financing	High	Political parties
Encourage women to share their experiences and advice with each other and with voters to keep them informed about the valuable contribution they can make to politics	Medium	Civil society organizations
Work with parties on their internal reform and encourage forming partnerships between parties, parliaments, blocs or women's organizations	Medium	Political parties, coalitions
Document models of successful female parliamentarians to help other candidates build confidence	Low	Civil society organizations
Develop a regional electronic network	Low	International agencies

## B. Additional needs expressed by PC members

Several candidates added needs they wanted included. Relating those needs to the research framework of the constraints discussed earlier reveals that those needs address four challenges, namely: political, economic, structural, and personal technical constraints. Those needs were further classified according to skill, communication improvement, or mechanisms needed.

### 1. Needs to support female candidates to overcome some political constraints

#### a. Skill needs

- Skills for confidence building in parties;
- Conduct courses and trainings in the field of political work and women's rights, especially the CEDAW Convention;
- Organize political awareness courses outside Iraq about legal terms to develop women's abilities to demand their rights and the rights of marginalized people;
- Organize courses on leadership, strategic planning and how candidates can reach their desired goal.

#### b. Communication needs

- Facilitate meetings with Arab women elected representatives to gather information about the electoral culture in other countries.

#### c. Mechanism needs

- Encourage political blocs to actively support the role of women, trust in their capacity and advocate for their rights in tangible ways, and not only theoretically;
- Introduce politics in the school curriculum and at university so that people gain awareness and face no difficulty in running or participating politically.

### 2. Needs to support women to face economic and financial challenges

#### Mechanism needs

- Work with youth volunteer teams as the main supporters of the candidate in the election;
- Provide financial support for campaign;
- Assign a guide or mentor to provide support in leading campaigns;
- Organize public debates with different groups so that the candidate can highlight her ability, culture, potential and development plans.

### 3. Needs to support women to face structural challenges

#### Mechanism needs

- Establish a platform by civil society organizations and voluntary groups to support women candidates.

### 4. Needs to support female candidates to face personal technical constraints

#### Communication needs

- Learn about election cultures in Middle Eastern countries through the exchange of visits and real experience on the ground. This practical experience is likely to increase both understanding and information- sharing.

## C. Needs of parliamentarians

Good practices and strategies to support women candidates and create enabling environment:

During the desk review of the International and regional literature, several good practices to create an enabling environment were identified and presented to the parliamentarians in the individual interviews, in order to discuss with

them their needs for these strategies and their priorities. The strategies presented to the parliamentarians were as follows:

- Create online platforms on Facebook;
- Document experiences on your web site;
- Provide a database on who does what;
- Support institutionalization of a unit within women's organizations with a structure to provide political capacity building;
- Encourage a peer-to-peer approach among female parliamentarians;
- Encourage initiation of a parliamentarian non-governmental organization;

- Promote "global south" experience or Arab-Arab dialogue or international parliaments, and support participation by female parliamentarians;
- Support an observatory for the status of women in women's institutions;
- Initiate platforms between United Nations agencies that support women.

Table 11 demonstrates the outcome of their assessment. It displays the good practice, the priority given by the group of parliamentarians and the actors suggested by the consultant for participation.

**Table 11. Good practice and strategy**

Good practice and strategy	Priority	Suggested actors
Initiate platforms between United Nations agencies	High	International agencies
Build women's political capacities by integrating them into political parties and strengthen their positions within the senior party structures	High	Political parties, Independent Higher Election Commission
Support the institutionalization of an independent body, such as the Human Rights Commission based on Article 108, and with a structure and budget to build women's political capacities	High	Local authorities
Promote the establishment of a special non-governmental organization for women parliamentarians	High	International agencies, Government
Support an observatory for women's status at women's institutions	Medium	Local authorities
Promote Global South experience or Arab-Arab dialogue or international parliaments	Medium	International agencies, Government
Create online platform on Facebook	Low	Civil society organizations
Provide a data base on who does what	Low	Civil society organizations

Initiate platforms between United Nations agencies:

- The experience of Iraq is very meagre and is in need of refinement;
- Platforms between agencies are very important to ensure and increase women's entry in political arena and their sustainability;
- The platform can also strengthen relationships among constituents.

Build women's political capacities by integrating them into political party and organization programmes, and strengthen their positions within the upper party structures:

- Adopt political, institutional and financial guarantees for women in order to ensure equal participation of female candidates in election campaigns;
- Since the public is against the parties, women candidates can be trained by independent civil society groups;
- It is important to qualify and support women candidates to have experience for the next political phase.

Support the institutionalization of an independent body such as the Human Rights Commission based on Article 108, with a structure and budget to build women's political capacities:

- It is important to have a structure to build political capacity and support women;
- It is best to choose the optimal institutions according to the current circumstance.

Promote the establishment of a special non-governmental organization for women parliamentarians:

- Initiate a non-governmental organization to sustain the communication and document the barriers they face and support their work;
- It can be established in the Human Rights Commission because it is independent;

- The non-governmental organization can facilitate the integration of women parliamentarians with their colleagues so they can work collectively and cooperate better together.

Support an observatory for the status of women:

- It is important to support an observatory for women's status;
- Integrate the observatory in government institutions.

Promote "South" experience or Arab-Arab dialogue or international Parliaments and support female participation:

- It is important to communicate and benefit from the experiences of the Global South and establish Arab dialogue to support and encourage women;
- It is important for sharing experiences, provided that its administration is with an international entity outside Iraq and not a regional one.

Create an online platform on Facebook:

- Create an online platform to communicate with each other and assign a leader for this community;
- Document experiences through online platforms;
- Almost all the segments of the society are active on social media and will benefit from online communication.

It is interesting to note that the highest priority was given to the need for the initiation of a platform among United Nations agencies. It is the only good practice that was unanimously selected as such by all the parliamentarians interviewed. An explanation for this might be due to the parliamentarians longing for impartiality and away from tribalism, favouritism or nepotism which they, as shown, suffer from.

## D. Additional needs of parliamentarians

Several parliamentarians from Najaf and Baghdad added needs that address five of the constraints, as follows:

- Financial: provide financial support that facilitates the electoral process;
- Socio-cultural: disseminate culture and awareness that promote the true role of women;
- Political: either abolish the quota or raise the quota to 50 per cent;
- Personal technical: establish measurements for women's competence and ability to communicate with the public and their acceptance for her; organize continuous courses for candidates; provide media support during elections;
- Personal psychological provide moral support, organize meetings with parties outside Iraq to enhance the candidate's confidence in her own abilities and capabilities.

## VI. Recommendations for policies to address barriers and promote women's participation and representation in elected public life

Table 12 portrays the policies that are required to support women candidates in combating various barriers, and promote their role in

political participation and representation. It provides the suggestions for the various actors to address policy needs.

**Table 12.** Policies recommended for overcoming barriers and promoting women's participation and representation in elected public life

Barriers	Policies	Support by			
		W	M	IA	LA
Personal, related to skills and capacities	Design a strategy to support women in promoting their abilities and empower them to assume their roles in life, including a policy to train and educate women	X			
	Support the drafting of an electoral platform in accordance with legislation and laws		X		
	Coach women on their appearances in the media during elections			X	
Socio-cultural	Educate society about the importance of women's political participation and highlight examples of female historical and religious leaders	X	X	X	X
	Support the media discourse of women and enable them to present their programs and plans in a clear and effective manner	X	X		X
Institutional structures	Support women's organizations that empower women candidates and work to build their political and social capacities and knowledge of international laws and conventions		X		
	Encourage female and male candidates to attend together the highest media meetings and face-to-face meetings with decision-makers to benefit from their experiences			X	X
Low participation of women in the state and electoral systems	Enhance women's empowerment to be 50 per cent to allow them to take up executive and elected positions	X			
	Strengthen women to activate their role in society in order for traditional views to change	X	X	X	

Barriers	Policies	Support by			
		W	M	IA	LA
Economy	Introduce her to the private sector and employers for financial support for her campaign	X		X	X
	Introduce unified advocacy for all candidates	X		X	X
Violence	Confront campaigns and rumours that offend women professionally and morally			X	
	Stipulate in the law of IHEC the type and placement of electoral advertising	X			
	Enforce a law that holds accountable and takes appropriate action against anyone who exceeds and violates electoral laws	X			
Political	Encourage Parties to clarify their policies so that women are convinced to participate	X			
	End the quota system, introduce a fair electoral system and involve independent commissioners	X			
	Activate and endorse the Convention on Elimination Discrimination Against Women agreement	X			
Gender awareness	Promote literacy programmes, particularly women's programmes that support women candidates and enhance their role in society	X	X		
	Promote awareness and non-discrimination between females and males in small and large families				X
	Educate the community on the importance of women's role in the media	X			X
	Provide practical moral and material support to enhance the candidate's confidence in her own abilities and capabilities	X			

## VII. Concluding recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study and to ensure an enhanced and sustained women's political participation, all identified barriers and suggested mechanisms need to be addressed in an integrated manner. Accordingly, the present section proposes the following recommendations.

### A. Creation of an enabling environment (political, legal and institutional)

- a. Develop a new strategy for the advancement of women that benefits from international expertise and emphasizes the support and promotion of a culture of equality, anti-discrimination and non-violence. This strategy should also take into account the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 5, aiming to ensure equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political and public life. This strategy should also include action plans and programmes for women's political, social and economic participation that the Government regularly follows and updates, in cooperation with civil society organizations, particularly non-governmental organizations, networks and women's movements;
- b. Create a national mechanism with a high level of decision-making capacity to coordinate the implementation of the strategy and follow up on the obstacles to its implementation, and all in cooperation with active civil society organizations;
- c. Allocate provisions in the State budget for addressing, developing, and promoting the political participation of Iraqi women to eliminate discrimination and violence

against women, and allocate development projects and achieve security and stability at all levels. This fund should promote women's leadership and political participation in parliamentary and PC election and can provide capacity-building, awareness-raising, advocacy activities and mentorship;

- d. Establish a national centre for women's studies to facilitate the conduct of studies on women's political participation, and to follow up on their situation and monitor the negative and positive aspects of their situation. This centre can study the impact of the specified challenges to women's participation and the cost of women's low participation in public life;
- e. Ensure that the quota is increased to reach the Beijing baseline of 30 per cent at least, and introduce measures to increase the presence of women in all decision-making structures (legislative, judiciary and executive branches).

### B. Fostering a socio-cultural context to raise awareness and combat stereotypes

- a. Promote and disseminate gender culture at all levels and in all State institutions to ensure that social and economic policies, including education curriculums, do not perpetuate deeply rooted negative stereotypes and exacerbate violence against women, but ensure the promotion of their full participation in public life, socially and economically;
- b. Disseminate nation-wide awareness-raising campaigns on women's political

participation and its added value economically and socially;

- c. Mobilize media in awareness-raising campaigns and establish guidelines to ensure their abundant coverage of women's political rights and that negative stereotypes are challenged. Special funds could be allocated to ensure this space on air;
  - d. Promote moderate male and female religious leaders to create a platform to promote women rights and gender equality in a religious discourse.
- b. Empower women to build up their self-confidence and erase their doubts, and encourage them to participate in decision-making processes and run for elections;
  - c. Design and implement comprehensive financing strategies aimed at political training of women candidates and, specifically, at the nomination phase of their campaigns. International experience shows that of the three most common funding types – public, private, and combined public/private – public funding is the most advantageous for women.

### C. Empowering female candidates technically and personally

- a. Provide a comprehensive technical capacity-building programme for women candidates that includes needed knowledge and information and skills;

# Conclusion

In sum, and as revealed throughout the present study, the barriers to women's participation in political decision-making are obviously primarily rooted in patriarchy. Male hegemony can only recede when women are empowered and prepared for higher office through strategies for challenging sexist stereotypes in society and in the media.

It is also recommended to embrace the support approach and focus on how women

can be effective agents of change. Rather than focusing only on how to run campaigns, and adopting only a top-down training approach, the more innovative approaches to adult learning such as expert on-the-job support, coaching and mentoring, or study and experiential visits, need to be effectively used. Capacity-building should not exclusively focus on empowering women in decision-making, but also on what men need to do to share the space with women and become agents of change.



# Annexes

## Annex I. Guidelines for interviews

### Case studies

#### *Purpose*

Case studies will be conducted with the nine women parliamentarians who have been elected outside the quota system to provide Insights on what worked and to understand the strategies and tools that helped them win.

Name:

Social Status:

Educational Level:

Political Affiliation and Social Engagement previous and current

There are three stages of the election campaign: – 1. The stage of deciding to run, 2. winning the nomination of the party, and, 3. running an election campaign.

Women face complex challenges at each stage. Experience has shown that a number of these challenges can be overcome by implementing strategies. So, what are these strategies?

#### **Describe your own experience (constraints and opportunities) in the following topics:**

- Campaign organisation – committee structure, staffing and accountability
- Research – information on election rules, past voting patterns, issues of concern to voters, your opponents (competitors)
- Money – budget and fundraising (money, time and people: volunteers, family) what were women MPs' experiences in fundraising? What were the major challenges and how were these overcome?
- Profile building – how will you let voters know who you are
- Targeting – Identifying voters who need to be persuaded
- Message – what will you say to win over voters, especially undecided voters
- Delivery of your message – media and direct voter contact strategies
- Votes on Election day- getting out your vote, observing voting and counting and ensuring security for yourself and your votes
- What strategies and lessons can be learned?
- Advice for women campaigners

## Focus group discussions

### *Purpose*

To get a counter-perspective; understand the general public perceptions of candidates and their attitudes towards women in elected office; what the citizens are looking for in a credible candidate. Focus groups will be conducted in five provinces and will include local civil society organizations, community leaders, as well as women's groups in PCs. The discussions of the focus groups will be complemented by meetings with women in parliament and PCs.

- What is the public's view of women candidates?
- What affects the choices of voters, especially with regard to women candidates?
- What image is the citizens looking for in a credible candidate for the council?
- Are there any advantages to being a woman candidate and what are they?
- What are the challenges facing women who run for seats in parliament?
- What mechanisms can women candidates use to combat those challenges? and
- How can men support her?

## Semi-structured interviews with women parliamentarians

### *Purpose*

To understand the challenges they face in their nomination and their candidacy; how they overcame them; what interventions are still needed to enhance women's political participation in life; what works best.

Name:

Social Status:

Educational Level:

Political Affiliation and Social Engagement previous and current

### **1. What obstacles did you face when you ran for Parliament and how to overcome it?**

Rank each problem according to its importance to you.

(1) is the most problematic, (2) medium problematic and (3) least problematic.

Constraints	1	2	3	Justification for Rank	How to overcome it
<p>Personal challenges relating to women's skills and capacities, such as formulating policies, developing strategies, networking, connecting with the electorate, and other requirements of candidacy for public office.</p>					
<p>Socio-cultural challenges, such as stereotyping of women, gender bias, conservative traditions and myths about religion, people accepting that women's leadership will never be successful, or that local council membership is already divided among the families and no one can venture to interfere.</p>					
<p>Structural and bureaucratic challenges and low participation of women in institutions: – gender biases are pervasive in Iraq's institutions and judicial and executive authorities in the state and electoral systems. There is also the influence of money in politics and reluctance of ministries to disclose information.</p>					
<p>Election violence and intimidations by the family or society in addition to the threats by competitors/opponents.</p>					
<p>Political legal Iraq's current political landscape is shaped by several conflicts and civil unrest. Women as an essential part of this society that has been marginalized and excluded, have to face these ongoing political obstacles and vulnerabilities for their participation in political and electoral processes and are hence reluctant to participate.</p>					

Personal ideology and psychological from early childhood, Iraqi women have to believe that they are inferior to men. This indoctrination continues even among educated professionals. Accordingly, she refrains from running for the council for fear of damaging her reputation.					
Others					

## 2. Were there any factors supporting you in your candidacy? And what were they?

## 3. Interventions that are still required to promote women's participation in public life and to promote women's political participation.

Rank the following items according to their importance to you:

1. highly important 2. of medium importance 3. least important

Good practice and strategy	1	2	3
Initiate platforms between UN agencies			
Build women's political capacities by integrating them into political party and strengthen their positions within the upper party structures			
Support the institutionalization of an independent body such as the Human Rights Commission based on Article 108, and with a structure and budget to build women's political capacities			
Promote the establishment of a special NGO for women parliamentarians			
Support an observatory for women's situation at women's institutions			
Promote South experience or Arab-Arab dialogue or international Parliaments			
Create online platform on Facebook			
Provide data base on who does what			
Other			

## Semi-structured interviews with female candidates in PCs

PC members are asked to identify common challenges that hinder the electability of women in their own right, rather than to fulfil the women's quota seats and to examine the challenges these women faced in their previous candidacy, new constraints they may face in the next (2020) elections, and the type of skills-strengthening and knowledge or information and support they require to meet their challenges

Name:

Social Status:

Educational Level:

Political affiliation and social engagement previous and current

### What obstacles did you face when you ran for Parliament? And how to overcome them?

Rank each problem according to its importance to you.

1. the most problematic, 2. medium problematic, and 3. least problematic.

Constraints	1	2	3	Justification for Rank	How to overcome it
Personal challenges relating to women's skills and capacities, such as formulating policies, developing strategies, networking, connecting with the electorate, and other requirements of candidacy for public office.					
Socio-cultural challenges, such as stereotyping of women, gender bias, conservative traditions and myths about religion, people accepting women's leadership will never be able to succeed. Local council membership is already divided among the families and no one can venture to interfere.					

Structural and bureaucratic challenges and low participation of women in Institutions: – gender biases are pervasive in Iraq’s institutions and judicial and executive authorities in the state and electoral systems. There is also the influence of money in politics and reluctance of ministries to disclose information.					
Election violence and intimidations by the family or society in addition to threats by the opponents/competitors.					
Political/legal: Iraq’s current political landscape is shaped by several conflicts and civil unrest. Women as an essential part of this society that has nevertheless been marginalized and excluded, have to face these ongoing political obstacles and vulnerabilities for their participation in political and electoral processes and are hence reluctant to participate.					
Personal ideology and psychological: From early childhood, Iraqi women have to believe that they are subordinate to men. This indoctrination continues even among educated professionals. Accordingly, she refrains from running for the council for fear of damaging her reputation.					
Others					

#### 4. What do you need to enhance your skills and qualify for election?

The findings of the desk review on literature of Iraqi women parliamentarians and parliamentarians in the region have revealed that there are many needs expressed for future training opportunities and areas where they need to improve and enrich their skill.

Rank the following items according to Importance:

1. Most important 2. medium important 3. least important

### Skills needed with priority

Themes for skills	High	Medium	Low
Negotiation and communication			
Formulation of policies and implementation of practical strategies			
Use of media to facilitate the work of the Council			
Mobilization and Advocacy			
Perseverance, self-confidence, commitment, affirmation, presence and prominence, and exploitation of opportunities			
Building multi leadership skills and self-confidence to assume leadership roles in their families, communities and public life			
Mobilization, alliance-building and strategic planning			
Conflict management and resolution			
Fund-raising and strategic management of campaign resources			
Other			

### Knowledge and information needed with priority

Needs of Knowledge and Information	High	Medium	Low
Iraqi Constitution, internal regulations, parliamentary procedures and constitutional guarantees for women			
Background on pending legislation			
Relationships/communication with voters			
Regional constitutions and international laws on women's issues and human rights			
International Conventions: CEDAW, Security Council Resolution 1325			
Background on Iraq's relationship with neighbouring countries and international treaties			
Activities and roles of committees			
Other			

### Mechanisms needed for encouragement and support with priority

Mechanisms	High	Medium	Low
Continuous training in communication and ongoing practice to gain confidence in public speaking, participating in political parties and meetings, and speaking convincingly in their families.			
Provide a campaign guide to help understand the political environment, (improve the formulation of the personal profile, support women psychologically, increase self-confidence improve time management, target voters, and recruit volunteers).			
Exchange of International information by reaching out to International organizations.			
Discuss prominent issues in the media.			
Other			

### Actions needed to expand Communication and learn from others

Themes	High	Medium	Low
Increase contact with the grass roots and ensure communication with civil society and NGOs			
Form alliances and build relationships with government officials			
Inclusion of men and women in working groups to train them in implementation of financially successful campaigns			
Encourage women to share their experiences and advice including with voters to keep them informed about the contribution they can make to politics			
Work with parties on their internal reform and encourage forming partnerships between parties, parliaments, blocs or women's organizations			
Document models of successful female parliamentarians to help other candidates build confidence			
Develop a regional electronic network			
Other			

## Annex II. Case studies: In their own words

### A. First case study of a successful female parliamentarian: the case from Nenawa Governorate

Mahasin Hamdoun Hamed

Social status: Married

Educational Status: Bachelor's in management and economy

Age: 62

Elected to two terms of parliament and twice won without quota

Political Affiliation: independent/Iraqi Forces Alliance Bloc

- There are three stages of the election campaign: – 1. the stage of deciding to run, 2. winning the nomination of my party, 3. and running an election campaign. Women face complex challenges at each stage. Experience has shown that a number of these challenges can be overcome by implementing strategies. So, what are these strategies?

I was enrolled in three sessions already. The first two were in the PC and the third one the Parliament. Thus, the decision was not difficult as I have enough funding and I get support through my relationships. I also did not face many challenges. The biggest challenge, however, was to choose the largest, most influential and most honest Bloc, who also respect women's rights and thank God in all my choices I was right. During the election time I worked very hard, consulting some media advisors to make the election campaign the most effective in order to reach social media sites, as well as marginalized groups and women. The support contracts and permanent job, for which I had earlier invested a lot of effort, were one of my assets as they had left a great impact and helped created opportunities for many successes in Mosul society.

#### **Describe your own experience (constraints and opportunities) in the following topics:**

- **Campaign organisation – committee structure, staffing and accountability**

I opened a special office in Nenawa province, appointed a director for the office and media and administration director and with them I started the election campaign with a well-thought-out strategy. I developed a special plan for each day and started with the team to promote the election campaign. Because I had acquired a good reputation from previous service in elected office, I was welcomed by voters.

- **Research –information on election rules, past voting patterns, issues of concern to voters, your opposition**

Through my team and my wide relationship networks, I knew all the rules of the election. I put in every polling station someone to watch the number of votes so that my votes don't get stolen, and I've been studying the needs of every district and area, and knew the most important need and worked to provide it. If there was a need for a service, I facilitated it through a service agency. If it was a financial need, then I linked them to civil society organizations and coordinated the work between them. I did not face many opponents because of my good reputation and in case of any opposition I did not oppose him but rather let them see my work so as to be convinced.

• **Money – budget and fundraising (money, time and people volunteers, family) what were women MPs’ experiences in fundraising? What were the major challenges and how were these overcome?**

In terms of money, I was financially empowered through my two previous sessions as a member of the Nenawa PC, and also from the first session in parliament. I was able to raise a large sum for the nomination again, as my first priority was always for political work. All this demanded great effort and also much time on my side, as I was devoting the majority of my time to this. This has also affected my wellbeing and that of my family. For two months I did not rest at all and I was not alone as my husband was with me because he was my office manager. Of course, I was working with great confidence because my family, meaning my husband and immediate family were always supportive of me. Because of my history and my political work and the support for the job contracts in 2008, people had great confidence and backed me because I had left a mark through my humanitarian and political work. I used to work day and night to serve people, the needy and the sick, and I have adopted many families in order to help them financially as much as possible. People approve of me because I never gave false promises but worked transparently.

• **Profile building – how will you let voters know who you are**

I am a middle-class woman from a well-known family, a real native of Musil, working to serve Iraq in general, and Nenawa in particular, I love my countrymen and I love to serve, I work for a better tomorrow, I left a big footprint in Nenawa province and I help the needy. I do not give promises to anyone, especially promises that I cannot fulfil.

• **Targeting – Identifying voters who need to be persuaded**

From my modest point of view, I need to convince everyone, all segments of society, because I believe in all abilities, and support them in the future. I targeted youth groups because they are the backbone of the country, as well as the marginalized classes that need help.

• **Message – what will you say to win over voters, especially undecided voters**

My message is honesty and transparency in working with others and I work in partnership with people to fix defects in state agencies and legislate laws for the benefit of the public. I don’t target the hesitant people, and I don’t try to convince them at all, I leave the person all the freedom to choose the right candidate, but I let my work convince them to believe in me.

• **Delivery of your message – media and direct voter contact strategies**

I delivered my messages through my office manager who was organizing all the meetings with voters in villages through a well-thought-out plan before moving on. I also knew the target group and how to meet their needs. I was keen to publish all the meetings through my website because I believe that 22% of the communication service is important in promoting and marketing my campaign.

• **Votes on Election day- getting out the vote, observing voting and counting and ensuring security of yourself and your votes**

In the first session, I was in direct contact with the Commission (IHEC) to know how many votes I got. But in the current session, although according to the scores, I was the first one who got votes in the list, as I was also in contact with the Commission. They however were not cooperative with me and this is what happened with the majority of female candidates because they are the weakest members of the political process.

• **What strategies and lessons can be learned?**

To be more careful in dealing with politicians as they are the first target of defamation and bullying and hence I have to deal with great wisdom and deliberate plans; to leave aside material gain and instead focus on serving the community, as it will have a very big impact on society and be of benefit to all.

- **Advice for women campaigners**

Prepare a well-thought-out strategic plan to start the campaign and stay away from random and haphazard work. Select a bloc that respects women's rights and will give them the opportunity to hold an effective position and work with integrity. When you win, work on legislation that serves women.

## **B. Second case study of successful female parliamentarians: the case from Baghdad Governorate**

Educational Status: – Ph.D. Business management and accounting

Age: 60

Political affiliation and community activity: Independent (Sadrist Movement- Al-Ahrar-Sa'iroun)

Previous work: University Professor at Mustansiriyah University – Head of Business Administration Department

She was also Head of the Quality and Performance department at the University. Member of the Supreme Council for Quality in the Ministry of Higher Education and is one of the founders of Quality Assurance in the Ministry of Higher Education.

- There are three stages of the election campaign: – 1. the stage of deciding to run, 2. winning the nomination of my party, 3. and running an election campaign. Women face complex challenges at each stage. Experience has shown that a number of these challenges can be overcome by implementing strategies. So, what are these strategies?

First of all, I must clarify who suggested nomination to me: – One of the employees who was with me at the university suggested that I nominate myself and he was a resident of Sadr City, where the majority are members of the Sadr movement. The employee informed me that Mr. Muqtada al-Sadr prefers independent academic figures and holders of higher degrees, and indeed I was nominated and won. I was the only one that Mr. Muqtada allowed to run, unlike all those who participated in the previous elections, because of my integrity, and my good knowledge of my work and my role within parliament, and I have no accusations of corruption, and not only that, but I headed the list in Baghdad. I was able to get 55,251 votes without anyone's help. At the beginning of my candidacy, the voters were from the university community, and after being known for my courage and professionalism, I was able to win the confidence of the Iraqi street to get a number of votes comparable to large numbers of men, especially as I am a candidate from Baghdad, and the voters are in Baghdad.

### **Describe your own experience (constraints and opportunities) in the following topics:**

- **Campaign organisation – committee structure, staffing and accountability**

In relation to the election campaign I had previous experience because this was not the first session; I contacted the head of the campaign and placed in each region someone who represents me. In addition to doing two to three seminars a week, sometimes I went to their homes and explained to them my electoral program and chose simple language that is in line with the awareness and understanding of the voters. My initial audience was intellectuals and academics but then I began to cover other groups, including less educated ones. I had to take this issue into consideration and simplify my speech, and they called me the lady of numbers.

- **Research –information on election rules, past voting patterns, issues of concern to voters, your opposition**

I'm going to start with issues that are of interest to the voters because I think this is one of the keys to winning the election. As I mentioned earlier, we have to take care of the issues that the citizen needs, and I was focusing on my speciality only in the things that I have knowledge about. I also had people in the regions who provided me with information on the needs of each region and in numbers. I had some people representing me in the polling stations.

- **Money – budget and fundraising (money, time and people volunteers, family) what were women MPs' experiences in fundraising? What were the major challenges and how were these overcome?**

At the beginning I suffered a lot from the issue of financing, and it was entirely out of my own money, unfortunately there are no companies or sectors supporting the candidates, as they do outside Iraq. And no matter how much money I have, it will not match the money that the parties have. For example they were renting the roofs of the buildings (for their advertising) while I was looking for a small place to put my picture, and although I am the head of my list, I can't compare myself to the other heads of the lists who were competing with me in Baghdad. They were former prime ministers and they had great financial resources. That's why I distributed my photos only in areas where I thought I could win. As for the party, they supported me with only 80 small pictures, and after the election I knew that there are companies and businessmen supporting candidates, but they expect those candidates to support them after they win the election, which is not acceptable.

- **Profile building – how will you let voters know who you are**

I made a short film about me and put it on my own Facebook page, because I wanted to address all segments of society including illiterate people as they look at Facebook and watch the videos, in addition to a printed profile that is also distributed to other groups.

- **Targeting – Identifying voters who need to be persuaded**

I hope to reach everyone in society and convince them. My audience began to change. After it was entirely academics and intellectuals, it started to include other classes, but unfortunately, I feel that the majority of women still do not give their vote to women, because women have become an enemy of women. I find my encouragement in the youth category, and they have confidence in me as a candidate.

- **Message – what will you say to win over voters, especially undecided voters**

My message to voters is that I am one of them. My message is honesty in my words with them; I do not promise them anything that I cannot do or is not part of my work as a deputy. In the last election I had completed a number of housing projects in the neighbourhood of El Rahma, and then through legislation I helped poor people own homes. It is through that act that I managed to win large numbers of votes.

- **Delivery of your message – media and direct voter contact strategies**

I was appearing in the media whenever necessary, and I was talking about things that are within my speciality and my work and I always advise the candidates to talk about what they know, also I think that media appearances should be thoughtful; distraction and appearing a lot is sometimes a double-edged weapon. There were pre-election TV shows hosting candidates but not all of them are good or serve the candidate as they sometimes do not give candidates the same opportunity and time to talk about themselves. I think if the candidate is nominated for the first time, they should make a film about themselves in order to avoid confusion, shyness and hesitation sometimes.

- **Votes on Election day- getting out your vote, observing voting and counting and ensuring security of yourself and your votes**

This is a very important period. For example, we used to provide 50 people to be observers and distribute them to the polling stations, but unfortunately these people lacked training. Going to the polling stations is also problematic because some voters have no financial capacity to go or sometimes they suffer from disability. This is also money that we spend, to ensure that our voters get to the polling stations easily. I have my team that monitors and counts the votes, and the Bloc also has its own team.

• **What strategies and lessons can be learned?**

Nobody should venture into the election game without having capabilities and patience, and they must also have a program that is clear and can be implemented, and the candidate must be confident that her party agrees to this program. A study needs to be undertaken to assess the priorities of the voters. We live in a changing world what is needed now is not the same as what was needed yesterday; every candidate must be aware of this.

• **Advice for women campaigners**

The candidate must know that when she goes through this experience and enters this arena, she will face a big challenge, which is her family and their custody, as her work will have a big impact on her personal life. She has to be conscious and ready for it. She must develop her capabilities, speak in line with her specialty and not distract herself. Honesty and again honesty with the voter, no promises that can't be fulfilled. A lot of people ran for the election and got large numbers of votes, but then their support dwindled in later elections.

**Other**

I hope that there will be female candidates for parliament who develop their capabilities before they win and become a deputy. The candidate, later deputy, must review the constitution, national laws, and international conventions, and know the history of her country. I also hope that the way the images are displayed for the female candidates are not as the ones existing now, and I hope that we will see the experiences of other countries and have alternatives.



