

Final Report to Meridian IYLEP 2013

Executive Summary

The Iraq Foundation (IF) provided 2 half days of training in Erbil for high school and undergraduate student participants in the 2013 Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange Program (IYLEP). On February 7 and February 14, IF carried out trainings in Erbil for high school and undergraduate students, respectively, in conjunction with Meridian International Center as part of larger reunions. To implement this training, IF began working with Meridian in November 2013 to develop and finalize a list of training topics for each group, avoiding duplicate training on topics discussed during the US portion of the program. IF leveraged our extensive nationwide network to select several experienced trainers with capacity in the final topic areas.

On February 7, IF contributed to the high school reunion by providing the following sessions: Community Engagement, including two sessions: an introduction on IF and strategies for engagement, and Marketing Yourself for Success.

On February 14, IF contributed to the undergraduate reunion by providing the following sessions: Community Engagement; Marketing Yourself for Success and Elections: Best Practices for Democratic Participation.

Overview of Deliverables

The Iraq Foundation developed and implemented 2 half-day trainings in Erbil for high school and undergraduate students on February 7 and 14, 2014.

High School Reunion

IF provided trainings during the high school reunion on Friday, February 7. Sessions included:

- Community Engagement Training
 - Introduction by Dhefaf Al-Jarahi, Iraq Foundation Manager of Operations
 - Strategies for Engagement in Iraq by Dler Ali, Public Aid Organization (PAO)
- Marketing Yourself for Success by Nazar Jamil, Programme Coordinator, PAO

At the *Introduction* session presented by Ms. Dhefaf Al-Jarahi, an overview of IF's work across Iraq with local NGOs was introduced.

Through the *Strategies for Engagement in Iraq* session, Mr. Dler Ali presented an overview and discussion of common challenges and solutions to becoming more engaged in local Iraqi communities. Specific ideas including working for governmental institutions or the private sector, working with NGOs, joining formal and informal groups and/or clubs, taking note of paid vs. unpaid opportunities.

He defined volunteering and the necessary preparatory work to selecting a relevant opportunity as well as perceptions of volunteering. Mr. Ali then discussed challenges to active engagement, such as political or economic, and how to work around these issues.

Students were then broken into smaller groups to brainstorm ideas for improving their local communities through engaging local leaders, schools, institutions and NGOs, creating a role for students to become more active citizens and motivating them to do so.

During *Marketing Yourself for Success*, Mr. Nazar Jamil provided tips and tricks to prepare students for college, such as researching schools and preparing your application, essay and resume writing. Students learned how to stay organized and motivated to achieve high grades, balancing studying with active community engagement and improve communication skills. Building on the previous session, Mr. Jamil provided examples of how to select internship and volunteering opportunities that will complement studies. Mr. Jamil also distributed a handout including examples and templates of CVs and cover letters.

All training materials and handouts have been attached.

Undergraduate Reunion

IF provided trainings during the undergraduate reunion on Friday, February 14. Sessions included:

- Community Engagement Training by Dhefaf Al-Jarahi and Abdulsalam Medeni, Resident Civic Participation Program Manager
- Marketing Yourself for Success: Nazar Jamil
- Elections: Best Practices for Democratic Participation: Abdulsalam Medeni

Ms. Dhefaf Al-Jarahi and Mr. Abdulsalam Medeni jointly presented the *Community Engagement* session. This session was revised according to a request from Meridian to have an English speaking trainer present alongside Ms. Al-Jarahi to facilitate greater understanding. Additionally a 2 page document was distributed with an overview of current projects. Ms. Al-Jarahi provided information on the founding and mission of IF, regional network, current and recently concluded projects and key strategies.

Mr. Medeni elaborated on IF's projects and linked it to a discussion of common challenges and solutions to becoming more engaged in local Iraqi communities. Mr. Medeni launched the discussion by comparing living in a democracy vs. dictatorship. He then broke students into 4 groups to discuss challenges and opportunities for youth civic engagement as well as critical initiatives. Students were broken into geographic regions as follows: North, Center, South, and South-Center. Students produced flip charts with key ideas. Using flipcharts, groups of students brainstormed ideas for improving their local communities through engaging local leaders, schools, institutions and NGOs, creating a role for students to become more active citizens and motivating them to do so.

During *Marketing Yourself for Success*, Mr. Nazar Jamil provided a skills building session on presentation through resumes, cover letters, interviews and graduate school applications. Mr. Jamil began the presentation by explaining the different types of presentations required according to the intended audience (e.g. university, private sector, non-profit). He then delved into how to shape a resume, including the distinction between a CV and resume and most important aspects of the resume. Mr. Jamil then discussed the purpose of a cover letter and required information. He also discussed interviewing preparation and skills and preparing

graduate school applications. Mr. Jamil distributed examples of CVs and cover letters to participants.

During the *Elections* training, Mr. Abdulsalam Medeni lectured on the importance of voting, voting procedures, including registration and gathering relevant documents, and key information in preparation for the 2014 elections. He provoked discussions by posing the questions: why did humans invent elections? What is the purpose of elections? He then delved into the topics of representative government, resolution of conflict, peaceful power transitions and being an active citizen. Mr. Medeni asked students if they thought these themes were applicable in Iraq and will democracy deliver for citizens to come to the understanding that to effect change, participation is necessary.

All training materials and handouts have been attached.

Programmatic Highlights

Dler Ali indicated that the conference was well arranged and he was particularly impressed with discussions on how to affect change in one's community during the Community Engagement training, led by IF at the high school reunion on February 7.

Ms. Dhefaf Al-Jarahi mentioned that writing CVs was particularly helpful for the high school students. She also indicated the visit of Dr. Zuhair Hamadi, Head of the High Committee for Education Development and Advisor to the Prime Minister, as a high point of the university reunion on February 14.

Nazar Jamil was impressed with explanations of how to volunteer or intern at CSOs discussed during the Community Engagement training at both reunions.

Abdulsalam Medeni was impressed with the concept of a reunion: bringing students together that studied at different universities in the US, supporting their projects and assisting in the practical design of their projects.

Lessons Learned

English language issues: Following Ms. Al-Jarahi's presentation of the Iraq Foundation's work and current projects, students requested a list of projects and information on provinces of implementation. IF shared this with Meridian February 11 for the undergraduate reunion (See Attachment: IF-Projects-Overview-Distribution). Meridian also requested that another trainer assist Ms. Al-Jarahi in her session to facilitate greater understanding. IF coordinated with Abdulsalam Medeni to perform this task.

Time limitations: Several of the trainers reported insufficient time for full participation by students in their session.

Media Coverage: No media coverage.

M&E Feedback Review:

High School Reunion: February 7, 2014

Students' Feedback (Source: Meridian M&E)

The **Community Engagement Training** including an introduction by Dhefaf Al-Jarahi and Strategies for Engagement in Iraq by Dler Ali, was reported high on a value scale (1-5, lowest to highest) with a total of 91% of respondents indicating a 4 or 5. Students indicated that the training was interesting and useful in planning for projects and college life. One student indicated that information on how to engage and volunteer with IF was lacking from the presentation by Ms. Al-Jarahi.

The **Marketing Yourself for Success** session by Nazar Jamil was also viewed favorable with a total of 74% of respondents indicating a 4 or 5. Students indicated that while the presentation was long, it was very valuable in developing projects and contained useful and realistic information, particularly about how to write a CV and dividing time between studies and volunteer work. One respondent indicated that the information will ease the university application process. Some respondents indicated that this session was too long, not applicable, the presenter was not highly capable and that it could have included job interviewing skills.

Trainers' Feedback (Source: IF Debrief with trainers)

Dhefaf Al-Jarahi: See below

Dler Ali reported that students were engaged and interested. He suggested that it would have been valuable to place some of the participants in internship positions to provide an opportunity to apply the lessons they have learned. Mr. Ali reported that he would provide students with guide booklets about volunteerism, drafting CVs and interview techniques. Mr. Ali reported that students asked: how they can get students to listen to them, trust and support them and how they can overcome security issues. He indicated that students seemed most interested in the “how to get around common challenges or obstacles” portion of his lecture.

Nazar Jamil: See below

Undergraduate Reunion: February 14, 2014

Students' Feedback (Source: Meridian M&E)

The **Community Engagement Training** by Dhefaf Al-Jarahi was rated by 60% of respondents as 3 or 4 on a 1-5 (low-high) with an average rating of 3.30. This training was reported as the least valuable by several students.

The **Community Engagement Training** by Abdulsalam Medeni was rated slightly higher with 43.3% of respondents indicating a 5 with an average rating of 4.03.

The **Market Yourself for Success** session by Nazar Jamil was rated by 40% of respondents as a 5, with an average rating of 4.63. With the Elections training, indicated as useful and offering relevant information.

The **Elections training** by Abdulsalam Medeni was the most favorably viewed training, rated by 53.3% of respondents as a 5, with an average rating of 5.23. Respondents indicating that this training was valuable and informative and enjoyed Mr. Medeni's presentation style.

Trainers' Feedback (Source: IF Debrief with trainers)

Dhefaf Al-Jarahi reported to IF that the topics selected were very beneficial and the information was new for students. She reported that students seemed very engaged and interacted in the sessions. Following the presentation on IF, key questions included:

- How can students become involved in IF's projects?
- How can we provide regular updates on activities?
- In the opinion of IF, what are the most impactful projects?
- How can students get in touch with IF's branches?

Nazar Jamil reported that time duration was a major issue in both of his presentations and he would have preferred to have greater participation, brainstorming and sharing of experiences. He indicated that next time, he would ask students to prepare their CV and resume in advance revising it during the workshop or writing an essay on a topic of interest that could be reviewed during the workshop. Students seemed particularly interested in participating in CSO activities and how to become more engaged through resources and workshops. He indicated that several students requested one on one reviews of CVs, resumes and/or essays. He indicated that IF should support the students through linking them with CSOs and helping them find internship opportunities.

Abdulsalam Medeni indicated a number of comments on the structure and organization of his sessions and the overall training as follows:

1. Time was too short for both sessions.
2. The group was too large for the civic engagement training.
3. More time needed for elections training to hold simulations and more group exercises would have been ideal.
4. Outcomes of trainings could have been made more clear and tangible.

Mr. Medeni was struck by questions and discussion points from students asking if change was possible and drawing parallels between the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and the current government. He reported to IF that students seemed interested in how to move forward in becoming engaged citizens and obtaining support for their projects.

Analysis:

For the 2014 Reunion, IF will:

- Distribute contact information for students on IF local branches and several key NGOs with experience working with youth to facilitate volunteering opportunities
- Shorten and/or include more interactive portions for "marketing yourself for success" session as this was indicated as an issue by students and the instructor
- Incorporate job interviewing skills in training sessions

Follow-up communication / activities with participants

Meridian has shared with IF a list of participants with contact information. This will be provided to our local offices and stored internally. IF will also use this pool of candidates in ongoing and future projects that involve and/or target youth.