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Empowering Returnee Women (February , 2017 – October 31, 2017)

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Above: Iraq Country Manager, Ms. Dhefah Jarrahi, with women leaders in Qayyara

From February to October 2017, the Iraq Foundation, with support from GIZ- Government of Germany, carried out a project with IDP/returnee women in Salaheddin, Nenawa, and Anbar provinces. The project represented a continuation of IF's work with IDP women in different provinces over the past several years. The goal of this project was to contribute to stability in post-conflict areas by enabling women IDPs/returnees to act as ambassadors for their communities, engage with local authorities, and contribute to overcoming social, legal, and economic challenges to stabilization. This summary report presents highlights from the project.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND GOAL

The project, which is implemented in three post-conflict governorates (Salaheddin, Nenawa and Anbar), aims to promote stability in the liberated areas by strengthening the capacities of women heads of households (WHH) and other women in these areas to become effective leaders and defenders of women and family needs and empower them to serve as ambassadors for their communities.

LOCATION

- 1- Anbar: Al-Malaab
- 2- Nenawa: Qayyara and Al-Jadah
- 3- Salaheddin: Neighborhood of Arbaeen and Qadisiya district

TARGET GROUP

500 women, of whom 60 self-selected for leadership training and responsibilities.

OBJECTIVES, OUTPUTS, AND RESULTS/OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVE 1

Building trust with women IDPs/returnees, assessing needs, and identifying women leaders

Outputs:

1. The Iraq Foundation carried out a mapping of 500 women and their families, with data on gender, age, education, family size, economic resources, special needs, professional skills, and other metrics.
2. IF held meetings with national government agencies including the ministries of Interior, Displacement and Migration, and Labor and Social Affairs; the Directorate for Women's Empowerment; the National Reconciliation Commission; and relevant committees in parliament.

3. IF held multiple meetings with local government officials, including provincial governments and councils, district governments, local directorates of concerned ministries, and coordinated closely with the Community Police Units in each location.
4. IF held meetings with IOM and other international organizations, to inform them about the progress of the project and secure their support.
5. IF held meetings with women in each of the areas identified within the project with a total of 25 meetings to discuss their needs and to encourage potential leaders to come forward.
6. 500 women beneficiaries were able to speak out and communicate with others, express their concerns and the needs of their families and communities.
7. 60 women were identified as potential leaders through self-selection.
8. Based on the meetings and interviews with women and families, IF prepared an initial needs assessment report.

Results and Outcome:

The following are some of the outcomes resulting from the project's activities:

1. A survey was carried out in the selected areas of the three governorates, covering 500 families, with 100 families in each region. The survey identified returnees, women with special needs and vulnerable women, as well as women who suffered violence. The issues of potential conflict within the community and the most important needs were identified as well as the type of assistance provided to these families, in addition to other information, such as the educational background, the social situation and the number of family members. The information on the families that participated in the survey was obtained through field visits to families and interviews with family members, as well as discussions with several governmental and non-governmental organizations.
2. There was a high level of support for the project from local authorities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Community Police in Baghdad and the governorates, as well as the Directorate for Women's Empowerment in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. The Directorate and other government agencies attended or hosted meetings with women.
3. Women leaders gained the necessary confidence, and were given the opportunity and encouragement, to talk about their needs and the needs of their families and communities.
4. Participating women began to identify the problems of other women, share information, and their desire to participate exceeded the expectations of the IF team. Confidence was built gradually over a series of meetings, and eventually women became more open in discussing their problems and needs.

5. The degree of confidence built up through this process was confirmed when some women expressed their wish to nominate themselves and nominate their female colleagues to be leaders and ambassadors for their communities and engage with local authorities.

Indicators:

IF used the following indicators to assess the effectiveness of the project:

1. Cooperation of families in giving information.
2. Cooperation of governmental (national and local) and non-governmental bodies in providing us with information.
3. The desire of local authorities to cooperate especially in projects related to women.
4. Attendance of women at meetings regularly.
5. Support of family members for women to participate in the project.
6. Urging local authorities to participate in the project.
7. The desire of women to lead and express themselves and present the reality of society.
8. The variety of related topics presented by women.

Success Factors:

The following factors aided in the success of the project:

1. The small number of international organizations that conduct surveys in such areas made the stakeholders trust more receptive to the project and increased its credibility.
2. The need of families and Women Heads of Households (WHH) for support and the response of local authorities, made them cooperate with the project effectively.
3. The importance of communication with all parties, including local and national authorities, to familiarize them with the project and to obtain support as a basis for success.
4. The lack of services and the deterioration of economic conditions in these areas encouraged women and local authorities.
5. The ability of the IF team to overcome social customs and constraints and gain the confidence of families and women to manage the dialogues.

OBJECTIVE 2

Training women leaders to become ambassadors and supporters of their communities. Women nominated themselves as leaders and received training in leadership skills and technology. Among the criteria for selecting leaders were: self-confidence, initiative,

active participation in meetings, and ability and willingness to communicate with and support women and their families.

Outputs:

1. Sixty women leaders were trained as ambassadors and champions for their issues and their communities. The training covered communication, advocacy, community outreach, and negotiation skills.
2. Sixty women leaders were also trained on technical skills, social media tools, and mechanisms to communicate with other women and with government agencies and ways to present problems to officials, find and propose solutions.
3. Social media groups were established for communication with communities and with officials, making the sixty women leaders “bridges” between their communities and local authorities.
4. Key local offices were assisted in setting up and use of social media Apps to communicate with women leaders.
5. Twenty five women-only forums were held under the guidance of women leaders, with the participation of 500 women.
6. Leaders also held 300 individual, private meetings with community women and families.

Results and Outcomes:

The following are some of the outcomes as a result of the project's activities:

1. Before the start of the training, IF prepared a questionnaire before and after the training to find out the preliminary knowledge base of the trainees and also to measure the extent of the trainees' benefit from the training. A positive increase in knowledge and capability was observed.
2. After the training, women leaders were able to communicate with officials with confidence, to articulate the problems of women and the problems of their communities, and to advocate for remedies.
3. Women leaders were able to use the technical applications they were trained on during the technical training to convey problems and needs of their communities, through the establishment of groups on Viber and Whatsapp. In each location there were two groups, the first among leading women and IF team where it was devoted to discuss and address the problems that they and their communities face, and the other

between women leaders, IF team and local officials to deliver these problems directly to officials.

4. Officials were responsive in their efforts to provide solutions and interacted constructively with women leaders.

5. Women leaders gained confidence and won the trust of families and their communities by holding mini-meetings in their homes and the homes of local families to gather information and communicate with their female counterparts, advising them and directing families to service providers according to each family's needs.

6. Through women's forums held in each region, women leaders managed to maintain communication between women and women leaders, helping them to identify pressing issues. Women leaders were able to bring these issues to the attention of officials in the relevant departments.

Indicators:

IF used the following indicators to assess the effectiveness of the project

1. Women were willing to learn, and demonstrated commitment to training and meetings.
2. Women persevered in attending women's forums despite the lack of financial incentives and despite their difficult family conditions, both economic and social.
3. Women were able to host small meetings with families in homes, despite their lack of knowledge of the work of civil society organizations, in addition to traditions and customs that vary from region to region.

Success Factors:

The following factors aided in the success of the project:

1. Multiple problems in the regions and lack of services require intervention.
2. The difficult economic conditions experienced in the liberated areas in general increased the need for forums with officials.
3. Lack of performance of local governments due to weak financial allocations, lack of technological tools, and inadequate interaction with the community.
4. Lack of communication between women and local government institutions, either for fear or lack of confidence.

OBJECTIVE 3

Women Leaders communicate effectively with local authorities and serve as ambassadors for their communities.

Outputs:

1. Sixty women leaders worked with local authorities and service providers on behalf of their communities.
2. Five roundtable meetings were held in each region, bringing together women leaders, local agencies and non-governmental organizations with a total of 25 roundtables. A total of 148 people attended those meetings; Community Police units participated actively.
3. Five targeted “hearings” were held in each region, between women leaders, relevant officials, and service providers, to address specific problems prioritized by the community, with a total of 25 hearings. (See Priority Issues Appendix)
4. The ability of local government authorities to improve their communication with the community.
5. Establishing a clearing house for information via the applications of Facebook and Whatsapp, which link women leaders with decision-makers and service providers.

Results and Outcome:

The following are some of the outcomes resulting from the project’s activities:

1. High attendance and response of local decision makers and representatives of local agencies to the roundtables; they provided solutions for some of the problems posed by women. (See Success Stories Attachment and Priorities List Attachment)
2. Women leaders were confident enough to manage the roundtables and to raise many of the problems that were raised during the women's forums. Local authorities were very responsive to women being ambassadors and advocates for their communities.
3. Local officials engaged constructively with women at the specialized hearings in the offices and headquarters of local authorities and service providers, listened to community problems posed by women leaders and provided solutions or promised to find solutions.
4. The ability of women leaders to track progress achieved through their communication with local authorities.

5. Representatives of local authorities, international organizations and non-governmental organizations were able to present their work and plans for the purpose of benefiting women leaders and transferring this information to their communities.

6. Local authorities were able to develop a mechanism of communication between them and the public through the work of the technical expert and his meetings with the local authorities. The mechanisms that were identified:

- In regard to reviewing the families' cases for the purpose of completing their official documents, the residents of each area are assigned to official working days to reduce crowding and waiting queues.
- Creating a Facebook page that includes leaders and local officials, and urging families to publish their problems and demands first hand, with an administrative presence managed by the women leaders in each region in addition to the support of the technical expert.
- Most of the officials did not have knowledge about the importance of having a Facebook page to communicate with the public.

7. Women leaders were able to benefit from the presence of international organizations and get some assistance such as chairs for people with special needs.

8. Under the sponsorship of the Directorate of Women's Affairs in the office of the Prime Minister, IF organized a successful meeting of women leaders with senior representatives of ministries in Baghdad, in which women leaders expressed community needs and challenges to stabilization, and officials established mechanisms for communication with the women.

Indicators:

IF used the following indicators to assess the effectiveness of the project:

1. Responsiveness of officials and local authorities to attend roundtables meetings.
2. The ability of women leaders to present problems in a specific, clear and professional manner.
3. Successful use of social media technology for communication among women, families, and officials
4. Response of local authorities and service providers to immediate problems and their ability and willingness to solve them first hand.

Success Factors:

The following factors aided in the success of the project:

1. Lack of a mechanism for communication between local authorities and families in the targeted areas created an urgent need for communication tools and mechanisms.
2. The ability of women to deliver problems to stakeholders in record time and in a technical way.

Examples of success stories:

The communication and interaction between women leaders and local officials, the ability of women to convey the needs of the community, and responsiveness of local officials, resulted in numerous achievements for the communities. As examples only:

1. The school of Maysaloun, one of the schools in the city of Ramadi- Al Malaab, was destroyed and its teaching staff and students suffered from the lack of school premises and frequent movement between temporary locations. This problem was raised at one of the roundtable meetings. A Provincial Council member of Al Anbar governorate adopted this case and helped by providing and equipping a caravan to replace the destroyed school.
2. Based on a complaint from the women leaders of the Qayyara – Al-Jadah area regarding the closure of the health center in the area from time to time, it turned out that the medical staff at the center were not committed to the official working hours. The health director of the district transferred the delinquent medical staff from the center out of the area and replaced them with new cadres. As a result, the health center operates daily and 24 hour per day.
3. Three of the women leader from Salaheddin province who participated in the workshops received job opportunities at the Ministry of Interior as inspectors after the visit of the police chief in Salaheddin Governorate. He stressed the necessity of cooperation and promised to provide support to the returning women and their dependents by opening the door to applications to the community police. He asked IF to inform the participating women to apply. After they applied, three female participants in the project were accepted into the police as inspectors.

Priority needs expressed by women:

1. Economic empowerment of women by training them in income generating professions.
2. Involvement of women in other programs, in order to develop their leadership skills.

3. Literacy programs, as some women in the communities were illiterate or semi-literate, and women attending the seminars expressed their great need for such programs.
4. Provision of better health services for the community, access to health care and availability of affordable medication.
5. Assistance to enable individuals and families obtain personal documentation to replace documents lost as a result of conflict and displacement.

Challenges faced by women leaders and NGOs:

1. The security situation is still unstable in the liberated areas.
2. Customs and traditions which have a negative impact on the participation of women in the programs and projects being implemented by the organizations, which can affect the work of the organizations.
3. The difficulty of communication with some government offices, because of the routine and bureaucracy prevailing in dealing with them.
4. Harassment or abuse of women by some government agencies or service providers working in international organizations.
5. Communication between local and international organizations is limited, and this is what we have noticed during our work, despite the keenness of IF to communicate with the largest number of organizations in the areas where the project was implemented.
6. There is no sharing of information and activities and information between local and international organizations, or between international organizations and local authorities.
7. Lack of a culture of partnership and networking between organizations, both local and international, despite the benefits that organizations may gain from such participation.
8. The selection of international organizations for specific local organizations that are nominated by government agencies, while there must be strict criteria for selection.

Observations through internal monitoring:

The observations below were gleaned during site visits by the IF Iraq country manager, following discussions with beneficiaries and local officials.

Observations regarding women:

1. Women were willing to discuss the challenges they and their families encountered, and the specific issues that needed to be addressed.
2. The trained women ambassadors were articulate, confident, and eager to represent their communities; in each location there were women who were outstanding advocates and very active.
3. Many officials were supportive of and responsive to the women leaders.
4. Women who acquire education, training and empowerment are able to effect change.

Observations regarding communities:

1. The families suffer from severe economic challenges.
2. Psychiatric and health problems are prevalent in the communities.
3. Some houses are demolished, and local authorities are unable to reconstruct them.
4. Families who stayed in their houses during the occupation of ISIS, suffer from security problems. Some are suspected of supporting ISIS, and this creates tensions within the community.
5. The residency of some families in public schools and houses under construction presents logistical and social challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Involve women in courses in various activities, even outside the governorate, in order to develop women's social, health, and cultural awareness and to look more closely in the field of civil society.
2. Support the women's leadership groups formed and developed by the project to ensure continuity of work. Women have shown themselves to be capable and motivated leaders and spokespersons. Expand the development of women leaders to other regions of return.
3. Invest in the role of women leaders in the processes of peaceful coexistence, political participation, and community organizing.
4. The need to develop economic projects for Women Heads of Households (WHH) through vocational training and micro-finance.
5. The need to establish legal clinics for women managed by the government, and under the supervision of civil society organizations specialized in this area.
6. Activating laws that will protect the family as a way to reduce the phenomenon of marriage outside the court because it is one of the reasons for the disintegration of the family unit.
7. Activating the role of community policing in the governorates.