

III. Experienced and perceived challenges facing female candidates and proposed solutions

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 political and other tensions 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 especially as candidates for elected public office, 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. Political parties also have a long history of not providing sufficient support, networks or resources to women candidates or women in public elected office. Women are inadequately represented in decision-making in most political parties and 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 and real commitment to advance women's political participation;

Personal ideology and psychological challenges: from early childhood, Iraqi women adopt perceptions that they are not equal to men. This indoctrination continues even among educated professionals. Accordingly, women refrain from running for office in the misplaced 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, in formulating policies, developing strategies, networking, connecting with the electorate, and other requirements of successful candidacy for public office.

A. Political 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 (Ninewa 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 have called for greater government transparency and implementation of governmental priorities that meet the aspirations of the Iraqi people (Baghdad PC member). Political blocs have leveraged their power and funds to broaden their support base. Women perceive the lack of services and corruption as obstacles to their political participation and are therefore reluctant to run as candidates (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 women's 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 (Baghdad), and a female candidate's loyalty is enforced, so they cannot leave their bloc (Salaheddin).

3. 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 capacity-building courses (Baghdad);
- Raise awareness to create the right election culture (Ninewa);
- 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 (Ninewa);
- Promote women's rights in political issues (Najaf);
- Parties need to clarify their policies so that women are persuaded to participate (Baghdad).

4. 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).

5. Mechanisms suggested by focus groups

- Changing the electoral law to reduce the dominance of political parties;
- 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.

6. 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 Ninewa, women MPs cited strong political support from their respective parties.

B. Socio-cultural constraints

1. Constraints expressed by women candidates

a. Discriminatory norms and traditions in society

- Patriarchal traditions (especially those deriving from tribal culture) disproportionately affect women 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 are not supportive of women's leadership and work with marginalized women to 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 Ninewa 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 leadership 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 norms and values associated with masculinity.

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 provide access to education for all;
- Female MPs should explore all their creative and intellectual power;
- Educate parents on the negative implications of 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. Community education is important to promote an understanding that appearances in public and in the media do not mean abandoning acceptable social norms.

C. Structural and bureaucratic barriers

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;
- 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 MPs and PC members for overcoming the barriers

- 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.

4. 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.

5. Importance of structural and bureaucratic barriers for women candidates

This challenge proved to be major for 30 per cent of respondents, especially in Ninewa, 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".

D. 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.

E. 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: Ninewa 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 Ninewa 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 Ninewa said: "I did not suffer from my family, but from the Al-Qaeda

terrorist groups through their phone calls". A Ninewa 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.

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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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 Ninewa 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".

F. Lack of preparation and training for new entrants

1. Constraints expressed by women candidates

Iraq is going through a new experience in democracy, according to many PC members. Most of Iraqi politicians, both men and women, lack the necessary political and legal knowledge.

a. First time experience for women

For the first time in Iraq, a country 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 Ninewa states: "I had no challenge about political awareness because I went through the political process as a Ninewa 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.

G. 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 Ninewa 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 Ninewa 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.

H. Additional constraints cited by 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:

- a. In public perception, politicians embody lies and theft;
- b. 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;
- c. 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. Needs of PC members

1. On the mindset of political candidates

- a. Be wise, patient and cautious in dealing with politicians as they are usually the first target of defamation and bullying.;
- 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, Ninewa Parliamentarian).

2. On the preparation for the endeavour

- a. Develop a correct, detailed and well-planned action plan for the nomination phase (Ninewa 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).

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

The women's caucus bringing together Iraqi women parliamentarians was supportive for two parliamentarians from Ninewa and Baghdad;

Degrees or other academic achievements were also a supportive factor for several parliamentarians from Baghdad.

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 Ninewa 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 (Ninewa).

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 Ninewa. 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 Ninewa

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 Ninewa 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. Identified needs by female candidates to support their entry into politics

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.

B. Additional needs expressed by PC members

Several candidates added needs they wanted included. Relating those needs to the research

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

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 parliamentary 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.

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:

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

- 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. Policy responses 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			
		Local authorities	International agencies	Men	Women
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			
		Local authorities	International agencies	Men	Women
Economy	Introduce her to the private sector and employers for financial support for her campaign			X	X
	Introduce unified advocacy for all candidates	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		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. General 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. Creating 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, judicial 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.

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;
- 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.

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 Ninewa 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 Ninewa 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 Ninewa 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 Ninewa in particular, I love my countrymen and I love to serve, I work for a better tomorrow, I left a big footprint in Ninewa 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 per cent 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.



