

A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN IRAQ

A BASELINE ASSESSMENT
CONDUCTED BY AIDA KAISY



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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMC	Communications and Media Commission
COMSEC	Council of Ministers Secretariat
CPA	Coalition Provision Authority
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CSO	Civil society organisation
DCVAW	Department for Combatting Violence Against Women
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMN	Iraqi Media Network
IWJF	International Women Journalist's Forum
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KRI	Kurdish Region in Iraq
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRT	Nalia Radio and Television
PAO	Public Aid Organisation
PFO	Peace and Freedom Organisation
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontieres
SGBV	Sexual and gender based violence
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WEO	Women's Empowerment Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is an overarching sense of pessimism that pervades public attitudes in Iraq. This stems from years of living in conflict, war, poverty alongside chronic unemployment and failing public services. This sense of hopelessness defines much of the debates and discussions about Iraq and any future prospects for gender equality and change.

There is a strong agreement amongst stakeholders that the media environment is highly politicised and that this is a hindrance to providing content that might support equality and human rights. Media are strongly affiliated to their funders and political parties, who are seen as highly corrupt and unethical. As such, media content and narratives are viewed as unrepresentative of the needs of the people. Media stakeholders felt constrained and restricted within this environment.

Audiences are turning away from mainstream media for their news provision in favour of social media. Traditional media channels are consumed mainly for entertainment purposes and programming. Audience consumption of entertainment programming has increased as a result of pessimism and the lack of positive stories coming out of Iraq.

Tradition and religion is seen to be playing a huge role in defining public attitudes towards women in the media. A career in the media is considered to be unacceptable for women with working late hours, travel and contact with men voiced as the key reasons. Audience reactions to the representation of women on screen was also informed by more traditional perceptions of the female role.

Male audiences outside of the two main cities, Erbil and Baghdad, demonstrated a greater propensity for sexist attitudes towards women and were less likely to perceive women in the media positively. This was further heightened with men in older age groups holding more negative views about women in the workplace.

There is an acute lack of ethics and professionalism in the Iraqi media. In the extremely unstable environment that is Iraq, the way that the public and media stakeholders respond to this is highly gendered. Women and men both attribute masculinised norms to women in the media. Women journal-

ists suggested acting as men was necessary in order to maintain their jobs and progress their careers.

The harassment of women journalists is evident in the workplace and online. Female journalists are subject to sexual harassment from their line managers with no genuine legislative redress on which to fall back. Shame and honour were cited as reasons for an overwhelming silence on issues of harassment in the workplace.

There is a clear lack of support at an organisational level within media organisations for women in the media. Maternity policies are few and far between and life insurance policies are non-existent. There are very limited policies to ensure that women are protected or indeed encouraged to enter into the media.

Iraqi audiences, in particular women, feel unrepresented by their media. They want to see and hear the voices of ordinary Iraqi women relaying their lived experiences in order to find solutions to everyday challenges and problems. At the same time, they bemoaned the lack of expertise from female experts and sources.





INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, Internews has been actively engaged in the delivery of a number of projects intended to improve gender representation and the rights of women journalists in the Iraqi media landscape. Project activities have focused on a number of areas, from digital and physical security to capacity building within NGOs and CSOs. This work stems from an Internews global strategic objective to improve and enhance the diverse voices of women in the media as well as advance women's leadership role and representation within media organisations themselves. All of these projects maintain a strong focus on fighting and preventing sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) through the media.

There are a number of external factors that have impacted on the condition of women and girls in Iraq. Iraq has experienced decades of violence and conflict, ranging from external interventions, state-sponsored violence, radicalisation to, more recently, organised criminal networks. These are emerging in a country that is dealing with the failure of the state to provide and protect its citizens. In these conditions, Iraqi women and girls have experienced war, conflict, ethno-sectarian violence, and have been forced to find ways to negotiate the terrain of conflict and post-conflict in a society where corruption is endemic at all levels. Most have had to deal with death threats,

kidnapping, torture and gender-based violence, either directly towards themselves or through a member of their family and friendship circles. It is within such unstable and fractious situations that gendered responses proliferate and become even more problematic.

This environment is further affected by a revivification of Iraq's historical social reliance on the moral codes and beliefs of a traditional honour-based society. Traditional beliefs and practices dominate the public sphere in Iraq and are often rooted in patriarchal notions of the male as breadwinner and head of the household. More recently, there has been a negative shift in perceptions towards women who work outside of the home, particularly at night, or in roles that require travel away from their families and communities. They are often viewed disparagingly and more women and girls are being actively discouraged from further education and economic independence.¹

There have been some nominal attempts at developing state policies and institutions that support women and gender equality in Iraq. The Iraqi constitution's Article 14 enshrines gender equality in the law. The Constitution also prohibits the trafficking of women and children. Iraq's election law dictates that the Iraqi Parliament, or Council of Representatives, should be made up of a quota of 25 per cent female

¹ <https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-girls-education-in-iraq/>; <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/5/supporting-girls--education-in-iraq>; https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/UNICEF_Iraq_in_Action_Education.pdf (Accessed on 6th October 2019)

“ Wars ... can revive the ‘old-fashioned’ ways. Wars can make uncivilised relationships between men and women seem reasonable. ”

*Nomo’s War, Emma’s War*²

members. However, the Constitution also permits religious groups to preside over systems and policies that govern such areas as marriage, divorce, children and gender-based violence (GBV).³ A Ministry of Women’s Affairs was created in June 2004 but it does not have an annual budget and has a very small number of staff. The Higher Council of Women’s Affairs in the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI) plays a stronger role in enhancing women’s rights in the Kurdish region but is still limited to some extent by political affiliations, finances and public attitudes. The KRI has also promulgated a number of laws to protect women against domestic violence, developed a National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and increased its quota of women in parliament to 30 per cent representation.⁴ Although Iraq ratified the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986, it has yet to develop legislation reflective of this and continues to be guided by Sharia law and Islamic codes. As it stands, women’s rights-focused CSOs across Iraq are the main instigators of activity to advance gender equality in Iraq.

It is within this general environment that the Internews project, *Aswatouna*, is planning and enabling activities to improve the role that the media is playing in the development of women’s rights, gender equality and political participation in Iraq. *Aswatouna* is a 36-month project aimed at “empowering women to participate equally as citizens and decision-makers by strengthening and expanding women’s voices in Iraq.”⁵

The project’s focus is on capacity-building with journalists and CSOs in order that they are better equipped to produce high quality content that is gender-sensitive and addresses women’s rights and gender equality. It also aims to amplify and increase women’s voices in the media and build leadership opportunities while also providing greater platform and information in order that Iraqi women can better participate in political and economic processes.

This report sets out to provide a baseline study and perspective from which to evaluate the impact of this project as well as develop a set of recommendations for project activities by assessing the following areas:

- How Iraqi women and men are currently accessing and consuming information.
- The extent to which Iraqi women are playing a role in the dissemination of content.
- The obstacles and challenges to equal access and participation of women in the media and in political and economic processes in Iraq.

This baseline study will help to identify key areas for focus and activities for the project, allowing the project to develop a more nuanced set of guidelines and policies based on a piece of independent empirically-informed research. It will also provide Internews with the opportunity to study the impact of the project over the duration of the project’s lifecycle by providing a base from which to evaluate change at the end of the project’s 3-year span. An end of project evaluation is planned in 2022 using the findings from this report to inform a research methodology for the final evaluation.

Following an explanation of the overall context for media and gender in Iraq, this paper will then move to a stand-alone section analysing the baseline from the perspective of the media and other key stakeholders from an institutional perspective, followed by a second stand-alone section analysing the baseline from the Iraqi audience’s perspective. Conclusions and recommendations will then be developed from both of the sections in order to inform policy-makers as well as *Aswatouna*’s project activities and beneficiaries.

² Enloe, Cynthia. 2010. *Nomo’s War, Emma’s War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*. University of California Press: California. pg. 53.

³ This law is known as the Personal Status Law and has provoked controversy for many years, in particular as a number of updates have seen it less supportive of women’s rights. For further information see the following: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/67347/1/WPSIraq.pdf>; <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/2175>; <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/5775/> (Accessed 6th October 2019)

⁴ A copy of the law can be found here: http://www.ekrg.org/files/pdf/strategy_combat%20violence_against_women_English.pdf (Accessed 27th October 2019)

⁵ Taken from available project documentation



CONTEXT

The media landscape, politics and gender in Iraq

The Iraqi media landscape continues to be defined by the key concerns that have afflicted the country over the last century. Conflict, violence, internal battles for power, geopolitics and corruption have all played a role in defining it. The Coalition Provision Authority's (CPA) exercise in developing pluralism across the media landscape after

the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 failed to take into account the subtleties and dynamics of Iraqi socio-political history and context. As such, the media landscape now reflects the political narratives of the state and key political actors and provides a tool for control and, at times, violence.

The CPA's work in establishing a functioning media system for Iraq saw the development of a public broadcaster, the

Iraqi Media Network (IMN), and a regulatory body for the broadcast media, the Commission for Media and Communications (CMC). The IMN's flagship channel, *Al-Iraqiya*, is still amongst the most watched channels in Arabic-speaking Iraq. Created in the blueprint of the BBC model of public service broadcasting, the IMN is governed by a Board of Trustees, one-third of which is legislated to be female. At the time of writing, however, there was only one female trustee on the board of the IMN. The advent of the CMC in 2004 saw the development of a large number of television stations across Iraq. The lack of commercial revenue and advertising markets, however, combined with flawed legislation sees these private channels mainly financed and operated by key political players and political businessmen or with external funding from countries with a vested interest in Iraqi politics and policy-making. Media ownership in the KRI is equally partisan with a large number of satellite channels mainly financed and controlled either directly or indirectly by the two largest parties in the KRI, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) from Erbil or the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) based in Sulaimaniyah. In some cases, women have taken senior roles within media outlets, for example *NRT Arabic*, a Kurdish-owned television station, and on the print side, *Al-Mada* newspaper, but these roles tend to be overshadowed by the outlets' political and financial affiliations.

The politicised nature of the Iraqi media landscape and its close association with key actors in government and politics both inside and outside Iraq have provoked a clampdown on a number of media outlets and journalists over the years. Until recently, political and media narratives were mostly defined by the ethno-sectarian projects of the state. During this period *Al-Shariqya* and *Al-Bagdadiya* stations, both associated more closely with a Sunni narrative at the time, had their domestic broadcast licenses suspended. *Al-Arabiya* has also come under scrutiny and threat. At the time of writing, the Iraqi government via the CMC has closed the offices of *Al-Hurra* Iraq, the Voice of America backed channel, and suspended their license after a report alleging corruption within Iraq's religious endowments was broadcast.

This crackdown on the media and freedom of expression has been further exacerbated with the rising influence of non-state actors on the political scene, such as ISIS or paramilitary groups across Iraq. Threats to journalists are on the increase and their origins are often nebulous and unclear. Online or cyber harassment of journalists is reported with alarming regularity. On September 6th 2019, Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) reported on accusations against 12 key media figures

and human rights defenders of attempting to “normalise relations with Israel” and threats towards their physical safety. Three of them were women and one a senior journalist at Al Shariqya TV.⁶ The more famous case of Afrah Shawqi—a journalist with the London-based *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspaper who was kidnapped from her home in Baghdad in December 2016 after publishing a report criticising militia-led violence—highlights the plight of women journalists in this milieu.

While television remains the most consumed platform in terms of legacy media, more recently social media has been playing a much greater role in the Iraqi public sphere and is also being used a tool for the intimidation and harassment of women. This was clearly evident in the 2018 national elections in Iraq. Online campaigns to discredit female candidates included fake videos and pictures of the women engaged in sexual acts in an effort to shame them and their families. These videos were condemned by women's rights advocates and CSOs including Hanna Edwar of *Al-Amal Association* who objected to the gendered nature of these political attacks.⁷ Attacks on women culminated in a number of female social media activists, bloggers and instagrammers also being targeted and the high profile murder of Tara Fares amongst others remains resolutely in the minds of many female activists and journalists.⁸

The Iraqi Women's Journalists Forum (IWJF) has conducted a number of studies into the harassment of and violence against female journalists across Iraq. A number of cases of physical attacks against women working across the media spectrum to expose corruption and the mistreatment of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been recorded in the last year. They have also monitored a large number of cases where journalists have been discriminated against and excluded on a gender basis.⁹

All of this sets the scene in which media content is developed and created, with very few mechanisms in place to ensure that women's rights and gender equality are prioritised in media coverage and very little political, or, indeed, public will to spotlight such issues. The following report will provide some further insight into the structural conditions that are impacting on the development of content for and by women, as well as the representation of women in media. It will also seek to unravel public attitudes towards the media and its representation of gender.

⁶ <https://rsf.org/en/news/dozens-iraqi-journalists-blacklisted-social-networks> (Accessed 27th October 2019)

⁷ <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/iraqi-s-women-candidates-face-smear-campaigns-1.723263> (Accessed 27th October 2019)

⁸ https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/tara_fares (Accessed 27th October 2019)

⁹ <https://www.iwjf.info/2019/05/05/the-increase-of-discrimination-phenomenon-against-iraqi-women-journalists-on-the-basis-of-gender-and-many-of-them-were-beaten-and-threatened/> (Accessed 27th October 2019)

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

The methodology for the study was to conduct research on three interconnected workstreams in a responsive and iterative approach, with the information and understanding gained in each supporting the ongoing and developing work and informing the design of the research questions for the subsequent stream.

WORKSTREAMS

Presence

The study will begin to develop an understanding of what voice Iraqi women have in the media either as sources, through content, or as producers. It will seek to answer the following questions with regards to women's presence in the media:

- Are women excluded from the media landscape? How and why?
- What type of discourse do we hear from women about women?
- Are women heard in the same way as men?
- What ideas are being conveyed by women and for what purpose?
- Who are the women that we do hear?

Production

Structures, practices and hierarchies within the media industry in Iraq will be examined in order to assess and identify gaps and needs at a practice-based level in order to increase the capacity of journalists and CSOs to produce gender-sensitive reports and address women's issues. Research questions will include the following:

- Who is producing content and what does this mean about how women are being represented?
- Who narrates for which audience and what purpose? How is the narration being done and what are the consequences?
- How are female audiences conceived by media stakeholders?
- What opportunities are available for women in the media in Iraq?
- Who are the gatekeepers of information within media institutions? At a policy level?
- How are women as primary sources selected? How are women included as subjects of stories?

Consumption

The study will explore how women and men are accessing information and any inequality or barriers to equal access. Research questions will include the following:

- Who is producing content and what does this mean about how women are being represented?
- Who narrates for which audience and what purpose? How is the narration being done and what are the consequences?
- How are female audiences conceived by media stakeholders?
- What opportunities are available for women in the media in Iraq?
- Who are the gatekeepers of information within media institutions? At a policy level?
- How are women as primary sources selected? How are women included as subjects of stories?



DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Desk research

This provided an initial understanding of context through an assessment of available quantitative, qualitative, academic and policy related research pertaining to the socio-political context of the country, gender related initiatives, relevant audience studies and needs assessments. This also included some content analysis of media to build an understanding of gender-sensitivity in the media of Iraq.

In-depth structured and semi-structured interviews

The research mapped and identified key informants and stakeholders across the media, policy and CSO landscape in Iraq. Interviews were conducted face-to-face as well as remotely (via Skype or WhatsApp) and allowed the project to develop analysis and recommendations on media production practices and gender issues in Iraqi newsrooms.

Focus groups

Audience research took the form of focus group research conducted across Iraq in order to provide current data on media consumption and information access by women and men. The research focus on media consumption habits gave the project some further insight into the media and content needs of Iraqi citizens through a gender lens.

ACADEMIC SOURCES

This report draws on a number of seminal academic sources on gender and media in Iraq. These include the books and articles referenced below, written by the following people and organisations:

Nadia Al-Ali, formerly professor of gender studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London now at Brown University as the Robert Family Professor of International Studies and Professor of Anthropology and Middle East Studies. Al-Ali has written on feminist activism in the Middle East, in particular Iraq, as well as questions of gender in relation to war, conflict and reconstruction. Her publications include *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (Zed Books:2007); *What kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (with Nicola Pratt, University of California Press: 2009) and a co-edited book with Deborah al-Najjar entitled *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics & Politics in a Time of War*. Her more recent research and publications focus on the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and the Kurdish women's movement. Al-Ali's focus on the importance of intersectionality¹⁰ in understanding the gender relations in Iraq will provide a nuanced framework from which to develop the analysis and recommendations for this study.

Zahra Ali, assistant professor at Rutgers University, focuses her research on analysing the political and social status of women in Iraq. Her recently published book, *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation* (Cambridge University Press: 2018) is an ethnographical and historical study of Iraqi women and their loss of social and political rights since 2003 as a result of the power vacuum that developed after the fall of the Baathist regime. Ali's very rigorous mapping of the gender-based landscape for CSOs in Iraq will provide an excellent basis from which to understand current initiatives and projects to improve gender equality in Iraq.

Cynthia Enloe is a feminist writer, theorist and academic who focuses on gender and militarism. Her seminal work, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, introduces the concept of and dichotomy between perceptions of the masculine West and the feminine East in particularly in relation to colonial and post-colonial societies and the emergence of feminist movements within them. Her more recent book, *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*, captures the impact of that war in Iraq has had the lives of both Iraqi and American women who were affected by the US invasion in 2003.

Zeynep Kaya is a Research Fellow at the London School of Economics Conflict Research Programme and is leading

a project on gendered drivers of conflict in Iraq. Her 2017 paper 'Gender Equality and the Quest for Statehood in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq' (London Middle East Centre Paper Series: 18) examines legislative and constitutional frameworks and argues that that the Kurdistan Region's policies of gender equality are linked to its dependence on multilateral organisations and Western states, as well as its government's aspiration to gain international legitimacy for statehood. Kaya's on-going work involves multi-stakeholder liaison and research on gender norms and aspects of socio-political life in Iraq.

The research study will also refer to a number of global indexes such as UNDP's Gender Inequality Index, in particular aspects related to empowerment and labour market participation and the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) and its categories such as family code, civil liberties and physical integrity. Referencing these indices will provide some direction for the study to analyse areas such as education, economic empowerment, labour opportunities, political voice, and supportive laws and institutions. It will also refer to UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media (2010) as a basis for the more specific assessment of gender equality in media practice, both organizational and individual, and media content.

The author of this report will also refer to her own recent work on media in Iraq which include a report produced in April 2019 for the London School of Economics DFID-funded Conflict Research Programme entitled "A Fragmented Landscape: Barriers to Independent Media in Iraq" as well as her doctoral work on the Iraqi media and a chapter on media in Mosul as part of a collection entitled *Media in Disaster Zones*, edited by Dr. Jamie Matthews and Dr. Einar Thorsen and due to be published by Springer in 2020. The recommendations in this report will draw by the empirical field work that the report author has undertaken specifically for this assignment.

It should be noted that rather than adopting a crude or formulaic answer to the challenges of gender representation in the Iraqi media, this report draws on the lived experiences of women media practitioners in Iraq and references these in relation to the wider national context.

¹⁰ Intersectionality refers to an analytical framework that attempts to identify how interlocking systems of power around, inter alia, gender, class, and race, impact those who are most marginalized in society.

SECTION 1

Baseline analysis of the media stakeholders' perspective on gender in the media

The following section describes findings from a series of interviews that were carried out with key media actors as well as CSO and political stakeholders who are active in policy-making and informing the Iraqi public sphere. The objective of the study was to uncover the structural and practical conditions that are impacting on media production and gender issues in Iraqi newsrooms. The study was a qualitative execution that was carried out in Baghdad and Erbil. Participants were chosen according to their involvement in the media and women's rights related industries.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching research question guiding this study was: How are Iraqi women and men accessing and consuming information and what role do gendered aspects of the news production and consumption cycles play in supporting or hindering this access?

Questions guiding this section of the study focused on the institutional nature of the participants in this stakeholder group. The aim was to gather an overall analysis of the group's viewpoint in relation to the following sub-questions:

- How do the institutional stakeholders view the role of women in the media in Iraq?
- How are media outlets supporting and promoting women staff to assume leadership roles?
- Are media outlets producing gender-sensitive content and what are the internal and external challenges to doing this?
- What are the opportunities for development of gender-sensitive content and the advancement of women's rights through the media?
- What are the risks for women to participate in media, and how are these being mitigated?

This section of the research analysis was conducted in tandem with the evaluation of the audience's perspective in order to identify areas where the two perspectives may or may not have common ground.

STAKEHOLDERS AND METHODOLOGY

The following section describes findings from a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews as well as some more informal meetings that were conducted with editors, managers, publishers, journalist and presenters from across the media landscape in Iraq. Interviews also took place with representatives from a number of women's rights-focused CSOs in Baghdad and Erbil and members of the political sphere who are involved in the advancement of women's issues and gender equality in Iraq. The interviews mainly took place in Erbil and Baghdad in June 2019. Some supplementary interviews were conducted over the phone in July 2019. Stakeholders from the following media outlets were interviewed: *Al Ghad* Radio, *Al-Hurra*, *Al-Iraqiya*, *Al-Mada*, *Al-Shariqya*, *Al-Sabah*, Asia Channel, *Biladi*, Iraqi Media Network, Monte Carlo Radio, *Nas News*, *NRT* Kurdish and Arabic, *Rudaw*. Stakeholders from the following CSO and NGO organisations were also interviewed: *Al Amal Association*, *Burj Babel*, EMMA, Iraqi Women Journalists Forum, Public Aid Organisation (PAO), Women's Economic Empowerment (WEO), and UNICEF. Policy-makers from the following governmental departments were also included: General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women (DCVAW) at the Ministry of the Interior in the KRI, Higher Council for Women's Affairs in KRI, Women's Affairs Committee, and the Council of Ministers Secretariat, COMSEC. In addition, academics from media and gender studies sections of the following universities were interviewed: Baghdad University, Nahrain University, Salahuddin University.

All of the stakeholders were chosen because they had a range of expertise in the media, policy-making, or women's rights and because they were considered to have the authority and influence to make a significant change to the media's practices and, ultimately, its content. Stakeholders were therefore selected based on their profile, longevity in the Iraqi media scene and reputation amongst the media community. The names were validated by other senior media stakeholders and figures who were interviewed. The stakeholders were mainly all representative of the traditional media sectors of print/online and broadcast as these remain the largest employees in the media sector and also the most likely to impact on policy and decision-makers.

PERSPECTIVES FROM WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

“Iraq is a tribal society. Some women cannot and do not have the strength to fight against this.”

Senior journalist, female, public media, Bagdad

“In Iraq they don't like successful people, especially women, so they find a way to bring them down.”

Senior journalist, female, public media, Bagdad

“There is also a problem with (women on) the street as they don't accept women in senior positions—and neither do their husbands.”

Journalist, activist and women's rights defender, female, Bagdad

“The problem exists at the individual level as well as at the institutional and educational levels.”

Senior editor, female, public media, Bagdad

“We need a societal change which is like digging a hole with a needle.”

Senior journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

“My bosses say to me, ‘You are a woman. What is your involvement with this issue?’ when it comes to covering something such as a parliamentary debate for example.”

Senior journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to understand the current environment and condition of the media, women's rights and gender coverage in Iraq, a deeper engagement with its socio-political and economic history is imperative. The impact of war, dictatorship, and inhumanity, combined with state policies that were designed to ensure that those in power maintained control, have shaped both the political field within which gender relations are defined and performed as well as the contemporary media landscape. For Zahra Ali, the effect of the sanction period in Iraq in the 1990s "corresponded to a period of social, political and economic brutalization of Iraqi society ... (and) redefined women's lives and gender norms and practices".¹¹ UN sanctions had a disparate effect on women and children in particular as a weak economy forced women out of the workplace in an attempt to provide employment for men. Women retreated to focus on their more traditional roles as wives and mothers and illiteracy increased amongst girls as families had to make choices about sending children to school. This view was confirmed by the stakeholders, many of whom also traced back the issues with the advancement of women's rights in Iraq to decades ago.

"The negative impact on gender relations began with Saddam Hussain who pushed women to have children and discouraged them from further education whilst all the time painting a picture that he was a feminist"

—Senior editor, female, public media, Bagdad

This condition was further perpetuated after the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. Not only is this period defined by war and ethno-sectarian violence, which impacted on the lives of women and men alike, it also saw the development of the state policies which currently govern Iraq and have obstructed the natural progress of Iraqi society. The creation of a Constitutional decree which defines the Iraq political system on the basis of ethno-sectarian appointments and the muhasasa system, Iraq's political quota system which sees public institutions and ministries also allocated on a sectarian basis, plus the ensuing period of sectarian conflict cemented the patriarchal nature of Iraq. Cynthia Enloe writes, "In the political vacuum created by the fall of the Baathist regime, new Sunni and Shiite insurgent groups mobilized and wielded violence. Each was masculinised in its social agenda, its membership, and its leadership".¹² The period of lawlessness and lack of coherent governance and weakness of the state which followed allowed for the growth of a more traditional influence on the social and political norms by which Iraq was governed.

Tribes in Iraq, as well as being defined by religion, sect and ethnicity, are also deeply rooted in the preservation of family and honour. Not only are women and girls often used as "compensation for injury or death"¹³, they are also subjected to the gender dynamics of male-dominated tribes. The effect this has on the way that women are perceived in Iraqi society is all too evident, according to the stakeholders. Women across the board felt that they are targeted based on their gender as society turns against them and their career successes.

"I am always worried someone will come by and make me fall"

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

This pressure comes not only from men but also from women as patriarchal attitudes become cemented into everyday attitudes and conventions. These attitudes become a means by which to apportion blame for the economic and social challenges that Iraqi people are facing. It is not uncommon for elites and governments to engage in patriarchal rhetoric in order to maintain control and this often trickles down into everyday parlance and behaviour. In Iraq, the "patriarchal bargain" is evident as Iraqi women engage in gendered norms as a strategy to survive and even benefit in the context of male-dominated elites and power structures.¹⁴ In many of the interviews conducted, stakeholders referred to the lack of will amongst Iraqi women to give credence to career-driven women or those who choose to live in different ways from their more traditional counterparts.

"The problem exists at the individual level as well as at the institutional and educational levels"

—Senior editor, female, public media, Bagdad

These tribal codes of honour and masculine perceptions dominating the narrative around the role of women in the family versus the workplace are having a huge impact on the presence of women in the media. A career in the media is viewed negatively as women are expected to work late nights, travel away from home, and interact with men who are not close members of their families.

"We have no programmes to encourage women to enter the media as there is a stigma attached to this work"

—Women's right activist, female, Baghdad

With the lack of women working media, the possibility of changing public social attitudes is diminished. The representation of women in the media is underpinned by these social

¹¹ Ali, Zahra. 2018. *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. pg. 40.

¹² Enloe, Cynthia. 2010. *Nomo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*. University of California Press: California. pg. 35.

¹³ <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a66f84f4.pdf> (Accessed 27th October 2019)

¹⁴ Kandiyoti, Deniz. September 1988. "Bargaining with Patriarchy". *Gender and Society*. 2 (3): 274–290.

PERSPECTIVES FROM MEN IN THE MEDIA

“ Women are having to make a choice between a profession in media and marriage and a family. ”

Media owner, male, Mosul

“ The professionalization of the media is needed; then gender will follow. ”

Senior policy-maker, male, Erbil

“ One of the problems of the media in KRI is that women are not encouraged to work in the media, by their family, their tribe, society. They go out late, they need to meet with political leaders, there is a risk involved. Families can't accept this. ”

Journalist and academic, male, Erbil

“ The media is too political to be concerned with women. ”

Journalist and academic, male, Erbil

“ Media organisations are financed by political parties—so parties will not support women in media. ”

Journalist and academic, male, Erbil

“ Alia Al Nusaif and Hanan Al Fatlawi are only type of female leaders we see in the media. ”

Media owner and journalist, male, Mosul

mind-sets and gendered roles. Women need to be more present in senior roles and play a greater role in the development of content that can challenge existing stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes.

“There has been some progress in the last 25 years, particularly since the formation of the Kurdish parliament in 1992. In the 90s there were 5 or 6 women in media, now there are more but they are not decision-makers. It is an issue across Iraqi society—if there are no senior women then society becomes patriarchal. Men programme according to what they want—they are male thinkers”.
—Women’s right activist, female, Erbil

A PARTISAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Media stakeholders emphasized the absence of independence in the Iraqi media. Its partisan nature and highly politicised ownership were seen as colossal contributing factors to the lack of female representation and gendered coverage. The Iraqi media landscape is dominated by media outlets that are funded by predominantly male politicians and politically-backed businessmen. A lack of proper regulation sees the media used as pawns in a political game that is competitive and dominated by political and religious ideologies.¹⁵ According to stakeholders, this politicised media landscape is less concerned with women’s rights and gender-sensitive content as its focus is on party-political battles.

“Each party has its own media platform so to work for them you too have to be political. This leads to a lack of professionalism and lack of ethics. These people cannot cover gender”.
—Senior journalist, female, private media, Erbil

This is manifesting itself in a number of ways as the media continues to reflect the narratives and practices of the political sphere. The corruption endemic in Iraqi public institutions and everyday practices is also widely evident in the practices of the media. It is expected that journalists will receive payment to attend press conferences, for example, even those hosted by the NGO and CSO community. Women’s rights’ CSOs expressed great concern over this form of bribery and yet felt forced to engage in the practice themselves in order to ensure coverage. In fact, payment does not even guarantee that key women’s issues will be covered by the press. Economic factors were also cited as a hindrance to developing content and there was a concern that content need to be paid for in order to be produced and created while financial power lies in the hands of political actors and oligarchs.

Stakeholders also raised a further concern around the lack of desire of those in power and politics to encourage and enable good journalism for fear that their corrupt behaviours and practices would be exposed. There is little political will in Iraq to encourage independent media or voices that might be critical of the government and its supporting actors. This situation then has an impact on female journalists and media professionals who are more likely to cover the political arena from alternative perspectives.

“Partisan politicised media do not want women to have strong voices. They do not want strong journalists”.
—Senior journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

The lack of independent funding for the media also has an impact on content and representation. Weak advertising markets and a lack of commercial revenue that is not linked to parties and their affiliates provides a breeding ground for media capture in Iraq.¹⁶ Developing and producing content, in particular investigative and audio-visual content that could provide much needed critique of social norms and patriarchal attitudes in Iraq, is costly. As already noted, the lack of motivation and indeed political will to develop such content sees the media’s politicised narratives become more deeply entrenched and financing focused on producing content that repeats hegemonic patriarchal norms and patterns. As the Iraqi media continues to reflect these highly politicised narratives, women’s roles and representation in media remain unlikely to change, let alone improve.

“You cannot separate the situation for female journalists from the situation in the rest of the country”.
—Senior policy-maker, female, Erbil

The political nature and focus of the media also sees a certain type of women in power reflected in its content. Many of the stakeholders were keen to point out that senior female politicians were amongst the few powerful women seen on screen or in print/online and that this was also having an impact on societal views of the role of women in positions of power.

When the presentation of women in positions of power is dominated by those espousing political narratives, which in Iraq are often seen as abusive or derogatory towards certain sections of society or political persuasions, social attitudes towards women in power become skewed and distorted. A lack of alternative female sources and representatives in the media is a key issue in Iraq and will be explored further into this report.

¹⁵ for further information see the following: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/100991/1/a_fragmented_landscape.pdf (Accessed 2nd October 2019)

¹⁶ Ibid.

THE LEGAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXT

While the political and media landscapes are clearly having an impact on the representation of women in the media in Iraq, there are a number of other external factors that are also hindering the advancement of women's rights issues and equality in Iraq. There has been some work on the legislative environment in Iraq, in particular in the KRI, but this has yet to manifest itself in anything specifically relating to gender and media. Iraq's public broadcaster, the IMN, has recently included a quota for female representation in its board of governors which is a small step in the right direction. However, this has not been replicated anywhere else in the media industry, such as in the CMC media regulator or the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate. The IMN has nothing in its editorial guidelines or charter that specifically covers women's representation in its content and the CMC's guidelines for the broadcast media are equally as negligent.

"We need a specific law on how women's issues can be supported by the media".
—Media senior manager and former MP, female, Bagdad

Some stakeholders identified an opportunity for the Parliamentary Women's Committee and the Media and Culture Committee to work together to develop more specific legislation that could support the media in producing more gender-sensitive reporting. It was also pointed out that there is currently no law in Iraq to protect journalists. Prosecutors rely on Iraq's archaic penal code, dating back to 1969, and the 1968 Press and Publications law as a tool to punish journalists and restrict media freedoms while para-legal forces continue to act with impunity towards journalists.¹⁷

"There is no law to protect journalists—the militias would never want this. They will attack your honour to stop you writing about them".
—Mid-career journalist, female, private channel, Baghdad

It was suggested by some of the senior female media journalists and editors that were interviewed that working with Parliament's media teams in order to garner support for legal reform for media legislation might address the growing threat that a lack of proper legislation might pose to women working in media.

Liaison between women's CSOs and the media was highlight-



ed by both sides as fragile and unhelpful to the progression of women's issues and rights through the media. Again, this was linked to the lack of independent financing of the media and the politicised landscape. As noted earlier in this report, NGOs and CSOs are offering bribes to journalists to attend press conferences and the lack of financial and job security for journalists was also cited by some media practitioners as a reason for accepting these bribes.¹⁸ Whatever the rationale for either, the relationship is one based on mistrust and corrupt practice. Media practitioners were concerned that CSOs had little media capabilities and needed to focus on how they could offer practical support to the media. CSOs mentioned the lack of diverse sources in the media on women's issues and a disinterest within the media profession in providing coverage of gender-related topics and content.

"The relationship between media and CSOs is weak. The media doesn't have the money or resources to cover CSO activities".
—Mid-career journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

"In the women's rights movement, we have no strong journalists to speak about our rights. They cover things superficially".
—CSO activist, female, Baghdad

It was suggested that stronger cooperation and partnerships between the media and CSOs could stop the practice of brib-

¹⁷ For further information, see the following: Reporters Sans Frontières Press Freedom Index 2019, Iraq page: <https://rsf.org/en/iraq> (Accessed 30th September 2019); Freedom House, Iraqi Freedom in the World 2018: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/iraq> (Accessed 30th September 2019)

¹⁸ Internews's Aswatouna project and its partners in Iraq categorically refuse to take part in this practice.

ery as well as provide the media with access to the provinces where the needs of women and children vary greatly from those living in Erbil and Baghdad, the key cities in which the majority of the media are based and are reporting on. There was also a concern raised by a number of stakeholders about the lack of engagement between Islamic leaders and civil society organisations on gender-related matters.

“Islamic women’s organisations are often opposed to the liberal CSOs working on this area. This also affects gender advancement”.

—Academic, female, Baghdad

The role that the media could play in providing a platform for debate and diverse voices and views is clear. However, this role is currently highly contested. In Iraq this is exacerbated further by the lack of tertiary-level education on gender equality and women’s rights. University media courses not only lack practical training on the basic principles of independent and diverse media, but contain no gender component in their programmes. CSOs and media stakeholders also bemoaned the lack of academic research on women’s advancement and issues which could serve to provide the basis for original programming and content.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA IN IRAQ

“The men are the managers, there are no women running anything”.

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Erbil

The current environment is creating very little opportunity for women in the media in Iraq. As the media continues to mirror other areas of social, political and economic life in Iraq, the number of women who inhabit decision-making roles in the media industry remains almost non-existent. This is perpetuated by a combination of the lack of legislation to ensure fair representation of women in senior management positions and traditional social perceptions of women in the media. What is more evident from this research is the negative experience that women of all levels in the media are facing as a direct result of their gender.

In more recent years some effort has been made to increase the number of women in senior roles or working as journalists in the Iraqi media. This has mainly been driven by the media development community and private media platforms that were launched in Iraq post-2003.¹⁹ The small increases have,

however, had a negligible impact on programming and media content. This calls into question the capacity for women to be actual decision-makers in the media. Key issues such as the gender pay gap, working conditions, the glass ceiling, and the continuing marginalisation of women as sources of opinion and knowledge, remain largely unaddressed due to the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes at the top of the media food chain.

“There is an increase in the number of women in media but not an increase in quality. They aren’t all good”.

—Senior journalist, female, public media, Baghdad

Role and responsibilities are apparently contested in the Iraqi media. There exists across the media a fundamental lack of understanding of the role of the journalist, in particular the on-screen news reporter or presenter. Reporters and presenters have little control of their own scripts and stories, often repeating what is fed down an audio earpiece to them while live on air. Reporters and presenters are largely recruited more on the basis of on-screen presence than ability to investigate or produce an analytical piece. On the one hand, this is preserving the notion of woman as a sexual object for male consumption. Women continue to be represented aesthetically and differently to their male counterparts. At the same time, it is breeding a culture of resentment amongst many of the female journalists towards their female colleagues.

“They are putting women in certain positions in order to look good, wear short skirts to encourage a certain type of guest and this creates a certain reputation”.

—Senior presenter, female, public media, Baghdad

“Women get jobs as presenters because of their looks not their skills—a mic just speaks down her ear and she repeats it—so a good presenter is not actually a journalist, they are just a media personality. She is also then judged in a certain way by the viewer as a result”.

—Senior manager, female, private media, Baghdad

Kandiyoti’s notion of the “patriarchal bargain” captures the current situation. Many of the female journalists interviewed for this study were quick to criticise the clothing and behaviour of many of their female colleagues. The reasons for this seemed somewhat ambiguous. It was not always evident whether their comments constituted a critique of employment criteria or expressions of envy. Zahra Ali alludes to a similar condition when meeting with a woman working on gender policy in the Iraqi government: “In a very normative climate regarding women’s clothes, her insistence on ‘appropriate women’s attire’ revealed her desire to perform alignment with

¹⁹ Ahmed, Huda (2010) ‘Iraq’, in Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, eds., (2010) Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa, Freedom House, New York, NY; Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD. pg 30.

²⁰ Ali, Zahra. 2018. Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Pg. 153.

WOMEN'S VOICES

“I have to sometimes be aggressive in order to get across that I am strong. I have to act male.”

Mid-career level journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

“The women who we hear are talking in a man's voice not a woman's voice.”

Senior journalist, female, Erbil

“We are a fragmented society. Harassment and violence are on the increase and this is mirrored in the media.”

Senior CSO activist, female, Erbil

Islamist politics”.²⁰

This is something that needs to be considered when developing policy recommendations and capacity building for women in media and media-related CSO organisations. Women are working in not very collegial environments that are underpinned by strong traditional attitudes. This situation further perpetuates what is seen as a lack of professionalism in the Iraqi media. Stakeholders voiced concerns with presentation skills and style with many alluding to inappropriate facial expressions, for example smiling when reporting on bombings or violence. A few stakeholders suggested that socio-cultural pressure might also be impacting on professionalism.

“There has been some resistance to trainings as there is a fear of not supporting or vocalising traditional thoughts”.

—Academic, female, Baghdad

The lack of collegiality expresses itself in a number of ways. Some emphasised how the lack of women in the media meant that those few that were seen on screen were seen to represent the professionalism of all female journalists, even though they had obtained their jobs primarily on the basis of their appearance. For many of the female journalists interviewed, there was a huge disconnect between themselves and their colleagues and few expressed sentiments of solidarity towards other female colleagues. Many of the female media practitioners that were interviewed discussed adopting male characteristics as a necessity to succeed in newsrooms that were far from gender-neutral.

“If a woman is a manager, then people treat her in a certain way. There are certain female characteristics that clash with being a manager.”

—Senior manager, female, private media, Bagdad

While possibly understandable as survival mechanism, what this does is undermine any efforts to normalise the role of women in the media and allow for non-patriarchal modes of practice to prevail in Iraqi newsrooms and beyond. It also indicates an overriding dominance of patriarchal structures and the impact it is having on professional conduct.

“Female presenters are part of the system and as part of the system their work is sub-optimal”.

—Blogger, female, Bagdad

There exists also a fundamental lack of job security in the media sector, with unsatisfactory and poor working conditions leaving many journalists vulnerable to exploitation. Women are affected even further by the lack of economic security and the financial hardships of working in the sector. Very few media organisations offer maternity pay or life insurance for female journalists. Currently, the only media organisation with an organisational maternity policy is NRT. The public broadcasting service, IMN, offers maternity benefits in line with that of being a public sector institution. As a public broadcaster, the IMN should be leading the way in the media by defining its own maternity benefits and

packages. With the lack of women in decision-making positions, it is hardly surprising that this is the case and the reality sees Iraqi women once again having to make a choice between a career in media and their families. The lack of access to life insurance further problematizes the situation. Journalists in Iraq are operating in conditions that are often unsafe and dangerous. From covering war to terrorism, their work sees them in positions where they could come to harm.

“We work in journalism but we are worried about our future. We have no protection, no life insurance, no health cover at work. I drive home late at night. If anything were to happen to me—kidnap or anything—I would have no protection, cover or insurance”.

—Mid-career journalist, female, Baghdad

The lack of access to fundamental protection from their employer marginalises women even further from the media profession. Women need to be provided with the legislative foundations for gender equality and with the support structures they need to engage as media professionals as well as nurture families and maintain professional safety. One female former war correspondent who was interviewed was very transparent about the fact that the only way she has managed her career and a family was with their support rather than that of her employers. For many Iraqi women, such family support is not available because of the traditionalism and conservatism of Iraqi society, which effectively rules out the media as a long-term professional career option.

HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN IN MEDIA

Journalists remain exposed to an increasing number of safety and security challenges when reporting and working in Iraq. They are operating in a landscape where war and physical conflict are prevalent, where attacks on freedom of expression have taken on different forms with online harassment and attacks on social media leading to further threats to personal safety. While violent actions are of course common and numerous in conflict situations, journalistic work can also be challenged in other ways, with censorship, kidnapping and detention on the rise in the region.

Article 37 of Iraq’s 2015 Labour law defines sexual harassment as “Any physical or verbal act of a sexual nature, or any oth-

er behaviour that is related to sex and targets the dignity of men and women, is unwanted, unjustifiable, or degrading to the person at the receiving end of it, leading to their rejection, refusal to be subject to that behaviour, or to an explicit or implicit decision that impacts their job”. Sexual harassment and intimidation is prohibited in Article 10. Nonetheless, sexual harassment is on the increase because such legislation remains largely unenforced. Women are often subject to additional harassment and intimidation from their attackers if they come forward about the abuse.²¹ Shame and honour are key factors in the lack of confidence in speaking out against abusers. There are also very few governmental, CSO or NGO initiatives that are dealing with the issue of sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace, as the focus remains on violence towards women and children that was perpetrated by ISIS. The general attitude towards harassment is one of resignation.

There has been very little research on harassment and bullying in the media industry in Iraq. The Iraqi Women’s Journalists Forum (IWJF) conducted a study in May 2019 which highlighted a number of specific cases of gender-based harassment against female journalists which had often resulted in a loss of employment for the women involved.²² A recent study by Salahuddin University, undertook some empirical research on the harassment of women in the workplace. This included interviews with some media professionals and journalists, which confirmed that harassment was rife in the media and, in the case of harassment against women, highly gendered.²³ This was corroborated by all of the female media practitioners who were interviewed in Erbil and Baghdad alike.

“They do the same with men but with us it is gendered, they fixate on our social issues”.

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

“They have two ways of using women—they use your name and they use your honour or sexuality. They also look at social relations—family, brother, father—and get to you via your tribe”.

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Erbil

It is clear from the interviews that once again the practices of the media are reflecting those of Iraqi society as a whole and continue to be dictated by gender norms which are defined by men. Patriarchal management structures within media organisations leads to harassment and corrupt practice being played out in a gendered way. It was implied by many of the journalists interviewed that senior male figures in the industry did not want to be succeeded or indeed even report into women who might

²¹ OECD gender index, Iraq/; <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/IQ.pdf> (Accessed 1st October 2019) and CEDAW Shadow Report 2014: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/IRQ/INT_CEDAW_NGO_IRQ_16192_E.pdf (Accessed 1st October 2019)

²² Further details can be found here: <https://www.iwjf.info/2019/05/05/the-increase-of-discrimination-phenomenon-against-iraqi-women-journalists-on-the-basis-of-gender-and-many-of-them-were-beaten-and-threatened/> (Accessed 27th October 2019)

²³ Content not available online but as told to the report writer in an interview with one of the researchers on 20th June 2019.

“Harassment by senior bosses has increased in the media. They do it so that they can keep their jobs.”

Senior journalist, female, public media, Baghdad

be more talented or senior than themselves.

“There is also a lack of understanding with inexperienced managers who do not want to be told what to do by women”.

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

Harassment is often used as a means by which to cover up bullying and is commonplace in newsrooms, particularly with lesser-educated women, who often end up complying with the said abusive and bullying behaviour to avoid losing their jobs or being socially embarrassed. One of the younger female correspondents interviewed recalled harassment from her immediate male superior when she started to gain attention from senior management for her work. Money and promotion were offered in exchange for a sexual relationship. This particular correspondent felt that she had no alternative but to leave that particular media organisation. She did lodge a complaint regarding her manager’s behaviour to members the senior management team in the news organisation, but nothing was done and the perpetrator is now a very senior presenter at the public media channel in Iraq.

These working conditions for female journalists are compounded by the ongoing violence, which takes a number of different forms. Iraqi journalists are covering conflict, reporting on corruption and calling both state and non-state actors to account. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) records and monitors attacks on journalists in Iraq as well as journalists killed in conflict. Its Global Impunity Index 2018 places Iraq in third place globally as a country where attackers are least likely to be prosecuted. They have recorded 15 deaths of female journalists in Iraq since 2004, either through murder or cross-fire.²⁴

The high-profile case of Afrah Shawqi, who was kidnapped and tortured in 2016 for allegedly publishing an article against religious groups in Iraq, saw her eventually released after 9 days being held against her will. She has talked openly about

the harassment she has received over the years, from death threats to attacks on her honour, rather than anything directly related to the quality of her work. Shawqi and other members of the journalism community who actively campaigned for her release have also stressed the lack of support from any official institutions including the Journalists Syndicate.

“The issue (in the case of Afrah Shawqi) was silence. No one was saying anything even though everyone knew who the perpetrators were and what was the truth”.

—Senior CSO activist, female, Baghdad

Physical harassment of female journalists is now often combined with online harassment, a phenomenon found across the global media landscape, but which is particularly acute in Iraq. The message is clear that once again women should not be given a voice in the public sphere. RSF’s March 2018 report entitled “Women’s rights: Forbidden subject”²⁵ addresses the issue of violence against journalists, covering online harassment in particular. It suggests that in many cases the ‘information predators’ are often representatives from government, criminal associations and non-state actors as well as religious groups.²⁵ Online trolling is commonplace in Iraq and many of the journalists interviewed cited multiple cases of online abuse and threats, from online comments on social media to “deep fake” videos circulated online.²⁶ One of the female correspondents interviewed gave a harrowing account of deep fake videos of her performing sexual acts being circulated on social media.

It should be noted that the rise in such processes of online harassment is a key concern of “fourth wave” feminists who examine the role of the internet society in the marginalization of diverse and, in this case, female voices. This is becoming a global concern for female journalists and public figures and there is an opportunity for Iraqi CSOs and media practitioners to work with their international counterparts to find ways to

²⁴ https://cpj.org/data/killed/mideast/iraq/murder/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&gender%5B%5D=Female&cc_fips%5B%5D=IZ&start_year=1992&end_year=2019&group_by=year (Accessed 1st October 2019)

²⁵ <https://rsf.org/en/news/rsf-shines-light-forbidden-coverage-womens-rights> (Accessed 1st October 2019)

²⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/12/30/fake-porn-videos-are-being-weaponized-harass-humiliate-women-everybody-is-potential-target/> (Accessed 6th October 2019)



combat such behaviour.

THE INFLUENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES ON CONTENT

Media content that focuses on key challenges and opportunities for women has the potential to shape perspectives and attitudes of the public. The media should also be acting as an information provider for all of its audiences, providing them with the tools and resources they need to participate fully in

social and political life. However, the influence of embedded gendered institutional practices on Iraqi media content is evident to the stakeholders that were interviewed. There is a noted lack of content focussing on issues that are relevant to women or indeed are presented to include a female perspective or opinion. Institutional stakeholders highlighted the lack of content for women and produced by women.

“There is no real programme that focuses on women’s issues. Even Fairouz Hatem’s programme had a social focus not a gender focus. This needs to be addressed on a governmental level”.

²⁷ Fairouz Hatem is a long-standing and respected member of the media community in Iraq who presents one of the IMN’s flagship programmes, Shahrazade.

—Senior CSO activist, female, Erbil²⁷

There was also a universal concern that key national issues such as elections and conflict were not covered on behalf of women and that national issues that concerned women specifically were virtually ignored. A transformation in the landscape for women's participation requires the media to cover all issues from all perspectives. Media content and news in particular is dominated by a hegemonic male standpoint which is limiting the possibility of political, economic and social agency for Iraqi women.

“Coverage of government formation for example does not include anything on women's rights and needs in relation to that”.

—Senior CSO activist, female, Erbil

“No one is covering actual news—on women refugees, women IDPs, wives of ISIS.”

—Mid-career journalist, female, private media, Baghdad

This is further compounded by the lack of women used as expert sources in the Iraqi media. They are more likely to be represented as victims in a stereotypical and discriminatory manner. A number of interviewees were concerned at the lack of representation from women's rights NGOs, lawyers and doctors in cases where women might have been subject to physical harm or lack of safety.

“We need to use more female experts. Gender issues are covered by too many people who aren't experts”.

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Erbil

Coverage of topics such as child marriage, sexual violence and female genital mutilation (particularly in the KRI) were seen to be shunned in media coverage for societal and cultural reasons and journalists also suggested that better protection for women needed to be offered if such issues are to be covered properly. Taboo subjects such as these remain untouched in the media and Iraqi society continues to struggle with how to deal with these issues in a non-gendered and sensitive way. A senior female journalist at the public broadcaster told of a case where she had tried to produce a programme on reasons for divorce in Iraq but was stopped by senior management as they said the programme would be unacceptable to Iraqi society. The lack of ethics and experience in the media means some women are subjected to even further trauma when telling their stories.

“They cover violence towards women but then treat the victims badly when they interview them, asking questions like how many times have you been raped, naming them and showing their faces”.

—Senior CSO activist, female, Erbil

“They have no sense of ethics of values, showing faces, publishing names. For example, there was a recent story on a woman who was blackmailed into performing sexual acts. When the media found out, they published her photo and her name. She committed suicide”.

—Senior journalist, female, private media, Erbil

For several of the CSOs and media practitioners, there is a dire need for proper training and development of capacity to work with victims of abuse as well as cover topics that might be considered contentious to Iraqi audiences. For many, this comes back to the lack of representation of women in Iraqi media and newsrooms. Without women in decision-making positions in the media, developing gender-sensitive content will remain virtually unfeasible. Training in gender-sensitive and ethical reporting of both women and men will for course also be necessary.

“The media focuses on solving women's problems rather than enabling women to solve problems”.

—Academic, female, Baghdad

The next section will examine the issue of content consumption and audiences in more detail. It will provide an overview of the media consumption habits of Iraqi women and men as well as assess how Iraqi audiences interact with content created for and by women. It will engage with some of the key themes that have emerged from the study of the institutional perspective in an attempt to finally draw some conclusions about the perception and place of gender in the media industry in Iraq.



SECTION 2

Baseline analysis of audience perspective

In order to assess public perceptions of the media and gender-related content and representation, a baseline study was carried out in July 2019 which focused on the media consumption habits of Iraqi audiences. The study's aim was to examine public attitudes towards the media and information channels, analyse how audiences view the representation of women in the media and ascertain how they view media coverage of certain subjects in the Iraqi media.

Again, the study used qualitative methods, this time focus groups, in order to gather data from across Iraq. Focus groups were held in Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil and Mosul. Participants were recruited against a set of criteria that accounted for their geographical location, gender, age and socio-economic class in order to give an accurate representation of the demographic breakdown of Iraq.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research framework guiding this section of the baseline study was centred on the same initial research question: How are Iraqi women and men accessing and consuming information and what role do gendered aspects of the news production and consumption cycles play in supporting or hindering this access?

This question was then drilled down into three main areas that were used to guide the study:

- Stakeholders' perceptions of the overall media landscape in Iraq
- Stakeholders' view of the representation of women in the Iraqi media
- The role that stakeholders would like to see women play in the media and Iraqi society as a whole

STAKEHOLDERS AND METHODOLOGY

A total of fourteen focus groups were conducted with Iraqi women and men in Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil and Mosul. These locations were chosen in order to provide a national picture that incorporates urban, traditional, religious as well as post-ISIS communities. The groups were divided equally between women and men. Each focus group consisted of 8-10 participants who were allocated to groups based on gender, age groups (younger: 18-39 and older: 40-59) and educational levels (low and high). Four focus groups were held in each of Baghdad and Erbil (2 male and 2 female groups in each), and two groups in each of Basra, Diyala and Mosul, one male and one female in each. Groups were recruited to reflect an even split according to age and socio-economic class.

Following a general discussion of media consumption habits, the groups were shown preselected pieces of content. The content was chosen based on its representation of women and the presence of women within it. The content was used to provoke a further discussion about the types and roles of women in the media. It was also used to encourage a debate about the types of content that were missing from the Iraqi media.

The focus group discussion method was chosen because it enabled audiences from similar backgrounds to engage in conversations about topics that were relevant to them and their communities, as well as to identify areas where they agree, or disagree. These discussions were documented through audio recordings and transcribed for analysis.

The data was collected and managed by one of Internews' partners on the Aswatouna project, Peace and Freedom Organisation (PFO), based in Iraq, then analysed by an external researcher, the author of this report. A framework analysis was carried out to assess the responses from key stakeholders and then reviewed according to emergent themes. Key findings were confirmed by triangulating between the focus group discussions. This provided a methodical scrutiny of data that was used alongside contextual knowledge in order to ensure more meaningful and nuanced findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

As with the institutional stakeholders, across the board, participants in all of the audience focus groups regarded the Iraqi media landscape as highly partisan and corrupt, reflecting the political scene in Iraq as a whole. They revealed a high level of media literacy and were highly cognisant of political affiliations they associated with specific broadcasters. This was seen

across all of the groups, in Kurdish and Arab audiences, women and men, young and old. There was an overriding sense of pessimism not just about the media context but also the overall living, political and economic conditions of the country. Participants expressed a sense of frustration with the media's role in perpetuating this condition.

"Kurdish media each have their own agenda and subjects. And there are no laws to govern them".

—Erbil, younger female

For this reason, participants were turning to traditional media, in the main broadcast media, for entertainment programming rather than news. There was a huge sense of disillusionment with news content that came from the Iraqi media with many of the participants referencing political agendas and repetitive content. Arabs Got Talent was a popular programme across all of the Arab groups, male and female, and the Pan-Arab satellite channels proved popular in providing these shows.

"MBC takes me out of the depressing situation we live in here".

—Baghdad, older male

Most of the participants were accessing news and political content via social media posts and comments. It is unclear from these focus group discussions as to whether or not the news that is being consumed via social media has been taken from the social media accounts and websites of the main TV channels. Previous research studies conducted by this author would suggest that this is in fact the case. Friends, family and influencers might be choosing the content that is being consumed, but the majority of this content is still being produced by the traditional mainstream Iraqi and Pan-Arab media in most cases.

"I don't watch television, just social media. All of the news on television is also on social media, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat".

—Basra, younger female

The main Iraqi channels from which news and debate programmes are being consumed by Arab participants were Al Iraqiya, the public broadcaster, and Al-Sharqiya, a private channel often associated with providing an alternative perspective to that of the public broadcaster. Kurdish participants were likely to watch Rudaw, a channel that broadcasts from Erbil, and Kurd Sat in Sulaimaniyah, which stopped broadcasting in September 2019. Local media also seems to be playing an important role in the news consumption cycle. Mosul focus group participants were likely to watch Al-Mosuliya TV and those in Basra were most likely to listen to Al-Mirbad radio station. Local Facebook pages such as Diyala Haweyetuna (Diyala Our Identity) and Basra Madenati (Basra My City) were also cited as influential by groups outside of the main conurbations. Print media was hardly mentioned by participants across all groups.



A PARTISAN LANDSCAPE, GENDER AND THE MEDIA

This political and economic context and lack of trust in the media was seen to have an impact on the role and representation of women in media in the eyes of the participants. Participants pointed to the lack of professional standards in the Iraqi media and, while this was not seen to be exclusively gender binary, it was perceived to play out in a particularly gendered way when it came to the representation of women on screen. Female and male participants in all groups highlighted the lack of ethics and low standard of reporting in the media. Fake news was discussed as well as the mistreatment of guests and inappropriate presenting styles. A lack of focus on professionalism in reporting, to their mind, was resulting in female journalists selected by channels based on physical appearance rather than on professional ability, education or knowledge.

“Audiences focus on the make-up and clothes of the presenter because the quality of the content is weak”.

—Erbil, younger female

“They only think about the looks and beauty when it comes to presenters not what they are actually presenting”.

—Baghdad, younger female

Audiences’ heightened awareness of the political allegiances of the media was constructing an obvious lack of trust in the media’s ability to play its role as an accurate and independent information provider. Participants expressed a mistrust of media content and were keen to point out the negative impact that the Iraqi media was having on social attitudes and development.

There was a collective sense of hopelessness and that things were unlikely to improve in the current context.

“Even if a presenter has all of the right characteristics, she would still be forced to follow the politics of the channel. She is told what to wear and what to say”.

—Baghdad, older woman

All of these findings are in line with a number of recent research studies on declining trust and pessimism amongst the Iraqi public in the political class and their allied institutions. According to an opinion poll carried out by the National Democracy Institute in 2019, 3 out of 4 Iraqis believe that the country is heading on a negative course and trust in public and political institutions is very low.²⁸ It is unsurprising that Iraq’s partisan media platforms are therefore viewed with a similar level of cynicism and distrust and this corroborates with the sentiment amongst institutional stakeholders in the KRI and across Iraq as a whole.

Cynthia Enloe draws attention to the dichotomy between the attitude in religious societies, such as Iraq, towards the female body and beauty and the “sexualising and commercialising (of) women’s bodies” by the media.²⁹ These challenges are pervading the attitudes of the Iraqi public when consuming the media and having an impact on their perceptions of female positions in society. Participants were scathing of attractive women on screen and often seemed to equate a lack of ethics with physical beauty. What is clear however is that both women and men in Iraq do not feel that these particular women represent them or women in their communities.

In the focus group discussion, female audiences were more likely than male to protest this situation. Many bemoaned the overabundance of content aimed at women that focused solely on beauty and fashion subjects. Female participants wanted to see women covering subjects that mattered to them, subjects that might have an impact on policy and society. Male participants outside of Baghdad and Erbil were more likely to categorise women presenters and content related to women as that which relates to the home or family such as cooking and education.

²⁸ Accessed on 4th October 2019: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Iraq%20Survey%202019_EN_0.pdf

²⁹ Enloe, Cynthia. 2010. *Nomo’s War, Emma’s War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*. University of California Press: California. Pg. 35.

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVES

“ The news is all the same. They tell us things that benefit the parties and it is all negative. ”

Basra, older male

“ Media does not have a positive impact in the same way it does a negative one in our society, especially in the Kurdish region. ”

Erbil, younger male

“ Women are always presenting the morning shows. We want to see women presenting programmes that have an impact. ”

Baghdad, younger female

“ We don't want good content as such. We just want to be entertained. ”

Erbil, younger female

“ When it comes to political news, Facebook is my number one. ”

Erbil, younger male

“ The role of women in the media is just a visual thing — it is about the way they look and nothing else. ”

Baghdad, younger male

“Haifa Hasoony mainly covers make-up and clothes and beauty in her show. They don’t cover issues that truly concern women such as rights and needs”.

—Mosul, younger female³⁰

The issue of representation and a feeling that women in the media might embody the average Iraqi woman on the street was something that was also debated amongst the groups. As mentioned, female presenters that were chosen based on appearance were not seen to be representative. Women in the focus groups wanted to see more ordinary women who looked like them; they wanted to hear from women who provided an insight into the lived experiences of the Iraqi public and women with case studies that might match their own. Female participants across the board saw these as severely lacking in the current media landscape.

“I would like to see more ordinary working women, as guests and in content”.

—Bagdad, older female

“We want to see the picture of the Iraqi women, not the Western woman. We see a lot of women trying to copy the western woman and as a society we tend to compare the two.”

—Basra, younger female

This quote also highlights a key issue which was discussed amongst many of the participants across the groups. The Iraqi public are still guided by traditional and religious principles and thought, and this is clearly something that dominates perspectives on hierarchies and roles in both the family and society. Discussions around the role of women in the media and the types of content that might address concerns of relevance to Iraqi women and men were informed by more orthodox views on women in society, particularly in the male groups and with groups outside of the urban centres of Baghdad and Erbil. Women and men voiced anxieties about the decline of family values, escalating divorce rates, violent computer games and the increasing incidents of suicide in Iraq, suggesting a return to more traditional familial frameworks that could provide Iraq with the stability and order that it needs. Both genders pointed out that eastern societies and religions such as Iraq’s were less willing to accept women in positions of power or even with careers. Female participants however were more likely to see this as damaging to Iraqi society and suggest that supporting women would benefit male and female alike.

“They just marry women off at the age of twelve now. Women are the basis of this society. If they are not educated, then they cannot fully help that society”.

—Basra younger female

“The economic situation in Iraq requires both women and men to work. That is the reality and we need to face it”.

—Baghdad, older female

While female participants were more likely to reference the economic need of women to work themselves, male participants in the more traditional governorates outside of the two main cities of Iraq displayed more gendered attitudes than their urban counterparts, emphasising the roles of women as wives, homemakers and mothers.

“Baghdad is different from Mosul. In Mosul, the problem is that men do not want to work closely with women.”

—Mosul, older male

“In the traditional areas, women are different than in the city.”

—Basra, older male

Although such views were more evident amongst male participants from rural and more traditional regions, it must be noted that it was a widespread view across all participant groups that internalised cultural values and social expectations cannot be ignored when working in Iraq. This attitude was reflected in the conversations that were had amongst the groups about women in media with male participants more likely to reject content presented by women or about senior women figures for example. Interestingly, as noted with the female participants, men were more likely to be receptive to female-led content when the key protagonist of the content was considered to be representative of the ordinary Iraqi woman. For example, from the video clips that were shown in the Arabic-speaking focus groups, Manar Al-Zubaidi and Fatima Hassan Khafaji were both commended for their ability to speak on behalf of and represent the Iraqi public and women in particular.³¹

“If I could do something, it would be to communicate the experiences of ordinary women to people”.

—Erbil, younger male

“I see her (Manar Al-Zubaidi) as a mother, a sister, a friend. And I think that is why people respected her more”.

—Basra, older male

³⁰ Haifa Hassony is an Iraqi female television presenter who currently presents a morning programme on Al Sharqiya TV. She is known for her make-up tutorials and beauty tips. She is one of the most followed Iraqis on Instagram in Iraq with a current count of 6.4 million followers.

³¹ Manar Al Zubaidi is an Iraqi journalist whose publication, Al Manar News and regular radio show broadcast from Diwaniya, addresses women’s issues, and highlights the role of media in combating violence against women and prepares reports about minorities. Fatima Hassan Khafaji is a public servant who has spent over two decades looking after her local community on the outskirts of Baghdad. Participants in the focus group were shown an episode of #DedicatedToService in which she had appeared.



Decades of perpetual instability and conflict in Iraq have seen a return to gendered principles that are defined by a very fixed notion of what are conventional ideas of masculinity, motherhood, marriage and familial roles. For women and men in Iraq, it will require a seismic shift in everyday living conditions and experiences for these notions to be substantially changed. A longer-term approach to developing the media and its representation of women is necessary. This would need to be complimented, however, with both governmental and civil society endeavours to improve rights and access to services such as education, healthcare, and so on.

“When the Iraqi public gets used to this type of representation (in reference to women in the workplace) then it will become normalised”.

—Baghdad, older female

Participants were also keen to point out that Iraq's gender situation cannot be compared to that in other countries, particularly those in the Global North. Such views strongly suggest that reforms to the Iraqi media and its content cannot ignore the very complex intersection of history, religion, conflict and lived experience that dictates the Iraqi reality.

LACK OF FEMALE EXPERTS

Public perceptions of women in the media have been further stigmatised by another very specific type of women that are seen on screen. The Iraqi media's partisan ownership and highly politicised narratives sees much of its content domi-

nated by politicians. Politics in Iraq is characterised by tumultuous inter-party contests, hate speech, abusive language and aggression. The most senior women in Iraqi society as seen on television are more often than not representative of that scene. In a milieu marked by the lack of diverse women represented in the media, public opinion of women in senior roles is distorted by the only women that are seen regularly on screen, i.e. female politicians. Participants in the focus groups were very vocal about their dislike of the political class and this resonated again in a gendered reaction to the women that they were most likely to see on screen.

“Women in politics are chosen according to quotas and political leaning ... we don't see them properly serving this country”.

—Mosul, younger female

“Women in politics are doing nothing for women's rights”.

—Baghdad, younger female

While many of the participants were clearly frustrated with Iraqi politics and its female representatives, what was evident from the discussion is that they are keen to see a more representative and diverse range of women on screen. Attitudes might still be defined by the prevailing stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, but there is evidently a will for content that can bring more positive female role models to the Iraqi public.

“We need to focus on schools not politics when it comes to female representatives”.

—Mosul, older male

The negative perception of the female politicians who do appear in the media is arguably reinforced by the lack of female expert sources in the Iraqi media. This was another area of concern for participants in all of the focus groups. The line between journalism and advocacy is one that is often crossed in the Iraqi media, which is marked by the lack of expert comment and factual data to corroborate much of its content. Increased access to the internet and therefore regional and global media sources has exposed much of the Iraqi media's lack of commitment to providing diverse sources and expert opinion, as audiences are able to access content that is produced by less overtly partisan media in the region and beyond. The lack of expert sources was seen by participants to have an impact on the media's coverage of important topics and those related to women's rights and affairs.

What is clear from the focus group discussions is that participants are more receptive to content that is seen to be accurate and supported by a range of knowledgeable sources.

"She had very professional skills because she looked at the legal issues involved and included data and numbers".
—Baghdad, older male

When participants discussed the types of content that they would like to see presented by women, all of the groups emphasised the importance of knowledge of the subject by presenters and guests alike. This is evidently deficient in the Iraqi media.

COVERAGE OF SOCIAL ISSUES, HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

Participants across the board bemoaned the lack of coverage on issues that mattered on a societal rather than political level in Iraq. Rather than working to shape the social agenda and social attitudes and behaviours, Iraq media's prevailing objective was seen to be advocacy for their politicians that financed them. Some participants wanted to see content that focused more on familial challenges such as marriage and child-rearing but there was also a call for a more solutions-driven approach when it came to topics such as suicide, domestic violence, and harassment.

"When a woman commits suicide, we want to understand why she did so. They never explain this to us and these aren't simple issues".
—Mosul, younger female

"The more programmes like this, the more the street will care and the greater likelihood there is for change."
—Baghdad, younger female

"The family problems and high divorce rate that the Sulaimanyeh court talks about. There is a discussion around them but no solutions".
—Erbil, younger male

Participants reacted positively when shown content covering sexual harassment in the Iraqi street that was shown to them in the focus groups and, again, suggested that the media needed to play a greater role in proliferating this message.

Participants, female and male, were keen to see more programming that dealt with social issues, for example rising unemployment and divorce. They showed an acute awareness of the media's role in influencing attitudes towards topics such as these. In two of the female groups, participants discussed personal experiences of harassment and lamented the lack of support from families and local communities. They wanted to see more content in the media that covered the issue so that they didn't feel silenced by the socio-cultural stigma that is often attached to victims of harassment in Iraq.

POSITIVE STORIES

Participants wanted to see positive stories of success from women in their media. They wanted to be inspired and motivated by other women across all the industries that they felt were contributing to a better Iraq. Women and men suggested that they would seek and share this content. They were also convinced that it would have a powerful impact on changing attitudes and perceptions of women and gender roles in society. They were keen to see women as guests sharing experiences and women as sources providing knowledge and experience.

"We want success stories and we want to see the road to that success as it is even more important than the actual success itself".
—Erbil, younger female

CONCLUSIONS

This research analysis of the media landscape sought to understand how different stakeholders in the Iraqi media perceive gender both structurally and representationally. What this report has demonstrated is that the Iraqi media's failure to offer a gender-balanced representation in the media, both institutionally and through its content, is directly linked to the overall political environment characterised by endemic corruption and the highly partisan media landscape that has emerged in the last 15 years. The report also demonstrates that there is in fact a great deal of work to be done in a number of different areas in order to address the media's failure to provide women and men with content that will allow them to make informed choices and participate equally in political and social processes.

Corrupt practices, political financing and institutionalised patriarchal systems have seen the media fail to provide equitable coverage of women's issues or indeed include women as decision-makers organisationally. Both the audience and media stakeholders are acutely aware of the lack of ethical practice by the media and both are attuned to how this has become gendered in prevailing conditions of economic failure, conflict and weak governance in Iraq. The overall mood was one of pessimism from all stakeholder groups about the current state of and prospects for the media in Iraq.

The lack of opportunity in a non-meritocratic society such as Iraq both generates and sustains the prevalence of highly-gendered policies and practices across the Iraqi media landscape. This is seen in both stakeholder groups: media stakeholders were likely to disparage their female colleagues; audiences were likely to reject female depictions that they felt were not representative of all Iraqis. Traditional and religious attitudes dominated much of the discussions and many of the challenges facing women and women journalists were attributed to these fixed mind-sets. Again, both stakeholder groups were in agreement that employment rituals and practices were shaped by patriarchal perceptions of a women's role in traditional societies. A lack of female representation in media institutions is seeing the production of content that fails to deal with the key issues of Iraqi women and provide much-needed solutions to the challenges of everyday life.

Within this general context, the following conclusions need to be considered in order to develop solutions that might work for Iraq:

Without major changes in Iraqi society, the ending of endemic corruption and bad governance within media organisations

will be very difficult to achieve. However, Iraq could be seen also to be at a turning point in its history. The recent heightening of angry public protest suggests that many Iraqis, especially the young, are acutely aware of the problematic nature of Iraqi politics. The findings of this report suggest that they would also see the media as a key ally of political corruption and social decay. The media, first and foremost, needs to play a role in providing an accurate picture to Iraqi citizens, serving their needs and not just the interests of those in power.

It has been amply evident across the world historically that women bring different skills and perspectives to public debate and policy and can dramatically shift prevailing social attitudes. It is vital, therefore, that the benefits of including the voices of women in political and social debate and the devising of solutions to Iraq's myriad social and political problems is clearly communicated through governmental, educational and media institutions. Giving women a greater and more substantial role in the Iraqi media and ensuring their diverse voices are more fully represented in media content are, therefore, vital steps towards improving Iraq's future.

It must be emphasised that these are challenging tasks that resist simplistic or "one size fits all" solutions. As this report shows, the perceptions and needs of Iraqi audiences differ across the country and media content and solutions must reflect these variations accordingly. Attitudes towards women in the urban centres of Erbil and Baghdad vary greatly to those in provinces such as Basra and Diyala. Newly liberated and post-ISIS areas such as Mosul and Anbar raise a number of distinctive challenges for the media and viable responses will need to be developed in tandem with local CSOs and media organisations.

Identifying pockets of opportunity, few though they may appear to be, is key at this point in Iraq's history. These could be in the form of nurturing stakeholders, institutions and independent media expressing a will to change. They should also include the utilisation of emergent opportunities to engage differently with the Iraqi public, in particular young women and men, who are keen and ready to make change. This may involve such things as the development of innovative media content that is more likely to resonate with marginalised or disaffected audiences as well endeavouring to facilitate their greater contribution in the media production process.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite this report's predominantly negative depiction of a media landscape that is failing its citizens, there are a number of key areas that have been identified for development. These have been informed by both of the research studies and, in some cases, recommendations that came directly from stakeholders themselves. The recommendations are aimed at policy-makers, the media, CSO and media development communities who are active in Iraq.

In making recommendations, it is important to reiterate the specificities of the socio-political context of Iraq. It would be a mistake to simply apply standards and solutions that might have worked in other countries in the case of Iraq. Therefore, any work to activate these recommendations needs to be done in dialogue with women working on and in the media and gender fields in Iraq. It would also be important to recognise that solutions must be considered on a national, regional and even provincial level within Iraq, in order to address the specific need of its many communities.

It is also important to note that many of these recommendations are long term solutions which may prove difficult to initiate in the current conditions in Iraq. There is obviously a more immediate need in the media to include female voices and women's issues in content. Capacity building in media organisations and with journalists might address this in the short-term. Safety and security must also be considered a priority area for focus.

LEGISLATION

There is an imperative to work with governmental departments and ministries to develop specific media legislation that will regulate the representation of women in senior roles in media institutions. Quotas can be considered as well as better employment legislation that can protect and encourage women who are seeking media careers. The Parliamentary Media and Culture Committee alongside the Women's Committee in Parliament need to develop draft legislation to support this, or at the very least begin to coordinate and agree strategies for future development.



It is also recommended that governmental bodies coordinate with CSOs working in the field on issues related to media coverage and content pertaining to issues such as domestic violence, sex trafficking and GBV to ensure that current legislation supports women and girls in these conditions.

ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES

A lack of editorial policies and focus on issues related to governance within media organisations also needs to be addressed. Individual media organisations should develop HR programmes and policies that can protect female employees as well as encourage more women to enter into the profession. Benefits such as maternity pay and life insurance are critical, but also policies that deal with harassment in the workplace and online persecution need to be considered. Workshops and audits that allow for a reflexive look at governance structures and the representation of women within those structures should also then address gender imbalances within media organisations and inform fixed policies and procedures.

NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

One method of dealing with harassment is by facilitating and enabling networks of support internally with media organisations and externally amongst other journalists in order to combat harassment. Regular meetings and sharing of experiences can help build a unified front against harassment of all kinds. Networks also have a greater power in lobbying and campaigning for better rights at both a national and international level. There is also an opportunity to support Iraqi women journalists in coordination efforts with international organisations who are working on solutions to the growing challenges that women in the media are facing, such as the International Women's Media Foundation and Women in the News. They have developed a number of tools aimed at journalists working in the MENA region. Peer-to-peer engagement is crucial when dealing with issues such as harassment and intimidation.

The Internews project, Women's Voices, developed a national coalition that brought together women journalists and wom-

en human rights defenders from across Iraq to work together on the different aspects of addressing SGBV, including supporting advocacy efforts, trainings, round-tables and mutual learning opportunities across the coalition and beyond. The success and learning from this project can be applied in other contexts and organisations. This coalition can also be utilised as an existing network of support.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Gender-focused curricula need to be introduced into media education programmes at colleges and universities across Iraq. Women and men who study media need to understand and learn the importance of incorporating diverse voices, including women and minorities, as well as the need to develop gender-sensitive reporting skills and content. It is essential that curricula development and design clearly reflects the specific challenges presented by the Iraqi social and political context.

INTERNSHIPS AND MENTORING PROGRAMMES

Internship programmes aimed at encouraging women into the media should be facilitated through universities and select media organisations. Internships for women needed to be monitored and supported by women-rights CSOs in order to ensure that they serve to nurture and promote women in the media. Internships need to target women from across Iraq, of all classes, religion and ethnicity and be positioned as a route to secure employment. There are also a select number of media organisations in Iraq within which women hold senior management roles. These women need to be included in mentorship programmes whereby women can learn from them. There is also an opportunity to connect with global mentoring programmes such as the Marie Colvin Circle, which provides mentoring to women journalists across the MENA region, and Women in News.

CAPACITY BUILDING

It is clear from the research that there is a need to consider a number of areas for training of journalists. While generic professional skills training is obviously required, a greater focus on working in the Iraqi context would enhance capacity-building programmes. For example, journalists need to learn how to convince an editor that a gender-related story is both important and likely to attract a receptive audience. Gender needs to be embedded in all capacity-building programmes and related to core journalistic principles such as independence, impartiality and diversity. Whilst these principles might be evidently missing in the contemporary Iraqi media landscape, capacity building must presuppose the desire of many journalists to embrace them.

EXPERT SOURCES

All of the stakeholders pointed to a dearth of expert sources, particularly female. Including a balance of female and male experts would help to change the existing pattern. The creation of an effective and reliable database of female experts that can be accessed by all journalists would support this. The database should be multi-disciplinary and be used as a means of strengthening women's voices in the media.

FINANCIAL GRANTING

The lack of independent financing for the media in Iraq has been blamed for the lack of content on topics related to women's rights and stories about women. Grants supporting the production of gender-sensitive content on under- or misreported issues would provide a more accurate appraisal of certain topics. Investigative reporting on topics related to women's rights, human rights violations, sex trafficking and gender-based violence for example could be supported with a focus on providing journalists with the support needed to find platforms on which to publish and broadcast their work.

CSOS

A greater emphasis on coordination between women's rights CSOs and the media should be actively supported. This would encourage a more strategic approach to the role of both of the communities in providing a stronger basis from which women rights can be better represented in the media. A number of mechanisms for improving coordination should be explored. These could include workshops, networking, online tools and content development.



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