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SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN IRAQ

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The author of this paper requested to be anonymized.

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List of acronyms

BWA: Baghdad Women Association

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

IDPs: Internally Displaced People

INAP: Iraqi National Action Plan

INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organizations

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

IT: Information Technology

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MVI: Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Index

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

UN: United Nations

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution

Executive Summary

This study dissects the linkages between women's participation in peacebuilding and their economic empowerment. After ten qualitative interviews with key stakeholders from Mosul and Baghdad as well as a desk review of data within research on 'Women, Peace and Security', the study concludes that greater attention needs to be directed towards economic empowerment as an integral part of peacebuilding programmes. Drawing out challenges and opportunities as well as best practices when it comes to combining economic empowerment and peacebuilding. This study recommends designing livelihood programmes based on a thorough and realistic assessment of Iraq's economy, map women's skills and abilities instead of only their needs, and support women's collective work to ensure the creation of social trust and social cohesion, that will contribute to peacebuilding processes.

1. Introduction

Women's participation in peacebuilding programmes has been proven to enhance and create more sustainable and lasting peace due to their heightened focus on reconciliation and economic development in peace negotiations⁽¹⁾,⁽²⁾. This includes women's participation in legislative processes, decision-making processes, and their presence in civil society roles, and leadership roles. In this study, peacebuilding is defined by building social capital, which refers to creating connections amongst individuals for the purpose of creating "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness". Social capital brings about civic virtues of tolerance, acceptance and mutual trust that will consequently facilitate interpersonal cooperation.⁽³⁾

Traditional peacebuilding programmes often put less emphasis on the economic empowerment of women, addressing securing livelihood as a secondary issue, or pursuing it separately, instead of an integrated mechanism of peacebuilding. However, livelihood programmes that engage with women to reduce poverty and inequality can be invaluable. Women are often the most strongly impacted group by war and displacement and as a result of often being financially dependent on their male counterparts, they face insecurity. In conflict and post-conflict situations, this insecurity due to a lack of means to secure livelihood is heightened. Thus, peacebuilding should imbed livelihood programming as a result of building social capital to reduce insecurity. These opportunities can range from supporting female-led businesses to creating more safe spaces for women to work together in the public sphere.

While there is substantial programming dedicated to women's economic empowerment, this topic remains largely understudied.⁽⁴⁾ Existing studies assessing economic empowerment as part of peacebuilding programmes in Iraq are treated as a distinct field of research.⁽⁵⁾ When exploring interlinkages between economic empowerment and peacebuilding, this study analyses economic programming activities that aim to contribute to peacebuilding through enhancing social trust and cohesion, as well as women's participation in public life and therefore uses the terminology 'a peacebuilding approach

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- 1 UN Women. "Facts and figures. Women, peace, and security." <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>, accessed 27/01/2021.
 - 2 Lindborg, Nancy. "The Essential Role of Women in Peacebuilding". United States Institute of Peace. 2017. <<https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/11/essential-role-women-peacebuilding>>, accessed 27/01/2021.
 - 3 Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.
 - 4 Reliefweb. "Towards Women's Economic Empowerment in Iraq". 2018 <<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/towards-women-s-economic-empowerment-iraq-enar>>, accessed on 28/01/2021.
 - 5 UNDP, "Women's Economic Empowerment. Integrating Women into the Iraqi Economy", 2012, https://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/publication_1.html, accessed 30/01/2021.

to economic empowerment'. This study aims to shed light on the fact that the approach of economic programming itself can contribute to peacebuilding, when conducted in a manner that aims to foster social trust and therefore social capital, while increasing women's participation in the public sphere. To do so, this study first briefly outlines Iraq's economic drivers and women's roles within the Iraqi economic framework. Secondly, it scrutinises peacebuilding programmes in Iraq at present. This is followed by an analysis of the link between women's economic empowerment and lasting peace, emphasising challenges and best practices. Finally, this paper gives policy recommendations to relevant International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and state institutions.

2. Methodology

The study consisted of a thorough desk review and personal interviews. The desk review covered the most recent information on women's economic empowerment programming in Iraq, as well as previous research done within the framework of women, security and peacebuilding in the region. These insights were used to collect original data through ten semi-structured ninety minute interviews with key figures in the fields of economic empowerment and peacebuilding in Iraq, to gain an accurate and in-depth understanding of women's experiences and their changing socio-economic situation through current peacebuilding and livelihood programmes. Five interviews were conducted with members of women's organisations in Baghdad, while an additional five interviews were conducted with women activists and participants of peacebuilding workshops and economic empowerment programmes in Mosul (see Appendix). Not all the interviewees from Mosul, all of whom suffered during the recent conflict with ISIS, gave consent for all their personal details to be published, therefore most interview participants from Mosul have been anonymised. Prior to the ten personal interviews, two informational interviews were held with a project coordinator of the Baghdad Women's Association (BWA) in Dohuk as well as with a member of the Aman Organization for Women to gather an overview of their projects and goals.

2.1 Limitations

This study is based on a desk review and ten in-depth interviews and is therefore not a complete representation of economic empowerment and peacebuilding programmes within Iraq. Rather, this study reveals the intersections between women's economic empowerment and peacebuilding and through interviews with practitioners and experts in the field, ensures a thorough understanding of the subject. In addition, the limited time available precluded the conduction of further interviews or follow-up interviews, which would have been beneficial to understand the real-time effects of the peacebuilding programmes currently in place.

3. Contextual Analysis

This section focuses on the insights gathered from the interviews conducted as well as the desk review. The insights are separated into three distinct sections: an explanation about women's position in the Iraqi economy, the importance of women's economic empowerment to peacebuilding, and finally the opportunities and challenges to addressing a shift in peacebuilding methodology in the Iraqi landscape.

3.1 Women in the Iraqi Economy

To understand the effects of women's economic empowerment and women's participation in peacebuilding in Iraq, a broad understanding of Iraq's economic drivers is necessary. Wealth produced in Iraq mainly stems from the oil sector, which provides 90 per cent of the government's revenues, while employing only 1 per cent of the Iraqi population.⁽⁶⁾ Most of the revenue generated from the country's oil sector is redistributed to Iraqis through employment in the public sector which, according to the United Nations (UN), comprises around 60 per cent of the population.⁽⁷⁾ This labour force primarily works within the service sector, including in parts of the government. The second largest employment sector is agriculture, which employs almost 22 per cent of the population.⁽⁸⁾ Agriculture belongs to Iraq's private sector due to the dominant public sector not being able to develop its full potential to provide formal job opportunities.⁽⁹⁾

While Iraq's oil resources make it a rich country in general, the people of Iraq do not benefit from this wealth, neither in terms of state services, such as infrastructure, education or health services, nor through job opportunities. According to UNICEF and the World Bank, 20 per cent of the Iraqi population lived under the poverty line in 2017/18. This situation has been further exacerbated by COVID-19, as the multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) identified 42.1% of the population as being particularly vulnerable to poverty as a result of the pandemic.⁽¹⁰⁾ The MVI looks at a series of measures to determine population vulnerability. Some of these factors include, school attainment, garbage disposal, and drinking water, where more than one-fifth of the Iraqi population has been found as both

6 CIA. The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#economy>.

7 UN Iraq, Country Profile, http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=941:country-profile&Itemid=472&lang=en, accessed 17/01/2021.

8 Estimations are based on the year 2008, see CIA. The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#economy>.

9 UN; IAU (Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit). "Iraq Labour Force Analysis 2003-2008". 2009. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/0F8F17DCD9AE2D2B492576160019E73D-Full_Report.pdf, accessed on 27/01/2021.

10 UNICEF. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/1181/file/Assessment%20of%20COVID-19%20Impact%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Vulnerability%20in%20Iraq.pdf>, accessed on 09/08/2021.

vulnerable and deprived.⁽¹¹⁾⁽¹²⁾ Youth populations have been especially harshly impacted by wealth inequality: the World Bank estimates youth unemployment in Iraq to be 36 per cent, compared with the national unemployment rate of 16 per cent.⁽¹³⁾ Furthermore, 35.5 per cent of Iraqi youth were found to be neither in employment nor in education or training in 2020.⁽¹⁴⁾ COVID-19 full and partial lockdowns has led to a further decline in economic activity in Iraq.⁽¹⁵⁾ Decades of protest in different parts of Iraq, including Iraqi Kurdistan, Baghdad, and Basra have made it clear that the people of Iraq resent the economic situation of the country.⁽¹⁶⁾ Regional conflicts between different governorates across Iraq have led to increased food pricing, food shortages, and clean water supplies, further aggravated by COVID-19, have led to millions of International Displaced People (IDPs).⁽¹⁷⁾ In 2018, a UN study discovered that the lack of livelihood opportunities is a key contributing factor for violence in areas liberated from ISIS, often populated by IDPs as well as returnees.⁽¹⁸⁾ Trauma, displacement, and unemployment are factors that heighten violent conflict and with Iraq's population facing monumental levels of youth unemployment and internal displacement, there is a strong correlation between these factors.⁽¹⁹⁾ In Mosul alone, 80 per cent of youth between 18-25 were found to be unemployed in 2018.⁽²⁰⁾ As a result, securing livelihoods remains a priority for Iraq's population.

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- 11 UNICEF. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/1181/file/Assessment%20of%20COVID-19%20Impact%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Vulnerability%20in%20Iraq.pdf>, accessed on 09/08/2021.
 - 12 UNICEF. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/1181/file/Assessment%20of%20COVID-19%20Impact%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Vulnerability%20in%20Iraq.pdf>, accessed on 09/08/2021.
 - 13 Iraq: Engaging Youth to Rebuild the Social Fabric in Baghdad. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/12/02/iraq-engaging-youth-to-rebuild-the-social-fabric-in-baghdad> , accessed 09/08/2021.
 - 14 World Bank Data. Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Iraq. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=IQ> , accessed 09/08/2021.
 - 15 World Bank Data. Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Iraq. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=IQ> , accessed 09/08/2021.
 - 16 Ali, Zahra, LSE blog, "Protest movements in Iraq in the age of a 'new civil society'", 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/10/03/protest-movements-in-iraq-in-the-age-of-new-civil-society/>, accessed on 04/01/2021.
 - 17 Iraq Mission Data. <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/> , accessed 08/09/2021.
 - 18 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Humanitarian Needs Overview". 2018, p. 4, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2019_hno_irq_28122018.pdf, accessed 20/12/2020.
 - 19 Iraq: Engaging Youth to Rebuild the Social Fabric in Baghdad. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/12/02/iraq-engaging-youth-to-rebuild-the-social-fabric-in-baghdad> , accessed 09/08/2021.
 - 20 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Humanitarian Needs Overview". 2018, p. 4, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2019_hno_irq_28122018.pdf, accessed 20/12/2020.

When unemployment rates are disaggregated by gender, the situation is even worse. Women are disproportionately affected by Iraq's economic difficulties, with an unemployment rate of 63 per cent, in contrast to 22 per cent of men in 2017.⁽²¹⁾ This disparity is further evident in figures regarding the labour workforce in both public and private sectors: in 2017, women's participation in the labour workforce represented only 11.2 per cent, compared to 74.4 per cent for men.⁽²²⁾ Thus, in Iraq's drained economy which does include avenues for economic opportunity, women remain marginalised.

Especially vulnerable and at a higher risk of poverty, abuse, and exploitation are female-headed households. According to a UN study, female-headed households make up one in ten Iraqi households, thus almost 450,000 households.⁽²³⁾ Because statistical data on the labour workforce participation rarely considers domestic labour, often entirely relegated to women. The author therefore recommends that, when encouraging women's participation in the labour market, it is crucial to not overburden women with non-domestic as well as domestic labour, but to advocate a more equitable distribution of domestic and economic responsibilities within Iraqi society.

Despite low participation of women in the workforce, women are highly prevalent within Iraq's agriculture industry. Agriculture is especially important for Iraq, as it offers the possibility for diversification in an economy that is heavily dependent on oil revenues. During the period of international sanctions from 1991 to 2003, Iraq came to rely on food imports, despite its own agricultural production. Even today, most of Iraq's imports consist of food items.⁽²⁴⁾ Therefore, the development of Iraq's agriculture is a major factor for ensuring food security for Iraqis. In 2017, women made up 43.7 per cent of the agricultural workforce.⁽²⁵⁾ At the same time, it should be noted that the agricultural sector is characterised by high levels of informal work, which is rarely rewarded with direct monetary income and is unprotected by the law. Research has also demonstrated the vulnerable position of women within agriculture work, where women are rarely in control of the resources and the financial transactions in agriculture at any point of the supply chain (i.e. setting the price, going to the market to buy and sell, managing the financial aspects of the business).⁽²⁶⁾ Thus, while agriculture is an important sector of the Iraqi economy, especially when it comes to providing livelihood opportunities, it is crucial

21 ILO (International Labour Organization). <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/>, accessed on 22/12/2020.

22 ILO (International Labour Organization). <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/>, accessed on 22/12/2020.

23 IAU (Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit), Women in Iraq Fact sheet. 2012. <https://nina-iraq.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Women-In-Iraq-Fact-sheet-English.pdf>, accessed on 15/12/2020.

24 CIA. World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#economy>.

25 Vilardo, Valeria, and Sarah Bittar. "Gender Profile – Iraq: A situation analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq". 2018. <<https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620602/rr-gender-profile-iraq-131218-en.pdf>>, accessed on 21/12/2012.

26 Vilardo, Valeria, and Sarah Bittar. "Gender Profile – Iraq: A situation analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq". 2018. <<https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620602/rr-gender-profile-iraq-131218-en.pdf>>, accessed on 21/12/2012.

to pay attention to the specific working conditions of women within this field in order to avoid fostering new forms of gender discrimination or exploitation.

On a legal basis, the Iraq Labour Law of 2015 governs employment relationships in Iraq, including working hours, the rights and duties of workers and employers, leave, and the prohibition of discrimination over age, disability, gender, race, etc. It also sets a minimum wage that is currently USD200.⁽²⁷⁾ Unfortunately, this law is not widely implemented within the private sector, as pointed out by interviewees in Mosul.

3.2 Women, Peacebuilding and Economic Empowerment

As previously defined, peacebuilding is the process of building social capital which refers to social networks and norms of reciprocity that arise from them.⁽²⁸⁾ The civic virtues of tolerance, acceptance and mutual trust that consequently facilitate interpersonal cooperation thus reinforcing the process of peacebuilding.⁽²⁹⁾ When it comes to applying the tenets of peacebuilding in Iraq, major reference points are UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Security and Peace, and Iraq's National Action Plan (I-NAP) to implement the resolution. UNSCR 1325 highlights the role of women in peacebuilding, thereby setting an agenda for the universal rights of women. It urges all UN Member States to increase the participation of women in the prevention of conflict, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and all processes involved in implementing sustainable peace.⁽³⁰⁾

In the MENA region, Iraq has been a pioneer in implementing UNSCR 1325 by releasing the first ever I-NAP in 2014. Despite this first initial step towards greater inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes, there have been several limitations in implementing the I-NAP. First, there is a lack of knowledge amongst local activists and rural populations pertaining to the I-NAP.⁽³¹⁾ Second, while drafting the I-NAP, civil society organisations were included and acknowledged as the 'I-NAP1325 Initiative', a conglomerate of thirty-one Iraqi women's rights civil society organisations hailing from mainly urban areas.^{(32) (33)} The exclusion of diverse civil society organisations has been a critique of previous NAPs globally, as particularly in the field of women, peace and security, civil society plays a

27 Al Sarab Law Office, Lexology, Employment and Labour Law in Iraq. 2018. <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=8fc1dc22-85ab-453a-b833-d4de286f9ff9>, accessed on 17/01/2021.

28 Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

29 Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

30 UN Security Council. "Resolution 1325". 2000. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>. accessed on 27/01/2021.

31 Elbarlement; SwissPeace, "Scoping Study-A Strategy for Women Participation in Peace Processes in Nineveh", 2020.

32 Kaya, Zeynep. "Women, Peace and Security in Iraq: Iraq's National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325", Middle East Centre, LSE. 2016.

33 Iraq NAP 1325. <http://www.iraqnap1325.org/index.php/about-us>, accessed 08/09/2021.

critical role.⁽³⁴⁾ In addition, certain action points mandated by UNSCR 1325 are missing in the I-NAP, including a clear action plan, timelines for programmes to be run during the I-NAPs mandate, and budget.⁽³⁵⁾ Finally, the first I-NAP expired in 2018 and the second I-NAP was published in 2020, a gap that was further felt by the COVID-19 crisis. In response, civil society actors emphasised the need for “continuous coordination and collaboration across sectors, in particular, the involvement of all stakeholders including civil society, IDPs and survivors of ISIS taking into account the needs of each governorate.”⁽³⁶⁾ The second I-NAP was only endorsed by the Iraqi Council of Ministers in April 2021.

Another much less recent international framework relevant to women in Iraq is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, to which Iraq acceded in 1986.⁽³⁷⁾ Iraq has not ratified the optional protocol in which countries must report on their progress on ending discrimination against women. However, in 2019, the Iraqi Women’s Network produced a CEDAW shadow report, which indicated that women are not equally represented within peacebuilding programmes.⁽³⁸⁾ Indeed, in the Iraqi context, the crucial and fundamental role of women’s participation in securing lasting peace, has been extensively researched and affirmed.⁽³⁹⁾

There are manifold reasons for the continued lack of women’s representation within peacebuilding. One of the main factors is the security situation, whether in Baghdad or in Mosul or elsewhere in the country.⁽⁴⁰⁾ It is mainly the security setting that prevents women from taking active roles within public life. Women in Baghdad pointed out how regular public threats by militias create an atmosphere of intimidation which women from different backgrounds protested against in October 2019. According to interviewee Hannah Edwar, “the uprising is a prime example of the increasing empowerment

34 Kaya, Zeynep. “Women, Peace and Security in Iraq: Iraq’s National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325”, Middle East Centre, LSE. 2016.

35 Kaya, Zeynep. “Women, Peace and Security in Iraq: Iraq’s National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325”, Middle East Centre, LSE. 2016. p. 19.

36 EuroMed Feminist Initiative, “Consultation session on the development of the 2nd Iraq National Action Plan (NAP II) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, 2018, <http://www.efi-ife.org/consultation-session-development-2nd-iraq-national-action-plan-nap-ii-implementation-uns-1325>, accessed on 22/01/2021.

37 UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”. 1979. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>, accessed on 28/01/2021.

38 Iraqi Women Network, Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, 2019. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared_Documents/IRQ/INT_CEDAW_CSS_IRQ_37264_E.docx. accessed 24/12/2020.

39 Tabbara, Hanan, and Garrett Rubin. “Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation: Community Voices from Syria, Iraq and Yemen – a discussion paper”. 2018, p.2. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/2018/women%20on%20the%20frontlines-web-rev.pdf?la=en&vs=2003>, accessed on 20/01/2021.

40 O’Driscoll, Dylan. “Women’s participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Iraq”. Institute of Development Studies, 2017.

of women in Iraq, but also witnessed a violent reaction of militias⁽⁴¹⁾ that specifically targeted women's presence and social activism in the public sphere. The kidnappings of Saba Mahdawi and Mari Mohammed, who were intimidated into silence,⁽⁴²⁾ and the killing of Sara Taleb in Basra, fatally shot after returning from a peaceful demonstration,⁽⁴³⁾ are tragic examples of the lack of safety, specifically women's safety, when it comes to participation in the public sphere".⁽⁴⁴⁾

The peacebuilding programmes led by INGOs mostly engage in awareness-raising and social cohesion-fostering activities.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The majority of interviewees pointed to these two approaches of peacebuilding programmes. Concrete activities mentioned by the interviewees from Mosul included workshops between different minority communities, interfaith dialogues, and workshops deconstructing ISIS ideology. The intention of such programming is to develop trust between different communities, thus building a social network and increasing social capital. The majority of women interviewed also stated the importance of awareness-raising workshops on women's rights, including UNSCR 1325. At the same time, one interviewee in particular, suggested that the creation of safe public spaces for women to facilitate gatherings should be an additional priority to peacebuilding programmes to contribute to garnering social capital.

Since the aim of these workshops is mostly to create lasting social connections, trust and cohesion as a method of peacebuilding, their format is important to consider.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Participants and the convenors of these workshops pointed out that lasting friendships and networks cannot only be created within short-term workshops. Activist and interviewee Sroor Helal from Mosul explained: "I never benefited from those [short] workshops held in hotels in Erbil. What I really benefited from, until this day, was a two-week peacebuilding workshop that was held in Diwaniye, where members of different communities came together. In the beginning we were hesitant with each other but then

41 Most militias in Iraq are affiliated with political Islamic parties that are usually part of the Iraqi government. Militias that attacked women were for example the militia belonging to Muqtada Al-Sadr, that is Saraya Al-Salam but also militias that belong to the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi) such as Al-Asa'ib or Hizb'Allah.

42 RUDAW. "121 Iraqi activists kidnapped, murdered since October 1". <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/290120204>, accessed 09/09/2021.

43 Al Jazeera. After threats and chases .. Details of the killing of two prominent activists in Basra. <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2019-10-13---after-threats-and-chases----details-of-the-killing-of-two-prominent-activists-in-basra-.BJ-iWoTetS.html>, accessed 09/09/2021.

44 Ali, Zahra, "Women and the Iraqi Revolution", Jadaliyya, 2020, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/40817>, accessed 17/01/2021.

45 Malteser International. "Social cohesion in the Nineveh Plains". 2020. <https://www.malteser-international.org/en/our-work/middle-east/iraq/being-different-does-not-mean-you-are-enemies.html>, accessed on 14/01/2021.

46 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

we became friends throughout our daily discussions. We are friends and connected until today”. Therefore, longer-lasting peacebuilding activities that create opportunities for meaningful discussions among activists from different communities, the interviewees emphasised, are much more useful in the peacebuilding process of building social trust, which will accordingly contribute to higher participation of women in public life.

Increasing women’s participation in peacebuilding must also consider their freedom at home, specifically regarding gender norms that discriminate against most women. Generally, gender stereotypes demand that women remain at home, take on the domestic work, and raise children, while men are primarily seen as the breadwinners in the family. This creates a massive dependency since women must ask their husbands, fathers, or brothers for money and often for permission to work. While this plays out differently in Iraq according to the socio-economic and educational background of families, these norms remain prevalent throughout Iraq. Iqbal, from the Organization of Women’s Freedom, in Iraq identifies the domestic sphere as a sphere of unequal power relations: “Freedom at home is an important step to establish freedom outside and has important effects on society”. Therefore, raising not only women’s, but also men’s, awareness of women’s rights, is vital for building a strong foundation for a socially just peace.

3.3 Current Livelihood Programmes

When it comes to economic empowerment of women, most research and data points to the effects of conflicts on livelihoods and economic wellbeing, highlighting the challenges but also the opportunities for change.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Structural challenges to women’s economic empowerment consist of patriarchal gender norms.⁽⁴⁸⁾ These challenges include restrictions on women’s mobility, which hinders women’s participation in public life, a perceived lack of security, family pressure, household responsibilities, and a lack of some employment skills.⁽⁴⁹⁾ However, in their work on displacement and women’s economic empowerment, Kaya et al. show that even though conflict has a severe and damaging impact on women’s livelihood, it may also offer the possibility for social renewal, including the change of discriminatory gender norms.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Kaya et al. ascribe this to the context of conflict in which women, mostly out of necessity, engage with norm-breaking ways to secure their livelihoods.⁽⁵¹⁾ Currently, international funding in the post-conflict context is used by women’s rights organisations to cater to women empowerment programmes that focus on securing livelihoods.

47 Kaya, Zeynep, and Luchtenberg, Kyra. “Displacement and Women’s Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq”. Center for Women, Peace and Security, LSE. 2018; UN OCHA, p 4.

48 WRC & OXFAM. 2015.

49 Kaya and Luchtenberg.

50 Kaya, Zeynep, and Luchtenberg, Kyra. “Displacement and Women’s Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq”. Center for Women, Peace and Security, LSE. 2018; UN OCHA, p 4.

51 Kaya, Zeynep, and Luchtenberg, Kyra. “Displacement and Women’s Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq”. Center for Women, Peace and Security, LSE. 2018; UN OCHA, p 4.

Securing a livelihood also means preventing women from being subjected to further violence. Different security actors perpetrate violence against women and girls partly, because these women do not have the security of life and income that comes with access to livelihood opportunities and basic services. Whilst women and girls are subjected to violence, including sexualized violence, boys are at risk of being forced into child labour within the armed groups that proliferate in Iraq.⁽⁵²⁾

The main critique, which can be levelled at existing livelihood programmes, is that most do not consider that limited opportunities for formal employment in Iraq as a structural issue. Both limited availability of work within the public sector and an underdeveloped private sector have led to insufficient work opportunities. In addition, many programmes have failed to take into consideration the possibility of expanding the skillset of women with different backgrounds and rather offer them the same generic programmes, with limited training for professions such as beautician, hairdresser, seamstress, etc..⁽⁵³⁾

Therefore, while research on livelihood programmes indicates that the lack of livelihood opportunities leads to different forms of violence and the erosion of social cohesion, it does not offer insights on linkages between economic empowerment and peacebuilding. The next section will shed light on this topic.

52 Jarhum, Rasha, and Alice Bonfatti. "We Are Still Here: Mosulite Women 500 Days After the Conclusion of the Coalition Military Operation." 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ENG_We-Are-Still-Here_Mosulite-Women.pdf>, accessed on 12/01/2021.

53 Kaya and Luchtenberg.

4. Economic Empowerment as Integral Part of Peacebuilding in Iraq

In most research, livelihood and economic empowerment of women has mainly been treated as one aspect of peacebuilding or even as an entirely different subject matter. This study finds that economic empowerment must be an integral part of the definition and the process of peacebuilding itself.

This finding is underlined through statistical data within the peacebuilding literature pointing out that in post-conflict situations, “the main recovery need for Iraqi IDPs in 2018 continues to be access to employment and job opportunities.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ Of those 6.7 million people in need, women makeup almost half at 47 per cent. Especially severe is the situation of female-headed households in debt, generating one out of three indebted households.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The importance of economic empowerment to peacebuilding is also confirmed through the experiences and in-depth insight of key stakeholders within both programmes confirming that:

“Peacebuilding will never be established through workshops and awareness raising. It is only through economic empowerment that people step outside, engage with others, and develop a practical responsibility towards their society.”

-(Aliya, Volunteer With Us, Mosul)

Consequently, the goals of peacebuilding, that is the establishment of lasting social cohesion and trust, require not only awareness, but must also be actively built through livelihood programmes that keep people engaged not only in earning an income, but also building lasting mutual relations of social trust. Hence, the approach to livelihood programmes has an impact on peacebuilding. The following sections will lay out the challenges, opportunities, and best practices when it comes to combining economic empowerment and peacebuilding.

4.1 Challenges

The main challenge to peacebuilding through economic empowerment is that the economic context within Iraq provides little opportunity for women to access the already very marginal labour market. As previously stated, the Iraqi economy is mostly state-run and depends heavily on oil income with little diversification. While the agricultural sector is a promising sector to be developed with women making up the majority workforce, employment relations within agriculture are mostly informal and do not offer women the control over the income made. Thus, there are structural and institutional obstacles that

54 UN OCHA, p. 51.

55 UN OCHA.

must be addressed not only through the individual economic empowerment of women,⁽⁵⁶⁾ but also by the government of Iraq and the Kurdish regional government.

Within this context, when it comes to livelihood programmes, supporting female-led businesses has been one way to practically encourage women to earn an income. One widespread business, mentioned by the majority of interviewees, have been beauty salons established by women. While these projects have been evaluated as successful by BWA, the Tammuz Organization for Social Development critiqued these programmes for their short-term duration and the lack of sustainability, explaining that not all women can set up beauty salons. This situation calls for the diversity of livelihood programs that are adapted to the specific socio-economic groups of women which will be further outlined in the recommendations section.

Another structural challenge is the lack of security and the patriarchal gender order that is indicated above in Section 3 of this report. The patriarchy enforced in Iraq results in restrictions on women's mobility, family pressure, household responsibilities, lack of education and employment skills, and a general lack of autonomy.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The absence of independence and opportunity leads to a lack of security, especially in conflicts or post-conflict contexts, where the search for opportunity can lead to terrorist organisations, an one interviewee describes:

“Livelihood opportunities are important, especially for women without husbands and widowed women, so they do not turn to terrorist organizations, militias, or engage in criminal activities to find jobs that might harm them only to gain an income.”

-Interviewee (Mosul, 2020)

This resonates with a 2018 UN study which posits that women resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as early marriage of girls, taking children out of school.⁽⁵⁸⁾ It is crucial to see the linkages between violence and lack of employment, which includes men joining armed groups to make a living. This paper thus argues that for peace to be established, the basic income to provide livelihood, from employment that stems from an economy where peace, not war, prospers.

It is also in the implementation of projects that challenges to creating sustainable peace arise. Thus, projects with a sole focus on awareness raising workshops are seen as ineffective, as interviewee Iqbal Al-Slaan explained: “Awareness raising without any material basis remains knowledge confined to the classroom”. Similarly, a BWA project coordinator explained: “The motivation for women with lower or no income to participate in these sessions without any material gains or practical knowledge, such as literacy, is little.” Thus,

56 Golla, Anne Marie; Malhotra, Anju; Nanda, Priya; “Understanding and measuring women's economic empowerment.” International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). 2011. < <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Understanding-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment.pdf> > , accessed on 14/01/2021.

57 Kaya and Luchtenberg.

58 UN OCHA.

while it is crucial to raise women's awareness on topics such as, women's rights within Iraqi law and outside of it, knowledge on women's health, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and transitional justice, its practical application can only be exercised in livelihood practices of everyday life. Therefore, a combination of both peacebuilding seminars as well as training in different skills is crucial. That way, women can understand peace through newly gained awareness and practice peace by gaining an income through livelihood practices, reinforced by social cohesion practices developed in workshops.

4.2 Opportunities and Best Practices for Combining Economic Empowerment and Peacebuilding

Economic empowerment through which social cohesion and women's participation in public life are bolstered leads to more meaningful and lasting women's participation in peacebuilding processes. As interviewee Iqbal articulates it:

"Most women in Iraq must ask their husbands, fathers or other male relatives for money. I was one of them. So, of course, having your own source of income brings greater peace to women than asking their husbands or fathers. This is what we call economic peacebuilding."

-Iqbal (Baghdad, 2020)

It is crucial to understand the situation of Iraqi women from an economic point of view. The concept of economic peacebuilding centralises economic empowerment in social cohesion building activities of the peacebuilding process. Economic empowerment here is a practical way forward to offer perspectives for women to build their lives by themselves, according to their own choices. Consequently, this will affect women's decision-making, starting within the domestic sphere around her mobility and use of income and then moving into the broader public sphere that is concerned with women's rights. While this is a major opportunity for women's economic empowerment, it needs to be considered that even if women earn money, it might end up in their male relatives' hands. Liza Hido further explained this idea and offers practical ways forward:

"I had a participant in our livelihoods programme whom I asked what she does with her new earned income. She said that it was with her husband now since this how religious custom in Islam demand it. I sat down with her and explained that there are no such customs. This is only one example of why it is important to hold awareness workshops and inform women about their rights".

-Liza Hido (Baghdad, 2020)

While economic empowerment is a practical way forward to offer perspectives and opportunities for both men and women to build their lives by themselves, it needs to be accompanied by awareness-raising workshops on women's rights. Thereby, knowledge gained in peacebuilding activities can be directly put into practice through livelihood income, creating a fruitful connection between both aspects. Another risk is that the money earned by women or any loans obtained might be taken by male relatives. Some interviewees stated that loans from the state are given usually to state employees only,

and even if these are women state employees, the loans end up in the hands of their male counterparts. This means that along with raising awareness of women's rights, policy changes to break down institutional barriers. A possible solution is offering both state loans or loans from INGOs to groups of women for developing a female led-business. Thus, the mutual accountability of women towards their project makes it harder to give out money to their personal male relatives based on cultural norms and pressure.

A crucial aspect of access to livelihood opportunities are women who are empowered to build strong networks that will foster sustainable peace. While livelihood opportunities are difficult to create, an initial option might be to create safe public spaces for women that enable women to be more present and participate in public life. There have been examples of the creation of safe spaces for women,⁽⁵⁹⁾ such as centres that are dedicated to providing women with physical and emotional safety while also offering counselling and training in skills for employment. While this is extremely useful, it is important not to practice gender segregation as this has been used by political Islamic parties as a way to isolate women further from the rest of society. Rather, male presence should be encouraged in these spaces under certain conditions that have to be discussed locally by the women organising these spaces. This can lead to heightened gender awareness and more opportunity for women in the public sphere, a cornerstone for economic peacebuilding.

Another solution is to invest in the creation of public safe spaces. Nadia, an interviewee, is a Muslawi woman who has suffered at the hands of ISIS and today offers psychosocial support within different local and international NGOs explains the importance of safe spaces:

“One very basic consequence of the lack of livelihood opportunities for women means to stay at home. This not only leads to aggravating psychosocial and mental health issues of women, it also prevents them from creating social relations. Even a public park or other spaces for women to safely meet and engage with each other is important.”

-Nadia (Mosul, 2020)

Therefore, a step forward can be investing in safe public spaces outside the home, as a way to enable women to build trusting relationships with others from different communities. This reinforces peacebuilding through gaining social capital while simultaneously alleviating some of the psychosocial effects of remaining confined and isolated within the house. Concretely, safe public spaces in the form of, for instance, large gardens with a house to which entrance is initially allowed for women and their children only and at a later stage men can be included/hosted under certain conditions could be very useful. The exact implementation of such a public space however depends on the specific area and needs to be discussed with local civil society activists. Thus, women will also be more visible and mobile in a mostly man-dominated public sphere. Over time, this may lead

59 LWF (The Lutheran World Federation), “A safe space for women and girls in Iraq”. 2020. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/safe-space-women-and-girls-iraq>, accessed 22/01/2021.

to the normalisation of women's presence in the public sphere. Ultimately, and for this process to be sustainable, access to livelihoods is also needed, so that leaving the domestic sphere becomes part of daily routine and necessity for increasing numbers of women.

Sewing workshops as a method for connecting both economic empowerment and peacebuilding was raised by interviewees from the Tammuz Organization for Social Development and the Iraqi Women's Network, as it is one of the prime examples of women's livelihood programmes. There has been little effort by international donors to combine sewing workshops with peacebuilding activities such as, raising awareness on women's rights and SGBV. Importantly, the awareness raising sessions were seen as necessary, and therefore conducted by local Iraqi NGOs themselves, rather than as part of the official programme of donors. While sewing courses are one viable option for women with little education to gain skills, it is not always sustainable for women to take their sewing machine's home after the course and start working alone where they are again relegated to the domestic sphere of the house.

A more viable practice, conceptualised by the Tammuz Organization for Social Development, has been to set up rooms, or to support women to set up a hall for themselves, where women work together as co-workers within a sewing company, similar to start-ups. The benefit of collective work outside of the home is that the goals of peacebuilding programmes, namely social trust, cohesion, and participation in public life are not only taught in workshops, but enacted on a daily basis through common work goals. The civic virtues of tolerance, acceptance, and mutual trust that contribute to building trust and confidence, or as Putnam called it the social capital, will consequently facilitate interpersonal cooperation.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In the case of Tammuz Organization for Social Development, women had been able to mutually support each other, to socially normalise spending time outside the domestic sphere, as well as developing their own business through practice. Working outside of the home and accessing public life also helped the women involved gain relevant business knowledge within the sewing sector. Another way to build social capital through economic peacebuilding is to form groups of women, train them in sewing and support them to set up and manage their own sewing factory. In this way, they learn to manage projects by themselves and also organise themselves socially. Until now, however, this kind of practical combination of peacebuilding through economic empowerment has only been implemented on a small scale. The following testimony from one such sewing factory exemplifies how economic peacebuilding provided support and enabled women in making autonomous decisions about their lives by strengthening the participation of women in civil life and groupings:

60 Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

“One of the women working in the factory has been facing severe domestic violence. After she did a sewing course with us, she worked within a sewing company. After earning her own income and learning about her rights as a woman, including divorce law, at one point she went to court to get divorced. So, she had to become independent financially to take care of herself, deciding to refuse to be subjected to violence. Gaining her own income enabled her to make an autonomous decision about her life and that of her daughters. Thereby, she started to become a decisionmaker.”

-Amal Kabashi Faraj (Iraqi Women’s Network, 2020)

Apart from sewing courses, Liza Hido from the BWA explained the importance of not only supporting livelihood programmes in fields that are typically ascribed to women, such as sewing or aesthetics, but also offering women programmes to gain IT skills and English-language skills. However, she also cautioned that it is important to be aware of the wishes of the participants themselves who mostly opt to work in sectors traditionally ascribed to women.

Indeed, the challenge and opportunity with either English or IT courses is that they need to be adapted to the women they are teaching. For example, courses geared towards rural women with little IT or English education might already have different kinds of agricultural skills that can instead be supported. Generally, livelihood programmes should be diversified and include women from different backgrounds and regions.

At last it should be pointed out that when designing livelihood programmes, it is important to consider that it is not only about gaining financial resources, but also about gaining hands-on and social skills that can be used to support and engage in peacebuilding. Also, professional skilled women need to be considered further in livelihood programming.

Enhancing professional development for professional women, as nurses, teachers, social workers, although very impactful to peacebuilding, is often left aside and needs to be further studied and addressed.

5. Recommendations

- To INGOs: When designing economic peacebuilding programs, seek out potentially growing economic sectors.

A thorough understanding of the Iraqi economy in terms of the labour market is necessary to build livelihood programmes that are sustainable and that are becoming an integral part of the economy. While most programs focus on classes in sewing, English and IT skills, and supporting beauty salons, a thorough analysis of the potential within the Iraqi labour market can offer more sustainable forms of livelihood to women. For example, the potential of agriculture is mostly neglected within livelihood projects. While certain INGOs and donor agencies focus on developing Iraq's private sector, the potential of these sectors for developing livelihood programmes for women who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds is yet to be developed.

- To INGOs and Iraqi Government: Within livelihood programs, offer special support to groups of women rather than individual women.

Whether women are given loans or specific livelihood opportunities, it is crucial to support a group of three or more women to lower the risk of male relatives receiving the income. Individual women are more prone to the social pressure of giving any income she makes to a male relative in her household. However, when it is a group of women, mutual accountability makes it more difficult to give money to male relatives. At the same time, women can share each other's problems, support, and empower each other. In terms of peacebuilding, this supports networking, building trust and confidence in the work environment.

- To NGOs and INGOs: Understand the different skills of women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

While it is important to map the diverse needs of women, particularly those affected by war and violence, it is also important to understand women's skills as this will offer hints for economic empowerment. This will also account for the fact that women remain extremely resilient, exercising agency over their lives rather than being reduced to mere victims without any skills. Therefore, employing a wider definition of livelihood skills to facilitate their access to the relevant labour markets.

For example, most of the rural women have experience in agriculture. Consequently, courses in ecologically friendly agriculture, in marketing, presentation skills to showcase local produce for tourists ensure that women can continue working in a growing industry with diversified skills. Of course, it needs to be remembered that a collective character of work is equally important for women here so that her work does not only remain part of household chores or informal work that lacks pay structure. Being aware of the discriminative gender dynamics within traditional agriculture where men receive most of the material income is important. Therefore, workshops and educational awareness programmes that focus on women's rights, women's health, international and national law in Iraq, and further political processes should also be included in the structure of these skills-based courses.

Young women who have graduated from universities require further employability workshops and livelihood opportunities in their fields of choice (ie. IT, medical and social services, English etc.). This relates to the fact that the degrees women might obtain upon graduating are theoretical and not suited to the labour market. Hands-on skills and professional development workshops that train women on using their knowledge to practically enter the job market, and through their participation within their communities, also develop the private sector are therefore needed.

Professional and/or skilled women should receive adequate support and be equipped with relevant skills in order to be able to offer hands-on skills workshops to other women, and multiply their knowledge within their communities.

- **To the Iraqi Government:** Create safe and comfortable spaces for women outside the domestic sphere.

It is important for women not to spend their days only confined at home with little contact to larger society as this creates depression and heightens possibilities for conflict. Even if there are little employment opportunities, creating a safe environment for women within public places enhances their visibility within Iraqi society, thus normalizing their presence within public life. These public spaces may be public women's centers and gardens with possibilities to engage in sport or physical exercises that are widely accessible but also offer security and have a women-first policy. Therefore, it is important to be mindful not to engage in gender segregation as a solution, thus also allowing men to go to these spaces under certain conditions. These conditions might be discussed in each specific case and might be prohibiting picture-taking or explicitly condemning harassment. Supporting the presence of women in public space directly influences peacebuilding and economic empowerment by normalising women's presence outside the household, enhancing social trust, and creating networks between women.

6. Conclusion

This study has pointed out the ways in which economic empowerment of women is an integral aspect of women's participation in peacebuilding. It has outlined the structure of the Iraqi economy that allows little women's participation in the labour market, wherein women suffer more than twice then men from unemployment. Hence, it is important to consider both the realistic potential within the Iraqi labour market as well as women's specific skills. Within this context, drawing on interviews with key stakeholders, this research has highlighted the limitations of addressing economic empowerment as simply one aspect of peacebuilding or even within a different framework. All interviewees confirmed that a sustainable form of peace is not only implemented through enhancing women's participation in peacebuilding but also by offering women access to livelihoods as the basis for making their own decisions. Implementing peacebuilding via economic empowerment, or rather economic peacebuilding, is best practiced through offering women both awareness pertaining to women's rights as well as the opportunity to work collectively, outside the domestic sphere. In this way, Putnam's conceptualisation of peacebuilding through the creation of social capital is fed by economic empowerment opportunities that contribute to giving women agency in the public sphere.⁽⁶¹⁾

To gain a deeper understanding of the kind of livelihood programs needed, further research is required that provides more information on how women who have participated in livelihood programs have also participated in peacebuilding. This calls for a broader study that is representative and able to identify as well as interrogate a large number of women who have participated in livelihood projects. Results from such a study would offer more details and practical advice on what to consider when implementing livelihood projects as part of peacebuilding programs.

61 Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

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8. Appendix

Table 1: Interview Participants from Mosul

Name	Organisation	Age Range	Profession
Sara	Participant in peacebuilding workshops and activist	20-30	Employee of an IT company
Nadia	Employed within different NGOs, for example 'Un Ponte Per'	20-30	Trainer for psychosocial support
Sroor Helal	Employee in several organizations; created her own community group, Fariq Sroor (Sroor's Team)	20-30	Nurse
Aliya	Volunteer in 'Volunteer With Us'	20-30	Project coordinator
Wurud	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	20-30	Project coordinator

Table 2: Interview Participants from Baghdad

Name	Organization	Age Range	Implementation of Economic Empowerment	Implementation of Peacebuilding
Iqbal Al Aslan	Organization for the Freedom of Women (OWFI)	40-50	Yes	Yes
Hannah Edwar	Al-Amal Association	70+	Yes	Yes
Vian Al Sheikh Ali	Tammuz Organization for Social Development	30-40	Yes	Yes
Liza Hido	Baghdad Women Association (BWA)	40-50	Yes	Yes
Amal Kabashi Faraj	Iraqi Women's Network	50-60	Works, observes, and networks with women's organisations who do the implementation process	Works, observes, and networks with women's organisations who do the implementation process

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