

## **Iraqi women caught and the low level of economic participation\***

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### **Overview**

In Iraq, gender equality is both a human right and a national imperative, since the political economic, social and cultural changes for transforming the country cannot be completed without women's empowerment and participation. Moreover, women need their own voice in this transition. Experience shows that no group is capable of representing the interests of other groups effectively, however sincere their intentions may be. Women are best qualified to represent their own interests.

The empowerment of women has fluctuated during the past three decades in Iraq but at no time has it done them the justice promised by human development. Long-standing cultural and social discrimination, coupled with a new sense of insecurity resulting from different forms of direct and indirect violence, present formidable challenges to Iraqi women today.

As other countries have shown, transition to democratic rule can provide historic breakthroughs in the removal of institutional and cultural obstacles to women's empowerment. However, a basic requirement for this is that transition must motivate women to become their own advocates for equality and human rights. Moreover, while emerging democracies have the opportunity to reform societies by establishing basic freedoms, democratic government, free markets and human rights, the insecurity associated with times of struggle can nevertheless undermine such important outcomes. When transition takes place within a surrounding conflict, the need for a stable democratic system becomes the main priority and can eclipse the imperative of equality. If that happens, political transformation in the transitional phase may sometimes increase, rather than decrease, the prevalence of gender inequality. (Many Arab women who participated in their countries' struggles against colonialism learned that the fight for political independence does not guarantee women's independence and can indeed become a pretext for denying it).

This study will examine how women in Iraq have been caught between conflict, transition and their legacy of cultural restrictions, and the impact of all these factors on the economic activity levels of Iraqi women.

### **Empowerment: A Misunderstood Process**

Since its establishment, the Iraqi State has been inclined to create opportunities for the institutional empowerment of Iraqi women, by providing wider access to education, health services, and job training. Yet the State has shown no real awareness that empowerment is not achieved solely through enacting legislation; but rather, that it only comes about when society puts laws into practice, which in turn demands changes in the culture of discrimination. Women's empowerment requires a culture of equality of access and opportunity, with all its attendant values and psychological and legal dimensions. Moreover, such a culture must provide for the rights of both women and men, for there can be no rights for women where there are none for citizens as a whole.

\* This study is mainly based on Iraq human Development Report. The writer is the national coordinator and the chief of the statistical team of the report.

The argument this study presents is that empowerment is a process that requires more than institutional mechanisms and technical training. It should lead to a culture of equality beyond the formal means of empowerment, as provided through education and health services, legal acts and decrees. For example, an increase in expenditure on education may amount to nothing if the educational programmes themselves promote inequality. Similarly, expenditures on health may not yield positive outcomes if traditional practices and values prevail over the health system. Iraq has spent much on education and health programmes and passed many laws supporting the advancement of women. However, changes in societal values conducive to equality have not been pursued in parallel.

Thus, a narrow focus on instituting social, educational and health services, which ignores the cultural aspects of empowerment and the problems of insecurity, can reverse the impact of such progress. This implies that women's empowerment goes beyond control of resources, the capacity building of existing and new institutions, or inclusion in decision-making processes. It necessitates the removal of cultural stereotypes in order to challenge inherent discrimination, inequality and violations of human rights, including and especially those of women.

In Iraq, the imposition of sanctions and the growing political and economic crisis, with the insecurity and conflict it has bred, have meant that women have not fared well compared to men in recent decades. Women are worse off on several key human development indicators. In 2006, although women's life expectancy (62) was altogether higher than that of men (55), 30% of women aged 15 and up were illiterate, compared to a rate of 14% among men. Combined school enrolment rates (primary, intermediate and secondary) were 55% for females and 68% for males. Unemployment rates were also higher among women: 23% compared to 16% for men. Women's earned income is only 11% of men's. Agricultural work constitutes 60 % of total working hours per week for women and only 22% for men. This fact helps explain their low income, as agricultural work for women is known to be mostly unpaid, or of lower productivity. The value of HDI was 0.627, while that of the GDI was 0.584.

### **Education as a Tool for Empowerment**

Evidently, there is still much progress to be made towards the achievement of the MDGs, although women have scored remarkable gains in political participation. Education on the other hand continues to exhibit stubborn problems in female illiteracy, dropout rates, and inequality.

One positive outcome of previous policies that deserves notice is the rise of female Enrolment in university education. The rate of enrolment for women for the academic year 2006-2007 was 59% for morning classes, 30% for evening classes and 30% for technical education.

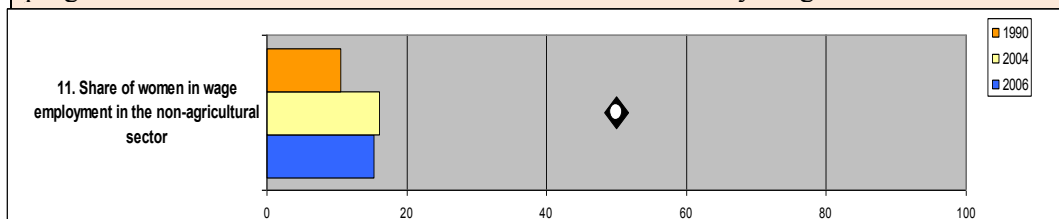
Admissions policies at the universities and higher institutes were changed after 2003. Those that discriminated between males and females have been dropped so that instruction at Engineering and Medical Colleges is now equally available to all, where previously men were granted preference.

Iraqi women have achieved remarkable levels of education during the past decades as a result of the modernization of the economy and the need to fill jobs left vacant following the mobilization of men in the military sector. Women's professional levels have risen, especially in the more socially accepted fields of education and health services. In 1997-2004, 68% of teachers were women, and the overall rate of women's participation in the medical professions represented 30-60% of the total, as Table 1 shows.

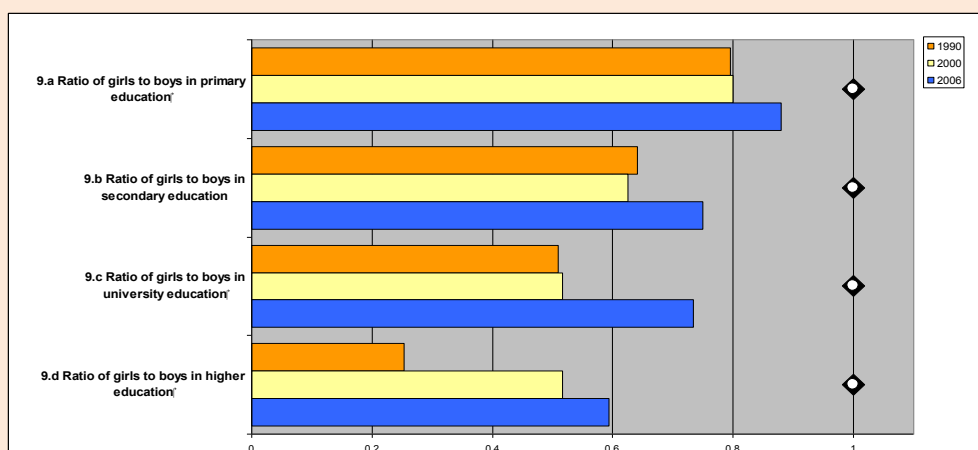
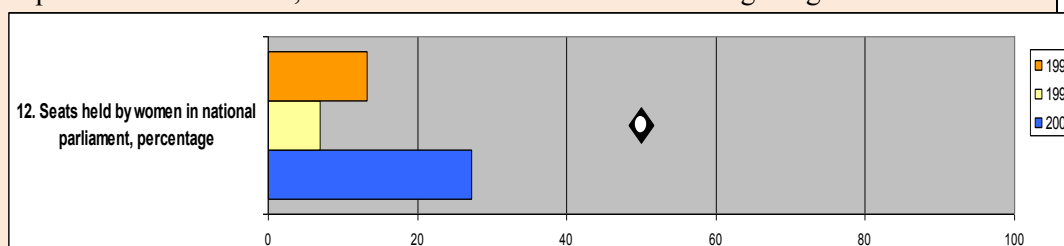
**Box 1: Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals**

**Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

The percentage of women in paid jobs in non-agricultural sectors was 15.3% in 2006, while it was 10.6% in 1990, a situation which requires a much greater commitment to progress and accelerated measures to reach the internationally set goal of 50% in 2015.



The proportion of seats held by women in parliament was 27% in 2006, up from 7% in 1997, pointing to significant progress in the promotion of equality and the empowerment of women, with a reasonable chance of achieving the goal set for 2015.



- The ratio of girls to boys in primary education in 2006 was 0.91 compared with 0.80 in 1990. This represents progress towards the goal set.
- The ratio of girls to boys in secondary education in 2006 was 0.80 compared with 0.64 in 1990, which indicates progress towards the defined goals.
- The ratio of women to men in university education in 2006 was 0.73 compared with 0.51 in 1990. This represents some progress, though it will need to improve faster if gender equality at this stage of education is to be achieved.
- Ratio of women to men in tertiary education in 2006 was 0.59 compared to 0.25 in 1990. Clearly, deeper policy changes are necessary to ensure that gender equality is achieved by 2015.

Source: COSIT, MDG reports

**Table 1: Women's Participation in Medical and Health Professions**

Professions/Years	1997	2000	2004	2009
<b>Physicians</b>	36.3	38.4	34.3	<b>35.9</b>
<b>Specialized Physicians</b>	30.2	33.4	30.2	<b>28.1</b>
<b>Dentists</b>	58.7	59.4	57.1	<b>54.2</b>
<b>Pharmacists</b>	76.0	69.0	47.5	<b>49.8</b>
<b>Total</b>	44.5	45.5	39.3	<b>40.9</b>
<b>Paramedics</b>	35.8	34.7	27.0	<b>32.2</b>

Source: COSIT, Annual statistical abstract, different years, (Kurdistan Region not included)  
Annual Report ,Ministry of Health, Iraq.

### **Box 2: Free Education for all Iraqis?**

*First: Education is a fundamental factor in the progress of society and is a right guaranteed by the state. Primary education is mandatory and the state guarantees to eradicate illiteracy.*

*Second: Free education is a right for all Iraqis in all its stages.*

Article 34, Iraqi Constitution, 2005

Solutions to continuing gender inequality in education are currently limited, as complicated living and security conditions exacerbate the problems. Commitment to compulsory education, as the text of the Constitution declares, will provide an opportunity to stop the decline in school attendance. In this connection, a paradox can be observed. While the proportion of women attending universities has gone up, many families are reluctant to send their younger daughters to primary school. Obviously, this trend would undermine the gains that women have secured in education so far. Furthermore, although education is considered essential for extending women's options and empowerment, cultural and traditional factors still make many urban families force their educated daughters to stay at home and not practise any profession. This restriction will undoubtedly curtail women's economic independence and full participation in society. Thus while society may offer both sexes the same opportunities for empowerment in principle, the hurdles women have to surmount to reach and retain those opportunities are higher and more numerous.

### **Political Transition: Gains and Challenges for Women Women in Positions of Power**

Since the introduction of the quota system on September 4, 2003, political life has been enriched by affirmative action for women. In the 2005 elections, for example, 87 women gained seats out of 275 in the National Assembly, or 31% of the total. In local council elections from closed electoral lists they gained 28% of seats. Additionally, adherence to the quota system significantly raised the number of women elected to governorate councils. At the same time, the system of lists can lead to a decline in the rate of representation by women, when winning lists increase in elections. This was noticed in the parliamentary elections, where the number of women elected decreased from 87 in 2005 to 75 in 2007, and to 81 in 2010.

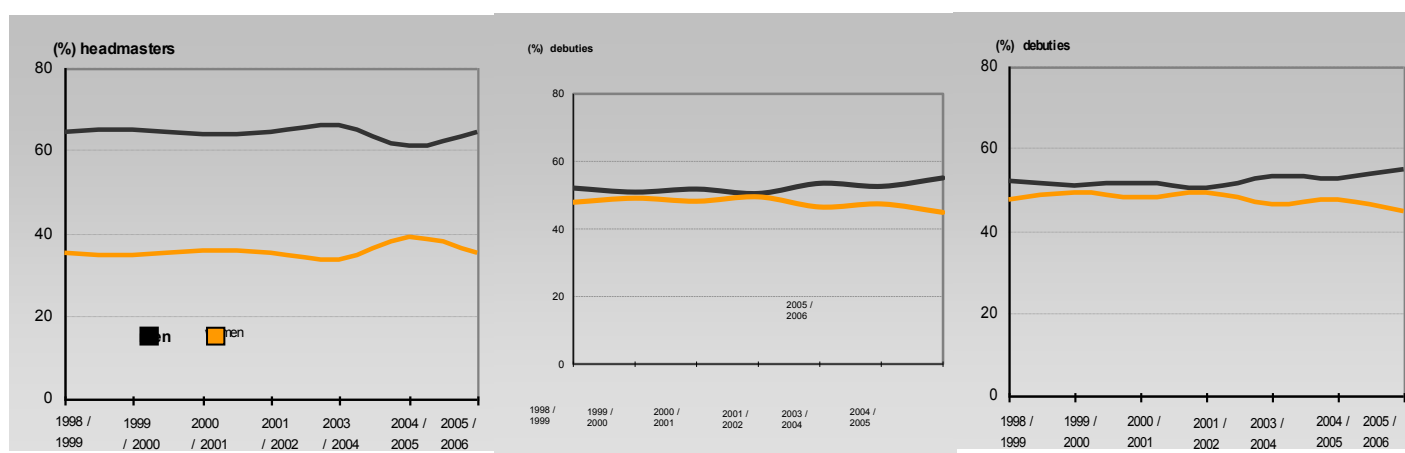
A strong turnout of women was noted in the recent elections, especially in rural areas and low-income neighbourhoods, though this showing has been attributed to the impact of a fatwa issued by high-ranking clerics. Indeed, one should not underestimate the role of traditional culture in shaping behaviour and attitudes in Iraq and the strong influence of religion in creating new images of socially accepted women's roles. Religious institutions therefore need to step up to the responsibility of helping to strengthen women's advancement.

Such results place a question mark over the future of women’s political participation in Iraq when the application of the quota system (which is confined to three parliamentary elections) comes to an end, or in the event that the electoral law is changed. As the experience of neighbouring countries shows, the position of women in politics is vulnerable. In 2007, Kuwaiti women failed to win any seat in parliament, and Omani women lost their seats on the Advisory Council in the most recent elections.

### Has The Gender Gap Narrowed?

Since 2003, the number of women in administrative decision-making positions has also increased, from 12.7% to 22.4%. Although women represented only 2% of the judiciary in 2006, they fared better in the executive. In 2006, there were four female cabinet ministers, plus a total of 342 high-ranking officials, including 8 under- secretaries, 33 counsellors and inspectors general, 86 directors general, and 215 assistant directors general. The situation Of 2011 dose not significantly differ from that of 2006, except the decrease of the number of female cabinet ministers to only one. However, this improvement does not necessarily reflect progress towards narrowing the gap between men and women. The number of women in primary school administration decreased slightly in 2005, a field where women constitute the majority of staff. At the secondary school level, the number declined after 2005. This was largely due to the reinstatement of previously dismissed male staff, and, more specifically, to the increase in salaries which encouraged men to return to positions which they had left in the 1990s.

**Figure 1: Women’s Participation in Secondary School Administration**



Source: COSIT ,Annual Statistical Abstracts, different years

### Gender of Household Head and Deprivation

The obstacles related to the gender is considered significant factor of deprivation in Iraq. It is important that each person should have the ownership, insurance, education and dwelling especially in the case of women headed their family.

The number of households headed by women is 11% of total households according to IHSES survey 2007 . 81% of these households headed by widows .The table below shows the systematic pattern of deprivation rate between households headed by man and woman despite the great deference between men and women contribution in labor field and the low rate of women contribution in the economic activity. The household headed by women is more deprived than those headed by man represents in ownership of assets and durable goods.

**Table 2 : Percentage of deprived households in economic situation field by the gender of household head**

Gender	Percentage of HH	Per capita expenditure	Dependency Rate	Durable goods	Ownership of assets	Lawns and advances	Guide of economic situation field
Man	88.7	25.6	53.0	14.9	17.8	26.7	32.0
Woman	11.3	20.0	49.9	21.3	21.3	26.2	33.4

Source: COSIT . Deprivation Map Of Iraq, 2006

## Does Legislation Guarantee the Protection and Empowerment of Women?

Reforms to legislation in the context of democratic transformation are essential to the achievement of equality among citizens, notably between men and women. These should be followed by institutional mechanisms, interventions and procedures to ensure the solid establishment of a sound democratic society. If disparity in capabilities restricts options for women and limits their opportunities in economic or social activities, a state's legislation should under no circumstances exploit this to promote discrimination between men and women.

In Iraq, there are a number of relatively progressive laws still in force, like the Personal Status Law No. 188 for the year 1959, Labour Law No. 71 for the year 1987, Minors' Welfare Act No. 78 for the year 1980 and Social Welfare Act No. 126 for the year 1980. As far as the last Act is concerned, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is endeavouring to formulate an alternative law for the purpose of organizing the activities of social protection. All these laws could be considered as a solid basis on which to guarantee equal rights for women.

The most important instrument that can be referred to as a foundation for women's empowerment – regardless of the criticism it often draws – is the new Iraqi Constitution of 2005 which strove to include a number of positive measures for women. The preamble of the Constitution states:

“We, the people of Iraq..., men and women ...have resolved... to respect the rule of law, to realize justice and equality...and to pay adequate attention to the woman and her rights.”

Under Article 20, the Constitution bestows on men and women equally the right of inclusion in public affairs and the exercise of political rights. It emphasizes the value of education and the role of the State in promoting and protecting this right for all the people (Article 34). Articles 31, 32 and 33 guarantee the rights of all Iraqi citizens to health services. In accordance with Article 18, women may pass on their nationality to their children. The Constitution also provides for affirmative action, granting in Article 49 a quota for women of no less than 25% of the seats in Parliament. The Electoral Law No. 6 of 2005 also stipulates that election candidate lists should abide by this quota.

Yet the Constitution contains some articles, clauses and implications that could be considered discriminatory or unfavourable to women. For example, the preamble contains a total of 85 words specifically relating to men out of a total of 316 words, against only 4 for women. Furthermore, Clause „A“ of Article 2 states that Islam is the essential source of all legislation: thus, it is not permissible to enact a law that contradicts the tenets of Islam. Article 41 states that "Iraqis are free to abide by their personal status according to their religion, beliefs, doctrines or choices...", which has also raised concerns. It is feared that such provisions may allow for different interpretations of the Islamic Sharia, resulting in barriers to legal equality, especially in matters of civil code, such as marriage and divorce. Varying interpretations could set up different practices in different provinces, or between rural and urban populations and between members of different religions.

These provisions are seen as a step backwards when compared with provisions of Law No. 188 for the year 1959. The rationale behind the legislation of this 1959 law was the multiplicity of the sources of judicial power. It was feared that variations would lead to unstable family life and the lack of universal guarantees of individual rights. This was the motivation for formulating a law which combines the most important legislative provisions agreed upon by all.

Indeed, Article 41 of the Constitution contradicts Article 14, which is considered to be a fundamental guarantee, namely: “Iraqis are equal before the law with no discrimination because of gender or race.” Such a contradiction compromises the unity of universally applicable legislation. There could well be cases of non-correspondence or incompatibility between certain laws. This situation in turn removes the individual from the status of citizenship to the status of religious affiliation and further revokes the general rule of law with its comprehensive application to all people. (Source: *Reviews of the Iraqi Constitution*).

When it comes to providing protection for women and prohibiting violence against them, constitutional and legal provisions alike may be inadequate. The Constitution, for example, avoids referring specifically to women when it addresses the issue of violence in the chapter on rights. Article 4, for example, offers a general prohibition against "all forms of violence and abuse in the family, school and society". Yet even though this provision covers women implicitly, the current Penal Law in Iraq is at odds with it, providing a legal cover for violence against women since it does not consider marital violence as a specific crime. Article 41 states "there is no crime if the act has befallen in exercise of an established right under the law and shall be considered as a use of the right, for example a husband's disciplining of his wife... within the extent of what is established by Sharia law or tradition".

Again, a reference to men in the Constitution does not necessarily mean the inclusion of women. For example, Article 44 states that "the Iraqi is free to move, travel and reside inside or outside Iraq". Yet freedom of movement and travel for a woman under the age of 40 is not in practice guaranteed as the law does not allow her to obtain a passport without the permission of a guardian.

Article 45 states that "the State shall adhere to the advancement of the Iraqi tribes and clans... and promote their noble human values..., and shall prevent those tribal traditions that conflict with human rights". This wording is another source of concern for women's empowerment. The reference to the tribes recalls certain traditional violations to which women's rights and freedoms could be exposed. The unspecific wording of the Article could well lead to the continuation of such violations. It allows for various interpretations of "noble human values" as they concern the rights and freedoms of women, which could perpetuate traditions notorious for violating the human rights of women without fear of any consequences from the powers regulating tribal authority. Amnesty International referred to this issue in its Document No. 14-23 for the year 2005.

The law has never provided a binding deterrent or any form of punishment to put an end to honour killing. While local and international reports continuously decry the existence of honour crimes in Iraq, this form of murder is often registered as suicide.

Thus, even where the Iraqi Constitution provides for *de jure* non-discrimination against women, legal, social and cultural factors often represent *de facto* obstacles in the way. For instance, women have the right to equal wages, but the law does not provide binding provisions to guarantee equal promotion. This paves the way for discrimination between men and women. Indeed, gaps and contradictions between constitutions and the laws which supposedly give effect to them are common throughout the Arab world, and are especially troublesome on matters of women's rights.

In 1986, Iraq ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with reservations at the time on clauses (w) and (k) of Articles 2, 9, and 29. Those reservations effectively nullify the Convention's provisions for equality between men and women. Since the beginning of the transition in 2003, women's organizations have striven to remove these reservations, without success. The Constitution further does not include any article acknowledging that ratifications of international conventions are binding on the state. In any case, the new regime has rejected commitments to international conventions ratified by its predecessor, in particular CEDAW, on the basis of contradiction with Islamic Sharia. The same rejection applies to UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

In sum, it can be agreed that the Constitution and a host of other legislative initiatives together provide a basis for the empowerment of women in areas such as education, health and social services. Yet at the same time, these provisions often do not correspond with realities experienced by Iraqi women today. Despite the existence of anti-discriminatory laws and the Constitution, such provisions are often limited by traditional and cultural practices, all the more so in times of ongoing violence.

## Economic Transition: Losses and Sacrifices of Women Shrinking State Responsibilities

Transitional stages often entail a review of the role of the state in order to better adjust to realities and enhance equality among citizens, including between men and women, through institutional mechanisms and government interventions. Yet such reforms often weaken the state when its strength is most crucial. In Iraq, while reforms resulted in a number of new legislations, they were also accompanied by the dismantling of the State, which could then no longer fulfil its responsibilities or provide key services in the transitional economy. These abrupt changes adversely impacted gender equality in Iraq.

Before 2003, the State was the main employer of women in Iraq. Women represented 46% of public sector employees, and were the main providers of services and social benefits in the domains of health and education, especially in areas benefiting women.

The State also provided legal protection against all forms of abuse against women and encouraged women's economic participation. However, during the transitional period, neither the private sector nor civil society has so far been able to fill the void created when the State was dismantled.

### Unequal Access to Assets

One of the foundations of human development is to ensure women's access to, and control over resources such as land, means of production, and loans. Yet in Iraq women do not enjoy equality with men in that important respect. Although no data exist to measure ownership of such assets as land, property and businesses, it is safe to say that women in general possess fewer financial assets than men. For example, the vast majority of land and housing units are registered in the names of men, and men clearly dominate in private sector ownership and management. Female heads of household also own fewer assets.

#### Box 3: The Predicament of Households Headed by Women

The loss of state-sponsored support for women is especially felt among the growing number of households headed by women in Iraq today. In these households, the main breadwinners (fathers, husbands and sons) were lost as a result of continuous wars. The spread of armed conflict and the escalation of violence after the year 2003 have led to an increasing number of widows, although statistics vary on their precise number. A survey conducted by Iraq's Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology in 2004 showed that 11% of Iraqi families were supported by women and 73% of these families were headed and supported by widows. The survey also pointed to a difference between the income of families supported by women and that of male-headed families. 40% of families headed by women were unable to earn 100,000 Dinars per week (about \$85), compared to 26% of the families headed by men.

**Source:** COSIT, Iraq Living Condition Survey, 2004

Article 23 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution guarantees "the right of the Iraqi to ownership" without any discrimination based on gender. The Constitution does not, however, mention joint ownership of the family dwelling, as is stipulated in the constitutions of other Arab countries such as Tunisia and Morocco.

Small micro-credit projects led by women represent an effective strategy for supporting women's empowerment in a market economy. Yet women are often unable to have access to these opportunities, given the prevailing insecurity, adverse family pressures, and, especially, lack of access to loans and collateral which banks require. Expanding access to micro-credit projects and home-based work could be a favourable solution for women with limited education



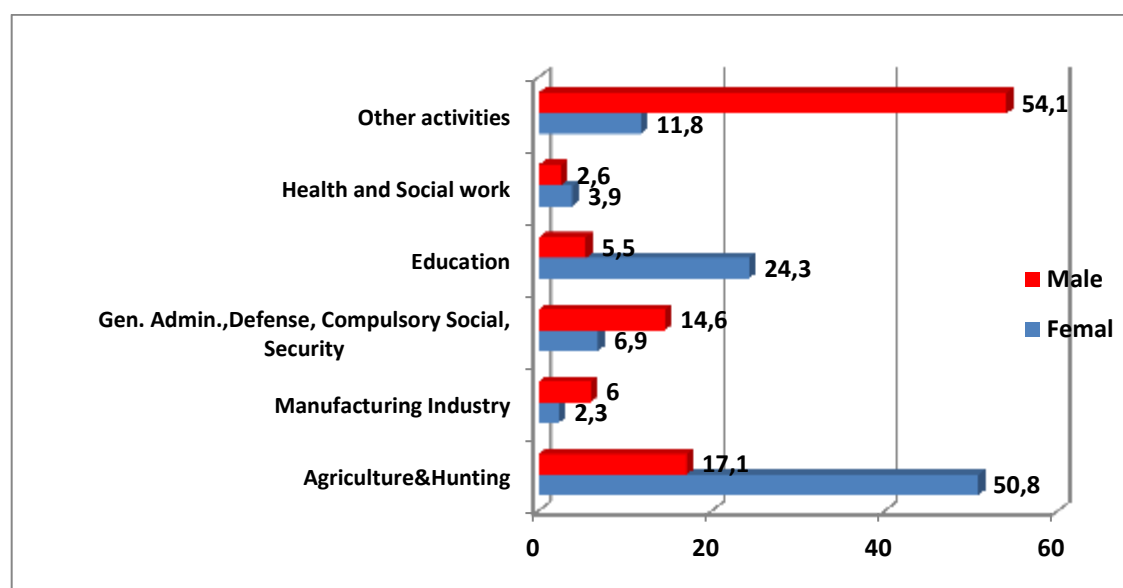
and training, rural women, the elderly, and widows supporting families. This is especially so given that evidence points to the willingness of women, especially those with higher education, to engage in such activities. Yet at the macro level, opportunities for such initiatives are restricted. The Ministry of Industry provides operational loans to industrial entrepreneurs who were licensed before 2004, and not to new projects which could be beneficial for creating employment among women. The Ministry of Labour launched a plan for micro-credit projects in 2007, but the opportunities this initiative provided were limited in scope and favoured mostly men.

The government could open up new opportunities through reform of the lending system in public banks, by lifting the requirement for real estate as collateral and by encouraging women-friendly banking services such as those that distinguish the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.

### Unequal and Insecure Job Opportunities

The labour laws in Iraq guarantee equality, as is evident in the public sector, but in the private sector, they are not properly applied to ensure fairness and equal remuneration for women and men. This discrimination is not only due to a biased attitude in the labour market, but also to women's low level of skills, which in turn leads to poor productivity compared to men whom the education system favours.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Male & Female in Spheres of Economic Activity, 2008 (%)**



In general, the rate of women's participation in Iraqi economic activity (14% in 2003) is considerably lower than men's participation (74% in 2003). At the same time, however, the female rate of economic activity in rural areas is higher than in urban areas. This can be explained by two factors: first, economic activity in the rural areas depends on family cooperation to satisfy basic needs; second, the menial tasks rural women perform are more socially acceptable and it is thus easier for them to find work in agricultural production inside their homes. Furthermore, agricultural work requires less education and training, thus providing more opportunities to a larger number of women.

**Table 3 : Economic Activity Rate during 2003-2008**

Rate	2003	2005	2008
Woman	14.2	20.4	18.0
Man	73.7	77.4	74.9
Total	44.1	49.5	46.8
Percentage of Woman to man in rural	26.6	42.0	31.4
Percentage of Woman to man in urban	15.0	17.5	20.2

Source : COSIT, Employment and Unemployment survey for the years 2003-2008

Unemployment rates are strikingly high among women. Table 3 indicates that the unemployment rate among females rose to 19.6% in 2008 compared to 16.0% in 2003, while that of males dropped to 14.3% in 2008 compared to 30.2% in 2003. Policies taken to reduce unemployment in general have met with limited success.

The transition towards an open market economy in Iraq may provide both more opportunities and more challenges for women. The opening of the market may provide new opportunities in the private sector, but will undoubtedly increase competition for jobs and require skills which the education system imparts unequally. It will also lead to fewer jobs in the public sector.

**Table 4: Unemployment Rates for Men and Women, 2003-2008.**

year	Urban			Rural			Total		
	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
2003	22.3	31.0	30.0	6.7	28.9	25.4	16.0	30.2	28.1
2006	36.8	17.7	20.8	6.3	15.6	13.2	22.6	16.9	17.5
2008	28.9	14.0	16.5	8.1	14.9	13.3	19.6	14.3	15.3

Source: COSIT, Employment and Unemployment Survey for the years 2003-2008

In the meantime, the insecure conditions in Iraq after 2003 have led to a decline in employment levels in the private sector. Women employed by the private sector account for 32% - 38% of all workers in agriculture, health, financial institutions and other areas. However, women in the private sector have been more vulnerable to job loss when the current economic situation forces companies and institutions to restructure. The private sector prefers to employ men citing that, unlike women, they do not take maternity leave and are less likely to need time off for family reasons.

Social traditions and stereotypes regarding males, females and “the nature of women” sometimes determine the kinds of job opportunities women are given. For example, women are seen to be more suited to jobs like sewing and dress making.

The worsening security situation has forced many factories that were employing numerous women to close down. Even the few remaining factories still face difficulties arising from a lack of infrastructure and the consequences of an unhealthy work environment with its attendant hazards for female workers.

Since the 1990s, scattered work patterns have spread in the informal sector known for accommodating large numbers women in various trades involving the manufacture and marketing of home-made products such as foodstuffs, clothing and traditional handicrafts. Other means of livelihood in this category are household service and peddling, which women pursue in the absence of alternative options in more productive sectors. Informal sector employment opportunities of this kind have expanded, drawing even women with high levels of education and skills. Women resort to this sector in circumstances of unemployment, professional discrimination and family need for additional income. Female heads of household

turn to it to provide for their families. Such work is marginal and does not provide financial, social or psychological stability for women. The disadvantages of working in this sector for women are many, not least the absence of benefits and rights that are guaranteed by law for workers in the public and private sectors.

#### **Box 4 :Iraqi women and Time Use**

Iraq Time Use Survey shows that Iraqi women spend more time in household works (approximately 28 hours weekly) than men do ( 3 hours weekly ). The total average of working hours of Iraqi women is 46.6 H/W compared to 31.2 H/W for men. This means that two thirds of the women working hours is spending on household works.

### **Under Employment**

Employment and Unemployment Survey Results indicated the increasing rate of under employment (persons who work less than 35 hours). The rate has increased from (40.2%) in 2003 for women to(53.1%) in 2008 and from (19.4%) for men to (23.4%).

**Table 5 under Employment rate (15 year and more), urban and rural, during 2003-2008 (%)**

Year	Under employment rate								
	Urban			Rural			Total		
	women	men	total	women	men	total	women	men	Total
<b>2003</b>	26.4	14.0	15.7	62.5	29.2	26.2	40.2	19.4	23.5
<b>2006</b>	35.0	20.9	23.2	70.8	28.6	43.4	52.6	23.6	31.0
<b>2008</b>	27.4	19.0	20.2	77.5	31.7	43.0	53.1	23.4	28.7

Source: COSIT, Employment and Unemployment Survey for the years 2003-2008

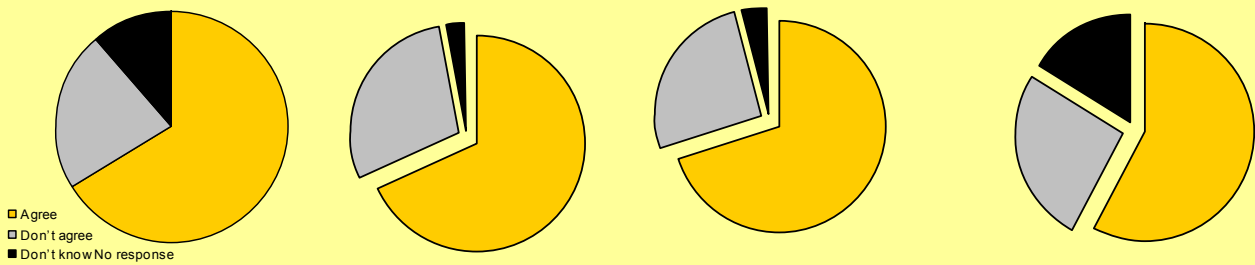
### **The Influence of Cultural Tradition in Violence against Women**

It was hoped that deliberations over the restructuring of institutional and administrative bodies in Iraq after 2003 would include serious consideration of women's issues. Unfortunately, the worsening security situation led to continued discrimination and inequality between the sexes. The mounting insecurity during the transition has thrown up new barriers preventing the majority of women from participating in the labour market, in political activities, and in gaining adequate access to medical care and educational opportunities. Women have not only suffered from discrimination and marginalization, but also from violent assault and sexual abuse during the crisis

**Box 5 : The Opinion Poll on Human Security – the Impact of Insecurity on Attitudes toward Discrimination against Women**

**Does an Absence of Discrimination and Violence Against Women Increase Human Security?**

In 10 out of 15 governorates covered by the poll, 85 % of the people believed that absence of violence against women was an important factor in overall feelings of security. In three governorates only, where the level of violence was high and general feelings of insecurity were widespread, the absence of violence against women was not considered as important: Nineveh (39%) Kirkuk (27.3%) and Baghdad (16.7 %).



Women's equal participation in politics and decision-making strengthens human security

Equal employment for women strengthens human security

Absence of violence against women leads to greater human security

Social discrimination against women reduces human security

Political and civil violence in Iraq has gravely affected women's safety, making them unwilling to be full participants in society and driving many to disappear from public life.

**Has Insecurity Increased Violence and Discrimination against Women?**

A majority of respondents in all governorates agreed that the security situation has worsened violence against women and social restrictions on them.

Source: Ministry of Planning & Bayt Al \_ Hikma, Iraq Human Development Report, 2008

Tension and open conflict in Iraq have affected family relations. Violence in the street has been reproduced in the form of self-inflicted violence or violence against women and children. A sample study of 250 women showed that all respondents had been exposed to some sort of violence, and 37.6% of them to physical violence. Other forms of violence include cursing, insult, harassment, and false accusations. Physical violence was inflicted on 62.6% of women, while 24% of the total number had been threatened by their husbands with divorce, desertion, expulsion, the taking of another wife or being kept from going to work. A disturbing outcome of the survey was that 65.2% of the women interviewed blamed themselves for being the cause of the violence they suffered (through their own negligence, for example); the majority agreed that keeping silent about the violence perpetuated the phenomenon. However, only 15.6% of those surveyed stated that men had no right to practise violence against women, against 84% who stated that men had the right to inflict violence on their wives, whether occasionally or on a regular basis. The role of traditional culture in conditioning women to accept male domination is quite clear.

The evidence generated by the GDI and GEM shows a generally progressive trend in the status of Iraqi women but these indexes fail to reflect the realities of women's lives on the ground because their few components cannot capture the multiple dimensions of inequality. For a more accurate assessment of women's empowerment in Iraq, additional dimensions need be measured: violence against women, advocacy for equality, personal security and individual dignity.

Cultural traditions transmit values, create life styles and guide human conduct. They are influenced by the social and economic environment, and exert influence on that environment in equal measure. There can be little doubt that the most formidable cultural constraint facing Iraqi women is the deep-seated value of family honour which is almost obsessively associated with the conduct and situation of female family members.

Threatening to kill a woman to remove shame is a punishment and deterrence at the same time. It is supposed to make women more committed to family values, with their concomitant emphasis on reputation and honour. These traditions allow younger males to call older females to account in the event they are suspected of unacceptable conduct. Worse, those traditions allow them to kill those females if they succeed in marrying against the will of the family or if they perpetrate what is considered a sin.

Judging women and their conduct draws legitimacy from social standards. In traditional societies, the individual is connected with heritage more than with the present or the future. For women, cultural heritage, which is formed by traditions rather than by religion, is one of the basic references in forming standardized notions of acceptable conduct. This becomes lodged in the collective consciousness and informs each individual's behaviour. These inherited traditions which guide individual perceptions see women as inferior and dependent beings. This view simply ignores the transformations that have taken place in women's contemporary lives. Women are still seen as inferior by nature. Honour killing, for example, is a phenomenon that has lasted for centuries. As far back as 1700 BC, the Codes of Hammurabi, the sixth king of old Babylon, stipulated that an adulterous woman should be thrown into the river.

This stereotypical image of women has lasted for centuries because the State, throughout its history, has helped to perpetuate it, to avoid entering into conflict with society and its religious and cultural leaders. So ingrained has this image become that, as several studies have shown, the view some women themselves hold of their own sex is not altogether different from that held by men.

Women's acceptance of this false image imposed by tradition provides the State with all the justification it needs to delay enacting legislation that would improve their situation. The seclusion of women is also justified by society as a means of ensuring their protection. Here too, women's acquiescence in such practices serves to reinforce the stereotypical image. In this way, the family remains the most resistant pocket of cultural bigotry against women, where male violence against women is accepted as a disciplinary or preventive right.

## Conclusions

The empowerment of Iraqi women during the transitional period should be an overarching goal, not a side objective, as women have an equal part to play in overall economic, political and social development. Yet evidence shows that Iraqi women are disproportionately affected by the shrinking of the state's power, the insecurity arising from political instability, the breakdown of economic activities and the deterioration of social structures, all resulting from ongoing conflicts.

Increased violence against women is currently the most dangerous consequence of the transitional phase and requires urgent interventions from all actors in society. The State should face its responsibilities for the provision of human security for women, as well as empowerment and protection, and the abolition of all forms of discrimination. Seeking

protection, women have retreated to their community, sect or tribe, away from the state, thus reversing the gains of almost a full century of modernization undertaken by the State itself.

Through long decades of wars and conflicts, the state neglected or condoned, intentionally or otherwise, all forms of discrimination against women, young and old, from all sects and minorities, whether workers, rural residents, housewives or widows. Women became victims of traditional practices with no recourse to the State and its laws for protection and care.

The role of the State has weakened since 2003 while the transition to a market economy has been fraught with problems in the short term and questions about opportunities in the future.

At the same time, the lack of security has hampered progress in human development and damaged mechanisms for genuine empowerment. However, there is still an opportunity to improve the situation of women. The transitional phase, when regulations and laws are being restructured, grants a historic opportunity to accomplish many tasks on the road to achieving equality. Yet what has been gained under the law in terms of political participation since 2003 may not be a lasting achievement since legal provisions expire or change. To nourish and protect those rights, women face a long and rocky road ahead. The State has specific responsibilities to help them complete their journey that should not be neglected. These include:

- Amending laws (and the Constitution) to eliminate provisions, omissions and contradictions that perpetuate discrimination.
- Ensuring freedom of opinion to encourage public debate and dialogue; there is a need for public consciousness-raising campaigns and deep changes in media stereotypes of women;
- Creating a new labour environment that sets aside the present division of labour based on limited roles for women and their restriction as workers to sectors of weak productivity.
- Confronting the culture of domination and marginalization and disseminating a culture of peace and tolerance to eliminate violence against women in all its forms and put an end to its perpetuation as part of accepted culture.
- Reforming educational systems and curricula to change society's perceptions of violence against women, and instill a sense of common responsibility for ending it.

By taking a firm stand on a culture of human rights, equal opportunities and gender equality, the centuries-old culture of discrimination against women in Iraq can at last be dispatched for good.

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