

Promoting Gender Equality in Iraq

UNESCO's Approach to Gender Equality

Within its Medium Term Strategy (2008-2013) *gender equality* has been designated as **one of UNESCO's global priorities**. In order to assist the Organization in carrying forward its work in addressing gender equality – including contributing to the attainment of MDG 3: *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women* - the **Priority Gender Equality Action Plan** (2008-2013) was developed, outlining a two-pronged approach for translating UNESCO's values and commitment to work on gender equality with Member States into practice:

- (1) Mainstreaming of gender equality issues throughout UNESCO programming at all levels, and throughout the programming cycle;
- (2) Building commitment, competence and capacity for mainstreaming of gender equality through capacity and resource development with partners.



Globally, UNESCO staff is responsible for awareness and usage of these two approaches, in addition to contributing to the attainment of specific objectives related to gender equality laid out for each Sector within the Action Plan, contextualized for the needs and challenges of the Member States with whom they work.

The UNESCO Iraq Office and Gender Equality

UNESCO's programming in regions of active or post conflict aims to increase knowledge and understanding concerning the transformations that occur in gender relations during and after conflict, and to ensure the protection of women's rights, and their full participation in peace-making, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstructionⁱ.

Through its continuous focus on mainstreaming of gender equality across its programming, UNESCO contributes to the objectives laid out within Security Council Resolution 1325 for linking women to the peace and security agenda in Iraq. Since real and lasting peace and security can only be attained when the root causes of conflict, including persistent inequalities, are addressed, **UNESCO supports the inclusion of both women and men from all groups in Iraq in its sponsored activities, thereby ensuring that multiple perspectives are available to enrich programming.**

By focusing on building capacity of its governmental and civil society partners to identify and address inequalities, UNESCO helps ensure that girls and women, as well as boys and men - especially those from most vulnerable groups - have a role in the reconstruction of their nation. *As gender equality also concerns men, UNESCO is increasingly focusing on the role of men and boys with regard to gender equality in Iraq.*

Education

Achieving gender equality in education carries with it strong human rights implications – and without it, development agendas across the globe will not succeed. It is an investment that pays high returns because quality education for girls and women has been shown to improve livelihoods and enhance civic engagement and responsibilityⁱⁱ. Although gender parity has improved in the last decades, many countries are still struggling with high inequality in both access to and quality of education. **Iraq is believed to have the highest illiteracy rate in the region, with an estimated 18 – 20% of the population, (and 26.4% of Iraqi women) being functionally illiterateⁱⁱⁱ.** Rural dwelling women are amongst the most affected populations in Iraq, *with less than 50% of women aged 15-24 found to be literate*, compared with 72-80% for their counterparts in urban areas^{iv}.

The post-conflict context of Iraq has contributed to the current situation through destroyed infrastructure, loss of qualified personnel and massive displacement. In addition to gender disparities, other factors such as poverty, conflict, and geographic location clearly play a role, calling not just for a focus on gender but on multiple-vulnerabilities in the development of more inclusive systems of education.

ⁱ internal document, UNESCO, The Role of Women in Peace Building and Reconciliation

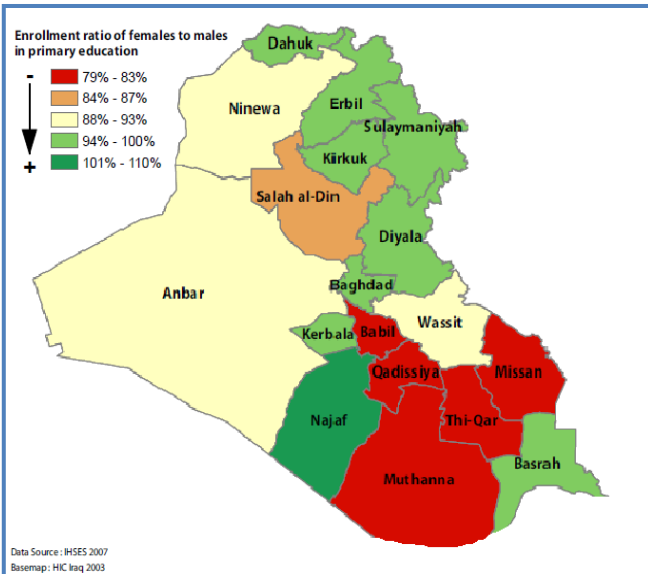
ⁱⁱ UNESCO: Gender and Education - <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/gender-and-education/>

ⁱⁱⁱ 2010. Literacy Initiative for Empowerment in Iraq: Literacy Needs Assessment Report (2010-2015). Pg. 22

^{iv} Ibid.

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UNESCO Iraq has a broad portfolio of programming to support the efforts of the Government of Iraq and civil society address issues of gender equality and further vulnerability factors within the Education Sector.



UNESCO Iraq's work on education contributes to attainment of MDG 3 by aiming at the following outcomes:

- 1) National capacities strengthened to plan and implement inclusive, rights based education sector plans, policies and programmes that are gender-sensitive and assure equitable access to education, including in the areas of literacy/non-formal education, teachers, curricula and higher education.
- 2) National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) policies reviewed to ensure adequate skills for transition to the labor market for females and males.
- 3) Quality of secondary education enhanced to expand equal access and ensure retention of girls and boys.
- 4) Enhanced capacity of the education system to respond to HIV and AIDS in a gender sensitive manner.
- 5) Strengthened coordination and partnerships with national and international organizations to ensure holistic programming on gender equality.

Contributions from previous and ongoing work

Literacy and Non-Formal Education

UNESCO's interventions in literacy are structured within the **Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)** framework. Activities that have been successfully implemented include:

- Literacy and life skills training for over 2,000 female illiterates through 8 Community Learning Centres.
- Establishment of an NGO Coordination Network for Literacy
- A new Iraqi Literacy Law signed into effect 8 September 2011 which includes a provision on life skills and empowerment of students, together with literacy.
- Preparing to release a storybook with handwritten stories submitted mainly from female learners describing how literacy programming has empowered them.



An **Educational TV satellite channel** was launched in February 2011 with programming based on the official curriculum, allowing greater educational access for vulnerable groups, such as women, and assisting educators.

In cooperation with the UN Joint Team on HIV/AIDS for Iraq and within the framework of **EDUCAIDS**, UNESCO Iraq has:

- Developed a **methodological toolkit** for integrating knowledge and skills related to HIV/AIDS prevention and response by literacy and non-formal education facilitators. Within the toolkit, increased vulnerability of girls and women to HIV/AIDS has been addressed.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Within the joint **Local Area Development Project**:

- Equipment was purchased for workshops targeting female activities, such as sewing machines and computer labs in vocational training centres.

Within the **Improving TVET Project**:

- Piloted disciplines in the apprenticeship system emphasized trades for females such as textile design and printing trades.
- Equipment purchased for the Ministry of Education comprised sewing and ceramics workshops.

The ultimate aim of both projects was to increase women's engagement in the local labour market.

Planned Activities

UNESCO Iraq is developing several new initiatives that aim to increase capacity within the Ministry of Education and civil society to integrate gender equality into all levels of the education system.

This programming includes further support to higher education where UNESCO has already sponsored one official from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to attend a CEDAW training course; stronger linkages between education and protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to gender based violence; and capacity building for the mainstreaming of gender equality in policy and curricula.

Culture

As the only United Nations Agency with a mandate for culture, UNESCO plays a strong role in advocating for consideration of culture within Iraq's development agenda, including dimensions of gender equality therein.

Present-day Iraq contains a diverse mixture of religious and cultural traditions which reflect both traditional gender ideologies and roles, as well as those that have been altered by the protracted conflict.

UNESCO's advocacy for the recognition of the equality and value of all cultures, including inherent dimensions of gender, helps minimize the risks of marginalization and reinforces solidarity, thereby promoting an inclusive development process. Creating conditions for persons to access, benefit from and participate in a shared culture, regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender, fosters a climate of human rights and further supports a culture of peace^v.



With relation to the Culture Sector's contribution towards meeting MDG 3, UNESCO will contribute through the following two interrelated goals:

- 1) *Highlight and document the role played by women in the development of culture;*
- 2) *Focus on the impact that cultural development can have on women's empowerment across cultures and societies.*

Contributions from previous and ongoing work

Within the Culture Sector UNESCO Iraq strives to ensure gender parity among participants in capacity building activities and other schemes, as well as advocacy and support to its partners in Iraq to nominate qualified women to positions of leadership within project activities. Examples of past and ongoing projects within the Culture Sector where concrete evidence can be seen are:

Rehabilitation of National Heritage Institute

- UNESCO Iraq included handicrafts produced by both genders, including carpet weaving and sculpture.
- From 2004-2008, sponsored workshops on **music and ballet** for students from both sexes.

Revitalization of Erbil Citadel

- Continued support for gender balance within technical support and management of project activities including site management.
- An upcoming study tour to Rome includes seven participants, six of whom are female.
- Documentation of history of Citadel includes oral history accounts from women who had previously resided there.

Modernizing Sulaymaniyah Museum

- Support the mainstreaming of gender equality in all aspects of the project, including curricula developed for museum's educational programmes.

Planned Activities

UNESCO Iraq is developing new programming that uses traditional cultural practices, such as oral expression, as a vehicle for teaching literacy skills and related literacy-based cultural expression.

Science

Innovation in the areas of science and technology – and the gender equality dimension therein - has become one of the most important and debated issues worldwide, especially with relation to disparities in women's access to education and training, and the demands of the labour market. Starting with the United Nations Decades on Women and Development (1975-1995), special attention has been directed towards the role of women in science and technology and the need for increasing their presence in education focused in these areas. *Gender equality is one of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which clearly call for action related to science, technology and gender in order to be met.* Given its specific mandate in the natural sciences, **UNESCO is playing a major role in addressing the above-mentioned issues, advocating and affirming the crucial presence of women and the gender dimension in science and technology through its programmes and activities¹.**



^v Internal document on culture in post-conflict, post-disaster contexts.

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In Iraq, UNESCO's work in the Natural Sciences Sector focuses on the achievement of Government and UN priorities related to inclusive and equitable economic growth, environmental conservation, mitigation and control within international obligations and increased access to quality essential services – most notably water.

Contributions from previous and ongoing work

Rehabilitation and Conservation of the Karez

- Contributed to restoring and preserving of 20 karez systems across northern Iraq, benefitting local communities, especially women who are the primary water providers for the household, allowing them more time to engage in other economic and educational activities.

Master Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation (2011-2015)

- Plan will ensure that inclusion of both women and men is integrated, helping create an inclusive society.

Planned Activities

UNESCO is currently developing a project on the role of women in water management to include components on women's water user unions, women-led community education on water management and a capacity building programme for government and civil society on conflict mediation practices around water.

UNESCO Iraq's work within Natural Sciences will contribute towards meeting MDG 3 through the following aims:

- 1) Attention to gender equality within a focus on improved conservation and management of the environment and natural resources;
- 2) Attention to gender equality within its work on capacity building in the areas of science, technology and innovation with a focus on sustainable development.
- 3) Provide science and technology policy makers with a framework for action regarding gender mainstreaming in science and technology.

Communication and Information

As the UN agency with a particular mandate to defend and promote freedom of expression, UNESCO has been supporting independent media in post-conflict contexts, which has contributed to peace – building and reconciliation in a number of countries through support to gather and disseminate non-partisan information¹. UNESCO's support to media includes promotion of dialogue among media professionals and support in drafting legislation that promotes freedom of expression – all the while considering the gender dimensions of this sector of work.



Contributions from previous and ongoing work

Protection of journalists, academics, human rights defenders

- Raise awareness among the target groups of existing human rights protection mechanisms and capacity development for assessing and reacting to threats and risks. In addition, this project is lobbying for investigations into attacks on journalists, academics and human rights defenders, so as not to allow a climate of impunity to take hold in Iraq.

Planned Activities

UNESCO Iraq is organizing upcoming trainings on reporting tools and mechanisms to address Human Rights violations, and on personal safety and security, addressing gender equality issues and problems women face in the field in particular. It will also produce a safety manual on the basic knowledge and practical skills needed to effectively address and mitigate critical security threats and risks faced by the target groups of journalists, academics and human rights defenders.

UNESCO's work within the Communications and Information Sector towards achievement of MDG 3 aims at the following expected outcomes:

- 1) Gender equality perspectives are integrated into communication and information-related policies and strategies;
- 2) Women are empowered to participate in development processes and public life through access to information and knowledge relevant for their lives;
- 3) An increase in gender perspectives within media content in Iraq;
- 4) Capacities of media institutions are enhanced through high quality, gender responsive trainings;
- 5) Women's involvement in peace-building processes and reconstruction in Iraq are enhanced through better access to information;
- 6) Safety and security of female Iraqi media professionals and journalists is strengthened.



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