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An Exploration of Gender Justice in a Post Conflict Environment: Islamic Relief's International Development and Advocacy Programme on Preventing Violence Against Women in Iraq

Abstract

The paper reports on a programme, consisting of three phased projects conducted by Islamic Relief Worldwide in Iraq. The aims of the programme was to provide sustainable support for vulnerable women affected by conflict and to raise awareness about increasing violence against women in the changing surroundings of post-war Iraq. The projects were instigated in 2008-2009 and impact assessed in 2012.

The first project took place in late 2008 in the Al-Khadra'a and Al-Fadil districts of Baghdad, engaging 52 women in vulnerable situations who found themselves reliant on charity as a result of the loss of 'bread-winning' family members. Many were widowed and responsible for orphaned children. The project consisted of support for the creation of home-based businesses and provided training in social entrepreneurship activities designed to alleviate poverty through small business enterprise, develop confidence and a sense of community through engagement and teamwork with other participants and inform them and the wider public about women's rights. The project consisted of small workshops, craft training courses and capacity building workshops as well as educational programmes on Iraqi law, personal law, psychological health and well-being and nutrition.

The second project impacted 36 handicapped (deaf and/or dumb) women in Fallujah. Similar to the first project but with the additional challenge of working with poorly educated women, most of whom were illiterate and many able only to communicate through sign language.

The final project advocated against violence against women in Iraqi society through music, art exhibitions, workshops, advocacy and media engagement. The project impacted over 1000 participants directly, including men, women, boys and girls and was implemented at schools and in university and college departments across Baghdad in mid-2009.

This paper reports on the details of all three projects and examines the sustainable value of the projects through an impact assessment in 2012, to see, for example, if the women continue to make a living through their established cottage industries. It further examines how the women have been empowered as a result of their involvement in the projects, the importance of advocacy and campaigning within Iraq, approaches to GBV education, working with young men and analysing numerous pertinent intersections of discourse, such as GBV and disability.

Through this programme, this paper is able to explore the broader social and economic impact of conflict from a gender perspective, the changing landscape of Iraqi society and how conflict has very markedly affected gender justice in a detrimental manner. Finally, the piece provides case studies about some of the participants and their personal challenges as a consequence of vulnerability and violence within post-conflict Iraqi communities.