



**“SUCCESS STORIES”  
VOICES FROM IRAQI CIVIL  
SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

With the contribution on Japan  
Supplementary Budget 2019-2021



From  
the People of Japan



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# PREFACE

## IOM CHIEF OF MISSION

Since 2003, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Iraq have been playing an increasingly important role in Iraq's recovery from conflict and displacement. Through a wide variety of actions – including humanitarian assistance, community peacebuilding, advocacy and human rights monitoring – CSOs in Iraq play a vital role in ensuring a stable and peaceful Iraq. This has been especially true following the humanitarian and displacement crises caused by the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014. Across Iraq, Iraqi CSOs mobilized in solidarity with their communities as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) hosted within their communities, to address new humanitarian needs, gaps in service provision and social tensions.

Opportunities to expand the contribution CSOs make to Iraq's political, economic, social and cultural recovery abound. The international community can offer valuable support through technical capacity-building, mentorship and advocacy.

With generous support from the Government of Japan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) works closely with CSOs in Tel Afar and Najaf, offering a comprehensive package of support that includes trainings, small grants or in-kind assistance, partnerships and technical support. These efforts strengthen the ability of CSOs to provide valuable peacebuilding and social cohesion activities in their communities and rebuild strong relationships between citizens and their elected officials.

Ultimately, we hope that IOM's support will bolster the skills, resources and solidarity already shown by Iraqi CSOs, with the ultimate aim of contributing to a more stable and peaceful Iraq.

Gerard Waite

Chief of Mission

IOM Iraq

# PREFACE

## EMBASSY OF JAPAN IN IRAQ

Iraq and Japan have been close partners for decades; Japan opened its diplomatic hub in Baghdad back in 1939 and both countries upgraded their respective legations to embassies in 1960. Since then, Iraq and Japan have benefitted from many rich cultural and economic exchanges. As part of the friendship and cooperation between both countries, Japan is committed to providing support for reconstruction and reconciliation in the conflict-affected areas in Iraq.

In 2018, Japan adopted the Security-Development Nexus (SDN) approach. SDN is based on the understanding that a vicious cycle of conflict can only be ended when both security and development are mutually enhanced. While neither security alone nor development alone can ensure sustainable socioeconomic stability in a country, few prior humanitarian and development projects addressed both aspects; Japan therefore engaged in the promotion of the SDN approach in Iraq.

Some of the Japan-funded SDN projects are carried out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM Iraq has implemented SDN projects since 2018, addressing the needs of both security and development to support IDPs and host communities. These projects include capacity building of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which represent, I believe, the key for local ownership and local initiatives to promote and implement the SDN approach.

Civil society and youth in Iraq have a pivotal role to play in addressing the root causes of human insecurity. Indeed, human security must be people-centred and encompass not only the protection of citizens, but also empowerment so they can fend for themselves. Some of the initiatives described in this book showcase Japan's commitment to these values.

My appreciation and respect go to IOM Iraq, who successfully implemented these, with its vast expertise and unwavering focus on humans and locality.

I hope these initiatives will help Iraqi people to rebuild their lives and enhance the friendships and cooperation between Iraq and Japan.

Mr SUZUKI Kotaro

Ambassador of Japan to Iraq

## INTRODUCTION: CIVIL SOCIETY AND IOM IRAQ

Iraq has experienced complex challenges to stabilization and peacebuilding since 2003, most recently associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which captured large swathes of territory in 2014 and caused vast destruction and displacement across Iraq. Civil society has played a vital role in post-conflict stabilization since 2003. Civil society actors, from volunteer networks to youth groups and community-based organizations, have mobilized to address humanitarian needs, encourage greater civil engagement and citizens' awareness, and complement government services. In doing so, these actors offer a community-led approach to recovering from violence and provide an essential link between international organizations and local communities. Moreover, as the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Iraq grows stronger, they also have the opportunity to also influence political processes towards better governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

History, demography and culture influence the shape and functioning of civil society in Iraqi communities. Traditionally, religious and tribal social structures formed the basis of very ancient forms of civil organizations, which cemented mutual support between members of a religious or tribal group. While these groups remain prevalent and influential, the events of 2003 marked a turning point for Iraqi civil society. The change in governance, the humanitarian crisis and influx of international actors prompted the creation of numerous new CSOs that reflected a more familiar shape to western audiences, as ostensibly neutral entities dedicated to the public good. Although these modern, post-2003 CSOs still rely on traditional ethical values of solidarity, social networking and cohesion, they no longer link their support to a specific religious, ethnic or tribal affiliation. Moreover, the sector typically shares a common purpose of increasing the role of the community in decision-making processes.



Today, thousands of CSOs operate in Iraq, with varying levels of expertise and resources, as well as diverse thematic focus. While some CSOs are professionally run, many others are led by enthusiastic and altruistic individuals who have limited knowledge about how to run and manage these types of organizations, and struggle to navigate Iraq's complex legal and institutional environment. Most CSOs find it difficult to access federal government officials or to develop effective advocacy strategies, and also speak of the "credibility gap" that exists with local communities who are often suspicious of their activities, given the novelty of CSOs in many areas.

In this context, international actors can play a valuable role in strengthening civil society in Iraq. This support can take multiple forms: capacity-building, mentorship, technical advice and administrative or advocacy support to navigate the complex institutional environment. This support must be tailored to the specific goals, existing capacities and intended function of each CSO – which might cover broad areas such as protection, social cohesion, service provision or advocacy.

This booklet offers some examples of IOM Iraq's engagement with CSOs, and our efforts to strengthen the capacity of CSOs to act as peacebuilders in their communities. Ultimately, we hope that these efforts will result in stronger social cohesion and overall stability in communities across Iraq.

# LOCATION AND CONTEXT

## Najaf

Al-Najaf is the capital of Najaf Governorate, located about 160 km south of Baghdad in central-south Iraq. Al-Najaf is one of the most important historical cities in Iraq and in the Islamic world, especially for Shia Muslims, as it hosts the shrine of Ali Ibn Abi Talib and Wadi Al-Salam (valley of peace) and is a prominent centre of Shia learning. As a result, religious tourism contributes almost 30 per cent to the governorate's gross domestic product (GDP), complemented by industrial and agricultural activities, with farmers growing mostly wheat, rice, dates and vegetables. As a result of the relative stability of the governorate, Najaf scores above average on humanitarian indicators (such as poverty and unemployment); however, literacy and education enrolment compare poorly to most other governorates of Iraq, particularly for female students. The governorate's economic development is also hindered by poor infrastructure and a lack of private investment.

Although the past ten years in Najaf have been relatively peaceful and the governorate was spared the onslaught of ISIL's invasion in 2014, Najaf hosted a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were fleeing ISIL and the subsequent military operations to retake their areas from the group. Most IDPs in Najaf are hosted in religious buildings, and while this demonstrates the generosity of the religious establishment, these informal settlements are extremely vulnerable as IDPs risk eviction and do not have guaranteed access to water or health and sanitary services. Civil society has often mobilized in support of these IDPs, including IDPs themselves, who volunteer to assist in distributing provisions to other IDPs in greater need.



## Tel Afar

Tel Afar is located at the crossroads between Turkey, Syria, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Federal Iraq, generating complex geopolitical interests and a rich demography that is predominantly Turkmen, both Sunni and Shia. Arabs, Kurds and other ethnic minorities also live in Tel Afar. Given its strategic location and complex demographics, Tel Afar witnessed high levels of resistance and violence in 2014 and was occupied by ISIL for several years. Even before ISIL's occupation, relationships were strained between the Sunni and Shia Turkman communities in the district, as well as between the predominantly Turkman community and the neighbouring ethnic and religious minority groups, since the sectarian violence that took place after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. These underlying tensions were exacerbated under ISIL's occupation. Since the city was retaken, the local community has struggled to come back together, with tensions exacerbated by fears of ISIL affiliation among those who stayed.

Since 2014, Tel Afar's economy has been strained, with a lack of job opportunities and a weakened private sector. The occupation also caused significant damage to the agricultural sector, which provided the majority of employment prior to 2014, with the World Bank estimating that over 70 per cent of basic infrastructure in Tel Afar was destroyed. Service delivery also has not recovered fully: health services are costly, the education system is reportedly worse than before 2014, and water supply to remote neighbourhoods and villages is scarce. Civil society in Tel Afar looks markedly different to other areas of Iraq, and typically centres on the community's tribal structures, which are collectively seen as the primary authority and stabilizing force in the district. International or local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and youth/volunteer groups are present but are not considered to be as influential as the tribal structures. Yet CSOs do exist, and they typically emphasize economic inequity as the most pressing and under-resourced issue facing their communities, alongside social and ethnic tensions.



# ILP

After starting out in 2004 as volunteers and active youth from Anbar Governorate, the members of Al Hub wa al Salam (ILP) consolidated their presence as part of Iraq's civil society landscape. Since 2012, Al Hub wa al Salam has been registered as a local CSO, working to assist IDPs in partnership with local and international partners.

Al Hub wa al Salam's programming targets cities such as Anbar, Erbil, Baghdad and Mosul, through vocational trainings and livelihood activities in the fields of IT, social cohesion, farming training and handicrafts.

Al Hub wa al Salam seeks to promote stability and livelihood's sustainability through trainings on agricultural development and building the capacity of young people to help rural areas in the country.

Under the Government-of-Japan-funded project, in 2019 IOM Iraq provided Al Hub wa al Salam with a

grant to support livelihood initiatives with a comprehensive tailor-made training package and expansion of activities throughout Tel Afar's Ayadiyah sub-district, in Ninewa Governorate.

Al Hub wa al Salam's partnership with IOM Iraq led to enhanced cohesion and trust between community members who took part in vocational trainings. Reportedly, the trainings helped individuals from rural areas develop their agricultural strategies and gain practical experience through active participation in their trainings.



NAME

YASSER

CSO

ILP



PROFILES AND TESTIMONIES

CSO PROFILE(CSU)  
ILP

Testimonies of beneficiaries  
Yasser Faris Mahmoud

## YASSER FARIS MAHMOUD

Because of my family's financial situation, I was never able to go beyond a primary school education. I started as a daily worker in construction when I was 12 years old; I earned 6 USD a day. With my wage I helped my family with household expenses. But working in construction took a physical toll. I applied for a plumbing and sanitation contracting course to learn new skills that might help me find another source of income. After that, I may be able to get a team together to work in plumbing and sanitary contracting for houses and buildings. It will be a business that I own. I am very grateful for this training and other opportunities offered by these CSOs. Most families in Al-Ayadiyah need support, and it is great that these organizations go around door to door to provide aid or to inform people of training opportunities. We love these local organizations because they are from here and they treat us like family; they listen to our concerns and needs and try to support us. They also serve as a link between international organizations and local communities.

## MOHAMMED JAMEEL

After the 2014 ISIL conflict, I was displaced to Baghdad. When I returned to Tel Afar, I started working with local NGOs. Currently I work with Love and Peace Organization. Our activities, supported by IOM, focus on empowering participants to find jobs through five different capacity building vocational courses. There are 20 participants in each course; trainings are on plumbing, electricity, computing agriculture and live-stock skills. Groups are gender balanced but the agriculture training is an exception – all 40 participants are women. We chose to work in the villages surrounding Al-Ayadiyah town because other NGOs already provide various activities in the town, but these villages need support. We have also been working on peace-building and social cohesion in Tel Afar to address issues between returnee families and the families who remained in Tel Afar throughout the conflict. IOM's support for our organization was vital in making our activities possible, especially those aimed at young people.



NAME  
**MOHAMMED**

CSO  
**ILP**



## BROB

Bent Al-Rafidain (BROB) was established in Babylon Governorate in 2005. The organization's activities and programmes are implemented in several governorates in partnership with UN agencies and international organizations. BROB's main areas of operation are Karbala, Salah al Din, Najaf, Anbar, Diyala, Diwaniya and Baghdad.

BROB aims to provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender, age or ethnoreligious affiliation. Gender inclusion is at the core of BROB's mandate. The organization works to create space for women to express their opinions and effectively participate in the social, political, cultural and economic life of their communities.

IOM Iraq has supported BROB since 2019, through two project cycles funded by the Government of Japan. The collaboration transitioned from in-kind support to direct grants, showcasing the technical progression of this partnership. IOM Iraq's Capacity Building team has worked with BROB to develop skills within the organization's membership and implement activities that can enhance social dialogue in conflict-torn societies. A specific focus was placed on social cohesion through community initiatives led by youth and elders to find appropriate solutions for social cohesion barriers in Najaf.

IOM Iraq has also trained BROB members on finance, administration, logistics, reporting and proposal writing for project development, through a training package including coaching visits and follow ups, development of selection criteria for beneficiaries and trainers, and revision of monitoring and evaluation tools for project activities.

BROB's contribution to the IOM Iraq project came via trainings on social cohesion and peace-building, mediation and protection of street children, among others. BROB also conducted awareness raising campaigns and has plans to establish committees to officially lead responses to pressing social issues.

## AKRAM JASSIM SULAYMAN

I divide my time between my studies in dentistry and working as a volunteer with Bent Al-Rafidain Organization. Two years ago, I started volunteering to support people in need and to make a positive change. I also participated in a peace-building workshop with Bent Al-Rafidain. During the first session we engaged people with disabilities in a roundtable discussion about the reasons behind their marginalization in the community, and about their opinions, hopes and aspirations. In the second session, we engaged young people and gave them the opportunity and the space to get together with senior citizens and discuss challenges they face, particularly marginalization, and present possible solutions. Local NGOs are working hard to raise awareness and to educate people; they know the community and individuals better than international NGOs and therefore can be more effective in identifying needs and delivering support.



NAME  
**AKRAM**  
CSO  
**BROB**

NAME

ALAA

CSO

BROB

PROFILES AND TESTIMONIES

CSO PROFILE(CSU)  
BROB

Testimonies of beneficiaries  
ALAA OMRAN

## ALAA OMRAN

Before joining BROB, I used to complain about our country's situation and its poor services; I was looking for opportunities to work for the community and change it for the better. I joined BROB in 2008 as a volunteer. BROB is focused on capacity building and keeping in touch with its beneficiaries in the long term, so I decided to stay. The IOM-supported project has three main components: the first component was the COVID-19 awareness campaign covering Najaf Governorate. The second component involves mediation between young people, seniors, tribal leaders and clergymen to address societal issues — one of the goals was to reduce the gap between generations. The third initiative is an awareness raising campaign about homeless children and beggars. We are doing our best, in cooperation with the community police, to find solutions to this problem. We have found a philanthropist who will cover the expenses of sending these children back to school, as well as their living costs. Najaf's society has many needs; many issues are deeply rooted in traditions, and we therefore need to work closely with people.

# BUSTAN

Bustan Association was established in 2003. The organization works primarily with women and children, offering services in the fields of protection, education, media and communication, and landmine awareness. The NGO operates in Erbil, Basra, Missan, Diyala, Anbar, Kirkuk and Ninewa governorates.

Bustan seeks to help the most vulnerable groups and defend their rights. It has implemented more than 65 programmes in 15 Iraqi governorates, focused on law, protection, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and others such as the promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Bustan's vision is to build a community in which children, women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups are fully included in education and development initiatives, and participate as full-fledged citizens. Bustan works to raise awareness and improve tolerance towards these groups.

IOM Iraq's Capacity Building team has supported Bustan in its community stabilization efforts in Zummar sub-district, through trainings, frequent technical and financial guidance, and coaching visits to monitor project implementation among others. As a result, Bustan's staff gained technical, administrative, logistics skills, and earned more experience in writing proposals.



NAME

LARA

CSO

BUSTAN



من الشعب الياباني  
From the People of Japan

THE SE

NT

PROFILES AND TESTIMONIES

CSO PROFILE(CSU)  
BUSTAN

Testimonies of beneficiaries  
Lara Ahmed Fathy

## LARA AHMED FATHY

My family was displaced during the ISIL crisis. When we returned to Zummar, we found our house empty; it was just a shell. We felt very frustrated. I decided to go back to school and looked for any courses and activities offered by the NGOs here. I learned about a Photoshop course after a home visit from Al-Bustan staff; I was thrilled to join. I learned about editing images, drawing tables and making designs. I had no idea about Photoshop before, but now I have a good understanding of how to use it. The presence of these local organizations in the area has had a positive impact on society. Both women and men have actively participated in their trainings. I am certain that my participation in this course will give me an advantage when looking for job opportunities. I'm a student and I work as a tailor from home, but I am eager to join all possible courses to develop myself and my capabilities. These trainings have enhanced communication and interaction between participants who come from different backgrounds in Zummar; they help us mix and form bonds and friendships.

## SIDEL KHALIL

I left my hometown In Syria due to the civil war. At first, I settled in Sulaymaniyah then moved to Duhok. I worked in various roles in the humanitarian sector and gained a lot of experience; my main focus was helping women and children; they are the most vulnerable groups in conflicts. I joined Al-Bustan Organization as a project manager to oversee the IOM-supported projects in Zummar district; we work to empower youth and create job opportunities. Zummar needs much support: there aren't many job opportunities and services are nearly nonexistent. We tailored our activities and trainings to the community's needs. One clear difference I have seen over time is in the behavior and social integration of female participants. We wouldn't have been able to implement all these activities without the support of international NGOs, just like the work of the international organizations wouldn't be complete without the presence of local NGOs who are from the area and have a better understanding of the community and its culture.



NAME

SIDEL

CSO

BUSTAN



## NAMA

Nama Organization for Human Development is registered with the Iraqi NGO Directorate Baghdad; its headquarters are in Tel Afar, Ninewa Governorate. Since 2017, Nama has implemented several projects and activities focused on social cohesion, peacebuilding, youth development and empowerment, in partnership with several international and local organizations.

Nama seeks to be a leading development organization that promotes an independent and active civil society in Tel Afar, and provides humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups.

IOM Iraq has supported Nama with staff development and offered grants as well as in-kind support, which boosted the sustainability of the organization's interventions.

Moreover, IOM Iraq's Capacity Building team worked with Nama to provide technical support for proposal writing and enhance its organizational skills.

IOM Iraq and Nama collaborated to provide career opportunities for targeted beneficiaries, with a focus on women's empowerment and participation.

## FATIMA MUHAMMED

I had mixed feelings when we returned to Tel Afar after years in displacement. I was happy to see my town again, but sad to see the effects the ISIL conflict had on the town. I am glad to see that residents are moving forward and that they mix with other communities in displacement. NGOs who work on social cohesion projects and other activities are also helping, as they provide opportunities for people from different backgrounds and neighborhoods to mingle, which improves social cohesion. This year, I joined an agriculture and nursery course offered by Nama. In Tel Afar we do not have many plant nurseries, but we grow a lot of plants in our homes. I have a passion for plants, and I am keen on developing my gardening skills. I learned how to grow winter and summer plants and how to care for them. Through such activities and others, women now feel more empowered to have a voice in the community, to express themselves and talk about their needs. We also get to build friendships and connect with other girls and women. Even after these activities are over, we will remain friends.



NAME  
**FATIMA**  
CSO  
**NAMA**

NAME  
**HASSAN**  
CSO  
**NAMA**



## HASSAN SOHAIL AMIN

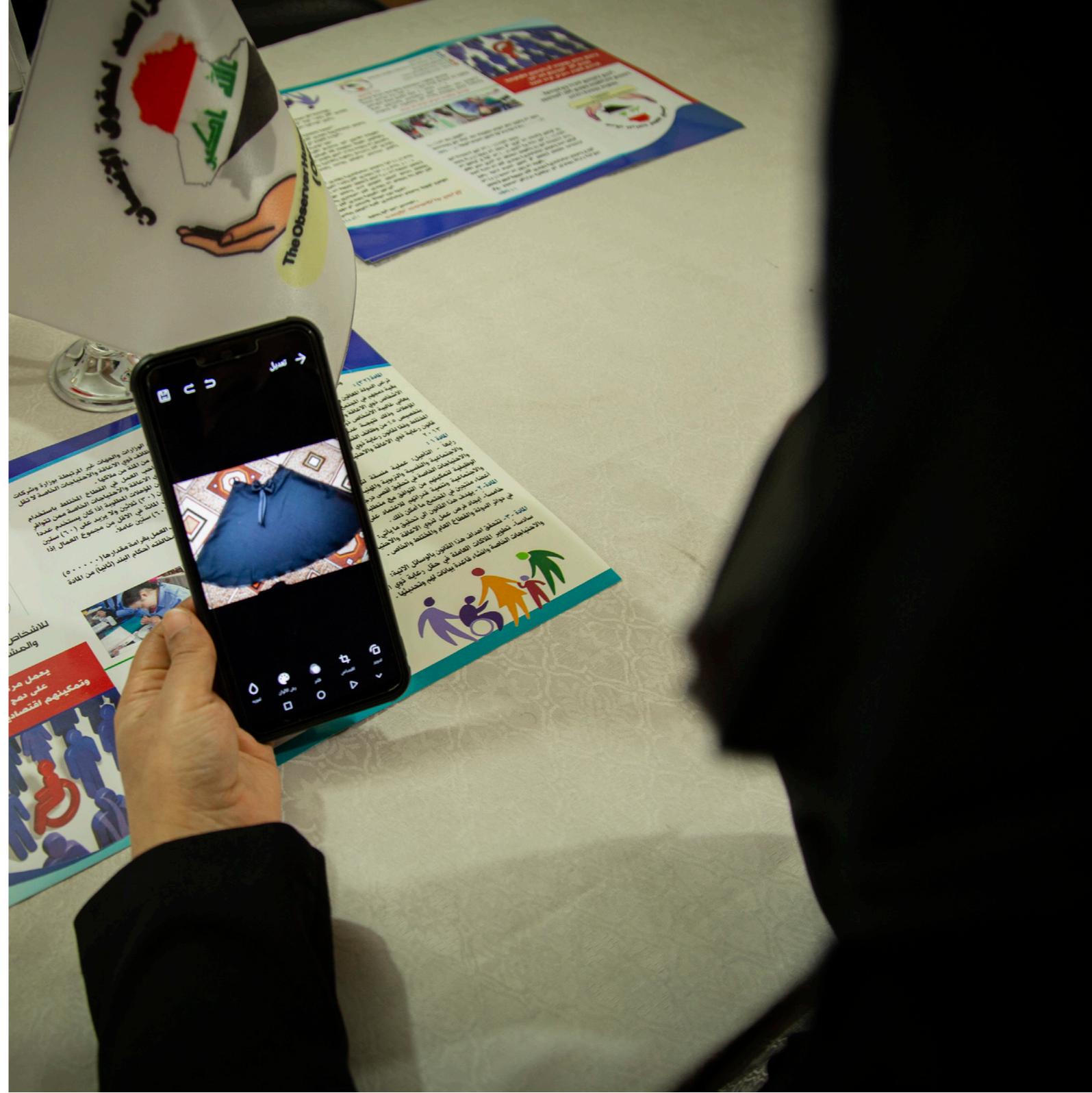
I studied photography and cinema in college and wanted to use these skills to help develop the community, so I joined Nama organization in 2017 as a volunteer. I have trained several young people in photography; many of the trainees have taken up photography as a profession, some even opened their own photography studios. With support from IOM, Nama has implemented many projects, bringing together young people of both genders and from different backgrounds to support peacebuilding here in Tel Afar. Before displacement, people in Tel Afar did not view NGO's activities favorably; there weren't many activities that involved people across the socio-religious spectrum to promote diversity and tolerance in Tel Afar. This changed when returns started; people started working with local organizations. IOM Iraq has supported peace-building activities in Tel Afar for several years now, bringing people from all backgrounds together. All these activities have helped to empower young people and establish a strong bond between Nama and the community.

# OHRC

The Observer Human Rights Center (OHRC) is a local NGO established in 2003 by a group of young people in Najaf Governorate. The organization works to monitor, document and report violations of human rights in Iraq, as well as advocate for victims. OHRC's headquarters are located in Najaf, with sub-offices in most governorates across Iraq. OHRC has partnerships with other local NGOs and international organizations, through which implements activities all over Iraq, with a focus on the middle Euphrates region.

IOM Iraq supported the organization with a capacity building programme focused on disability inclusion and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, in line with Iraqi law No. 38. OHRC has organized awareness raising campaigns led by people with disabilities, including several vocational trainings, workshops and focus groups discussions with NGO members and government representatives, both with and without disabilities.

IOM Iraq worked with OHRC's staff to improve project implementation outcomes and make plans for future projects, via a training package, coaching visits and follow ups, among others.



NAME  
RUQAYYA  
CSO  
OHRC



## RUQAYYA NAJEM

Local NGOs such as the Al-Rasad Center understand our concerns and issues. We feel mostly marginalized by the community because of our disabilities, but Al-Rasad Center members are different. I'm a tailoring trainee with the Al-Rasad Center and I love it. I wanted to do this training to develop my skills and make a living from tailoring. I hope that our voices can reach all international organizations so that they pay more attention to people with disabilities. I hope there will be more development and capacity building activities targeting people with disabilities to empower them and change their state of mind. Such activities encourage people with disabilities to get out and engage in meaningful actions and mingle with other people. What we learn from these trainings could also help us find jobs as most of us are already educated people and have university degrees. Most people with disabilities have talents and abilities but they need more support to integrate with the community and find opportunities.

## LAYTH SAMI NOURI

We started as a group of young people who engaged in human rights issues after the fall of Saddam Hussein. We currently work in different fields in cooperation with other organizations; we have volunteer teams who work on issues including COVID-19 awareness campaigns, assistance to vulnerable families, combatting violence against women, and supporting the participation of women in politics. Our latest project, supported by IOM, had several components. One was economic empowerment to promote inclusive employment, another component was vocational training for people with disabilities. We had 15 female participants in the tailoring training and 15 male participants in the computer training; in each training, there are 10 people with disabilities. We did this to promote the integration of people with disabilities with those who do not have one. Not many organizations are interested in people with disabilities, but we know that they have many talents and capacities. We will do our best to support our participants as they endeavor to open small businesses, by purchasing tailoring machines and computers for them.



NAME

LAYTH

CSO

OHRC



# QTCL

The Qalat Tel Afar Cultural Association (QTCL) was established as an NGO in 2008 to raise cultural awareness and work to rebuild relationships between different groups, in post-conflict Tel Afar. The organization is well regarded by local authorities and the wider community in Tel Afar, especially after the support that the organization provided during the ISIL conflict.

QTCL mainly works in Tel Afar district and its surrounding areas, as well as in Karbala and Najaf. The organization aims to improve tolerance and acceptance within the community; empower women and vulnerable groups; foster peaceful coexistence; and combat ethno-religious stereotyping. IOM Iraq supported QTCL with administrative, proposal writing, logistics and reporting trainings.

Through two rounds of grants and one round of in-kind-support, IOM Iraq helped the organization conduct workshops and trainings in legal awareness; house management and recycling; social cohesion between community groups; and vocational or GBV support for the most vulnerable women and girls in Tel Afar.

## IBRAHIM MUHAMMAD YUNUS

QTCL was established in 2007, when the security situation was deteriorating and Al Qaeda cells were active in Tel Afar. We have implemented activities touching on all aspects of life including security, education, and peacebuilding. In 2020, most of our activities were concerned with capacity building for women, youth and the unemployed. Our first project of 2020 was held under the auspices of an IOM project; we trained a group of women to make their own sweets and pastries. We believe this activity helped women by offering them a form of psychosocial support. Other activities included vocational training for unemployed youth who returned to Tel Afar after displacement; and employability skills for young graduates, including CV writing and job-hunting skills. We feel empowered to take community problems directly to the authorities through the Peace Committee formed by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers and funded by international organizations. We are seen as trustworthy within our society because we are neutral and intervene in public matters to advocate for everyone's best interests.



NAME  
IBRAHIM

CSO  
QTCL

NAME

IMAN

CSO

QTCL

PROFILES AND TESTIMONIES

CSO PROFILE(CSU)  
QTCL

Testimonies of beneficiaries  
Iman Majeed

## IMAN MAJEED

I got married at a very young age. I was only 17 and I was a student; I was not asked if I wanted to get married. It did not occur to me that marriage could cause this much trouble and pain. I had to quit school. My marriage ended with a painful separation. I went through a very bad mental state; I felt suffocated most of the time. I was mostly isolated. One day I learned on Facebook about psychosocial activities offered by different organizations, including IOM and QTCL. I decided to participate, to get out of my isolation. During the activities, we had group discussions and I got the chance to share my story and experiences. I tried to raise awareness about early marriage and how girls should not drop out school for the sake of marriage; they should not be forced to get married. We also discussed how to tackle these issues in society and how to deal with their psychological consequences. I learned many life skills that can help me overcome my psychological crisis. I sense that I am improving; I already feel much better than I did before I participated in this activity. The credit goes to the local organizations as the difference they make in our society is clear. Now the people of Tel Afar, especially girls, are mixing with the community and are present in all kinds of diverse activities. I will continue to develop myself and work on getting through my ordeal, no matter what it takes.

## DISABILITY INCLUSIVE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

Disability-inclusive livelihoods opportunities ensure the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion of their rights and the consideration of disability-related perspectives, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of People with disabilities.

The presence of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) between 2014 and 2017 led to increased levels of violence and economic destabilization in the country. In addition, people with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by conflict, violence and economic hardship in Iraq. IOM Iraq and partners, through the Government of Japan-funded project 'Leveraging the Security Development Nexus in Iraq', systematically look at community stabilization across the country through an "inclusion lens".

People with disabilities are often excluded from livelihood opportunities due to negative attitudes and inaccessible information, training and workplaces. A compelling example of a CSO working to ensure people with disabilities are included is seen in Najaf, through the Observer Human Rights Centre (OHRC). People with disabilities are often excluded from livelihood opportunities due to lack of skills and qualifications. With funding from the Government of Japan, this CSO could implement a livelihood project in partnership with the local Vocational Training Centre (VTC) aimed at increasing marginalized groups' access to the job market and promoting income generating activities.



"I always wanted to have a skill and contribute to my family's income."

Beneficiary from Najaf

To ensure people with disabilities were included in the project, OHRC identified people with disabilities through communicating and coordinating with representative organizations of people with disabilities in Najaf. As a result, 30 beneficiaries with disabilities (15 men and 15 women) enrolled in computer and sewing courses at the VTC in Najaf. Furthermore, these 30 trainees were consulted about the main barriers hindering their participation in the training courses, as well as the potential solutions to overcome the barriers.

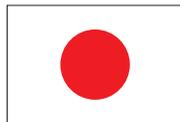
One female trainee with a physical disability shared: "I always wanted to have a skill and contribute to my family's income". She identified transportation and manoeuvring her wheelchair around the VTC as the two initial barriers to her participation. However, through the provision of transportation and accessibility adaptations to the VTC, she was able to attend the sewing course. When reflecting on the future she added "I will open my own project to teach sewing to other women and also sell my products to shopping malls".

Consulting people with diverse disabilities and their representative organizations at the different stages of the project is a key step in order to address their challenges and guarantee their right to access livelihood opportunities.

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