

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

AUSLANDSBÜRO JORDANIEN

October 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 2013

NIKLAS MALCHOW  
RASHA AL RASHED  
DR. OTMAR OEHRING

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## Economic Empowerment for Iraqi Women and Youth

**Event:** Symposium

**Date, place:** October 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Dedeman Hotel, Erbil - Iraq

**Organization:** Women Empowerment Organization  
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung – Amman Office

### 1. Program Overview

#### Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013

##### Welcome Speeches

Mrs. Suzan Aref

Director  
Women Empowerment Organization  
Erbil

Rasha Al Rashed

Project Manager  
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung  
Amman Office  
Amman

On behalf of

Dr. Otmar Oehring

Resident Representative  
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung  
Amman Office  
Amman

##### **Session 1: Presentation of the Focus Groups - Shedding Light on the Most Important Challenges and Recommendations**

Dr. Wasfi Kahwaji

Dean of Management and Economic  
Collage  
Salahdin University  
Erbil

##### **Discussion**

##### **Session 2: Panel on Governmental Programs – Economic Empowerment for Women and Youth**

Mr. Dara Rashid

Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

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Central Government  
Baghdad

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Mrs. Anwar Abdul Sattar

General Manager  
Ministry of Women Affairs  
Iraqi Government  
Iraq

RASHA AL RASHED  
NIKLAS MALCHOW  
DR. OTMAR OEHRING

Mrs. Adiba Abdul Saiid

Member at Women Higher Council  
Kurdistan Region  
Erbil

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Dr. Aref Hito

General Director  
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs  
Kurdistan Region  
Erbil

**Discussion**

**Session 3 (Continuity): Panel on Governmental Programs - Economic Empowerment for Women and Youth**

Mr. Haydar Mustafa

Director  
Ministry of Planning  
Kurdistan Region  
Erbil

Dr. Adnan al Sarraj

Consultant  
Ministry of Youth  
Central Government  
Baghdad

Dr. Abdul Hussein al Anbaki

Prime Minister's Advisor for Economic  
Affairs  
Central Government  
Baghdad

**Discussion**

**Session 4: Iraqi Labour Law in Terms of the Positive Results, Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

Mrs. Nermine Kardaghi

Consultant Attorney/Board Member  
Women Empowerment Organization  
Erbil

**Discussion**

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**Session 5: The Role of International Organizations in Contributing to the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth**

Mrs. Luz Tantaruna

Project Officer  
The International Organization for  
Migration (IOM)  
Erbil

Mrs. Lina Al Qudwa

Economic Specialist  
Women Affairs  
United Nations  
Erbil

**Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**Session 6 (Continuity): The Role of International Organizations in Contributing to the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth**

Mrs. Athraa al Hassani

Director  
Model Iraqi Women Organization  
Baghdad

Mrs. Halema Al Jaf

Member at Iraqi Business  
Association for Economic Development  
Baghdad

Mr. Emad Al Rabbat

Executive Director  
Small Business Development Center  
(SBDC)  
Samawa

Mrs. Suzan Aref

Director  
Women Empowerment Organization  
Erbil

**Discussion**

**Session 7: Working Groups to Develop Appropriate Mechanisms for Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth**

**Session 8: Presentation of Groups**

**Session 9: General recommendations and suggestions - Identifying the Important Mechanisms for their Implementation**

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**Objective**

Women involvement and representation in executive positions within the Iraqi public and private sphere is substantially low, barely covered by the media and neither touched upon by public dialogue. In addition, there are insufficient assistance and support programs to create sustainable opportunities that ensure the youth to refine their future careers and to participate in the economy. Thus, deficiencies in government programs, the Iraqi labor law and the contributing effect of international organizations and NGO's need to be re-evaluated and advanced in terms of the current socio-economical challenges Iraq is facing.

Consequently, the following symposium wishes to address Iraqi youths and women who are seeking to get engaged with developmental processes and private sector activities to express economic empowerment. Development experiences around the world have proven that the achievement of sustainable economic growth rates is the most powerful instrument for poverty alleviation. Economic growth presupposes the contribution by different sectors of the economy that has been a key vehicle to enhance the standards of living. In this respect, the attainment of economic growth should be based on the participation of all members of society within the production process.

In this context, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung/KAS Amman and the Women Empowerment Organization organized a conference on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 in Erbil to discuss the obstacles women and youth are being confronted with in the process of acquiring considerable economic competences. The forum was attended by various government representatives from the Kurdistan region, the central authorities in Baghdad,

academics and delegates of international organizations, NGO's and business associations.

**Welcome Speeches**

At the beginning of the conference, the organizers Suzan Aref from WEO and Rasha Al Rashed, speaking on behalf of Dr. Otmar Oehring, KAS Amman, welcomed all participants and thanked them for their great commitment and a fruitful cooperation. Mrs. Aref emphasized the urgent necessity to integrate women and youth in the development process and stressed their economic needs. Additionally, she emphasized the advantage to have a combination of decision-making units and NGO's at the debate that ensure a productive discussion with good outcomes. Subsequently, Mrs. Al Rashed referred to the vast reflux of Iraqi women that developed from rather substantial economical activities in the 1980s to a significant decrease of influence and involvement in 2013. Furthermore, she underlined the reality that the Iraq war led to the death of many Iraqis. The wives of those men had to take the lead and manage upcoming challenges on their own. Moreover, a lack of legal protection and deficiencies in public and political determination to counter those adverse realities is observable.

**Session 1: Presentation of the Focus Groups - Shedding Light on the Most Important Challenges and Recommendations**

At the beginning of the first session Dr. Wasfi Kahwaji presented a survey that outlines the people's perception of advantages and disadvantages in working for the public and private sector. Initially, he explained that the private sector as such has become a significant entity in Iraq since the country has a free market. Some

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people, however, are sensitive to the private sector arguing that their employment is not guaranteed due to the fact that the manager is able to easily dismiss his employees. It is too risky and insecure. On the other hand, working in the public sector ensures more sustainability and better chances of promotion. In addition, the requirements for young people to become engaged with the private sector are higher in terms of prior experiences and languages. Subsequently, the following questions were raised in the survey.

*Is there any development in schools/curriculum to teach about the private sector?*

It was mentioned that there is no awareness building in schools or universities that could educate students on the importance of economic participation. Hence, students need to become aware of this fact and understand why the private sector is essential to a countries development.

*Does the media play a role in motivating the youth?*

An extensive coverage by the media that raises pressing problems or stimulates incentives and attempts to inform the youth on job opportunities or requirements of the private sector does not exist.

*Do social norms prevent working in private sector?*

It does to the extent that, various conservative families are afraid of their daughter's reputation in becoming engaged to work in the private sector. This is also due to the deficit in legal support and the lack of awareness among the public and the youth to work in the private sector. Additionally, Dr. Wasfi stressed that, people would like to see better securities in the private sector, i.e. pension funds or insurances, which enhance the individual's

social security and thereby the respect of their families.

*Is vocational training available?*

There is an insufficient provision of vocational training. Better venues and frameworks are necessary in order to establish effective and sustainable education programs.

During the discussion participants elaborated that the public sector has to collaborate more closely with the private sector. Furthermore, Iraq needs to establish an institution protecting the rights of employees. Another participant underlined the hindrance for women to individually or via an undertaking enter the market and eventually compete. She provided the example that, even though there is high unemployment among Iraqi women - approximately 3 million. One problem is the high number of foreign workers in the country, i.e. nurses coming from India to work in Iraq. Moreover, 60-70 percent of the jobs are considered for individuals that are economically linked to the parties. Furthermore, he stressed that Iraq have had a well working private sector in the 50s and 60s. Thus, there is the need to understand why and how these entities were successful at that time.

**Session 2: Panel on Governmental Programs - Economic Empowerment for Women and Youth**

The first speaker was Mr. Dara Rashid. He started his deliberations by illustrating the fact that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs mainly works with marginalized individuals of the public and thereby focuses on integrity and transparency. Further, the ministry tries to establish a social security network. Mr. Dara suggests that, 90% of the budget must be allocated to projects that centre on infrastructure and investment campaigns. In the following he refers to the

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concept of mindset and cultural habits that needs to become reformed in order to change the pattern of how women are perceived in the private as well as in the public sector. According to him, at the moment there is no ample private sector in Iraq. That is why Iraq has to build grassroots capabilities and integrate women to establish a functioning private sector.

The second speaker, Mrs. Anwar Abdul Sattar, started with a thorough presentation on the achievements and developments of the State Ministry of Women Affairs. She emphasised that the Ministry does not have enough employees to operate according to its needs and that no money from the budget is allocated to the Ministry of Women Affairs. In this respect, she proposes to have a comprehensive strategy paper on economic empowerment that outlines its shortcomings and recommends its adequate solutions. Furthermore, gender units in the public sphere are required to guarantee that women are included in the policy-making process.

The next speaker Mrs. Adiba Abdul Saiid represented the Women Higher Council for the Kurdistan Region. She highlighted the substantial role of women in the Iraqi society and accentuated to empower their capabilities in order to secure women's interests and desires. This has to come within the support of the government and other sides that work within this field. Therefore, the government should concentrate more on the economical empowerment of women. The authorities have to provide better training opportunities and create job vacancies for women to recognize their role as needed. In addition, women should start their own projects, which can be done by the support of civil society organizations.

The last person outlining his thoughts for the second session was Dr. Aref Hito. He underlined the point that the private sector should be established and maintained; the workload must be distributed among multiple ministries and groups and not just one institution; and the implementation has to be performed collectively. Last year the decision was made to amend the labour law in the Kurdistan Region in accordance with the International Labour Organization. The reformed law redefined the working hours in the public and private sector, it established a labour court in order to enact rights and regulated the practices of different workers. Those legal amendments almost exclusively focused on the private sector. Supplementary actions were initiated to merge and integrate women and youth via training courses and vocational directorates. If 50% of the female attendants would eventually become employed these measures would have succeeded. The trouble had been that most of them were non university graduates and therewith had problems to enter the market. Another activity is to allow and give people micro loans in order for them to conduct their training or project. Here, women were prioritized. Accordingly, the public sphere should empower women not only in terms of a quota but ensure genuine options and education.

Consequently, Iraq needs to establish an efficient Ministry of Women Affairs that is able to operate result oriented and does not merely exist in theory. Furthermore, it was observed that there has not only been a recession in women's employment but also that woman's aspirations have been undermined. It was mentioned that there even though a quota exists, there is no support for the overarching idea of promoting women empowerment and gender equality. As a result, Iraq is in need of regulations and specifically awareness

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building in order to counter those negative societal perceptions. Another remark emphasized that democratic elements are not understood in this region since most of the people are too uneducated and ignorant to call for participation and representation rights, which underlined the problem of a questionable education system.

**Session 3: Governmental Programs – Economic Empowerment for Women and Youth**

Mr. Haydar Mustafa acknowledged that the private sector is not extensively developed in Kurdistan. The labour market and the public sector have difficulties and worries in employing qualified people due to a lack of knowledge. He recommends countering social challenges by conducting an assessment in order to find the reasons for the low participation of women in the economy. However, a definite indicator that there is potential for the empowerment of women is expressed in the latest parliamentary elections where 34 female candidates competed of which 9 entered into parliament. Besides, Mr. Haydar emphasizes that, it is the role of NGO's, the UN and the government to act collectively and enforce an assessment for women participation and empowerment.

The second speaker was Dr. Adnan Al Sarraj from the Ministry of Youth. He outlined that, there no specific planning at the moment since there are no statistics, no surveys and no high-level research centres. Another point of criticism was the harassment of women which led to a situation in which only 9,4% of women visit the sport forums and centres established by the Ministry. In addition, the campaign that sought to motivate and promote women to go to certain sports clubs had mainly negative or no real response. In this respect, better laws for the protection of women are

urgently needed. Further, vacant jobs and female applicants are available however, outside labour is still preferred even though it is not necessary and does not help to solve the cause of the problem. Also the coordination between the Ministry of Youth and Sports on the one side and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on the other side has to increase. Dr. Adnan added that, Iraq is equipped with vast natural resources however, does not know how to manage that wealth. In addition, its private sector was established under post-War conditions. Accordingly, there is more import than export even though there are oil revenues.

The last speaker, Dr. Abdul Hussein Al Anbaki, emphasised the need for a socio-economic dialogue that should become engaged to have economic reforms. An issue is that 90% of Iraq's unemployment is structural and thus, needs long term economic changes that adapt to it specific market structures. The immense problem of corruption and discrimination in salaries is still present and specifically appears in the private sector. Therefore, there is the need to create a suitable and favourable work atmosphere via generating certain incentives in the private sector.

During the debate it was further discussed to strengthen the middle class and to establish a real market economy including consumer protection as, at the moment, Iraq is only a consuming market. Moreover, it should be noted that women also face problems and disrespect in the public sector and not only the private sector. In addition, laws are needed which better protect women entrepreneurs; which guarantee a women quota in every Ministry; which criminalize harassment; and which incorporate sexual education to the curriculum in primary schools to help women to counter harassment against them.

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**AUSLANDSBÜRO JORDANIEN** **Session 4: Iraqi Labour Law in Terms of Positive Results, Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

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Mrs. Nermine Kardaghi pointed out that the concept of freedom gained more prominence leading to employees pushing for further participation and demanded more rights on the issues of wages and working hours. Deficiencies within the legal system however do exist. One problem is that judges give statements or rulings irrespective of the law which is a conception of the old times. Additionally, many companies do not comprise rules and regulations but only norms that are still characterized by discrimination. Therefore, it is a necessity to update the law and stipulate gender equality. Likewise Mrs. Nermine proposes to equalize Arab and foreign workers with Iraqi workers in terms of a reformed Iraqi labour law. Specific amendments are required to impose within the Iraqi labour law as all labourers need to be represented in the public.

**Session 5. The Role of International Organizations in Contributing to the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth**

The first presentation was given by Ms. Luz Tantaruna illustrating a research project by the International Organization of Migration (IOM). The organization collected data related to In Kind Grants (IKG) assessed through direct interviews collected in 13 governorates from 2010 until 2013. During this time 977 of the interviewed beneficiaries were in a full operating business of which 89% were obtained as samples to measure the educational level and business type by comparing household income and business profit before and after providing assistance with IKG. The accumulated results so far indicate that,

people with intermediate education, bachelor degrees and secondary education are the beneficiaries and profiteers whereas those individuals with no formal education or only primary education are no profiteers at all. Thus, the educational level is corresponding with the family income and the business profit. Therefore, it is crucial to counter the educational system and not only recognize the willingness to establish equal rights but to implement them.

Since Dr. Khaled Kohshnaw was absent the next speaker to follow was Mrs. Lina Al Qudwa from UN-Women. Initially she introduced UN-Women and highlighted their mission to enhance women empowerment. The main focus of their work is concerned with increasing leadership and participation, ending the violence against women, strengthen women rights and to engage in peace and security. Particularly in Iraq UN Woman encourages and supports woman groups to exercise more influence in legislation as well as the ministries. Additionally, she provided a presentation on an online tool termed 'Digital Library' initiated by UN Women. This is one of the effective means that can be taken to promote the idea of a knowledge gateway and to increase women participation in the economy.

In the concluding remarks for the day, Suzan Aref emphasized that current programs are too generalized for women. Besides those anticipated programs or trainings, essential elements are the implementation of strategies, decisions and above all self-confidence among women in order to eliminate any legal, personal, and ideological barriers that prevent women from exercising their competences.

**Session 6 (Continuity): The Role of International Organizations in**



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**Contributing to the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth**

The first speaker opening the second conference day was Mrs. Athraa Al Hassani who stated that private sector competition barely exists in Iraq which is mainly a result of the Iraq war that led to the destruction of the infrastructure needed for the private sector. Furthermore, she reviews that there is no link of trust among the government and the private sector due to the fact that, there is too much corruption in both sectors. This approach, i.e. to establish a company via bribes, has set the country back for centuries. She advocates to initiate a proper strategy for the private sector and to adopt an investment law that increases employment among Iraqis, implements regulations to protect the private sector and to regulate imports from Turkey, Syria and the UAE.

The next speaker, Mrs. Halema Al Jaf, is a company owner who only employs Iraqi workers. Recently, she conducted a two month training for women, which was in accordance with the US embassy and focussed on teaching business English. Here, Mrs. Halema pointed out that projects are facing the major problem that graduate students do not possess the obligatory English and computer skills which are indispensable in the private sector.

Mr. Emad Al Rabbat from the Small Business and Development Center (SBDC) outlined that his organization will organize a training to improve marketing skills and business openings. The SBDC seeks to gather decision-makers and small and medium sized businesses in order to find challenges and solutions that could further progress within the private sector. 4,500 jobs have already been created due to the placements of their centres. In the following month his

organization is initiating a program that aims to teach people to open up a business.

Suzan Aref concluded the session by stressing the importance to allocate budget within the Ministries accordingly in order to better invest in women and youth development.

During the discussion, a participant argued that for three years the private sector has been protected with a 5% customs tariff as compared to 0% in 2008, which had socio-economical effects. However, he adds that additional investment and economic protection is needed as well as a reformation on the laws and a solution to regulate Iraq's funds. Another speaker pointed to Iraq's media marketing which is lacking to efficiently sell Iraqi oil. Additionally, it was said that in order to activate the private sector in one way or another, tariffs on raw materials should be removed. In the course of the years, Iraq's private sector was left alone without any legal advice protecting its status and rights. Furthermore, it was proposed to have a comprehensive national study in order to counter grassroots problems and work collectively. In this respect, it is also crucial to establish an effective bureau that observes the paying for taxes and initiate a strict tax system that also ensures the protection of what Iraq produces and exports.

**Session 7: Working Groups to Develop Appropriate Mechanisms for Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth. Groups are Divided in two Parts – one for Government Representatives and one for Organizations**

Within the group debate it was especially emphasized that the social security law does not cover the private sector. The law was established in the 1970s but is not applied

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anymore and should be amended as it does not fit Iraq's current circumstances anymore. Due to the fact that social security, labour law, pension funds and health advantages are provided in the public sector but not in the private sector, people do not see an advantage in the private sector. Another issue, as discussed before, is the English language barrier and the lack of skills.

**Session 8: Presentation of the Groups**

After the internal discussions and deliberations within the groups, the government group outlined their results as followed:

- 1) Managing the resources
- 2) Developing and amending administration
- 3) Provision of incentives in the private and public sector (social security law, pension funds, labour law, etc.)
- 4) Public and private sector should have specific job descriptions
- 5) Contracts in the private sector have to be better regulated

The organizational groups developed the subsequent proposals:

- 1) Amending and activating labour law since it is not valid and known among the public
- 2) Activating law for business women and promoting female lobby groups
- 3) Developing and promoting skills of the youth
- 4) Encouraging volunteer work in companies and NGO's
- 5) Improving skills by enhancing the practical side (providing incentives in the private sector)

**Session 9: General Recommendations and Suggestions; Identifying the Important Mechanism for their Implementation**

After the individual presentations, the two groups started to debate on their respective results in order to collectively find future recommendations that help to counter the lack of women and youth empowerment in Iraq. Due to the participant's exceedingly fruitful discussion that helped to express various views and alternatives the listed recommendations were agreed upon:

- 1) Review the Iraqi labour law and submit proposals to develop it in line with the current situation
- 2) Improving the business environment through administrative reform
- 3) Providing administrative and financial regulations regarding the personnel affairs in the private sector
- 4) Educating the community of how to deal with the private sector through the activation of information programs
- 5) Creating an education curriculum which promoted internships for students in the private sector during summer holidays
- 6) Directing students of relevant universities to conduct research and studies on private sector projects
- 7) Activating the investment law and determining a percentage to employ jobless young people and women in investment projects
- 8) Determining a risk allowance within the private sector's job description
- 9) Activating the Consumer Protection Act and the protection of national products
- 10) Activating the imposing of customs tariffs on imported goods
- 11) Pushing the legislation of new laws for the public and private sectors together

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- 12) Establishing a partnership between the public and private sectors, especially with regard to development programs
- 13) Government contribution in encouraging young people and women through tax exemption of capital projects for at least a period of 3 years
- 14) Conducting a survey for the number of unemployed women and youth
- 15) Expanding business partnerships between government and civil society on issues of training and raising awareness. In addition, to prepare programs for economic empowerment among women and youth
- 16) Developing the skills for women and youth, through ongoing training and rehabilitation programs
- 17) Ensuring the rights of workers in the private sector through follow-up and control of private companies by the governmental and civil society organizations
- 18) Facilitating access to soft loans for youth and women without imposing any interests