



# Collaborating for Better Electoral Practices in Iraq

Search for Common Ground (Search), in partnership with the United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), established a Community of Practice (CoP) in 2019 aimed at strengthening networks between NGOs working in the democracy, human rights, and governance sector in Iraq. The CoP promotes increased strategic coordination, capacity strengthening, and learning, providing members with access to webinars, workshops, and the online Iraqi Key Resources Library. The CoP introduced a Mentorship Program (MP), giving member organizations the time and space to connect, to foster collaboration and strengthen programmatic complementarities.

Ahmed Jassam Mohammed, Executive Director of Al Noor Universal Foundation ('Al Noor'), and Bashar Amer Al Obaidy, Program Director of Al-Tadhamun Iraqi League for Youth ('Al-Tadhamun'), participated in the MP as mentor and mentee, respectively. Ahmed and Bashar leveraged this opportunity to exchange expertise and open a space for dialogue. Following MP exchanges over 3 months, Ahmed and Bashar decided to join forces and implement the "Enhancing Voter Confidence in the Electoral Process" project in Anbar Governorate.

The initiative is funded by CoP member National Democratic Institute (NDI). Project activities include an advocacy campaign, assistance in the monitoring of parliamentary elections, and an upcoming training for youth on election campaigning and media use. Each organization has a well-defined role in project implementation, relating to their respective experience and expertise. Given its long-term experience in Iraqi political analysis, Al Noor leads the research and planning. Leveraging its fieldwork experience in Anbar, Al-Tadhamun is in charge of on-the-ground project activity implementation. Ahmed and Bashar recognize that it is the combination of both organizations' expertise that makes the project a success.

"Al Noor's experience with the Iraqi political context enabled us to successfully plan this election-focused project", Bashar explains. "Thanks to Al-Tadhamun's existing relationships in Anbar", Ahmed adds, "it was easy for project activities to reach the right stakeholders". The benefits of collaborating on better electoral practices in Iraq became clear to Ahmed and Bashar during mentorship exchanges. "The CoP Mentorship Program is truly a one-of-a-kind activity in Iraq", Bashar notes, "it offers participants a unique platform to freely discuss."

Al Noor and Al-Tadhamun's collaboration will not stop when their electoral project ends. "We plan to continue working together in the future", says Ahmed, "specifically to promote better transparency within the Iraqi government". Ahmed and Bashar also plan to deepen their collaboration from joint project implementation to organizational strategic alignment fostering strong cooperation and avoiding duplication. For Ahmed and Bashar, the CoP MP opened the door to partnership, and, ultimately, to more successful and coordinated program implementation within Iraq's democracy, human rights, and governance space.

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