



Collaborating for Women in Politics

The Community of Practice (CoP) project promotes increased strategic coordination, capacity strengthening, and learning between organizations working in Iraq. The United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) funds the CoP, which is composed of organizations working on DRL-funded projects.

To foster learning and connections, Search for Common Ground (Search) organizes regular meetings and workshops, which provide CoP members the time and space to connect with one another. To that end, Search hosted an in-country workshop in April 2021, with the goal to promote further collaboration between members of the CoP.

During the workshop, Al Noor Foundation (Al Noor) and Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) connected with one another and decided to plan further discussions on an issue important to them both: the participation of women in Iraqi politics, and violence against women during electoral processes.

Suzan Aref, director of WEO, and Ahmed Jassam, executive director of Al Noor, briefly described their organizations' programming, expertise, and challenges, during the CoP workshop. Following the workshop, synergies and entry points for collaboration emerged between their organizations' work. Upon learning more about Al Noor's activities on gender political quotas and electoral violence in a follow-up meeting, Suzan Aref identified complementary areas. Al Noor sees their work with WEO as an opportunity to gain further knowledge about women's issues in Iraqi politics and the work of women-led organizations.

Al Noor and WEO have since signed a Memorandum of Understanding, to frame their collaboration on women's political participation and electoral violence. They plan to work together on organizing training sessions for staff and to continue regular meetings for improved programming coordination. "We hope to create a sustainable link between our two organizations", says Suzan Aref, "in order to continue working together on issues that are of interest to both of us".

"Collaborations between organizations, like ours, are a great advantage of being part of the CoP", Suzan Aref notes. She explains that many organizations in Iraq tend to work in a vacuum. They do not seek to learn about CSOs' experience and expertise, therefore limiting organizations' capacity and leading to duplicate projects.

"After meeting with Ahmed Jassam from Al Noor, we both thought: 'why haven't we done this before?'" Suzan Aref adds. WEO and Al Noor view the CoP as a unique platform for organizations to find opportunities to work together, complement each other's expertise, and implement more impactful and effective programming.

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