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IRAQ GOVERNANCE STRENGTHENING PROJECT

Annual Report on Lessons Learned and Best Practices (2012)

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Annual Report on Lessons Learned and Best Practices

SUBMITTED BY CHEMONICS INTERNATIONAL
September 15, 2012

Contract No. AID-267-C-11-00006
Deliverable No. D-2012-078

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ACRONYMS

CBO	Capacity Building Office
COP	Chief of Party
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
ESDO	Essential Service Delivery Oversight
GAPTIS	Government Accounting and Project Tracking Information System
GO	Governor 'Office
GOI	Government of Iraq
GSP	Governance Strengthening Project
LG	Local Governance
LGP III	Local Governance Program
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSTP	Organizational Self-assessment and Transformation Program
PC	Provincial Council
PDS	Provincial Development Strategy
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

I. INTRODUCTION

As per Section F.7.A.(d) Chemonics provides its **Annual Report on Lessons Learned and Best Practices** for the Governance Strengthening Project (GSP) under Contract No. AID-267-C-11-00006. This document provides adequate information and insight explaining why the proposed course of action in the consecutive annual work-plan is justifiable, and how it reflects lessons learned in the previous year of project implementation.

The goal of this document is to capture best practices developed by GSP over the course of the first year of implementation, from September 2011 to September 2012. Programming in a conflict environment carries with it special challenges, and GSP adapted to these challenges with a number of innovative approaches. In an effort to address two distinct but overlapping spheres of activity, this document is divided into two parts: 1) best practices related to the implementation of program activities and 2) best practices for overall project management. Each section highlights what worked well (the best practice) and provides examples that illustrate how these approaches were developed and put into practice in GSP.

II. BACKGROUND

In September 2011, USAID launched the Iraq Governance Strengthening Project (GSP). GSP is a four-year project designed to enable provincial and local governments to respond more effectively to community needs. The project has two components:

- a) **Component I:** Institutional Strengthening. Targeted provincial and local governments institutionalize core authorities and responsibilities.
- b) **Component II:** Executive Oversight. Targeted provincial and local elected officials hold executive ministries accountable for improved services.

Under each component, GSP promotes provincial and local government institutional development to build constructive provincial council and governor office capacity and oversight mechanisms. Activities are Iraqi-led, supporting government and civil society efforts to strengthen the responsiveness of provincial and local governments to community needs. The estimated distribution of project resources is 60 percent for Component I and 40 percent for Component II.

A. Project Highlights:

During the first year of implementation, GSP has built strong relationships with 15 provincial governments. The relationships developed by GSP have assisted the program establish credibility with stakeholders and also allowed the project to obtain embedded offices in 11 of the 15 provinces. GSP anticipates obtaining embedded offices in the remaining four provinces by the end of Year 1. GSP has implemented activities in the 15 target provinces as depicted by the table below.

B. Table: GSP Activities by Provinces

Activity	Anbar	Babil	Baghdad	Basrah	Dhi Qar	Diwaniyah	Diyala	Karbala	Kirkuk	Maysan	Muthanna	Najaf	Ninawa	Salah ad Din	Wasit
Embedded Office	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓
Citizen Satisfaction Index	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gender & Vulnerable Population	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Organizational Self-assessment Transformation Program		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓				✓		
Local Government Association	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Governorate Policy Unit	✓		✓												
GAPTIS & Budgeting Assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved Governorate Budgeting Accountability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved Capital Project Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved PC-GO Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Effective Citizen Participation		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓			✓
Essential Service Delivery Standards of Performance	✓	✓	✓			✓						✓			✓
Essential Services Delivery Oversight Unit		✓	✓			✓		✓						✓	✓
Participatory Essential Services Delivery Oversight		✓	✓			✓		✓				✓		✓	✓
Citizen Services Desk	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓				✓			✓
Legislative Tracking System		✓	✓												

GSP hub offices in Baghdad, Hilla, Basrah, and Erbil became fully operational. Provincial Coordinators, the leaders of embedded technical teams, were hired in 14 of 15 provinces. Baseline citizen satisfaction surveys were completed and compiled into a baseline Citizen Satisfaction Index against which the project will measure impact.

On the program side, GSP conducted two national conferences. The *Provincial Governments: Centers of Excellence* conference, held on April 19 and 20, 2012, introduced the GSP Organizational Self-assessment and Transformational Program (OSTP) to high-level provincial actors, and the *Provincial Development Strategy National Workshop*, held on June 28, 2012, enabled

the staff from the planning units of PCs and GOs from the 15 provinces to gain a better understanding of Ministry of Planning requirements for completion of 2013-2017 Provincial Development Strategies (PDS). GSP provincial coordinators assisted seven provinces in the preparation of their PDS. The PDS National Workshop also resulted in the identification of regulatory gaps in the planning and budget preparation process. As a follow-on to the PDS workshop, GSP, the Ministry of State for Provincial Affairs, and the Ministry of Planning is planning a three-day *Sulimaniyah National Workshop*, September 18-20, 2012 to facilitate a joint approach to clarifying and resolving regulatory gaps in capital-projects planning by provincial and federal authorities. GSP also assessed budgeting operations and Government Accounting Project Tracking and Information System (GAPTIS) utilization in 15 provinces.

Using a participatory approach, GSP developed a plan to address areas for improvement in local government, which was introduced to Baghdad Provincial Council (PC) and Governor's Office (GO) officials in a Baghdad Stakeholders' Meeting. The Baghdad PC and GO adopted the plan and a steering committee was formed.

GSP initiated support for Integrated Development Planning involving stakeholders at the provincial and central levels, joint PC-GO Essential Service Delivery Oversight (ESDO) units, citizen service desks, and citizen participation mechanisms through a series of meetings and workshops. OSTP teams were formed in six provinces and OSTP self-assessments were initiated.

C. Tools and Techniques

GSP uses a matrix organizational structure to provide the flexibility to adapt to the dynamic operating context of Iraq while maintaining geographic reach and technical depth. It also reduces dependence upon individual team members, minimizing the impact of employee turnover. The project's technical and administrative headquarters is in Baghdad, where the chief of party (COP), deputy chief of party (DCOP), team leaders, and finance and compliance management are based.

The chief of party provides overall technical direction and management in coordination with USAID/Iraq. The deputy chief of party leads monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and ensures the integration of crosscutting issues into GSP programs. On an as-needed basis, the deputy chief of party also assists the chief of party on program components. Team leaders and senior technical specialists, also based in Baghdad, provide technical support and guidance to the embedded teams in the provinces and lead the two components.

In the provinces, regional managers oversee the work of GSP's provincial coordinators and their teams. Each regional manager is based at one of four regional hubs: Erbil, Baghdad, Hilla, and Basrah. The Regional Director provides management oversight of the hubs and plays a coordinating role to ensure efficient and effective deployment of resources and program

activities. Through this organizational structure, technical assistance is designed in Baghdad, and hub offices manage embedded provincial staff in the implementation of program activities. This approach enables the project to focus resources where they are needed and adjust the mix of resources and activities accordingly.

GSP's guiding principles will ensure the success of the project. These principles build on the vast experience of the implementing consortium which brings significant knowledge supporting local governance in challenging operating environments. The main principles are:

- *Sustainability through local ownership*, by making the additional investment so our partners are taking the lead, while the project provides technical oversight and guidance
- *International best practices* with an Iraqi delivery, by emphasizing identifying local talent and exceptional organizations
- *Capacity building* by working hand-in-hand, “*learning-by-doing*” with all stakeholders, building trust, and forging durable relationships with our local partners
- *Flexibility and adaptability*, by leveraging windows of opportunity that further governance strengthening
- *Focus on citizen needs, input, and feedback* for services and results so that the program is demand and commitment driven

D. Table: GSP Program Innovations

GSP Goal	Impact on Local Governance Systems	Impact on Iraqi People	Impact on Iraqi Government
Policy advocacy capacity established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOs assisted can now determine issues on which to focus, analyze them, and make recommendations to advocate reforms • Relevant and provincial priority policies are produced in collaboration with central ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic direction for the province's development is clarified and established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better policy making due to informed decisions
Continuous institutional development process (OSTP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-supported and self-initiated institutional development and organizational changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient and effective services provided by local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain trust and confidence of the people
Established representative and sustainable local government association(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable and efficient system of support for capacity development and mechanism for sharing and leveraging resources and best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient and effective services provided by local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain trust and confidence of the people • In addition sustainable capacity development, it improves their advocacy role

GSP Goal	Impact on Local Governance Systems	Impact on Iraqi People	Impact on Iraqi Government
Improved budget accountability and improved capital projects cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient planning and timely delivery of needed and strategic projects in a participatory manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens are involved and aware of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize and strategize their important project with informed citizenry Improved budget capital budget execution
Improved provincial communications (outreach) and citizen participation in the decision-making processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication capacity with citizens and central government and active citizen participation in the decision –making processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informed citizenry and buy-in and acceptance of decisions and projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory and transparent governments
Governance Effectiveness Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established benchmarks of the provincial governance capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient and effective local government services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand their governance capability and set goals for improvements
Establish essential service delivery oversight units and standards that are supported by and coordinated with central ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide efficient and effective services oversight system and structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive better services that are monitored, evaluated and improved Engage citizens in service delivery oversight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make central ministries accountable for delivered services
Establish citizen service desks that are centered on customer services principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer oriented and proactive LG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service requests are efficiently handled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LG responsive to their citizens need
Establish legislative tracking system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing system for efficient and effective legislative tracking and analyzing system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear understanding purpose and impact of the legislations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized and goal oriented legislations

III. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GSP faced the challenge of lost momentum due to the gap in time between the conclusion of the previous local governance project and the initiation of GSP. Security, bureaucracy, operational licensing, and obtaining visas and badges have been top issues facing the project. Despite all the challenges, the GSP has been able to overcome them and obtained solid commitment by provincial governments in all 15 provinces.

A. Project Design

GSP was designed by and was to be managed by the USAID Democracy & Governance Office. It was later transferred to the Capacity Building Office (CBO), where the Tarabot project was

conceived and is managed, to allow the CBO to synergize the two project designs and to better coordinate implementation. Among the design conflicts were overlaps in planned work with provincial gubernatorial offices, and OSTP initiatives. These issues were constructively resolved with the oversight of the CBO.

The initial GSP design targeted nine provinces for project implementation during Year I with expansion into additional provinces in successive years. This unequal distribution of assistance held the potential to create tensions between USAID, GSP, and provincial governments, and was not in alignment with the Tarabot approach. The CBO quickly called for simultaneous startup in 15 target provinces. The decision was beneficial, but the deviation from the plan created an unforeseen surge in administrative tasks associated with recruiting, establishing relationships with a larger roster of provincial actors, and launching provincial teams. In the short term, this detracted from the implementation capacity as management addressed expanded start-up priorities.

In the past, there have been many capacity-building projects implemented on behalf of USAID in Iraq that had more attractive incentives to offer government stakeholders such as funding for capital investment projects, procurement of office equipment, and opportunities to travel, sometimes internationally, to engage in conferences or trainings. Eliminating these incentives helps GSP management identify stakeholders who are truly committed to local governance performance.

B. Project Management

1. Leadership Development

Within Iraq where USAID massively invested in development projects, GSP continues to invest in building and expanding the capability of local program staff to ensure smooth transition and progressive replacement of expatriate positions by national employees. Recruitment decision in GSP factors in this approach and is supported by on the job mentoring and training support where managers will be progressively called to assume full responsibility and accountability over their function and tasks. Staff receives mentoring and coaching on soft and hard skills; for example supervision, program management, leadership, communications, and proposal writing. Fostering the development of GSP's staff, as well as investing in the long-term success of the Iraqi people, will allow GSP's activities to continue far beyond the close of the project.

2. Stakeholder and Partner Communications

Given the fast-paced and dynamic operating environment, the importance of building and maintaining professional relationships cannot be overstated. While Skype, mobile phones, and email are necessary forms of communication, nothing replaces face-to-face meetings. Regular in-person meetings are critical and should be prioritized even when they are logistically

burdensome or time consuming, particularly when new initiatives are being designed or the project is expanding to a new area.

GSP has made a concerted effort to schedule regular, face-to-face meetings with its stakeholders, especially the State Minister of Provincial Affairs, Dr. Torhan al-Mufti. The relationship built by GSP with the Ministry of State for Provincial Affairs has enabled GSP to move quickly into implementation in areas where the project previously had little to no reach. Similarly, GSP's embedded approach to its technical scope has created a highly communicative relationship with its stakeholders in various Iraqi GOs and PCs. GSP's embedded provincial teams work side-by-side with their government counterparts, thereby facilitating technical as well as administrative dialogue. GSP's provincial teams can relay recommendations they receive from interacting with PC and GO personnel on a daily basis to GSP's headquarters in Baghdad.

GSP provides personalized and on-demand program interventions. The COP has visited and met with many national and provincial leaders. The GSP workplan has been broken down into checklist (menu) items to obtain buy-in from provincial leaders.

In addition, the program was proactive in coordinating with other governance and capacity building implementers, thereby reducing programmatic redundancy across donor projects. GSP strives to leverage United States Government (USG) resources by coordinating with other partners and donors including the USAID-funded Tarabot project. GSP invited Tarabot's COP to participate in GSP's April conference, where he presented an overview of Tarabot's objectives and interventions as well as the complementary objectives of GSP and Tarabot. GSP's COP also addressed attendees at Tarabot's South Central Region Conference. GSP and Tarabot exchange weekly reports in order to identify opportunities for collaboration and to reduce overlap. GSP also coordinated with the SIDA-funded Technical Support for Iraq (TSI), implemented by Adam Smith International. GSP will continue to conduct regular meetings with other implementers have created opportunities for cooperation between similar development programs, particularly with regard to policy coordination between provincial governments and central government.

Striking the right relationship between a field office and home office is just as important. GSP was able to establish a productive relationship with its home office in Washington, DC and relied on the headquarters' resources—like finance, logistics, contracts, and human resources—to ensure GSP was compliant with USG rules and regulations.

3. Risk Mitigation

Though Iraq's security context present challenges to GSP, the project has been successful in developing creative solutions to enable programmatic headway while minimizing risk. While every security context requires different risk-mitigation strategies and tactics, GSP has learned several critical lessons that enabled a more efficient security platform.

Open and clear communication between all levels of security personnel and project staff is the core of a robust security platform. While this may be intuitive, GSP found that developing the right vehicle for open communication between all parties was critical to the success of the project. Pre and Post- deployment briefings set expectations for life and work in Iraq and developed an understanding of the security platform. A constant communications and feedback cycle enabled the security provider to adjust to the needs of the project personnel and explain when certain request could not be met. Close coordination of initiatives with the security provider and the HO has also enabled to project to surge assets to the most critical need while still providing a necessary level of support for the rest of the project.

Iraq's unstable environment and the need to be efficient with resources has also prompted GSP and the security provider to be very creative in finding safe solutions to security challenges during project implementation. A cookie cutter approach to security in Iraq is inflexible and does not allow the project the flexibility needed to meet project needs. An enabling mindset from both the security provider and Chemonics security team has been critical in fostering safe and meaningful project implementation.

In April 2012, GSP's technical approach shifted from full programmatic operation in four hub offices throughout Iraq to embedding provincial teams in each GO and PC. This embedded approach not only gives GSP more "face-time" with the project's beneficiaries, but also allows GSP senior staff to rely more heavily on the embedded local national staff for implementation, thereby reducing exposure and lowering GSP's security profile in the provinces.

In addition, this shift away from the hub approach has necessitated a security transition in the Hillah office that posed a unique set of challenges. In order to transition the location from a high profile, expat centric platform to a local office, the project needed to closely engage with the local staff and other partners in Iraq to develop a sensitive, local solution. Local buy-in to this process has been critical, not only for the planning and execution of the transition but also to enable the office to operate in a manner that fits into a low-profile approach.

4. Expatriate and TCN Recruitment

Working in Iraq is dissimilar to working anywhere else in the world. Living conditions are contained, security concerns create unprovoked stress, and other challenges make some people a poor fit for this unique operating environment. During its first year of implementation, GSP learned that it is extremely important to utilize a flexible hiring process that allows international staff unable to effectively cope with these challenges to easily transition from the project.

GSP is exploring options to hire staff on an initial short-term basis to provide both the project and the individual a trial period before making a long-term commitment. Following 90 days, the project and the individual should have the opportunity to either transition to a long-term contract, or separate and handover all responsibilities. Hiring consultants initially on a short-

term basis would allow for a more natural assessment of each consultant's fit for the project and position, and provides more flexibility to replace those who are not meeting project needs. During a probationary period, the home office project management team should continue to preemptively recruit additional eligible candidates in case of a poor fit or for short-term assistance to augment extended leaves.

Faced with this circumstance, supervisors may quickly realize that certain staff members are not ideal candidates for their positions or this environment. However, where overly rigid hiring and recruitment systems are in place, they have little option but to have the long-term staff members work through their problems rather than seek alternative arrangements.

Flexible hiring systems, with built-in and exercisable probationary periods, come with certain costs: they could dissuade some qualified or more experienced staff from signing up. Nonetheless, GSP's experience suggests they are critical for vetting international staff and ensuring the proper fit for programming in contexts like Iraq.

GSP's expatriate and TCN staffing is unique in that several staff, including the chief of party, regional director, and operations/compliance director, are native Arabic speakers. While Arabic language skills are not a requirement for any of the previously mentioned positions, this level of fluency allows GSP to integrate extremely well into the Iraqi context. Besides the clear advantage of being able to better communicate with GSP's Iraqi staff, these senior GSP personnel are able to connect seamlessly with GSP's GOI counterparts in meetings, trainings, conferences, and events. GSP's positive experience suggests that seeking out expatriates and TCNs for short-term or long-term positions, who are proficient or fluent in Arabic should be incorporated into the project's future recruitment efforts.

5. Cooperating Country National Recruitment

Given the security, cultural, and ethnic realities of the country, Iraq poses a host of unique challenges that human resources staff should be cognizant of as they prepare for recruitment efforts. In Iraq the approach to finding qualified candidates focuses primarily on spreading the word through informal networks. Due to security concerns, GSP generally avoids posting ads. However, this approach is regularly re-considered as the security situation evolves. Recently some websites have been identified as potentially viable options, particularly for entry-level positions but as of now, they have not been utilized.

Candidates often over-sell their skills and experience. Certain questions are less likely to result in informative answers. For example, it is better to ask "What is your experience implementing service delivery reforms at the provincial level?" than "How comfortable are you with implementing service delivery reforms?" HR staff should be especially careful when recruiting procurement staff in Iraq. Our experience has been that the Iraqi marketplace has a culture of kickbacks that motivates many candidates to seek a procurement position. It is recommended

that recruiters devote a portion of the interview to ethical questions and consider candidates who might have less direct procurement experience but are less entrenched in the kickback culture.

6. Procurement in a Challenging Environment

Due to the tenuous security environment and the prevalence of graft and corruption, procuring goods and services for GSP's daily operations and program activities was extremely challenging. GSP has struggled to find local national procurement staff who honored the project's commitment to procurement integrity. Ensuring that procurement staff conduct transparent and competitive procurements is essential for GSP's success, and selecting the right person to fill the Procurement Specialist position proved to be a challenge. Nevertheless, GSP has found that employing procurement staff on a 'trial' basis before fully on-boarding them has successfully mitigated the risk of corruption.

Further, GSP recommends hosting quarterly procurement trainings for staff in order to outline important rules, regulations, and timelines and their application in practice. Ill-aligned expectations between Chemonics and GSP in-country staff can create unnecessary tensions and harm working relationships.

The program also developed Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPA) when it needed to procure large quantities of the same item or service from a single vendor. This allowed ASI-South to enter into an agreement with a vendor, negotiate a fixed price, and purchase on-demand without using the RFQ process. While the entire RFQ process might take two weeks, once a BPA is established, within three days of a request, GSP was able to procure materials.

Later, the program reviewed and eventually modified Chemonics' corporate policy of releasing RFQs for items over \$500. In an attempt to balance the need for rapid procurement, compliance with USG regulations, and competitive pricing, Chemonics amended its policy to allow items between \$500 and under \$2,999 to require only three quotes, eliminating the need for an involved RFQ process. While the process remained somewhat cumbersome, particularly in the context of a fast-moving capacity building program, this step significantly improved GSP's ability to deliver smaller goods and services in a timely way. Similar procurement policies should be adopted at the outset of other similar projects.

C. Project Implementation

1. Tailored Technical Approach for Stakeholder Buy-In

Project management has learned to be cognizant of the mix of push and pull interventions available, and to adjust the mix and timing of these interventions in a tailored approach for each provincial government. There is a general lack of understanding of the service-based call to public service upon which western democracies are based, though the Iraqi governmental

structure calls for the same service-based perspective. Changing the mindset of stakeholders is a protracted process and can only be accomplished through multiple and well-timed interventions. The barriers and opportunities differ in each province, and so maintaining a keen understanding of the context in each province is essential to optimizing project impact.

Resistance to project interventions that improve transparency and accountability is frequently based on a desire to preserve opportunities for corrupt practices. This barrier is more pronounced than was perhaps anticipated in some provinces, and within some offices. GSP management has learned that involving a greater number of stakeholders in the planning processes and in ongoing oversight of GSP interventions reduces the potential for individuals or individual offices to shutting out GSP, or its interventions while significantly improving participant investment ('buy in').

A key element of stakeholder buy-in is the willingness to invest in technical assistance provided by GSP. It is easy for potential program beneficiaries to agree in principle to GSP's approach and never take real action in applying the new skills and practices to their work as public servants. However, when senior-level buy-in for GSP activities is obtained from Provincial Council Chairmen or Governors, their staff are more willing to apply the practical skills provided by GSP. Cost-sharing is the most significant and tangible indicator of stakeholder buy-in. Investment by GOI counterparts not only indicates a commitment to the types of interventions proposed by GSP, but also serve as encouragement for GO and PC staff to attend GSP trainings and events. These investments can be in the time commitments by GO and PC staff, monetary or material contribution to GSP trainings and workshops, and/or the provision of embedded, shared office space within the PCs and GOs themselves,

GSP has been successful in obtaining this high level of investment from GOI stakeholders. Currently, GSP has secured shared office space in eleven (11) provinces, and on several occasions GOs and PCs have offered to share the costs of upcoming workshops. These contributions to GSP's interventions are not only indicative of stakeholder buy-in, but also confirm GSP's responsiveness to each GO and PC's individual needs.

2. Transferable Knowledge

Many counterparts have previously participated in training programs but have been unable to implement the new technologies or practices that they learned in the real world. GSP management has learned that mentoring by embedded technical specialists substantially improves the effectiveness of regular training activities by providing continual support that enables participants to implement lessons learned on the job.

Turnover of elected officials, either due to elections or due to migration to the private sector, presents a challenge to GSP capacity building efforts. To alleviate the impact, GSP is

emphasizing activities that institutionalize processes and procedures as much as activities that build the capacity of individuals.

For example, building the capacity of governmental organizations through the OSTP methodology furthers GSP's efforts in Iraq. By drawing upon and leveraging the target organization's existing staff to evaluate and transform the organization from within, GSP is ensuring that GOI counterparts are equipped with the tools to identify and solve problems in the long-term, not just when GSP is present in Iraq. In this way, GSP is developing lasting structural changes that endure as governmental actors change.

3. Gaps in Donor-funded Projects

During the interim between the Local Governance Program III (LGP III) and GSP, some LGP III progress eroded, especially in the area of GAPTIS. GSP has rebuilt momentum through embedded staff and national conferences, but has been careful to both leverage the reporting and progress of LGP III while conducting its own assessment of the priorities and opportunities.

Management has learned that incorporating the input and sometimes participation of a vast array of assistance agencies, non-governmental agencies (NGOs), and implementing partners in planning interventions, trainings, and conferences enables GSP to leverage past and current activities and to avoid redundancy.

4. Program Communication

GSP has a decentralized structure of embedded teams, led by Regional Managers and technical component Team Leaders. Access to the provincial teams is limited by geography, communications infrastructure, and security concerns. This structure presents difficulties in developing a unified team and vision, in providing oversight to provincial teams, and in maintaining a complete understanding of the operating context in each province. To address this, GSP management uses a variety of outreach mechanisms including periodic visits by senior management, weekly Skype conference calls, periodic regional meetings at hub offices, and an annual "all-hands" meeting to bring the entire team together for work planning and to assess performance collaboratively.

5. Institutionalization

As mentioned previously, GSP is emphasizing activities that institutionalize processes and procedures as much as activities that build the capacity of individuals. This is accomplished through the development of standard operating procedures, legislation, and the implementation of processes and technologies for planning, budgeting, and communications and outreach. To enable these ventures to take root, GSP combines supportive longer-term mentorship through its embedded provincial teams with activities which build expectations and demand for improved performance. These include inviting community representatives to planning and

budgeting meetings, improving government communications to citizens, and communicating citizen issues and complaints to central ministries.

IV. BEST PRACTICES

The following are the fundamental elements that will ensure GSP's success:

- c) *Establishing partnerships.* Partnerships are central to the effectiveness of GSP and include the program's relationship with main counterparts and beneficiaries; other USAID-funded projects; and donors. It is important to understand the delicate balance of fostering and supporting these relationships and the amount of time required. These relationships serve to inform and protect the project while creating buy-in from stakeholders.
- d) *Tapping into local expertise.* Navigating the complicated legal and constitutional system in Iraq is difficult, even for the most qualified local government experts. To reduce the steep learning curve, GSP is actively seeking local, Iraqi short-term technical assistance for project activities. GSP has learned that bringing in international consultants can sometimes lead to delayed results since typically, a consultant will need to research the history and current state of affairs in Iraqi local governance. Conversely, Iraqi local governance experts already have this knowledge and can begin providing technical assistance and trainings immediately upon starting work. Through tapping into Iraqi expertise, GSP will be able to deliver assistance in a timely manner from local experts who not only understand the nuances involved in local governance in Iraq, but are also native Arabic speakers who can serve as informal resources for GOI officials long after GSP stops implementing.
- e) *Establishing linkages between key stakeholders.* GSP has taken a proactive approach to linking stakeholders in the PCs, GOs, and central government facilitate roundtable discussions towards establishing a mutual understanding on key issues and improving communication and coordination to resolve those issues.
- f) *Managing Expectations.* GSP comes after a wake of well-funded programs able to provide attractive incentives with limited accountability for actual performance change. Communicating GSP's approach to institutionalizing performance improvements early on reduces disappointment and potential problems during implementation.
- g) *Focusing on Performance.* Capacity building interventions are among the slowest types of activities to show impact, and it is easy for participants and implementers to focus on intermediate indicators such as the number of participants receiving training. GSP continuously communicates its commitment to governmental performance change and shares project performance-based indicator data with Government of Iraq (GOI) stakeholders to reinforce this understanding.

- h) *Learning by Doing.* GSP focuses on improving job performance through mentoring and coaching in addition to traditional training to provide personalized assistance to PC and GO staff. This on-going support helps to remove barriers and encourage implementation of technologies and practices learned through other technical assistance and training activities. Additionally, through day-to-day interaction, embedded staff are able to continuously identify needs and adjust programming in response. The end result is that capacity building is translated into desired improvements in performance.
- i) *Cost-sharing.* GSP continues to work towards tailoring its approach with its GOI counterparts and actively seeks opportunities to cost-share, allowing project funds to go further. GSP has already established a precedent of sharing time and material costs such as office space with the GOs and PCs, and will also encourage sharing conference, workshop, and training costs with its GOI counterparts.
- j) *Building upon Accomplishments.* There have been a plethora of development activities in Iraq during and following the US occupation. Working with donors, implementing organizations, and GOI counterparts, GSP seeks to learn from past experiences and to leverage reports and materials produced by previous efforts.

V. OPPORTUNITIES GOING FORWARD

Going forward, GSP will further strengthen relationships with key actors, and seek to forge new relationships as well. These relationships inform and protect the project and ensure buy-in from stakeholders. Additionally, as 'friends of GSP' tap into their own networks, the project becomes engaged with an exponentially wider array of contacts. As interpretations of regulations and receptiveness to GSP vary in each province and ministry, these relationships are a crucial asset to the project.

As mentioned, the use of embedded teams is enabling provincial governments to receive on-going support to remove obstacles and implement the technologies and practices introduced through GSP technical assistance and training. Going forward, GSP will bring these embedded teams together to share ideas and cross-pollinate best practices.

GSP is introducing a menu of services and interventions from which provincial governments and select and prioritize GSP interventions. The use of this menu streamlines work planning, allowing for more efficient scheduling of resources and activities, and engenders buy-in from stakeholders.

GSP will seek to regularly share monitoring and evaluation output and impact data with internal and external stakeholders. Doing so can incentivize GSP embedded teams and provincial governments to focus on GSP objectives, and will inform stakeholders in selecting and prioritizing GSP interventions.

The private sector, spurred by improved security conditions and business registration processes, is expanding in Iraq. GSP will enable provincial governments to leverage the private sector through support for public-private partnerships (PPP). PPPs have the potential to enhance government performance and improve services to communities while creating private-sector employment and maintaining government flexibility. The first steps will be an assessment of opportunities and training for government officials on how to identify and engage in PPPs.