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BROADENING PARTICIPATION THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY

Final Report



FINAL PROGRAMMATIC REPORT
(October 2012– December 2015)



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The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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Executive Summary

Broadening Participation through Civil Society (BPCS) is a USAID-funded program led by Mercy Corps Iraq, in partnership with ACDI/VOCA, Internews, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid, and Public Aid Organization. Between late 2012 until mid-December 2015, BPCS supported civil society organizations (CSOs) to link citizens and government to work in partnership to create a place where Iraqis can more effectively overcome crises and meet the needs of their diverse communities together.

In a context where, according to 2015 Mercy Corps public opinion polling, 80% of Iraqis have never met with their government, BPCS convened citizens and government entities throughout the country to work in partnership to help civil society and government deliver for the Iraqi people. Through outcome-oriented technical assistance in the areas of policy advocacy, organizational development and grants to local organizations throughout the country, BPCS produced results in the areas of good governance, service delivery, human rights, and conflict resolution. After ISIS invaded the country, and some began doubting the value of governance and development programming in Iraq, in 2015, BPCS produced its strongest governance outcomes. It is a testament to the resilience of the Iraqi people.

Through effective policy advocacy approaches, BPCS partners are now cultivating relationships with community leaders and government decision makers; accessing information and using it to monitor and improve government performance; fostering the leadership of young people; and ending harmful practices that prevent women from getting ahead. They are successful because they not only have stronger organizations supporting them, but they are now working in networks and coalitions that help them to share knowledge and resources, and mobilize greater numbers of citizens to reach their goals. During the summer 2015 demonstrations when tens of thousands of Iraqis poured out onto the streets to demand better services, led by many BPCS partners, the national level impact of civil society investments in Iraq had never been more visible. The interest-based negotiation, communications and organizing techniques provided by BPCS and previous investments by the international community, helped to ensure that the protests remained peaceful as the demonstrators pressed for anti-sectarianism and accountable democratic governance in Iraq in the streets and during in-person discussions with the Prime Minister, governors and provincial councils that continue today.

As a result of BPCS, partners have penetrated an entrenched culture of secrecy and corruption related to budgetary processes, and through effective advocacy and technical assistance, made provincial budgets available to the public in Baghdad and Basra. They are monitoring oil and gas revenues in Iraqi Kurdistan. They have changed, re-activated or improved services, particularly water (in at least ten documented cases) through successful civil society pressure on government in five provinces. In Wasit, the community is now receiving electricity up to 18 hours per day when previously it received only 8-10 hours of power per day. Tribal leaders in Basra made a commitment to no longer use women as currency to settle tribal conflicts, and the Shia and Sunni Endowments committed to no longer performing marriages, unless the couple has their union certified by the courts first, to ensure that women are able to fully access their benefits. The government in Basra took formal steps toward reducing the eligible nomination age to local councils, from age 30 to age 22, which will help to increase youth leadership in decision-making. And as a result of BPCS's conflict mediation, two feuding entities – the governor's office and the provincial council – are now working on implementing an agreement to allocate 1% of Basra's petrodollars to civil society.

Another important contribution of BPCS was management of the Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund, which created partnerships with eight CSOs around the country to assist

civilian victims of war and terrorism. BPCS provided livelihood assistance to 523 survivors, of whom over 70% now manage sustainable businesses, also improving psychosocial wellbeing. Forty-one community projects also provided needed infrastructure and medical equipment to communities affected by conflict. Moreover, the Marla partners utilized BPCS tools to persuade the Iraqi government to modify Law 20/2009 to improve government compensation provided to war victims, and to make it more easily accessible.

If support for the kind of development assistance provided through a program like BPCS had not been available, the Iraqi people certainly would have found ways to cope. However the United States would have missed an opportunity to deepen the country's nascent democracy, activate its citizenry, and make life better for the Iraqi people in all the ways described above, while the government struggles to fight a war, grapple with more than 3 million internally displaced people, and survive a fiscal crisis. If the country is to hold together, particularly as the government pursues decentralization, continued support for constituencies for reform that provide the kind of political cover that enables the Iraqi government to reform in ways that better meet the needs of the Iraqi people, will be required. Should the US or the international community reinvest in citizen-oriented governance programming in the future, BPCS recommends the following:

- *Allow sufficient time for outcomes to emerge.* The achievement of major outcomes can take years, depending on the starting point. This is especially true for advocacy outcomes because capacity is nascent, and legislative processes take a long time, which requires multi-year programming to complete a full cycle. BPCS outcome patterns demonstrate that influencing government tends to begin with establishing relationships and trust, and eliciting expressions of support. Later, this may translate into direct action, and policy influence.
- *Provide multiple tools.* BPCS outcomes demonstrate that influence can come from a range of strategies, e.g. town hall meetings, use of social and traditional media, roundtables, community mobilization, policy research, informal meetings, and demonstrations. It is unusual for one action alone to create an outcome. Thus, civil society needs to be equipped with a wide range of tools and skills that can be employed strategically in order to effect the desired change.
- *Create opportunities for collaboration.* Among nascent civil society, organizations do not always consider the benefits of collaboration. The patterns of BPCS outcomes, however, suggest that collaboration is effective. It is important to not only connect groups with similar missions or approaches, but to connect more technical CSOs with specialized expertise, with grassroots organizations that can mobilize large groups of people into action.
- *Support learning by doing.* BPCS observed that particularly among CSOs carrying out policy advocacy activities, CSOs did not always fully embrace the recommendations during training, and only later understood their significance and adopted the methods originally proposed. The longer CSOs had to implement, the more likely they were to come to these realizations and make the necessary shifts.
- *Consider multiple levels of government.* BPCS partners managed to have influence at many different levels of government, from the municipality to the national level. Each of these serves different purposes and may be appropriate for different types of CSOs or results. Each level, however, represents a different way for civil society to have influence and demonstrate to their constituents how their voices are being heard by government.
- *Consider sector-specific technical expertise necessary.* As BPCS was focused on strengthening civil society as a means to enhancing participatory democracy, the thematic focus of different projects (e.g. human rights) was a secondary priority. Therefore the BPCS team did not have nor invest in technical expertise in areas such

as the Personal Status Law or women's rights. This resulted in challenges, which could have been avoided had the technical team been better versed in these issues.

- *Invest more in young leaders.* Iraqi youth are energized and need to play a more prominent role in politics and decision-making processes. There is also a large segment of youth who aim to remain one of the least sectarian groups in the country. Programs that help them to develop their leadership skills and gain a stronger command of policy will maximize their positive impact as they serve in government, civil society or the private sector.

There is still much work to be done before civil society is able to realize its potential as a force for anti-sectarian, accountable governance in the country. While progressive opinion surveys show growing awareness, appreciation and trust of civil society – and greater support for a broader role – there remains much misunderstanding and mistrust of the sector. And while nearly 90% of the organizations that participated in organizational development activities demonstrated measurable improvement in institutional capacity, there remain many thousands in need of institutional assistance. Many will continue to struggle with financial sustainability, despite encouraging signs that the Iraqi government is willing to invest more in civil society organizations.

Iraq is not the same country that BPCS started to work in three years ago. Despite momentous change and challenges, the program has delivered on its five intermediate results. Democratic engagement of citizens has increased – particularly among youth, and women are also more active. Increased institutional capacity of some leading organizations has better positioned them for greater influence, and many CSOs remain committed to continuing to invest in their further development. We have numerous examples of increased impact of civil society on public policy – including assisting civilian war victims. And there are positive signs that civil society's enabling environment will be protected. Amidst crisis, there are many people and organizations still willing and able to work towards a brighter future for Iraq, who deserve the international community's continued support. They are the country's best chances of challenging vested interests that have harmed Iraq, helping the country to avoid the path of its neighbor Syria, and become the strong, stable, pluralistic state that the region and the world needs.

Acronyms

AI	Advocacy Index
AOR	Area of Responsibility
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
BFRCT	Bahjat al Fuad Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims
BPCS	Broadening Participation through Civil Society
COMSec	Council of Ministers Secretariat
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRL	Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, State Department
3H	Humanitarian Help Hands
IAA	Iraqi al Amal Association
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IR	Intermediate Result
IRI	International Republican Institute
ISIS	So-called "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" group
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCA	Organizational Capacity Assessment
OCI	Organizational Capacity Index
OD	Organizational Development
ODP	Organizational Development Plan
PAO	Public Aid Organization
PIP	Program Implementation Plan
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PVT	Parallel Vote Tabulation
RFA	Request for Application
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

A. Introduction

Program Overview

Building on a decade of work with Iraqi communities and civil society, Mercy Corps and consortium partners – ACDI/VOCA, Internews, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid (Mercy Hands), and Public Aid Organization (PAO) – developed the Broadening Participation through Civil Society (BPCS) program to strengthen the professionalism, vibrancy and interconnectedness of Iraq’s civil society. The goal of BPCS is that Iraq’s democratic systems become more participatory and dynamic as a result of civil society sustainably deepening citizens’ social and political engagement. Five intermediate results (IR) were expected to contribute to this goal:

1. **Democratic engagement of citizens increased.** BPCS engages and mobilizes diverse and marginalized groups to broaden democratic participation at community, sub-national and national levels.
2. **Institutional capacity of CSOs/NGOs increased.** The program targets organizations with the greatest potential to contribute to Iraq’s development through effective constituent-focused service delivery and policy impact, engaging organizations at various levels of capacity and scale.
3. **Impact of civil society on public policy increased.** BPCS facilitates opportunities for civil society to directly influence decision-making that affects the whole society.
4. **Enabling environment for CSOs improved.** BPCS strengthens mechanisms for collective voice and constructive collaboration with the general public, government actors and the private sector to ensure civil society leadership in Iraq’s consolidation of democracy.
5. **Special projects: civilian war victims assisted.** BPCS builds on over nine years of collective experience assisting Iraqi civilians who have suffered losses as a result of Coalition-Iraq Forces activities, or terrorist acts.

The consortium brought together six national and international partners with different skills sets and geographic responsibilities:

- **Mercy Corps:** Overall responsibility for program design and quality, and USAID point of contact.
- **ACDI/VOCA:** Responsible for program operations in the North: Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah ad Din, and Ninawa.
- **Mercy Hands:** Responsible for program operations in the Center: Baghdad, Babel, Wassit, and Karbala (Anbar shifted to Mercy Corps as the security situation became less stable, particularly from January 2013).
- **PAO:** Responsible for program operations in the South: Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar, Muthana, Qadisiya, and Najaf.
- **ICNL:** Technical lead on the enabling environment (IR 4). ICNL worked with two Iraqi partners, Humanitarian Help Hands (3H) in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) and Iraqi Al Amal in Baghdad.
- **Internews:** Technical lead on building the capacity of CSOs to work with traditional and social media effectively.¹

Due to design, shifts in budgets and the operating environment, the consortium was fluid. Internews joined in August 2013 following the withdrawal of another partner; ACDI/VOCA

¹ The International Republican Institute (IRI) was an original consortium member, but withdrew from Iraq prior to the program beginning. Mercy Corps took on most of IRI’s planned activities, with modifications, and brought on Internews to manage media-related work.

left the consortium on December 31, 2014 following a budget reduction; Internews' component ended on January 31, 2015; and ICNL concluded their activities in May 2015 following challenges in making expected progress at the federal and regional level. Throughout the program, the consortium remained flexible and reflective to respond to the changing context, lessons learned and opportunities. Major strategic and technical decisions, as well as subgrantee selection, were made by crosscutting committees led by Mercy Corps. This collaborative approach was essential to successfully navigate the continuous changes in the political and operational context.

Contextual Changes

A tumultuous political environment characterized most of the three years of the program. The first full year of the program, 2013, was recognized by the UN as the “deadliest year [in Iraq] since 2008,”² with an estimated 9,000 people killed. The downward trend continued when armed opposition groups took Fallujah in early January 2014, triggering ongoing fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi, which forced nearly 80,000 households to flee to other parts of Anbar governorate, as well as into Diyala, Salah ad Din and Kirkuk. This displacement came in the wake of an influx of over 50,000 Syrian refugees into northern parts of the country, particularly to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) from August 2013 onwards. This period also included three elections: provincial (May 2013), Kurdish regional (September 2013), and parliamentary (April 2014). Preparations for the Council of Representatives elections were particularly disruptive, with political posturing and other strategic moves creating social instability and increased violence, particularly in Baghdad, Ninawa, Salah ad Din, Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala. Despite technical problems, violence, and breaches of electoral rules, the Independent High Electoral Commission confirmed the elections' results on May 25. Nouri Al Maliki's ruling State of Law party won 95 seats – enough to claim a victory.

As political parties struggled to nominate a Speaker, a President and a new Prime Minister – particularly among growing calls for Maliki's resignation -- the extremist group calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. It gained ground in Ninawa province and expanded to control Salah ad Din, parts of Diyala and Kirkuk, and Makhmoor, only 40 km from Erbil, and also edging towards Baghdad. The crisis led to the biggest wave of displacement in Iraq's history (see below). This was a pivotal moment in the history of Iraq, altering the country irrevocably. Despite the political and security crisis, the Speaker and President were nominated within the period required by the Constitution. Following further instability and domestic and international pressure, Nouri Al Maliki stepped down as Prime Minister on August 14. Maliki's resignation, and the subsequent nomination of Dr. Haider al Abadi, led to the formation of what was expected to be a more unified and inclusive government. The Ministerial program was also adopted on time, and United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called the formation of the new government a “positive step towards political stability and peace in the country.”

The initial fall of Mosul precipitated an initial displacement of 140,000 households across Ninawa governorate and into the IKR. With an increase in both active fighting and terrorist attacks across the country, including Baghdad, the remainder of the program continued to be impacted by growing displacement across the country, now estimated to exceed 3.2 million people³, and no governorate remains unaffected. The situation has been further complicated by the involvement of religious leaders and other prominent figures, highlighting the sectarian nature of divisions. Other militias are forming (and reforming) with different agendas, further

² [UNIRAQ](#) and confirmed by Iraq Body Count.

³ [OCHA](#)

fueling sectarian and tribal tensions, some with international support. The involvement of a coalition of nations in conducting airstrikes has not sufficiently driven ISIS back, and the more recent involvement of Russia and Turkey has further complicated the context with the crisis taking on more regional and global significance.

Furthermore, as the conflict persists, resources and goodwill start to run low, and frustration mounts. Once returns of displaced communities begin in earnest, these tensions are expected to continue. BPCS partners have expressed concerns about “collective justice” and retribution in response to the numerous human rights violations that continue to take place, often targeting the most marginalized. These wounds may be harder to repair than the infrastructural reconstruction required. All this falls on top of a budget crisis as a result of low oil prices, which continues to put pressure on citizens, government, and civil society alike, and diminished their ability to respond effectively to the crisis. With no end to the conflict in sight, these economic and political conditions were sources of ongoing instability and tensions throughout year three.

Another interesting development in year three were the largely peaceful demonstrations that spread across Central and Southern Iraq in mid-August in response to a heat wave which left a number of people with inadequate electricity or water in dangerously high heat (upwards of 125 degrees Fahrenheit). Demonstrations quickly evolved into a call for the end of government corruption and an increase in accountability, which led to sweeping, if largely symbolic reforms by Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi⁴. Demonstrations continued through to the end of the program – also appearing briefly in the IKR – although losing steam by November. The demonstrations brought citizens out by the thousands and highlighted the growing frustration among Iraqis with ongoing corruption. Many BPCS partners were involved in these activities – including in leading them – which presented both a challenge, but more importantly, an opportunity to the program.

Summary of Activities

Despite the challenges, changes and uncertainty, BPCS managed to meet or achieve most of its targets. This included a programmatic pivot to focus more on working within the program’s scope to provide humanitarian assistance, and strengthen the community’s ability to adapt to the crisis. Some quantitative highlights include:

IR 1: Democratic Engagement

- 19,561 individuals received voter and civic education
- 59 talk shows produced and aired
- 16 subgrants were awarded for social cohesion and humanitarian initiatives
- 23 Election Monitoring and Voter Education subgrants were provided over three election cycles
- 19 Civil society fairs held

IR 2: Institutional Capacity Increased

- 150 CSOs participated in capacity building activities
- 88 CSOs implemented organizational development plans, of whom 91% demonstrated stronger capacity
- 724 hub activities took place
- 14 Sawa Centers for Community Action were created

⁴ [Brookings, Abadi’s Momentous Gambit Against Political Corruption in Iraq](#)

- 37 CSOs participated in humanitarian capacity building
- 25 informal activists participated in leadership activities

IR 3: Civil Society Impact on Policy Advocacy

- 22 CSOs received subgrants to implement policy advocacy initiatives
- 189 consensus building forums held

IR 4: Enabling Environment Improved

- 963 government officials participated in events with civil society
- 10 open forums held on the legal enabling environment, including the implementation of the federal and Kurdish Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) laws and the civil society support fund of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG);
- Two trainings provided for federal NGO Directorate staff on the implementation of the NGO Law No. 1 of 2010;
- 1,245 individuals attended Civil Society Assemblies

IR 5: Civilian Victims of Conflict Assisted

- 523 individual livelihood projects completed
- 41 community projects completed
- 7 Marla partners continuing to work together to support civilian victims of war and terrorism.

The remainder of this report elaborates on program activities and accomplishments by intermediate result, lessons learned and challenges overcome, program adaptations, and impact and results analysis.

B. Program activities and accomplishments

IR 1: Democratic engagement of citizens increased

BPCS helped communities see the value of participating in community and civic affairs by organizing fairs to raise greater awareness of civil society and bring communities together; a major voter education and monitoring effort; and subgrants in the areas of social cohesion and humanitarian response. Through technical assistance, providing incentives for collaboration and subgrants, BPCS introduced civil society organizations to tools and expertise that helped not only to broaden community participation, but also to make that engagement as constructive and successful as possible. BPCS fairs around the country helped to bring civil society together with government and citizens to build relationships and trust between them. BPCS had a major voter education and elections monitoring program during three different elections to mobilize citizens and connect them with a credible democratic process. BPCS also promoted the value of collaboration by awarding subgrants to organizations working together toward two common goals: social cohesion and humanitarian response during a time of mass displacement in Iraq.

Fairs

The BPCS baseline survey revealed limited awareness and understanding of civil society among Iraqi citizens, and the program designed public events to change this. Through the course of the program, BPCS held 19 fairs across the country that convened civil society, community leaders, government and the private sector to better understand the various ways that civil society is making a contribution to Iraq's development. The 19 fairs reached 4,288 Iraqis and highlighted civil society's efforts in areas ranging from political participation to

humanitarian response and even arts and culture. BPCS consortium partner Mercy Hands conducted nine of these civil society fairs over the life of the project, including three in Baghdad, two in Babel, two in Wasit, and two in Karbala provinces, for a total of five civil society fairs in the first year of programming and four in the second year. Consortium partner PAO hosted a fair each in Basra, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Diwaniya, Maysan, and Najaf. More than 100 local CSOs participated in these fairs, as well as government officials at the provincial and local levels, representatives from international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, USAID, academics, representatives of marginalized communities and other citizens. The events built on the relationships with the media, and included coverage from a number of television channels, radio stations, and newspapers. These events allowed participating CSOs to exhibit their products, services, and ideas, and create connections with various community sectors in a shared forum to create a common understanding of each sector's role in supporting the community. These fairs also provided an opportunity for local CSOs and activists to meet international donors and governmental authorities to discuss their needs and open new pathways of communication.

In addition to smaller local fairs, BPCS hosted three large-scale regional assemblies, detailed under IR4.

Elections Monitoring

Despite not being a traditional area of expertise for the consortium, BPCS agreed to include elections in its programming. To ensure proper support, BPCS sought external technical expertise and partnered with [Citizens' Association MOST](#). MOST was selected based on their extensive track record and expertise in organizing and performing domestic and international election observation in the Middle East, as well as in post-conflict and emerging democracies in Europe. It was hoped that strengthened civil society expertise in this area and a visible role for civil society in elections would not only enhance citizen participation but also raise the profile of civil society in Iraq. BPCS originally planned to only provide voter education, however the program ultimately monitored a total of three elections: Provincial Council Elections (February – May 2013), Iraqi Kurdistan Parliamentary Elections (June – September 2013), and Iraq Parliamentary Elections (February – May 2014).

Provincial Council Elections (February – May 2013)

Following a competitive Request For Applications (RFA) process, BPCS awarded 12 Iraqi CSOs⁵ subgrants to promote civic participation in Basra, Baghdad, Babel, Diyala, and Salah ad Din. Subsequently, 10 CSOs provided voter education to 10,170 citizens (67% women on average) through 290 workshops, and reached a wider spectrum of citizens through 31 radio and television talk shows.

Furthermore, BPCS provided four organizations from Wasit, Diyala, Babel, and Salah ad Din training to enable them to: (1) analyze electoral legislation; (2) monitor election administration and campaigning, as well as the election day itself, and (3) prepare election monitoring reports. These four CSOs recruited, trained and deployed 775 observers (24% of them women) to monitor 1,319 polling stations on Election Day in four



BPCS provided election monitoring and support on provincial and regional levels across Iraq.

⁵ Out of 77 applicants, 37 were eligible

provinces.

Iraq Kurdistan Parliamentary Elections (June – September 2013)

For the Kurdish elections, another competitive process resulted in BPCS partnering with Civil Development Organization (CDO) from Sulaymaniyah; SMART Foundation for Media (SMART) and Peace Generation Network (PGN), both based in Erbil. These three CSOs and their 56 partner organizations formed the Alliance of Domestic Elections Observers, committed to promoting a fair and transparent IKR election.

With technical assistance from MOST, eight members of the alliance monitored media leading up to the election, including the period in which media is disallowed from discussing the elections, randomly selecting five Kurdish television outlets to monitor. On the general voting day of September 21, 2013, the alliance deployed 627 static observers to roughly 10% of polling stations across the three provinces of the IKR. They also conducted parallel vote tabulation (PVT)⁶, which was the first independent PVT for an election in Iraq and, notably, announced accurate results prior to Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) releasing official results.

Iraq Parliamentary Elections (February 2014 – May 2014)

Based on the success of the two previous election efforts, BPCS undertook a scaled up and streamlined approach to support monitoring of the 2014 National Parliamentary Elections. BPCS



BPCS held a press conference on the findings of their election and media observations.

funded eight CSOs to recruit, train and deploy 2,655 citizens to monitor the special voting day (for members of Iraqi security forces and some medical workers who were required to work on Election Day) and Election Day in Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, Diyala, Babel, Wasit, Muthanna and Dhi Qar, with the support of 76 mobile teams to cover a sample of 13.1% of 20,212 polling stations across these provinces. These organizations formed an informal alliance for elections and media monitoring and worked closely with MOST.

Beyond elections observation, BPCS also supported two CSOs' efforts to monitor media in the weeks preceding the Parliamentary Elections. They recruited, trained and deployed 51 media monitors and observed a total of 34 media outlets from 13 Iraqi provinces, and 21 national and regional media outlets in Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkmen languages. The media monitoring covered 14 television stations, 14 radio stations and six newspapers and began on April 6.

The final activity implemented by the alliance was a press conference in Baghdad held on May 7, 2014. During the event, the CSOs reported the findings of their election and

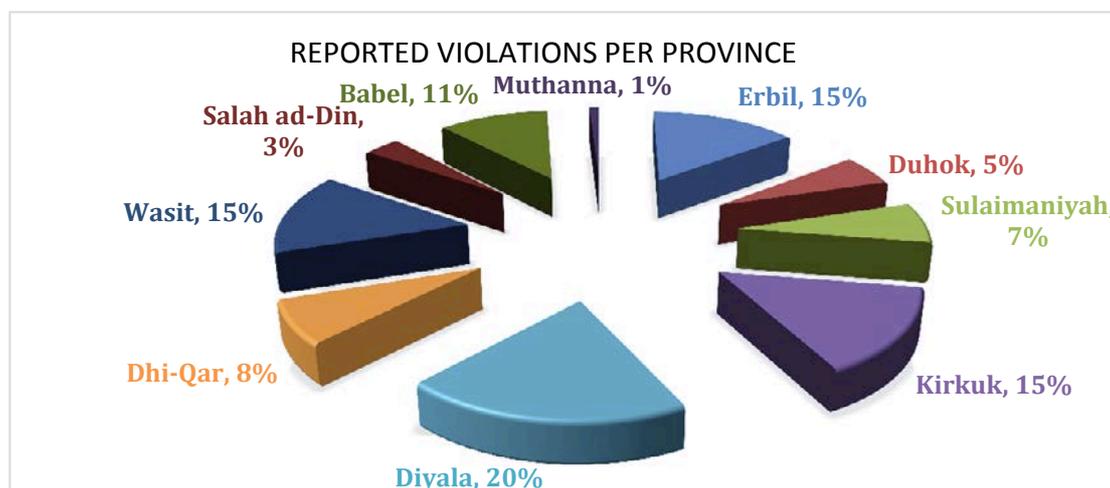
⁶ Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) is a statistical and mathematical methodology for projecting elections results. PVT allows groups to independently analyze the integrity of voting and counting processes while checking the accuracy of the official election results declared by oversight bodies. It can project the distribution of the results with great accuracy. PVT used also to monitor voter turnout. For instance a rapid increase in turnout for a specific voting location could indicate possible election irregularities or fraud.

media observation by province, citing examples of violations and recommendations for future elections. Thirty-seven media outlets covered the [press conference](#).

Violations reported on special voting and general voting days

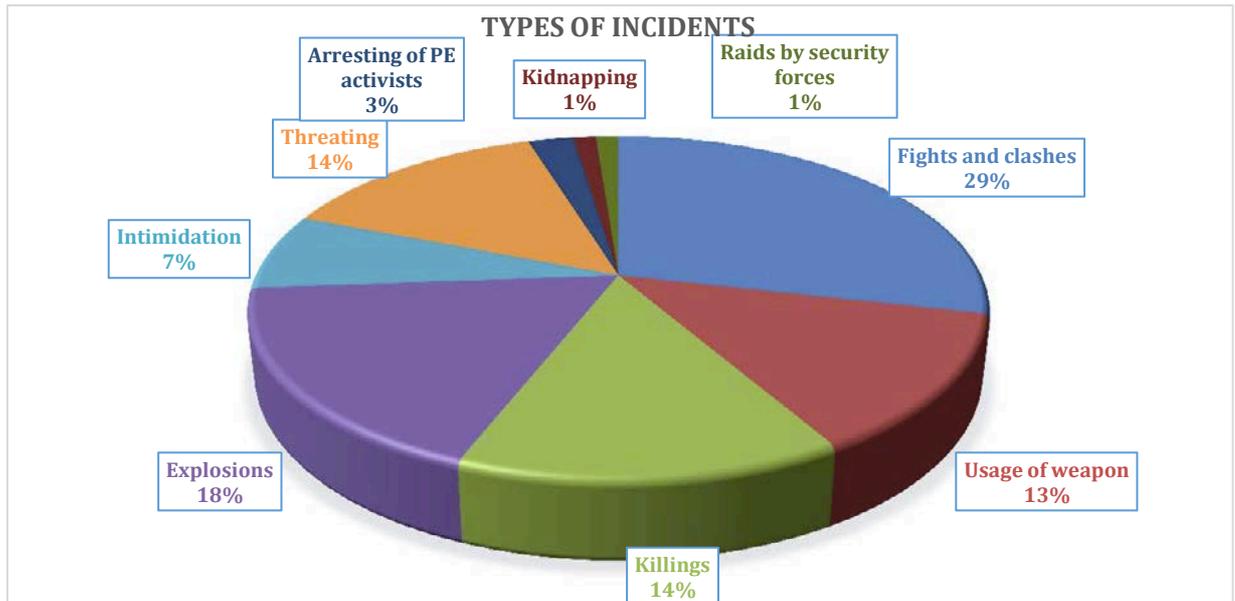
Observers reported on systematic violations of voting procedures in some polling stations, including serious irregularities such as group voting, proxy voting, family voting, illegal campaigning, direct and indirect vote buying, and ballot stuffing, which brought into question the quality of training given to the election administration to recognize and prevent these irregularities.

Family and group voting was the most widely reported type of violation. 42.9% of covered polling stations recorded at least one case of family/group voting, which is very high and implies that the secrecy of voting was not respected. It was also reported that procedures were not fully followed in some polling stations, including: the presence of election propaganda near polling centers, and a large presence of political party agents at all polling centers, which affected the flow of movement. Some voters' names were not found in the voters' list, which created some confusion. The figure below shows the reported violations per covered province during the 2014 election.



Voter turnout rates announced by the IHEC for both Provincial Council and Iraq Parliamentary elections well exceeded our observers' estimation, which was another concern. Observers were ejected from a number of polling stations in the late afternoon, but were allowed to come back for the counting process. In the absence of observers, the official turnout increased conspicuously in those stations, raising questions of legitimacy. Federal police and the Army were also observed confiscating ballot boxes during the counting process in a number of stations without a reasonable explanation. This raises large concerns about the transparency of the counting and tabulation process.

During 2014 parliamentary election, a total of 84 incidents of election-related violence were reported by alliance observers during the electoral campaign period from April 1 to April 28. In 29% of cases, the observers recorded fights and clashes between groups supporting different candidates or parties. The figure below shows prevalence of each type of incident during the 2014 parliamentary election.



Media Monitoring

Quantitative findings showed that neutral media coverage was rare, and that most coverage was biased and reflected the particular political affiliation of the television stations. Monitored stations therefore failed to meet the domestic Communications and Media Commission standards as well as international standards. Female candidates received only 3.07 percent of the total coverage, even though 32.34 percent of the candidates were women.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

BPCS brought a team of advisors from Europe and the Middle East to work with local NGOs and build a partnership with them. Despite being successful in many ways, it was a huge challenge for BPCS to manage both sides of the partnership, with so many moving parts under such a tight timeframe, in a technical area that was relatively new to many involved.

An external challenge was imposed by IHEC, which prohibited domestic observers from using their phones/cameras inside polling stations/centers. This instruction prevented the domestic observers from documenting and reporting many of the violations and irregularities they saw.

Moving forward, Iraqi civil society would benefit from investing more heavily in monitoring the electoral cycle not only on Election Day itself, but also on electoral campaigns. Youth should be more involved in this process. BPCS observed that many of the young elections monitoring team leaders have gone on to become leaders in the [recent demonstrations](#) that started in July 2015. It is also encouraging to see that some CSOs (including BPCS consortium partner, PAO) are already expanding their networks to prepare for the next elections.

Achievements

BPCS succeeded in strengthening the capacities of election-focused CSOs to not only monitor elections, but to serve in other watchdog functions and have more influence on their communities. Involvement in election monitoring helped CSOs to raise their profile, build their credibility and recognition, increase awareness of and trust in civil society by citizens and newly elected officials. Local governments of Wasit, Dhi Qar, and Muthanna continue to call on these CSOs for consultations and to participate in improving public policies.

This experience boosted the confidence of local NGOs to report to the public, and has positioned them to play a role in future democratic events. Peace Generation Network, for example, who monitored the IKR election, has signed an agreement with the Kurdish Parliament to monitor the parliamentary sessions and report to the public on them. Another example is Al Mirat Organization in Babel, which monitored the media during the 2014 elections, and is now a highly respected organization seen as a pioneer in expanding citizens' awareness of civil society and empowering youth leaders. Demonstrators and youth groups have been consulting CSOs such as South Youth Organization from Dhi Qar, Human Rights Organization from Wasit, and Babel-based Akad Institute on how to organize and plan their protests effectively.

CSOs face challenges during tense political times in initiating communication with local government, because they are often accused of political affiliation or even corruption. However, the CSOs who participated in BPCS elections monitoring are now building trust and credibility among both government and citizens, which allows them to play a mediating or facilitative role. There is evidence that the experience they have gained in monitoring elections has helped them to advocate for improved regulations on electoral spending and election campaign financing. An example of this is the recent issuing of a modern political parties' law, which led the IHEC to issue instructions on financing electoral campaigns, transparency of bank accounts administration, and spending upper limits⁷.

It is recommended that courts and the IHEC follow up on the findings of the monitoring committees and impose legal repercussions on parties involved in campaign violations in order to prevent further electoral tampering. The findings of the election monitoring committees also caused IHEC to announce a list of penalties for election tampering⁸.

Collaboration Subgrants

BPCS issued two rounds of collaboration subgrants to encourage likeminded organizations to work together towards common causes. These collaborations could also include government, private sector or informal partners, as long as the primary subgrant recipient was a registered CSO. The first round (February 1 – July 31, 2015) focused on strengthening social cohesion by creating opportunities for citizens to participate in community life, bringing diverse groups together, and promoting volunteerism and an understanding of the role of civil society. These collaborations effectively brought CSOs together to combine resources and expertise to positively impact their communities.

BPCS' six social cohesion subgrantees worked to increase awareness among youth about the importance of voluntary work to contribute to providing better services to IDPs, and mobilize and activate youth in peace building in Maysan, Babel, Kirkuk, Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah and Basra. For example, in Baghdad, Salam Al-Rafidain Organization (SAO) created an effective partnership between the community peacebuilding teams, tribal and religious leaders, and local authorities such as police and local councils. These partnerships enabled SAO to achieve its goals within Yousifiya district by supporting reconciliation processes related to community-level disputes and raising awareness of the importance of voluntary work to involve more youth groups in campaigns that support IDPs.

Women for Peace (W4P) Organization successfully gathered strong evidence and documentation of what IDP women from Mosul and Anbar witnessed and experienced during their displacement. They took their findings and created both a book and documentary, which

⁷ <http://www.ihec.iq/ar/index.php/news-archive/4992.html>

⁸ <http://www.ihec.iq/ar/index.php/news-archive/5849.html>

was distributed to the United Nations; Ministry of Women Affairs; Baghdad Provincial Council; and local NGOs that are advocating for women.

In Maysan, Al Ahrar held seven, two-day workshops for 20 participants to strengthen leadership capacity and emphasize the importance of voluntary work. Furthermore, Al Ahrar activated the Volunteer Center in the Youth Forum of the Directorate of Youth and Sport to coordinate and organize seven volunteer teams to design and implement community initiatives to promote volunteerism, peace and pluralism.

Bustan worked to strengthen pluralism and respect for cultural and religious diversity among the Iraqi youth of four provinces via an interactive program. The project enabled about 150 youth from Basra, Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil to learn and develop communication skills, as well as provoke discussion and change attitudes. The project engaged a diverse cross-section of the Iraqi community as well as decision makers to promote tolerance of different views and appreciation of differences in diverse communities. INSAN in Kirkuk succeeded in supporting 30 Peace Ambassadors who were able to change the thinking of the IDPs and the host community by conducting a series of activities that brought together IDPs, the host community, media, and government.

ENMAA Center for Research and Studies established a project to disseminate the principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Babel. Two members from the Peace Academy of the Enmaa Center created an opportunity for dialogue between the provincial health committee and youth in the Jbla district to offer suggestions to the Department of Health about improving health services of pregnant women in the district. As a result of the intervention of ENMAA, pregnant women will now have improved access to health care. This is significant in that it indicates that civil society is able to influence government decision-making regarding government service delivery.

Humanitarian Collaboration Subgrants

BPCS mobilized CSOs to work together to respond to the humanitarian crisis and rebuild Iraq's social fabric. Despite significant interest, only nine subgrants fulfilled the minimum requirements to be awarded a grant period of April 1–August 31, 2015, with Iraqi Al Firdaws Society and Al Shams Organization for Special Needs extending an additional month until September 30, 2015. The selected Humanitarian subgrants provided emergency assistance, psychosocial support, and easy access to essential public services, as well as greater awareness about IDP rights and promoted social cohesion and peacebuilding in Baghdad, Qadisiya, Muthanna, Basra, Erbil, Salah ad Din, and Kirkuk. Through BPCS subgrants, Humanitarian partners delivered more than **4,527** food baskets, **3,720** hygiene kits, **611** children's nutrition baskets & baby kits, and **305** clothing packages to IDP families.

In the second quarter of 2015, the Kirkuk municipality donated garbage bags, trash receptacles, and vehicles for garbage pick-up in Kirkuk IDP camps, demonstrating the impact of CSO-initiated collaboration between civil society and government in resolving service gaps. The Kirkuk municipality's contribution made it possible for City of Brotherhood and Peace Organization to implement this project successfully. This collaboration helped to address the pollution, litter, and unsafe environment that was leading to many disputes between IDP families, and exacerbating political and ethnic tensions.

In addition to the Humanitarian Collaboration subgrants, BPCS consortium partners were active in supporting the ongoing needs of the displaced. Mercy Hands hosted coordination meetings and roundtable discussions that brought together local CSOs, youth volunteer campaigns, and activists in Baghdad. Participants shared their information and experiences through various databases and evaluations, coordinated their distribution efforts to ensure

equitable support to vulnerable groups, and prepared work plans for collaborative efforts moving forward. Mercy Hands also conducted field visits to conduct needs assessments in order to get better understanding of the needs of displaced Iraqis. Building on the goal of BPCS to increase cooperation between various players in civil society, Mercy Hands partnered with youth volunteers and coordinated with local authorities to assess more than 684 IDP families in ten locations in Baghdad. The results identified cash and medical services to be the largest needs for IDP families. Youth volunteers also supported NFI distributions of school bags and children's toys, clothing, blankets, and hygiene kits to IDP complexes across Baghdad, as well as a mobile clinic campaign to provide basic medical services and awareness, and a rehabilitation campaign to improve conditions in Adhamiya IDP camp.

Additionally, consortium partner PAO trained local partners, and subsequently conducted needs assessments for IDPs in 15 provinces of Iraq to prioritize needs for distribution efforts. Vouchers were distributed with a value of \$50 USD to each of the selected 2,934 families which could be used on food or non-food items, and focus group sessions were held to follow up on gaps in services to these families across all 15 provinces.

Through the technical assistance, incentives for collaboration, and funding, BPCS was able to achieve important improvements in community recognition of civil society through fairs, voter education/election observation, community attitudes about diversity, humanitarian response and government service delivery. BPCS partners also experienced the benefits of collaboration and how greater impact can be achieved by leveraging relationships, networks, resources and knowledge of other entities with similar goals.

IR 2: Institutional capacity of CSOs/NGOs increased

An essential step in helping civil society organizations flourish is BPCS's provision of technical assistance and coaching to strengthen institutional capacity. The organizational development (OD) program targeted stronger CSOs that showed potential to serve as model organizations in Iraq. BPCS CSO partners accessed a range of tools and expertise to strengthen areas of organizational weakness, as well as build on organizational strengths. Special emphasis was placed on strengthening capacity to use social and traditional media effectively, which was identified as an important gap across the board. Finally, Civic Participation Hubs also contributed to supporting civil society capacity, which later evolved into "Sawa Centers for Community Action".

Organizational Development (OD)

In 2013, BPCS invited written expressions of interest from Iraqi CSOs to participate in an organizational development (OD) program. The program offered no financial incentive in an effort to attract only the most committed organizations. Over 300 organizations applied, of whom 89 agreed to make the required commitment, met the selection criteria and were accepted into the program. Selection criteria included applicants' annual budget, number of permanent staff, how long they had been working, and how many projects they had managed. While the intention of this process was to identify committed, strong organizations, it inadvertently favored more traditional CSOs who had managed external donor funds previously – some of whom had internalized some negative attitudes and habits that proved difficult to change. Had the process relied more on interviews, site visits, and recommendations, it may have revealed less experienced, but more innovative and mission-driven organizations.

Building on the experience of many capacity building programs in Iraq and elsewhere, BPCS realized that something had to be done differently in order to secure stronger results. A key

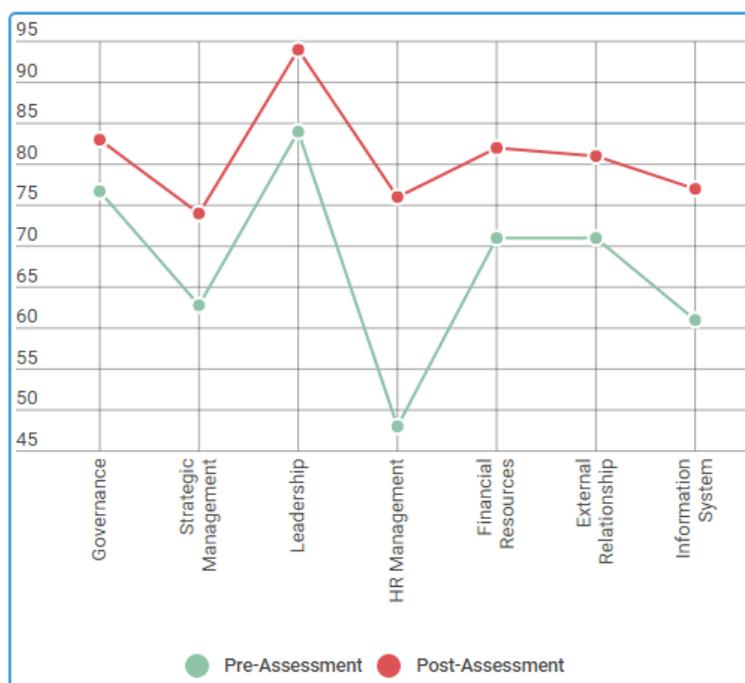
innovation of BPCS was the inclusion of coaching, which ensured that more trusting relationships could emerge based on mutual respect. By providing this training to BPCS team members who worked directly with CSOs, conversations encouraged CSOs to be more honest in thinking about their organizations, which promoted self-awareness and self-reflection. This was essential for the capacity assessment process used, although unfortunately not all BPCS team members received the necessary training in time for the baseline index.

BPCS adapted the [Organizational Capacity Index \(OCI\)](#) to the Iraqi context, which focused on seven key aspects of institutional capacity: governance, strategic management, leadership, human resources management, financial resources, external relationships and information systems. Using a coaching approach, BPCS coaches worked with selected CSOs to self-assess their capacity. The baseline OCI identified well-funded CSOs as scoring high particularly in external relations and financial management. However, their information management systems (including monitoring and evaluation) and human resource management systems tended to be weak. BPCS observed in general that the personality-driven, one-person shows, proved more resistant to change than some newer, and more democratic organizations, which typically provided more participants to trainings, demonstrated more commitment, and were more likely to implement the recommended changes.

Following analysis of the OCI results, each CSO worked with their “coach” to design an organizational development plan (ODP) that would allow them to focus on the areas that each CSO wished to see the most development in during a one-year period. From these plans BPCS identified and prepared training curriculum in core areas that all CSOs would participate in, as well as targeted training for more specialized needs. Experts – both within and outside the consortium – provided the training in workshops held around the country. Initially, CSOs were divided into “beginner”, “intermediate” and “advanced” cohorts, however this division proved to be unpopular, and instead workshops were organized geographically. This had the disadvantage of some participants finding trainings either too basic or too advanced, but also allowed organizations to learn from the experiences of others at a different point in their capacity development. In addition to the workshops, each CSO had a coach assigned by BPCS to work with them over the year to follow up on their ODP commitments. Consortium-provided coaches were able to monitor progress and provide individualized technical support to organizations in a way that promoted dialogue and experiential learning.

Targeted technical training was provided to all OD participants in areas such as Financial Management, Human Resource Management, and Leadership and Governance. Additional trainings by consortium partners were provided to CSOs in each area based on the specific needs of participating organizations in those areas. A copy of all training materials has been copied on to flash drives and provided to Sawa Centers, NCCI, the NGO Directorate and the NGO Department in Erbil to ensure that these resources are of continued value. They will also be uploaded to the [Musharka website](#).

BPCS consortium partners provided leadership coaching in three stages for around 30 selected organizations, which stood out as having significant potential for further growth. This led to strong personal benefit but did not always benefit the organizational level as much as expected. This was the case because most training recipients lacked either the skills or authority in many cases to transfer the knowledge gained in the training to others within their organizations. Leadership skills offered through OD would often be used to help individuals find solutions to individual or small challenges, rather than changing the environment of the CSO as intended. In the future, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring that representatives with decisionmaking power in their organizations participate, and that the knowledge gained helps to influence the organizational culture of the CSOs.



BPCS conducted the OCI comparison after one year. By this time, all BPCS coaches who had conducted the initial OCI with organizations had received coaching training. This coaching training improved their skills in conducting the assessment, which led to more accurate responses than at the baseline. For example, after receiving coaching training, project officers would modify the question, “Do you have a financial system?” to “Tell me about your financial system.” This rhetorical shift yielded more accurate

and open responses, which sometimes resulted in lower scores. Despite this, 91% of CSOs showed improvement through the OCI.

Overall, the most growth was seen in human resources management (28% growth) and information systems (16% growth). Less growth was seen in areas of external relationships (10% growth), with the least improvement in governance (6.6% growth). Older organizations tended to show the least improvement – which could be indicative of either their higher starting point, or the relative difficulty of making changes in more established structures. CSOs also saw improvement in their financial systems, which was particularly evident in proposals submitted to BPCS. Many subgrantees also participated in the OD program, and saw a great deal of improvement in their budget preparation, although this may have also been a result of the support and feedback provided through the subgrant process. BPCS CSO and consortium partners agreed that learning by doing was the most effective capacity builder.

To improve the results of the OCI tool moving forward, BPCS or similar programs could benefit from the use of supportive documents/tools to accompany the OCI, such as examples of human resource policies, bylaws, logsheets and other tools that demonstrate good practices. Ideally, capacity strengthening programs would also be long enough to ensure that careful sequencing is possible. For example, all project officers should receive full coaching training prior to conducting any OCI workshops, and they should also receive advanced training in all training topics to ensure that they are able to serve as resources to the CSOs. Training workshops would also be more effective if the program and the participating organizations could commit to sending the most appropriate staff to each workshop; people who have the authority to implement changes in their organizations as a result of new learning. Finally, a Training of Trainers model could be integrated to better share learning.

With a reduced program budget, a second round of OD for new partners was not possible, and BPCS decided to extend the original cohort’s program from one year to 18 months. Another unforeseen event was the change in the security situation in Iraq, which had an impact on the OD program. Travel restrictions made it more challenging for OD partners to attend trainings and complete OCI comparisons. Additionally, many organizations shifted their focus from

increasing internal capacity to responding to the humanitarian crisis. Overall, the OD component of the BPCS program started with 89 CSO partners, and completed OCI comparisons for 76. From those, the strongest and most committed 36 were identified as OD “stars” to receive advanced capacity building support, and 26 continued to the end of the OD trainings.

Media and Internews

Following the departure of IRI from the BPCS consortium, Mercy Corps brought in Internews to take on the media aspects of the capacity building program from August 1, 2013 to January 31, 2015. Internews’ intervention aimed to build the multi-media capacity of CSOs to utilize media effectively. The strategy was built around three activities:

1. Multimedia and Social Journalism Training
2. Develop and Implement Media Outreach Strategy
3. CSO and Media Partnership for Public Education

Success Story: Awan Organization

Awan created a campaign targeting the mayor of Diwaniya to increase funding to support IDPs. In order to publicize the campaign, the director of Awan partnered with a journalist to write news stories about the plight of IDPs. These articles attracted the attention of the mayor, who gave funding to Awan for blankets and heaters and personal cleaning supplies for IDPs. Awan was able to leverage their distribution efforts with this grant from the local government to received additional funding from UNICEF to further their goals.

Internews exceeded its training target, reaching 137 CSO participants (from a target of 120) with training on: branding and creation of media outreach plan; theory and practice of multimedia journalism; creating engaging materials with targeted messages using latest software; setting up effective websites with content that is engaging, updated regularly and highlights reform objectives; and understanding how to use RSS feeds, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, SEO (search engine optimization), Google Analytics and SMS technology to promote advocacy and monitor elections. Outputs from these workshops included new and/or improved Facebook pages, banners, newsletters, videos, images, flyers, business cards and logos. From the first workshop of 21 participants, 72 individual products were created.

Internews also trained 168 CSO participants (including 30% women) to develop media outreach strategies. Participants learned how to plan and implement media campaigns, and improved their knowledge of strategic planning in advocacy by 37%. The most exciting part of the media strategy paired 20 journalists with 20 CSOs to increase mutual understanding and appreciation of the



Internews conducted a series of trainings to increase the impact of CSOs through media.

sectors, as well as increasing civil society exposure to the media. These partnerships

were supported for four months, during which time 404 news stories were published: 321 in

newspapers/on-line, 45 on radio, and 34 on TV. Some partnerships continued after Internews' support ended. Most encouragingly, these partnerships resulted in some successes for CSO partners, including more government attention and support (e.g. the government gave Sawa Organization in Muthanna 5 million IQD to buy IDPs heaters and winter clothes), and more volunteers joining the organization (e.g. stories about Dhi Qar Forum resulted in 52 new volunteers, and the local government and schools asked the CSO to provide workshops).

Success Story: Press and Media Care Association

Before taking the Internews Social Media tools workshop, the Press and Media Care Association had one Facebook page. After the workshop, they increased their Facebook presence to four pages, each highlighting a different aspect of what they do. Their likes increased from 356 on one page to 34,837 across the four pages. One of their direct successes with their target audience was being able to help find jobs for 15 IDPs who had fled four different provinces.

Overall, these activities contributed to stronger CSOs capable of conducting outreach to citizens and the media. The CSOs learned how to create multimedia tactics, develop strategic outreach campaigns and work with the media. The real impact of the Internews activities can be seen in the improved capacity of the BPCS CSOs as they have the skills and confidence to engage citizens, media and government. The multiple success stories show that there is now a cadre of organizations more able to utilize media for publicity and advocacy. Internews concluded in its [final report](#):

1. The Iraqi CSO community wants to reach out to the public to create change
2. Knowing local government's interests is key to CSO impact
3. It is possible to find professional, ethical journalists in Iraq

In addition, Internews content about its partners and civil society initiatives have been seen by about 206,000 users on Facebook, of whom about 42,000 people engaged with Internews posts (18% women, 82% men, most aged between 18 and 24).

News Story Contest Winner from the CSO-Journalist Partnerships

Journalist Aycer Jabbar saw that IDP children were being denied access to an education because they did not bring proper identification with them when they fled ISIS. He [wrote an article](#) outlining the situation, which caught the attention of the Ministry of Education. The minister brought in the journalist to discuss the situation and to learn about the partner CSO that was tackling this issue. As a result the minister changed their policies to allow IDP children to attend school.

CSO Sustainability Strategy

Financial sustainability is a challenge for CSOs the world over, and BPCS attempted a three-phase strategy to address it: (1) Familiarize CSOs with different options for alternative sources of revenue; (2) Facilitate the development of financial sustainability plans; and (3) Provide expert consultation to review and consolidate these plans. The original strategy was more ambitious and also included setting up meetings between CSOs and potential new funding partners (e.g. the private sector, angel investors), however this proved too difficult with the time and resources available, and was not pursued.

For Phase I in May 2014, BPCS invited interested CSOs (including both partner and non-partner organizations) to a three-day event to introduce CSOs to the concepts of sustainability and alternative sources of revenue. This was organized at a time when many donors were reducing their support to Iraq and CSOs could no longer rely on international assistance. The

meeting was facilitated by international experts on civil society innovations, including social enterprise development, and included speakers who had achieved financial success through alternative means, such as crowdsourcing. The event was both theoretical and practical and culminated in a “pitch” competition judged by an expert jury, during which each team had to present a concept and sustainability plan in two minutes. It was an exciting process, however it also revealed how challenging it is to introduce new concepts in a way that can be quickly absorbed and acted upon.

The change in operating environment in Iraq following June 2014 had a profound impact on the funding opportunities available to CSOs. CSOs that pursue short-term humanitarian response opportunities were in high demand by international organizations. For others who were focused on longer-term development or advocacy projects, however, this shift heightened the importance of providing skills on financial sustainability. Phase II was organized in March 2015, and was only provided to the OD “star” CSOs. To participate, each CSO had to self-assess their strategies, opportunities and resources in their community, and based on this, they were divided into one of two streams: (1) diversified fundraising strategy, or (2) social enterprise development. International experts led two workshops, providing specific and intense training that resulted in participants developing either a fundraising strategy that targeted a variety of potential funding partners, or a social enterprise business plan. In both cases, strategies built on the CSOs’ vision, mission and organizational culture to ensure that CSOs remained mission, and not funding-driven.

The final Phase III in September 2015, BPCS’ international consultants provided one-on-one consultations for an entire day with each CSO to review, create, critique, perfect, and finalize financial sustainability plans tailor-made for each organization. Participating CSOs were challenged and forced to question their own organizational cultures, commitment, strengths and weaknesses. Each emerged with a clear vision and a plan, and many commented that they had never had this type of direct access to experts who could guide them through such a process. BPCS observed that most of the CSOs have the will and need to sustain, while a few remained more donor-driven rather than focusing on one area of specialized expertise or following a clear mission statement. BPCS noted that CSOs have been actively working toward sustainability and some in fact have implemented short-term plans. The sustainability strategy focused on supporting CSOs to develop more flexibility for shifting contexts and longer-term approaches to sustainability. Based on feedback from CSO partners, sustainability coaching would have been more beneficial earlier in the program, providing more time for follow-up and targeted skills trainings. A total of 24 CSOs developed sustainability strategies, including market and community research data, which they can adapt as needed.

Sustainability Success

Haraa Humanitarian Organization in Diyala grew from a donor-dependent group relying on temporary staff working out of one room, to an organization with over 10 permanent staff organized into three departments in a bigger building, plus a group of regular volunteers, and a social business enterprise that supports the financial sustainability of the organization.

Humanitarian Capacity Building

The mass displacement that occurred following the rise of ISIS in Iraq triggered a significant need for humanitarian response. It soon became clear, however, that CSO capacity for the most needed activities were limited. The strongest organizations quickly became overwhelmed with more work than they could responsibly manage, while many others struggled to find partnerships due to their limited experience. International humanitarian actors complained about the lack of skills in proposal writing, using Excel, selecting

beneficiaries and monitoring. BPCS launched a new capacity building opportunity for organizations focused on humanitarian response, with the aim of expanding the pool of Iraqi CSOs capable of providing professional humanitarian assistance. BPCS released a request for expressions of interest for humanitarian organizations with an interest in capacity building. In March 2015, BPCS partnered with 37 CSOs across Iraq and started to provide trainings in different areas requested by the CSOs. A workshop on humanitarian fundamentals and Sphere Standards was provided to all the partners to build a foundation of knowledge for their future work. BPCS also provided training in financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and interest-based negotiation. Simultaneously, BPCS released the RFA for [humanitarian subgrants](#) and 7 of the 37 who were trained submitted proposals and were awarded grants. In total, **13,466 IDPs received humanitarian assistance** through BPCS activities.

Networking and Coalition Building

BPCS promoted and encouraged its partners to cooperate and work in coalitions to increase their impact. This was a new and different approach for many participating CSOs in the earlier stages of the program, and at times BPCS observed more competitive rather than cooperative attitudes and behaviors. However, through bringing partners together to participate in powerful events such as leadership coaching, trust and relationships grew. In other parts of the program, such as through advocacy and collaboration subgrants and the Sawa Centers, CSOs also had opportunities to work together more and began recognizing the value of working in coalition. While BPCS deliberately did not push CSOs to work in networks (experience shows it is rarely sustainable) some of the most active and committed participating CSOs took the initiative to voluntarily form networks. Many of the “star” OD partners formed the “Musharaka”⁹ network to carry on capacity building efforts and are now continuing to coach each other, mentoring other CSOs, as well as youth activists. A [Musharaka website](#) has been created by Mercy Hands to host discussions, as well as key OD materials. The BPCS Marla partners are also formalizing the creation of the Marla Network (see [IR 5](#) below).

BPCS conducted a survey in September 2015 that produced some notable results from the participating 96 CSOs related to organizational effectiveness. Over 80% of BPCS partners are now participating in a network with three or more CSOs working toward a common goal; 80% are active social media users with an organizational Facebook page or other account and 82% claim to have improved relationships with traditional media. 83% now have a sustainability plan, and while only 22% reported developing relationships with the private sector, an impressive 47% of respondents claimed to have attracted additional funding as a result of participating in BPCS. Most importantly, BPCS seems to have improved the CSOs’ relationships: 87% report an improvement in government relations (and subsequently, 75% report observing changes in government attitudes and practices as a result of their efforts); and 93% report improvements in community relations as a result of BPCS participation. Most significantly, 88% report improved ability to respond to community needs and 91% claim to have more influence in their community as a result of BPCS.

In order to better support networks, Mercy Hands conducted organizational development reviews of networks interested in developing their skills further. Mercy Hands adapted the OCI tool to support networks instead of individual organizations, and followed up with interested networks within Central Iraq to do a two-day organizational development plan meeting to address areas of weakness. Mercy Hands also provided a series of targeted skills trainings for Iraqi CSO networks on topics such as public relations, network management, media and photography, and sustainability. In addition to the technical support that Mercy

⁹ *Musharaka* is the Arabic word for “Participation”, and is the local name for the BPCS program.

Hands lent to the organizational development of networks, BPCS partners also provided support of network activities such as conferences, workshops and coordination meetings.

Alternative Civil Society Actors

As the ISIS crisis unfolded, it became clear that other segments of civil society were taking positive action and doing so in a way that demonstrated high levels of volunteerism, innovation and commitment. These tended to be informal (unregistered) groups, and particularly youth. Bloggers and other individuals such as vocal academics were also observed as influential. BPCS conducted research in early 2015 to better understand these groups that came to be known within the program as “alternative civil society actors” to see what could be learned, or whether there was a role for BPCS to support their efforts. The research included a survey, key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Baghdad, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Basra to attempt to map the actors and understand their work and motivations. Following the [research](#), a [strategy](#) was developed for intervention in consultation with representatives of these groups.

It was clear that most groups benefited from their informality and many were not interested in registration (particularly once they learned more about what that process involved). The research showed that many activists are not necessarily exclusively affiliated with one group, but may support different activities of diverse groups. This allowed both individuals and groups to be more innovative and democratic, and attract volunteers for specific activities, rather than creating a long-term dependence. The BPCS approach therefore focused on strengthening the skills of these leaders. A training-of-trainers workshop was conducted in July 2015 for 25 civil society actors who are involved in social change. Citizens’ journalism training was also provided for 21 citizen journalists and bloggers who are active in traditional media and social media. BPCS recommends further work with this dynamic, committed sector of civic actors in a way that does not stifle their creativity.

Civic Participation Hubs

The original strategy for Civic Participation Hubs allowed for an organic approach that could respond to each region’s needs and provide space for innovation. Subsequently, ACDI/VOCA, Mercy Hands and PAO adopted different approaches and favored different types of activities. Through three physical hubs in Central Iraq, and a number of community-based initiatives, Mercy Hands implemented 139 activities in collaboration with local CSOs and with participation from government, academics, activists, and citizens. In Baghdad, Wasit, Babel, and Karbala, activities were focused on supporting youth and women, and addressed issues such as raising awareness about human and women’s rights, combating violence against women, democracy and peacebuilding, and strengthening the impact of advocacy activities and campaigns. Based on community and civil society feedback, Mercy Hands focused year three’s activities on sustainability of civil society in Iraq, humanitarian crisis response efforts, and enabling and encouraging youth and activists to play a more active role in the community. In central Iraq, 2,065 girls and women and 2,717 boys and men participated in Hub activities over the life of the program.

In order to leverage the connections formed between organizations and government through hub activities, Mercy Hands also developed an [Iraqi civil society directory](#) that includes general information about effective civil society organizations, networks, and youth campaigns in Iraq. The directory includes information on the portfolios of nearly 200 organizations, and covers all Iraqi provinces. The directory also includes information on the NGO laws in IKR and federal Iraq. Mercy Hands is distributing the directory to the mentioned organizations, international organizations, provincial councils, and ministries to

help them find potential partners and to increase visibility of CSOs. This will be done in coordination with NGO Directorates in Baghdad and Erbil, as well as with NCCI and in coordination with BPCS partners.

In the southern provinces of Basra, Dhi Qar, and Najaf, consortium partner PAO facilitated 143 activities in physical hubs that served as resource centers and collaboration sites to encourage networking, mentoring, collaboration, coordination and information sharing. Hub activities in the south were focused on community awareness activities and strengthening communication between CSOs to support organizations through peer mentoring from more experienced partners and develop relationships with local government and media.

In total, 734 hub activities were held across Iraq.

Evolution of the Hubs Strategy

It became apparent in mid-2014 that this organic approach was not achieving everything that had been envisioned, and was also missing out on opportunities (e.g. to network within and across regions) due to the lack of uniformity. Hub activities of different partners had moved in different directions, and some were found to be more useful or relevant than others. In August 2014, the consortium partners met to review the hubs strategy and it was decided that a new model was needed – one that could draw on the lessons learned and best practices of all the hubs to date. After analysis, a set of [minimum standards](#) for a hub-type space was created, as well as guidelines for management and effective activities. As part of the programmatic pivot, it was agreed that the new hubs would also serve to bring different community members together to respond to the humanitarian and social crisis. The Sawa (“together”) Centers for Community Action were born.

Sawa Centers for Community Action

Following a competitive process, 14 CSOs located in 13 provinces in Iraq were selected to host [Sawa Centers](#) between the period of March 1–September 30, 2015. Each Center proposed a diverse management board consisting of multiple organizations and prominent individuals to ensure a diversity of views, a wider pool of potential stakeholders and greater geographic reach. Each was housed within an existing organization’s space to ensure continuity, and BPCS provided additional equipment – including laptops, printers, and projectors – and information resources to ensure each was able to host events and offer services. Training for the Sawa Centers also required them to consider their own (financial) sustainability plans, and linked them with other activities of the consortium, e.g. Mercy Corps’ conflict program and humanitarian response team, to create opportunities for continued activities. Based on lessons learned from the hubs, funding was kept to a minimum to promote volunteerism and to demonstrate that powerful community events do not need much money to run well.

The Sawa Centers successfully provided a safe place for community actors and local government to discuss and resolve local issues. These centers provide a venue for local CSOs and government to provide training and capacity development to individuals and groups in their communities. Sawa Centers invested in the potential of youth to grow into strong, qualified leaders who can manage community initiatives and campaigns, while also providing them with a safe space to meet. Sawa Centers supported the local government to improve planning and design to provide better services, and the government has consulted Sawa Centers to find information on IDPs, for example. They played an important role in engaging different sectors of the community such as media, the private sector, local NGOs, and local government to address the humanitarian needs of displaced communities, as well as discuss and resolve issues related to reconciliation and social cohesion. Some highlights are included below.

- Starting in August 2015, Sawa Centers across Iraq played an important role in hosting discussions on the reforms announced on August 9, 2015 by the Iraqi Prime Minister, Hayder al-Abadi, and organizing and supporting demonstrations throughout Iraq. The Sawa Centers documented the announced reforms and shared that information with their communities through awareness-raising sessions. They hosted activists, community members and government officials to help communities create agendas with clear demands, and unify public opinion.
- In the second quarter of 2015, Awan Sawa Center organized dialogue sessions between the Provincial Council Agricultural Committee, the Agricultural Advisor to the Governor, and civil society organizations, to address the re-rationing of water. Following a series of dialogue sessions, the Qadisiya Provincial Council adopted several civil society recommendations issue to ensure that farmers were able to continue cultivating their land. The adoption of these recommendations by the Ministry of Agriculture led to a 30% increase in cultivated agricultural land, and raised the water ratio for the province, which will contribute to an increased standard of living for farmers and their families.
- Starting in the second quarter of 2015, the Erbil Sawa Center served as the coordination point for the IKR Shadow Constitution Committee, which consists of 21 members, including lawyers, parliamentarians, activists, and CSO representatives, to provide recommendations on the draft constitution. The recommendations developed by the committee are available to the media and have created an outlet for feedback to the Constitution Committee.
- The Dhi Qar Sawa Center encouraged a number of long-time youth volunteers to collect donations for orphans during the month of Ramadan. The activity provided youth with hands-on experience with project implementation, while providing assistance to children in need.

The Sawa Centers are one of the key legacies of BPCS. Many of the Centers share the vision of BPCS for a vibrant, professional and inter-connected civil society. The Sawa Centers have raised the hosting organization's influence in the community, which further spur them to do more with this new responsibility. While not all will be sustainable, most have continued plans for ongoing action and a group of volunteers who have made Sawa Centers a part of their life.

Under IR 2, BPCS has employed a number of strategies to contribute to strengthening institutional capacity. Organizational development assessments and tailored training, coaching, strategic engagement with media, peer support and technical assistance on sustainability helped many CSOs to establish a stronger foundation to meet the goals they set for improving their country and community. The voluntary formation of a network, supported by a directory and website and the existence of Sawa Centers help many Iraqi CSOs – not only those who benefited directly from BPCS – to continue to support each other and develop their institutional capacity.

IR 3: Impact of civil society on public policy increased

To increase the impact of civil society on public processes, BPCS provided trainings, technical assistance, and grants to 22 local CSOs between May 2013 and October 2015. Given that public policy is traditionally a government-dominated activity, few CSOs had experience with the policy process, nor a strategic understanding of developing advocacy

goals. Confirmed by the advocacy capacity index results, significant technical assistance was required and BPCS provided trainings on the fundamentals of policy advocacy; media tools; policy strategy; coalition and community mobilization; research and advanced policy development; public policy processes; relationship cultivation with policymakers; internal communication; and reporting. Subgrants enabled individual CSOs, partnerships, coalitions and networks to implement policy advocacy campaigns and government monitoring (watchdog) initiatives aimed at policy change.

Selection and advocacy public policy themes

BPCS aimed to increase civil society’s impact on public policy, despite not having specific policy objectives. The theme of the first round of subgrants was built into program design, as improved service delivery was recognized as an ongoing priority as identified in the baseline survey, and an area that civil society was considered well positioned to influence. For subsequent rounds, it was still considered important for the theme to be consistent for all subgrantees as a means to: (a) potentially have more impact on the issue, and (b) help connect different CSOs with similar issues to encourage collaboration and networking. BPCS decided that the selection of topics should be based on civil society priorities, and an online survey was launched in December 2013 through the BPCS mailing list and on NCCI. 180 organizations responded, with an almost even split between BPCS and non-BPCS partners.

The survey revealed that the most popular advocacy issue was human rights, followed by women’s rights – which became the themes for the second round of subgrants. A youth component was also included as this appeared on the survey, and was important for BPCS to continue offering opportunities to engage youth. For the third and final round, BPCS referred again to the survey, and moved to the next most popular topic: transparency and fighting corruption. This also reinforced BPCS’s long-term objectives of strengthening participatory democracy through good governance and therefore represented a good fit with the program scope. This theme was later modified to have a focus on transparency and accountability that would result in better service delivery outcomes for conflict-affected populations, given that funds were awarded following the displacement crisis (although this last minute change also resulted in fewer subgrants being awarded than had been originally selected).

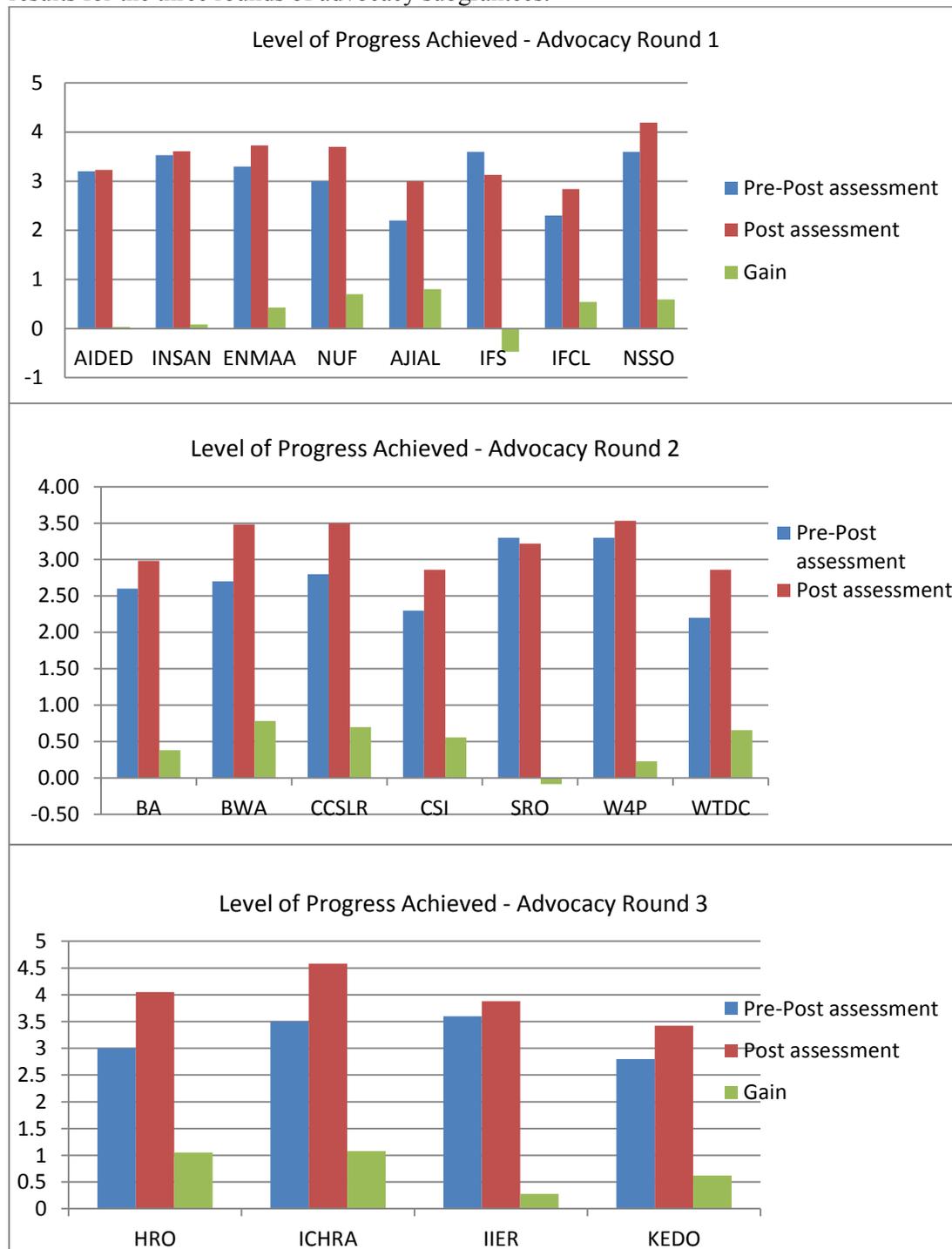
Subgrant Theme	Dates	No. of CSOs
1. Improving Service Delivery	Dec 2013 – Nov 2014	10 awards
2. Human Rights	Sept 2014 – July 2015	8 awards
3. Good Governance and Budget Transparency	January – August 2015	4 awards

Through these subawards, BPCS worked toward the two main advocacy component objectives: strengthening skills for advocacy and applying skills for advocacy.

CSOs Strengthen Skills for Advocacy

BPCS aimed to build the core capacities for organizations’ long-term development of policy advocacy competencies. To do this, BPCS developed a multi-component Advocacy Index (AI) tool in 2014, which drew on other models and adapted them to Iraq and the program’s needs. The tool was designed to help the BPCS team to facilitate self-assessments of development needs in advocacy and provide tailored technical support. This resulted in the pre-assessment scores and an advocacy development plan to enable each CSO partner to strengthen its capacity, while working towards its policy goals. The pre/post assessment helped the CSOs to understand their progress and continued needs in order to structure their

long-term advocacy approach. The following figures represent the pre- and post- assessment results for the three rounds of advocacy subgrantees.



Overall, results show 89% of the CSOs who were engaged in advocacy interventions strengthened their advocacy skills, as measured by the AI. It was quite startling to see some CSOs actually appear to have decreased in capacity. However upon questioning, it emerged that some CSOs developed a better understanding of advocacy concepts during the program, and recognized that their earlier estimations of their capacity were over-stated. As expected, CSO experience with *policy* advocacy was negligible, and most were more familiar with *issue* advocacy (awareness raising). It was therefore a steep learning curve for advocacy partners,

many of whom knew little about policy advocacy when they began the process. The key areas identified for development were:

- **Adaptability, Leadership, and Management Resources.** Comparative assessment results showed noticeable improvements in this area. Partners demonstrated use of different techniques and tools to work with media and government officials, and more familiarity with the policy process. BPCS provided tools for CSOs to be adaptable, play leadership roles and manage resources effectively while monitoring their internal organizations for capacity development opportunities, as well as the external environment for further advocacy needs.
- **Organizational reputation, networking capacity.** For decades, policies were entirely developed and adopted by the government without engaging the community, so CSOs are just starting to develop policy advocacy skills. AI scores showed good progress in this area, as CSOs recognized that strong alliances and networking could achieve greater public policy results. In order to gain visibility in the community and effectively influence the policy process, BPCS observed that advocacy partners needed to gain more knowledge and practice in issuing press releases and working with the media, communication skills that help to influence policymakers, and improved abilities in the development of compelling messaging.
- **Strategies: Issue identification, including research and analysis; constituency mobilization; and engagement with decision makers.** While helping CSOs to reflect on their strategies, BPCS challenged them to question their own assumptions. For example, by requiring CSOs to prove the validity of their assumptions through research, many found that what they thought to be true did not hold up once tested. This helped CSOs to reflect on their strategy and progress throughout their advocacy effort, and seek regular mentoring from BPCS. Similarly, many CSOs learned to appreciate the value of community involvement, even though it was not part of the original plan. CSOs became more sophisticated in their strategies related to approaching and influencing decision makers by mapping potential allies and opponents and developing tailored strategies.

CSOs Apply Skills for Advocacy

The advocacy subgrants, supported by training and technical assistance, were designed to support Iraqi civil society to participate in, and have influence over, public policies and government reform processes, and promote transparency, accountability and citizen participation in decision-making. It was a process that required more time to be fully effective, as the policy process timeframe was significantly longer than BPCS could accommodate. Activities were also often at the mercy of government schedules and agendas.

Despite the challenges and learning-while-doing, BPCS partners achieved a number of successes. A few illustrative examples of BPCS's outcomes in the area of policy advocacy include the following.

- In April 2015, BPCS partners successfully persuaded the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) parliament to change the extractive industries law to ensure more transparent monitoring, and improve public access to documentation on oil and gas revenues. A BPCS partner is now performing a monitoring role focused on the largest source of budgetary revenue in the KRG as part of an Integrity Commission.
- BPCS partners penetrated an entrenched culture of secrecy and corruption related to budgetary processes, and through effective advocacy and technical assistance, made provincial budgets available to the public in Baghdad and Basra. Further, Baghdad Provincial Council issued provincial decree Code 41/2015 stipulating that all local official entities operate transparently in their budget expenditure and project

implementation. They requested and have now received training on budget transparency from BPCS.

- Women who are married in traditional ceremonies without a court certificate are not able to access the benefits they are entitled to in Iraq. To ensure that all women are able to access these benefits, BPCS partners worked successfully with other civil society organizations and the Ministry of Human Rights to persuade the Shia and Sunni Endowments to cease the practice of performing marriages unless the couple has first received certification by the court. This demonstrates the ability of civil society to influence cultural and religious traditions that can be harmful to women's rights.
- In southern Iraq, government officials in Basra responded to BPCS advocacy efforts and took formal steps toward reducing the eligible nomination age to local councils from age 30 to age 22. This will increase youth leadership in decision-making.
- On 12 February 2015, as a result of BPCS advocacy, three parliamentarians in Sulaymaniyah committed themselves to convincing colleagues to support changes in the Nationality Law No 26/2006 Article 3 Section B in Iraq in order to alleviate the socio-economic impacts on vulnerable people. Also in 2015, the Senior Deputy for the Federal Speaker of Parliament, Aram Shaik Mohammed, committed himself to propose to the Speaker that the suggestions of BPCS partner Bustan about mitigating offensive language concerning children born to single mothers be incorporated into the draft amendment of the same law.
- Government officials in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region supported advancing and strengthening working women's rights through legislative action culminating in Kurdistan parliamentarians agreeing in the first quarter of 2015 to support a draft amendment to Labor Law 71/1987 that would protect female employee rights.

In addition to these policy wins, another positive outcome of BPCS advocacy efforts was the greater visibility, credibility and influence that civil society earned with both the government and citizens. As a result of these and other efforts, we now see the government consulting civil society more on policy-related issues, or requesting information from civil society to contribute to government decision-making. The contact between the different sectors helped to build respect and mutual understanding, which has helped to overcome negative stereotypes that previously served as a barrier to cooperation, as we will see further in IR 4.

Lessons learned

1. Leadership and adaptive management skills of CSOs take time to emerge, and they are not skills that can necessarily be “taught”, but need to be experienced. Particularly for CSOs who are accustomed to focusing on activities rather than outcomes, mindsets can take time to shift. The CSOs who were able to develop creative solutions to respond to changes and challenges tended to be more successful. Many, however, were unwilling to deviate from the original work plan.
2. Time was also against the partners in trying to both participate in capacity strengthening activities, while implementing at the same time. Strategic planning, advocacy planning, monitoring & evaluation, and reporting training should have been provided sooner, and time allowed within plans for implementation, training and coaching.
3. CSOs need to continue to be encouraged to establish effective coalitions to increase the chances of success in public policy making. While many are familiar with the theoretical benefits of working together, BPCS struggled to develop and provide adequate capacity building support on how to make coalitions work effectively in practice.
4. BPCS could have increased the effectiveness of its technical assistance by having a technical expert on the thematic areas of advocacy on the team. BPCS was able to provide strategic and tactical assistance, but could not advise on the more technical and legal aspects related to areas such as human rights or budget transparency.

5. Sustainability training was a worthy investment. It helped to equip CSOs to secure funds from other donors – and it may be one of the more challenging areas to attract support for (particularly from the Iraqi government). For example, Iraqi Institute for Economic Reform received funding from the National Company for Electronic Products. Civil Society Institute was awarded funding from the Swiss Embassy for \$20,000 for their policy advocacy activities.

IR 4: Enabling Environment for CSOs improved

The purpose of this intermediate result was to ensure that the rights, freedoms and protections of civil society were maintained and preferably enhanced to strengthen mechanisms for collective voice and constructive collaboration to ensure that civil society is able to play a leadership role in Iraq’s consolidation of democracy. Through the evolution of BPCS and the changing context, two distinct (and briefly overlapping) strategies were adopted:

1. **Years 1-2:** Continue to improve the NGO Laws at the federal and regional level, including increasing government financial support for civil society, through advocacy led by ICNL and its Iraqi partners Iraqi Al-Amal Association (Baghdad) and Humanitarian Help Hands (3H, Erbil). This plan largely built on the good work achieved by ICNL and its partners previously with DRL support.
2. **Year 3:** Focus on bringing civil society and government together at the provincial level to develop constructive collaboration and expand civil society’s influence on and access to government processes. Mercy Corps led this strategy.

This shift in strategy was largely considered necessary as a result of the conflict with ISIS and subsequent humanitarian crisis, which monopolized the federal and regional government’s attention, compounded by the financial crisis that had decimated the government’s budget. It also made strategic sense programmatically as it allowed BPCS to build on progress made and skills developed by other program components – particularly advocacy, elections and the Sawa Centers (underpinned by OD). The crisis also (at least temporarily) made movement around the country much more complicated, so a more localized approach was expected to enable more to be done, with a lower risk of interruption and cancellation.

Years 1-2: National/Regional Strategy (ICNL, Al Amal and 3H)

ICNL, Al Amal and Humanitarian Helping Hands (3H) focused on improving the legal enabling environment for Iraqi civil society by building upon the foundation of the two progressive CSO framework laws in Iraq. Federal NGO Law No. 12 of 2010 and the Kurdish NGO Law No. 1 of 2011 are recognized as models of enabling legislation for the Middle East region. To build on earlier achievements, the partners pursued a strategy of training, monitoring and dialogue.

- **NGO Directorate staff training:** To improve the implementation of the federal NGO Law No. 12 of 2010, ICNL conducted two multi-day trainings for federal NGO Directorate staff on the concept and role of civil society to strengthen cooperation and partnership with civil society.
- **NGO Department staff training:** To improve the implementation of the Kurdish NGO Law No. 1 of 2011, ICNL conducted a multi-day training for Kurdish NGO Department

Success Story:

As the result of legislation monitoring, ICNL and local partners were able to respond rapidly when potentially restrictive amendments to the Kurdish Law on Demonstrations were released. 3H spearheaded an advocacy campaign against the amendments, which resulted in President Barzani ultimately rejecting and returning them to the Kurdish Parliament unsigned.

staff introducing the concept of monitoring and evaluation for the Civil Society Support Fund.

- **Monitoring legislation and regulations:** ICNL monitored the status of legislation and implementing regulations related to the legal enabling environment for civil society. These included the unreleased draft amendment to the federal NGO Law No. 12 of 2011, draft legislation on freedom of expression, the draft Kurdish Law on Volunteerism, and proposed amendments to the Kurdish Law on Demonstrations.
- **Ten Open Forums** to facilitate effective working relations between civil society and the federal NGO directorate and the Kurdish NGO Department.
- **Improving youth awareness of formal civil society** and involving Iraqi youth regarding CSO law issues through a four-day conference for emerging youth leaders. Fifty-six youth leaders attended the conference, which explored the CSO law as applied to youth-led and focused CSOs, the meaning of volunteer work, effective dialogue between ethnic and religious groups, dispute resolution, and human rights and gender issues. A number of the participants went on to help organize the next Baghdad – City of Peace Carnival, celebrating World Peace Day.
- **Ongoing coordination and technical assistance** was carried out throughout the program to monitor, follow up and continue linking civil society with government counterparts.
- **Evaluate the Kurdish civil society support fund** by identifying aspects of the funding process in need of improvement or additional support, as well as priority areas for future funding. This was done through the administration and analysis of a survey of 1,000 individual beneficiaries of projects funded by the civil society support fund, and six open meetings between the NGO Department and fund recipients to discuss the mechanism.
- **Strengthen the Kurdish civil society support fund** through the participatory development and distribution of extensive [monitoring and evaluation guidelines](#), together with monitoring and evaluation forms for adoption by the Department in future funding rounds.

Year 3: Provincial Strategy (Mercy Corps)

Strategy development

Given the shift in context, in the third and final year of the program, BPCS reviewed its strategy and adopted an innovative approach to the enabling environment intermediate result. Given distractions at the national and regional level, Mercy Corps targeted the provincial level, where CSOs have a greater likelihood of success. The strategy involved trying different approaches to identify the impediments to a better working relationship between CSOs and local governments, and then working with both sectors to build trust and greater collaboration between them. Over the year, with Mercy Corps serving as a convener and then facilitator, BPCS strengthened the relationship between civil society and government officials all over Iraq, with the exception of Anbar, Ninawa and Salah ad Din. This strategy also benefitted from support from consortium partners, interested partner CSOs, and other Mercy Corps programs, representing a highly integrated strategy.

The strategy began with individual meetings with officials, NGOs, informal civil society actors, media, and



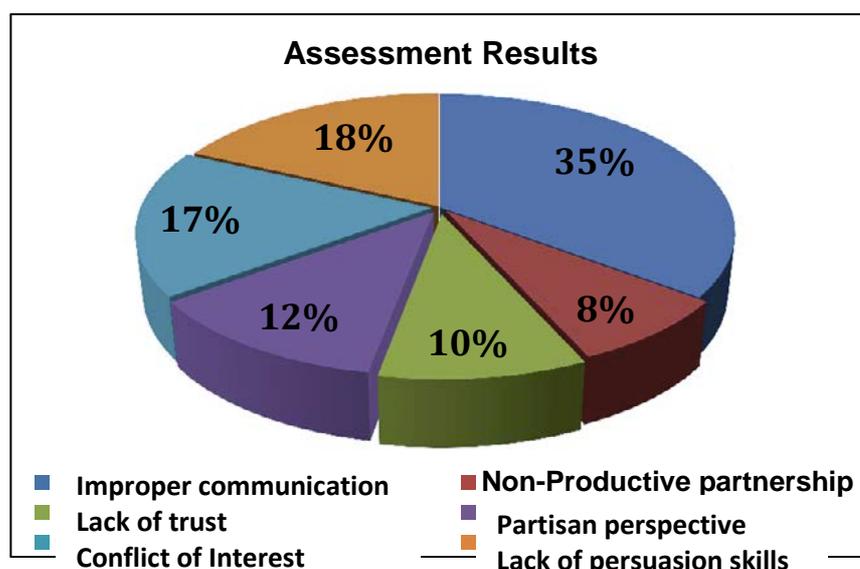
academics to test the waters and develop models to enable civil society

[A series of meetings were held to strengthen the relationships between civil society and government on a provincial level.](#)

and local governments to work together in the best interest of citizens. This was followed by open sessions, group discussions and roundtables to discuss and identify the most viable model. It became clear that among both local governments and civil society, there was a readiness to cooperate and break down barriers to partnership. Both parties identified a lack of communication and trust, and ambiguous mutual understanding as the root causes of the problems between both sides (see graph below). Without communication and contact, stereotypes and assumptions went unchallenged, with no incentive to overcome these issues.

Roundtables also brought representatives from private sector to participate along with government officials and civil society to create a communication platform between these actors. The aim was to help civil society develop meaningful partnerships not only with local governments, but to also build a relationship with private sector, which could prove to be an alternative revenue stream for CSOs. Similar communication and lack of mutual understanding issues existed between civil society and the private sector before BPCS' intervention.

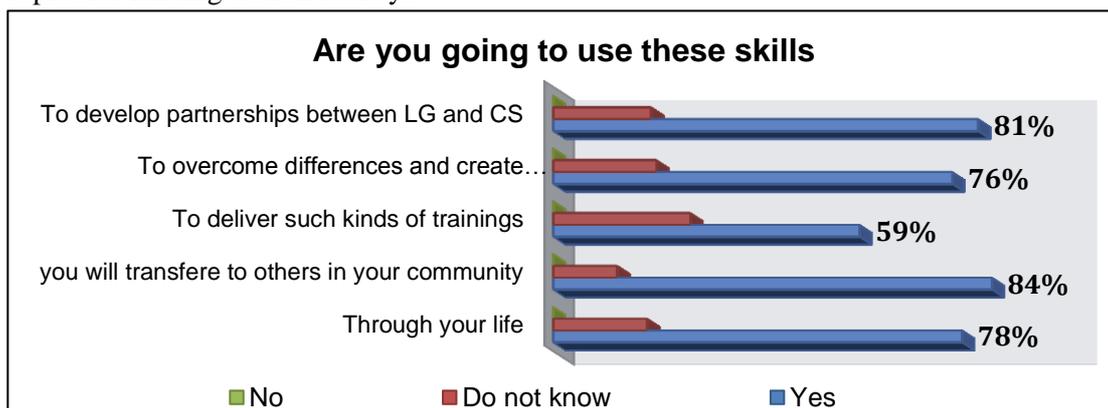
An online application was widely published through social media outlets to receive: (a) more input in understanding the issues and identifying the best model for building partnerships, and (b) applications of interest to participate in activities on this issue. Over 1,000 eligible responses were submitted from 14 provinces from CSOs and some officials. This is an extremely high response rate, indicating significant interest and motivation. The results of the assessment confirmed what the team had already discovered regarding the reasons behind lack of trust between both parties: poor communication.



Building trust between civil society and the government

BPCS launched a pilot project in two provinces, Muthanna and Qadisiya, and conducted training workshops on effective communication and interest-based negotiation with the Iraqi Center for Conflict Management and Negotiation Skills. Simultaneously, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed for discussion and agreement between civil society and local government to lay the groundwork for long-term cooperation between both parties. After minor tweaks to adapt to each province, MOUs were signed in both Muthanna and Qadisiya, and a high-profile conference was held in Qadisiya to announce and launch it. Based on this achievement, lessons learned, and success factors identified, BPCS went to work in another seven provinces: Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Dahuk, Dhi Qar, and Wasit. Key achievements are provided below.

Ten interest-based negotiations workshops were held for government and civil society representatives, including many high level officials, in Muthanna, Qadisiya, Dhi Qar, Wasit, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk, and two for Baghdad. In response to ongoing tensions between the Basra Provincial Council and Governor’s Office, and upon request from the Basra government, BPCS also provided interest-based negotiation training to Basra provincial council, governor’s office and civil society representatives. The workshops included high levels of participation among men, women and youth, who plan to continue using the skills they developed (see table below showing evaluation results). More importantly, the Basra workshop resulted in improved dialogue and follow-up action taken to implement agreements to provide funding to civil society.



Governor of Qadisiya signed the MoU publicly declaring support for civil society.

Three MoUs were signed in Muthanna, Qadisiya and Wasit by the Provincial Governor, Deputy, and Head of Provincial Council, which demonstrates high-level and binding support to the principles laid out by the [MoUs](#) around civil society and government cooperation for community interests. These MoUs are particularly significant achievements because due to the political quota system, the Council chairperson and Governor are from different parties. The MOUs therefore represent publicly

announced, bipartisan support for civil society.

A high-profile Provincial Conference was organized by the government in Qadisiya, represented by the Governor and Provincial Council Chairperson, who publicly declared their full support for civil society. Both high-level officials have held themselves and the local government accountable to move forward with developing the partnership with the civil society in Qadisiya. When signing the MOU, the governor wrote: “I believe in an active partnership with civil society” under his signature.

Two civil society forums were created in Muthanna and Dhi Qar. These forums are the first of their kind that represent CSOs, NGOs, unions and syndicates before the local and

federal government. Most significantly, they were created at the initiative of civil society itself, with government support – not at the behest of BPCS.

Two IKR roundtables were held to improve the implementation of Kurdish NGOs law and inspire closer cooperation between civil society and Kurdish authorities. In mid-2014, amidst other crises, the leadership of the Kurdish NGO Department changed and the incoming leaders had less background with civil society or understanding of the evolution of the law. By early 2015, BPCS was starting to observe some potentially concerning restrictions



Roundtables in IKR were held to solidify government best practices in supporting civil society.

on civil society, particularly in terms of increased requirements for registration and reporting. The two subsequent roundtable meetings held in [October](#) and [November](#) brought the former civil society advocates from the government together with civil society representatives and other supporters (e.g. UNOPS) to review best practices and the rationale for the existing law in order to prevent a rollback. 3H and PAO will continue to follow up on these developments following the closure of BPCS. Al Amal continues to track the federal NGO Law revisions, although the consortium is concerned that this process appears to be taking place behind closed doors and no draft has been shared by the NGO Directorate, despite many requests through different channels.

Civil Society Assemblies

The original BPCS plan called for annual Civil Society Assemblies to consolidate and communicate a collective vision of the sector. However, with the commitment to undertake elections monitoring and the early established relationships with various CSO partners in year one, organizing a national event of this scale was not feasible. Year two's event was cancelled only weeks before it was scheduled (October 18-20, 2014) due to the difficulty in obtaining air tickets, unease about security, and concerns that the timing for such an event was inappropriate given the economic and security crises the country was facing.



In year three, consortium partners reassessed the goals and feasibility of a large-scale event, and agreed that having an event to bring civil society together was still necessary. The consortium redesigned the format and implemented a series of three regional assemblies in Basra in May (organized by PAO), Baghdad in June (organized by Mercy Hands), and Erbil in September, 2015 (organized by Mercy Corps). Each event attracted hundreds of civil society, government and international participants, who participated

in panel discussions around issues including decentralization and the future of civil society in Iraq. At each, the highlight was a large-scale exhibition of CSOs and their work, which not only helped raise awareness, but served as excellent networking opportunities. A total of

1,245 people participated in these exciting events.

Advisory Boards Established

In the last year of programming, consortium partner PAO established 15 technical assistance groups for civil society committees in 15 provinces. Experts from eight to ten civil society organizations and civil activists in each province volunteered to serve on an advisory group to better link civil society with the provincial and federal government. These advisory boards will allow civil society a much needed voice in government decisions that impact them, and allow civil society to offer technical support to government where appropriate. MoUs are pending in Dahuk, Dhi Qar, Basra, Qadisiya, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah to finalize and activate these boards.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Working with governments – particularly in diverse locations – is always challenging. Ongoing political disputes and conflicts resulted in changing governors, head of CSOs committees and Provincial Council members. This led to continuous schedule changes and lost momentum. Fortunately, through persistence, seeking alternatives and having a compelling idea from which to work, progress was still achieved. However, despite growing interest, more time was necessary to finalize additional MOUs in provinces like Basra and Kirkuk. Most achievements were only possible as a result of investing in personal networks and building on the trust that BPCS has achieved. Supportive CSOs and officials were critical in ensuring success and BPCS observed that officials with civil society background were more supportive. There remains untapped potential for the government to benefit from the huge resources that civil society can offer in responding to community needs and to fill gaps that the government cannot. At minimum, more needs to be done to continue this dialogue, and positioning civil society to play an advisory and information-sharing role.

Youth continued to prove to be dynamic leaders, with the potential to become independent, neutral political leaders. BPCS is pleased to have included them in these activities, and recommend that be done in the future to develop individuals with potential. Similarly, the private sector has much potential to support civil society and partner effectively with the government. While this conversation began, more needs to be done to strengthen links and identify clear roles and responsibilities, which could (and should) be supported by policy.

IR 5: Special Projects- Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund

The Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund has been a special project within BPCS, building on over nine years of experience between ACDI/VOCA (in the north, until December 31, 2014) and Mercy Corps (in the center and south, and the north in 2015) assisting Iraqi civilians who have suffered losses as a result of coalition and Iraqi Forces military activities. Fund beneficiaries now also include victims of terrorism. Under BPCS, the Marla Fund reached 14 Iraqi governorates (all provinces with the exception of the Iraqi Kurdish Region and Anbar). Unlike previous custodians of the Fund, BPCS worked in partnership with eight CSOs – the Marla Partners – and this special project became closely integrated with other parts of the program with Marla Partners also participating in organizational development and advocacy activities, which enhanced results. These partners are:

- Al Malwiya Relief Foundation for Development (ARFD): Salah ad Din;
- Al-Murshed Center for Economic Development (AMC): Kirkuk;
- Amal Al-Watan Center for Development (AAW): Ninawa, until July 2014;
- Bahjat Al Fuaad Rehabilitation center for Torture Victims (BFRCT): Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Muthanna;
- Haraa Humanitarian Organization (HHO): Diyala;

- Human Rights Organization (HRO): Wasit and southern Baghdad;
- Iraqi Human Rights Watch (IHRW): Karbala, Najaf, Babel and Qadisiya.

The Marla Fund’s main areas of activity and achievements include:

1. **Individual projects**, which generate a sustainable income for the family of the deceased or injured through a livelihood project. Following beneficiary selection, partners worked with the beneficiary to design a project, and small business development training was provided, followed by an investment of typically \$7,000 to \$10,000. A total of **532 individual projects** were completed by BPCS.
2. **Community projects** benefitted a group of victims located in a particular community through the provision of medical, social, educational, or other community service to help conflict-affected communities recover from war and terrorism. **41 community projects** were completed by BPCS.
3. **Psychosocial assistance** activities provided psychological counseling to **281 victims**, and social reintegration activities to help survivors reconnect with their communities. Such activities included the distribution of food baskets (typically to celebrate the Islamic holy month of Ramadan) and school bags and supplies at the beginning of the school year. Additional socio-economic activities provided smaller value to support eligible victims who were not able to receive individual livelihood projects due the lack of resources. These projects benefitted **1,056 individuals**.
4. **Awareness raising and advocacy** to help war victims to understand and access their legal rights to compensation. This included working with the Iraqi government to modify Law 20/2009 concerning compensation to war victims.

Marla Activity	Beneficiaries
Individual projects	3,062
Community projects	70,904
Psychosocial assistance	1,337
Total	75,303

The remainder of this section examines the projects’ results in more detail, and outlines key innovations adaptations that the Marla Fund underwent during BPCS, resulting in many lessons learned.

Results of the Marla Fund under BPCS

BPCS attempted to visit all projects at regular intervals after project delivery to monitor success, sustainability and needs for additional assistance without creating expectations. These visits required sensitive questioning to ensure that BPCS was able to manage expectations, share information, and develop a greater understanding of the wider context. For instance, sometimes beneficiaries have to give up other work to start their business, so the overall impact may not be as great as the income level alone would indicate. In other cases, some businesses are not just selling goods, but providing services back to the community, indicating a higher impact than would show on paper. Of course, estimating the psychosocial benefits of a livelihood project is difficult to assess reliably.

Results of Marla individual livelihood projects

The types of individual projects supported varied considerably, given that the Marla Fund always attempted to support projects that responded to the beneficiary’s existing skills and interests. Many beneficiaries, however, did not have previous experience to build on, and they typically chose to establish a minimarket, which constituted 36% of the projects supported. Overall, these projects did quite well, depending on their location and the skill and commitment of the beneficiary. Another popular option was livestock, which made up 26% of

the projects. These projects tended to be less lucrative, and were typically recommended when there were no other options (e.g. the beneficiary lived in a rural area away from a market, or there were no other culturally appropriate alternatives). While these projects tended not to generate much in the way of a sustainable income, they did build household assets and served as a form of security. Other projects included electrical appliance shops (7%), furniture and home-ware shops (6%), mobile phone shops (5%), sewing businesses (3%), and the remaining 17% included a variety of projects including oil changing, photo studios, blacksmiths, and flour milling, among others.

BPCS conducted a final visit to 364 projects out of the total 527 implemented. Some areas were no longer accessible nor some beneficiaries reachable by phone, particularly in ISIS-controlled territories. BPCS was able to confirm that projects in ISIS-controlled areas have been abandoned, and it has been difficult to track how the families are faring. BPCS therefore expects the overall success rates to be lower than those reported here, since the numbers only include projects that were reachable and responsive. Key findings from this effort are:

- 311 projects have succeeded and are continuing out of 364 visited, demonstrating an 85% success rate in areas of relative stability
- 224 projects (62%) have expanded and evolved through either secondary locations or increased goods and services
- Net average income from projects is 450,000 IQD (approximately \$375) per month

Of those projects that have not succeeded, the main reasons identified, ranked from most to least common, are:

1. Difficulties faced by the beneficiaries, including poor location of the business or a change in the market, including a lack of experience/interest in managing a business;
2. Rent increases when the landlord observed the businesses' success;
3. Difficulties related to social customs and traditions (especially regarding working women).

The site visits revealed that the families of war victims who benefitted from this program are now more able to cover their daily living expenses and other life essentials including food, clothes, medical treatment and higher education. In addition to the material benefits, the positive impact on beneficiaries' dignity and self-confidence is clear, and in some cases has resulted in a decrease in negative coping mechanisms, such as taking children (often girls) out of school. Some are also investing additional money into expanding their businesses, and others are even starting up new ones. The [methodology](#) behind the success of these projects has been documented separately.



One Marla community project included a new bridge in a conflict-affected community in Dhi Qar province.

Results of Marla community projects

BPCS implemented 41 community projects to support conflict-affected communities, benefiting over 70,000 civilian war victims and other community members, both directly and indirectly. Projects were identified by Marla partners in consultation with local leaders, and tended to fall in one of three main categories:

- Support to health centers: 50%
- Support for youth and sport (e.g. soccer fields): 20%
- Support for other projects

including rehabilitation of schools and parks: 30%

All community projects have been handed over to the relevant institutions or local authorities, who have accepted responsibility for maintaining the project. Each project owner also made a contribution to the project, whether it was land, buildings, additional equipment or staff. These commitments help contribute to the sustainability of the projects, which have all been visited now and found to be serving both victims, their families and other community members. Examples include:

- Al-Shoufa Bridge links two villages in Dhi Qar, which has improved the safety of the crossing and enabled many children to return their schools, located on the other side of the river;
- The artificial limbs project in Al-Kut gives prosthetic limbs to war victims free of charge;
- Soccer fields in Wasit and Babel brought youth together to participate in positive and healthy activities;
- The health center at Bander Bin Hathal village in Karbala has reduced the need for war victims to travel long distance to receive quality medical care.

Results of Psychosocial assistance

BFRCT in Basra is the only Marla partner to provide both health and psychological support. Hundreds of counseling sessions were provided by psychiatrists from BFRCT in Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar, and Muthanna. This service had a positive impact on the behavior and attitude of victims, and improved communication with their families, and ultimately with their communities. BFRCT staff ensured that these sessions were provided with a great respect of the victims' dignity and respect their confidentiality. Unfortunately, the demand for such support significantly outweighed the supply and BFRCT could not always provide all the follow up needed, nor reach everyone in need. As BFRCT had identified more eligible victims than it could support with individual projects, it decided to innovate and developed a new category of smaller-scale socio-economic activities. These ten micro-projects were valued up to \$1,500 per household, and included home renovations (e.g. to improve shelter quality or sanitation) and small business inputs.

Many partners also carried initiatives to help the victims reconnect with their communities, and build linkages with others who experienced similar losses. These activities included providing food baskets during Ramadan, and school supplies to children of the neediest families. Some organized social events including meals, outings, or even trips to tourist and historic sites.



Marla partners organized a conference to further advocacy goals to support civilian war victims.

Advocacy and Networking

When BPCS began organizing Marla Partner meetings at the end of year one, it became apparent that the eight organizations could achieve even more by working together on shared goals. BPCS therefore provided introductory, foundational and strategic policy advocacy training to the CSOs. This included working with the Marla partners to develop an advocacy strategy to improve the

law on compensation for victims of war. This strategy had two main components: (1) raising awareness among war victims and the community about the rights of war victims under Law 20, and (2) advocating to the Iraqi Council of Representatives to improve the law itself. Each partner committed itself to an awareness raising campaign among the general public, war victims, and government officials.

A visible indicator of interest was the high-profile Marla Conference organized at the Council of Representatives Building – a first for an international NGO. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Committee of Civil Society Organizations and was opened by the Speaker of Parliament, indicating high-level recognition of the issue. Debates around compensation have been on the table for a long time, and remain hotly debated. As BPCS was winding down, discussions continued on whether new victim categories (e.g. IDPs, and families of those killed by popular mobilization forces) should be included under this law. This is expected to create further delays. However the real victory for the Marla Fund is the consensus reached between the Marla partners and the government's compensation committees, which have resulted in proposed revisions to improve the functioning of the fund, which will make compensation more accessible to victims.

At the end of the program, the remaining seven partner organizations established the Marla Network to continue their joint efforts to support war victims. The network's bylaws are drafted and the board members have been elected, although formal registration is yet to be complete. Its goals are simply to continue supporting war victims' rights; to find continued sources of funding to provide physical and moral assistance to victims; and to continue strengthening cooperation with local governments and the Central Committee for the Compensation of War Victims on these issues.

Innovation and Adaptation

Implementing the Marla Fund through civil society partners presented both challenges and opportunities for BPCS, and ultimately resulted in innovation and adaptation. Examples of this include the following:

- Expanding partner roles from providing direct assistance to also raising victim, community and government awareness about the rights of war victims.
- Extending cooperation with government from sharing information and facilitating access and documentation, to cooperating on a joint advocacy strategy to modify Law 20.
- Although a less successful innovation, BPCS attempted to involve the private sector in providing funds or other economic opportunities to war victims.
- In order to help the Marla partners be financially sustainable, each partner was given the opportunity to develop a sustainability project, in the form of a social enterprise or other income-generating approach. As the program learned more about the law governing this, only BFRCT's project was supported, which was to expand their polyclinic in order to increase the organization's income, with proceeds going to supporting civilian victims.
- Development – at the partners' request – of a Marla Network to continue sharing experience and capacity, and to further advocacy efforts.

Recommendations

As it is unlikely that USAID will continue to administer funds under this congressional budget earmark for war victim compensation, BPCS has the following recommendation for future fund managers:

1. The BPCS model for identifying eligible victims and designing individual livelihood projects had a high success rate that can be replicated. It rested largely on taking a personalized approach in identification, design and follow up, as well as allocating enough funds to generate sufficient income to improve quality of life.

2. BPCS sees potential in developing the business angle of livelihood projects supported. For example, a bonus \$2,000-\$3,000 after six months of success could serve not only as an incentive, but provide additional capital for further investment in the business. Another option would be to link successful beneficiaries with banks and provide more financial management training (or work with a bank interested in expanding financial literacy).
3. Working with civil society organizations as partners has not only benefitted the CSOs with new skills, experience and recognition, but gives Iraqi institutions greater ownership over the process, and beneficiaries greater access to assistance. Ongoing coaching, support and monitoring should complement this work to ensure quality and continued learning and investment in developing options for financial self-sustainability.
4. The Marla Network is a good step towards continuing community-led efforts to support victims of war and terrorism. The network will require additional resources to be effective, and will need to continue nurturing relationships with government stakeholders, and to continue its advocacy efforts to complete revisions to Law 20 – particularly in securing a more permanent role for civil society as a facilitator between victims and the government.
5. The Iraqi government has a victim compensation mechanism in place, including dedicated individuals working in it. The staff need – and have requested – more training and systems to improve efficiency and transparency. This would include installing and training on a database, file tracking system, and communication and reporting training.

C. Program adaptations: Lessons learned & overcoming challenges

Like any program implemented in complex settings, BPCS has undergone many adaptations in response to contextual shifts and internal changes to take advantage of programmatic learning. This section outlines some of these adaptations, which includes responding to challenges and lessons learned.

Contextual challenges

As expected, working in countries as unpredictable and unstable as Iraq comes with standard operational challenges, all of which BPCS experienced. These included:

- **Security and movement restrictions**, which could change at the last minute and result in either event cancellation or low attendance. To counter this, many events were organized in the IKR to increase the chance of full participation, which was a successful strategy, and also served to allow partners to take a break from their insecure environments. The potential downside of this approach, however was to skew the number of activities in the Kurdish region (and potentially increase travel costs, depending on where participants were coming from).
- **Travel and access challenges** were often experienced, including difficulty in securing flight tickets, or tickets being available in a way that made planning difficult. Traveling by road on certain routes (e.g. between Baghdad and the north) was unpredictable, and sometimes resulted in lower participation in activities. For a nation-wide program, these challenges created a heavy burden and sometimes resulted in activity cancellation. Sometimes activities could be rescheduled, held via video conferencing, or in some cases, were redesigned to have multiple local activities rather than one gathering, to reduce the amount of travel required (the tradeoff being reduced networking opportunities).
- **Banking and liquidity issues** increased during program implementation, which resulted in delays in transferring payments to partners, and subsequent frustration and the risk of reputational damage of both Mercy Corps and partners if activities were delayed. This required close follow up by Mercy Corps and pro-active communication with partners.

One way around this was to have partners open new bank accounts with more liquid banks (although this could change from one week to the next). When necessary, checks or *hawala* transfers were used in order to keep activities moving. Some subaward extensions were also granted to make up for lost time.

- **Government changes** could set back activities when supportive government officials left office, and program partners had to re-start relationships. This could either work for or against the program, depending on the openness of the new officials. Overall, however, BPCS may have been able to take advantage of willingness by newly elected officials to score some quick wins and make a favorable first impression on constituents. The **Kurdish NGO Department** was a special case, whereby a change in leadership resulted in concerns about rollbacks in civil society freedoms in the IKR. BPCS responded with two roundtables to bring together the “old” and “new” leadership, as well as other senior civil society stakeholders (including senior politician) to protect these freedoms as detailed in IR4.

Internal changes also required adaptation, including the early withdrawal of an original consortium partner. This demanded a re-shuffling of roles, the search for a new partner, and changes to the activity and performance monitoring plan. Similarly, a nearly 30% decrease in the obligated budget also required strategic decisions to be made to prioritize activities that would make the most contribution to the program’s objectives. Ultimately, the consortium decided to sacrifice scale rather than scope.

Humanitarian Pivot

The most significant contextual challenge obviously came in June 2014, when ISIS took Mosul and moved towards Baghdad and Erbil, triggering mass displacement and some evacuations by international actors. Activities were essentially paralyzed during this time of uncertainty, partly because of travel restrictions and not knowing what would happen. It also became clear that the country was undergoing a fundamental change that threatened the very viability and relevance of the program. This needed to be reconsidered and redesigned, and this process took time as both USAID and the BPCS consortium reviewed priorities and strategies. Ultimately, USAID and BPCS agreed on a directional pivot that still respected the original scope of the program and leveraged existing mechanisms in order to respond to the humanitarian crisis. While a painful process – mainly due to prolonged uncertainty, and having to give up strategies into which a lot of effort had already been invested – during a reflection meeting, the BPCS consortium agreed that they were very proud that the program was able to shift and respond. These adaptations across the program can be summarized as follows:

Civil society survey

Shortly after the crisis, BPCS conducted a survey among nearly 100 CSOs to learn how civil society was responding, what challenges they were facing in doing so, and where assistance would most be needed. This helped us to shape some messaging and remind partners of key principles, as well as gauge capacity building needs and interest.

(IR 1) Humanitarian response subgrants

With collaboration subgrants a mechanism available to BPCS, a new round was designed to respond to humanitarian needs. This was challenging given the program’s lack of humanitarian expertise to support a full response, and was designed to complement Mercy Corps’ own humanitarian response (independent of BPCS). This required imposing some limitations on partners, which created some creative responses by CSOs that involved community effectively, and filled some roles that other actors were unable to play.

(IR 1) Social cohesion collaboration subgrants

Similarly, a new round of collaboration subawards was just starting, and these were able to be shaped to focus on helping conflict-affected communities come together in response to a crisis that threatened to drive communities – and the country – apart. BPCS was pleased to provide this added value, as underlying drivers of conflict are typically neglected during emergency response.

(IR 2) Capacity building for humanitarian actors

Despite limited expertise, BPCS was able to design a capacity building program for CSOs who expressed interest in strengthening their ability to respond to the crisis. This program targeted a second tier of CSOs, who did not already have funding to act, and aimed to expand the cohort of CSOs who were able to responsibly manage humanitarian response programs.

(IR 2) Sawa Centers for Community Action

The civic participation hubs were being reviewed for relevance and effectiveness around the same time as the crisis began, which presented an opportunity to redesign them to make them more relevant to the context. Lessons learned and best practices from the different hubs were brought together, along with a plan to help the hubs link citizens to government during the crisis, and the Sawa Centers for Community Action were designed and a selection process began.

(IR 3) Advocacy for improved services for conflict-affected populations

Selection of round three advocacy subgrantees was being finalized when the crisis hit, with a focus on transparency and accountability of government. Following negotiations with USAID, this was shifted slightly to focus on improving transparency and accountability in a way that would result in improved services for conflict-affected populations. Unfortunately this meant that some selected subgrants were not supported.

(IR 4) Facilitate government-civil society coordination for humanitarian response

From mid-2014 onwards, dealing with the security, displacement and financial crises became the national and Kurdish regional governments' top priorities. BPCS realized that little progress could be expected on changing the NGO laws. The program's emphasis therefore shifted to the local and provincial level, where partners could have more access and influence. This adaptation led to significant progress in bringing civil society and government closer together, as reported in IR 4 results.

(IR 5) Dialogue with government on improving support for victims of war and terrorism

Marla Fund partners continued dialogue with the government, who were interested in expanding compensation support to IDPs (which BPCS counseled against in order not to expand Law 20/2009's scope to a point that was not sustainable). The crisis increased government interest in issues important to Marla, which helped partners influence changes to the law to improve access of victims to compensation.

Programmatic adaptations and lessons learned

BPCS also evolved as a result of internal changes and to respond to requests, learning, feedback and needs along the way. Key examples of these adaptations are:

Team capacity building

BPCS invested in ensuring that BPCS team members of all consortium partners were appropriately prepared for their roles, particularly as coaches of civil society counterparts. The investment in coaching training was a critical one, and all agreed that using a coaching approach helped build trust and a more constructive and equitable relationship with partners.

Only later in the program did the program add interest-based negotiations for all team members, which proved to be another useful crosscutting skill that should have been provided earlier. BPCS learned that while project management training was provided to all managers, it should have also been provided to all team members (which it eventually was, but only later in the program). The investment in team skills contributed to team performance, motivation, bonding and ultimately to program success. Much of it should have been provided earlier, however, in addition to refresher training, and for new team members joining.

Partner capacity building

Capacity building was a key approach of BPCS, and its reliance on coaching and mentoring proved to be a good strategy, although some individuals embraced it more quickly or fully than others. Providing a combination of approaches to capacity building (e.g. self-assessments, formal training, coaching, peer-to-peer learning and learning-by-doing through subawards) increased chances of success. Of course, not all OD partners received subawards (nor did all subgrantees participate in the OD program), and perhaps the combination of the two would have resulted in the strongest capacity strengthening outcomes.

Strengthening linkages between civil society and government

As mentioned above, the program's shift from a focus on regional/national to local/provincial government was an adaptation to the crisis. In retrospect, BPCS should have targeted this level of government from the beginning of the program, as it proved to be a more accessible entry point for civil society. Simply bringing (well-prepared) civil society and (carefully vetted and primed) provincial government together helped to overcome pre-conceived stereotypes, which have led to productive conversations around shared interests. Particularly after the crisis (which coincided with new government), there was surprising openness and responsiveness on the part of the government, who appeared receptive to civil society advocacy efforts. The interest-based negotiation training was a useful way to bring the groups together, break down barriers and build trust and the personal relationships that are so important for working together.

Defining civil society and its role in Iraq

BPCS invested in deepening the understanding of civil society both among civil society, as well as among citizens. This was achieved through training with CSOs, and mainly through fairs and hub events to reach citizens. However, as the endline survey results show, much still needs to be done to ensure that Iraqis understand what civil society is and what role it can play in Iraq. Civil society's history (including the negative aspects of corruption, inefficiency, political entanglements etc.) has proven difficult to shake. We are also seeing that some civil society activists are shunning traditional CSO models, are participating in different types of activities and avoiding government registration. BPCS invested in researching these actors more and found a dynamic and growing sector that should be both nurtured and protected. BPCS addressed only a small section of civil society in focusing on registered CSOs, and team discussions have concluded that while this may not have been a bad thing, that a more conscious decision should have been made about interaction with other aspects, such as chambers of commerce, unions and syndicates, and informal segments. Similarly, BPCS CSO interaction with religious and tribal leaders was more incidental than strategic, and could have been planned more deliberately.

Inclusion of youth

BPCS did not start targeting youth activists specifically until the second half of the program, and did not provide specific training or subgrants to youth prior to this. For better or worse, the program decided to target its assistance based on capacity and potential, rather than specifically targeting groups such as youth. Although when selection decisions were being made, diversity was considered, and subsequently, some youth organizations benefitted from

the program. All program activities made a concerted effort to include youth, particularly once BPCS started seeing more potential in youth leaders as part of informal actors, and later as leaders in demonstrations. BPCS also saw more youth involvement through CSOs' efforts to expand their volunteer base – which proved particularly effective through social media. ICHRA's advocacy initiative in Basra to reduce the age for election to office from 30 to 22 – which received significant government and community interest – also helped to motivate youth to participate in social activism. Had there been more time, BPCS would have invested more heavily in promoting youth's involvement and leadership in civil society.

Inclusion of gender issues and women

As with youth, women's organizations were not necessarily specifically targeted for support, although even without a quota in place, many were selected through competitive processes for participation in the program. Women's organizations benefited from OD, and were recipients of advocacy, collaboration, Sawa Center and even one Marla subaward. BPCS also found that many "women's organizations" are in fact run by men, suggesting that more women with strong management and leadership experience are still needed. Women's rights was also a theme for the second advocacy round, which attracted significant interest in a number of aspects. It also revealed a gap on the BPCS team in not having enough expertise in women's rights, which may have strengthened the technical assistance provided. Nor did BPCS provide gender training to its partners or subgrantees, which was unfortunate, as there remain large gaps in understanding and practice in gender mainstreaming. Outcomes harvesting revealed that the fairs were effective mechanisms to bring women to community events in socially acceptable ways, either with their families or following the initiative of other women in their community. It remained challenging to ensure women's participation in all events, although women leaders in civil society are not uncommon. With more time, BPCS would have invested in a partnership with the Iraqi Women's Network to enhance women's leadership in civil society.

Subgrant selection and management

Subgrants are a foundational activity of BPCS, and required an extensive management system. This took some trial and error to master, and eventually worked well with a larger team in place, clear roles and responsibilities, and communication channels established between the grants and compliance, program, and monitoring and evaluation teams. This collaborative approach to subgrant management, supported by robust systems and documentation flows, ensured that the management of 104 subgrants in this program was relatively smooth and compliant. The biggest challenge faced was payment delay, which could be for any number of reasons from late reports, late verification, late processing or banking issues. The [BPCS Subawards Manual](#) served the program well and is recommended for adaptation and use by other programs.

Similarly, the subawards selection committee with participants from all consortium partners also worked well as a way to bring together different perspectives, and give each consortium member a sense of ownership over the process and outcomes. The selection process itself underwent many changes with each round. Unfortunately some of the best practices identified could not be used consistently as the program began running short of time in the final rounds. Ideally, for example, the program learned that a process that includes a public information session, a concept paper, a workshop and then a proposal, was the best way to find the strongest candidates. However, some within BPCS felt that the process was too demanding and depended too heavily on good proposals – which may not always be the best way to judge an organization's implementing capacity or community reputation. BPCS would have preferred to use interviews and site visits as part of the selection process, but did not have the time or personnel to do this. BPCS also learned that despite clear evaluation criteria and

process, accusations of corruption within the system were inevitable. A [complaints email](#) was created to field such issues, but in reality was not used much for this purpose.

Consortium management

The BPCS consortium began with four international and two national partners who had never worked together before. Naturally it took time to build trust, establish relationships and harmonize organizational cultures, and there were early issues in relation to directional and collaborative styles. Even to the end, different partners had different requirements in this regard (e.g. Mercy Corps found that international partners preferred more direction, while national partners preferred more collaboration. All appreciated high levels of communication, participation and consultation). However the consortium managed to find a balance, much of which was centered around:

- (a) Technical committees in M&E, Communications, OD, Hubs/Sawa Centers and Subgrant selection, which allowed for all consortium partners to participate in decision-making on technical issues, and ensure information was shared;
- (b) Steering committee and consortium meetings, which allowed for consortium-wide participation in reflection and review, as well as planning and strategy design.

In the final stages of the program as BPCS continued to adapt to the context and the outcomes of previous activities, the two remaining national partners were invited to suggest new ideas. Both came up with innovative and practical ways to address needs (e.g. both partners either provided training or mobilized volunteers to identify beneficiaries for emergency distributions), or build on progress (e.g. PAO launched roundtables to collect civil society responses to government initiatives, and formed advisory boards to the government's CSO committees in 15 provinces, and Mercy Hands adapted the OD assessment to networks and supported BPCS partner calls to create a BPCS network). These initiatives – and the growing collaboration between PAO and Mercy Hands – demonstrates their growing initiative, creativity and capacity.

Monitoring and Evaluation

BPCS recognized that its original Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) was: (a) too quantitative, (b) not fully adapted to the modified program, and (c) too focused on the output and impact level. When some changes were being observed that were not being captured by the PMP or the large-scale population surveys, BPCS understood that another tool was needed to capture the changes being created in the community by BPCS. BPCS selected the [outcome harvesting](#) methodology and undertook an evaluation from August to November, 2015, led by the world leader on this approach. The evaluation revealed many compelling examples of changes that the program directly contributed to. This led to an interesting partnership with USAID's Complexity Aware M&E Initiative, including a presentation of BPCS at the American Evaluation Association's Annual Conference in November.

More information about some of these lessons learned can be found in a separate [Lessons Learned from BPCS Report](#).

D. Impact: Results analysis

While it is too early to understand the long-term impact of BPCS, we can already see some of its immediate outcomes. Overall, there are indications that key relationships are being transformed – particularly between civil society and the government, and civil society and community. We see evidence of greater capacity and credibility of the civil society sector, and stronger foundations to continue building on. The results of BPCS are best considered not in terms of the pre-defined intermediate results, but the more crosscutting ones that emerged as a result of programmatic integration and adaptation. While the achievement towards

indicators is strong for the program, with most targets reached or significantly exceeded, it is more useful to look at the outcomes of these results.

Output highlights

- ✓ 14 Centers for Community Action established and functioning in 13 provinces
- ✓ 45 different types of training provided
- ✓ 104 sub-grants awarded
- ✓ 150 civil society organizations received capacity strengthening support
- ✓ 25 CSOs mobilized 3,742 election and media monitors for 3 elections
- ✓ 724 community events held
- ✓ 963 government officials learned more about civil society
- ✓ 19,561 individuals received voter and civic education
- ✓ 73,300 people assisted through 561 projects to support victims of war and terrorism

1. Increased civil society influence on government

Government (particularly at the provincial level) is more open to civil society, and has demonstrated willingness to consult, learn, listen and act upon civil society demands and policy issues. This has been demonstrated by the numerous examples of improved service delivery, decisions based on civil society advice and technical assistance, and more opportunities for civil society to monitor government decisions and budgets resulting in more transparency and accountability as described in detail above under IRs 1 and 3.



Sawa Center in Basra holds a tribal accord to ensure the safety of women in tribal conflict.

2. Increased civil society influence on critical opinion leaders

While BPCS did not specifically target **tribal and religious leaders**, we have observed instances of influence on these traditional sectors, which is encouraging. Similarly, the **media** is increasingly interested in not only the stories and issues, but also the view of civil society, which also indicates greater influence. For example:

- Women who are married in traditional ceremonies without a court certificate are not able to access the benefits they are entitled to in Iraq. To ensure that all women are able to access these benefits, BPCS partners worked successfully with other civil society organizations and the Ministry of Human Rights to persuade the Shia and Sunni Endowments to cease the practice of performing marriages unless the couple has first received certification by the court. This demonstrates the ability of civil society to influence cultural and religious traditions that can be harmful to women's rights.
- In July 2015, BPCS persuaded tribal leaders in Basra to sign a commitment to no longer use women as currency to settle tribal conflicts.
- Organizations such as KEDO in Sulaymaniyah are reporting that various media outlets now contact them regularly for civil society's opinion on key political issues.

3. More trust and openness to a wider role for civil society among Iraqi citizens

According to the citizen perception and behavior surveys carried out in each year of the program, Iraqi citizens are showing more awareness of civil society, and significantly, the community is recognizing a broader role for civil society, beyond providing direct support to also influencing policy and monitoring the government. More people are reporting trust in

civil society, and that civil society makes a difference in their lives (although this success must come with the caveat that the survey also reveals continued misunderstanding about what civil society is and is not).

4. Protection of the Enabling Environment for Civil Society

With concurrent humanitarian and security crises, BPCS was concerned that policy level attention to civil society would face setbacks during the program. However, particularly at the Kurdish Regional Government level – progress was still made to protect civil society in Iraq. Furthermore, BPCS facilitated memorandums of understanding and other agreements between civil society and provincial governments to work more closely together, giving civil society better access to officials, and a mandate to cooperate in the community's best interests.

- In the second quarter of 2014, the Kurdistan Regional Government's NGO Department formed a neutral committee to evaluate over 400 proposals from the second round of proposals for the KRG civil society support fund, in line with BPCS recommendations and as a result of BPCS advocacy. Later that year, the Department signed a memo of understanding with a BPCS partner to conduct a review of its monitoring and evaluation system, which resulted in changes to the system.
- Memorandums of Understanding created between civil society and provincial governments to increase cooperation, consultation and civil society's access to government meetings and budgets. Agreements and commitments are also in place to continue working on policy issues together.

5. Stronger Civil Society Organizational Capacity, Collaboration and Sustainability

Over 150 CSOs received capacity strengthening support from BPCS, with nearly 90% of the 89 CSOs who completed the full organizational development program demonstrating improved institutional capacity. BPCS has produced some positive models of organizational growth and development, including organizations with expanded and diversified funding sources, greater volunteer pools, more robust financial management systems, and in some cases, social business enterprises that support the financial sustainability of the organization. In addition:

- According to a CSO survey completed towards the end of the program, as a result of participating in BPCS:
 - nearly half of the participating CSOs reported obtaining additional funding, and over 80% have a financial sustainability strategy;
 - 88% report improved government relations;
 - 93% report improved community relations;
 - 91% report having more influence in their communities;
 - 90% report more cooperation with other community groups;
 - 88% report improved ability to respond to urgent community needs.
- Many participating CSOs voluntarily formed a **BPCS network** to carry on this work and are now mentoring other CSOs, as well as youth activists. With over 4,000 registered organizations in Iraq, however, most still struggle with performance and sustainability.
- A *Musharaka* [website](#) will be maintained by Mercy Hands to ensure that training materials are continually available, and that civil society has access to capacity strengthening support and coaching. An [NGO Directory](#) has also been produced to help organizations find each other.
- **Sawa Centers for Community Action** will continue around the country to hold activities and provide support to civil society actors, including youth groups who benefit from the meeting space and internet access. All BPCS training materials have been provided to each Sawa Center to ensure these resources available to more CSOs.

6. More hope for Iraqi's civilian victims of war and terrorism

The Marla Fund was a very successful component of the BPCS program, with the eight partners (only seven after ISIS took Mosul, forcing one partner to disband) exceeding all program targets. The success rate of the small businesses established we believe is testament to the personalized and sensitive approaches that partners took with eligible beneficiaries – taking the time to understand their needs, interests, resources and limitations. In addition to the projects themselves, the partners raised awareness among communities about the rights of war victims enshrined in Law 20/2009, and even worked with different government offices to effect change in the revised law itself. BPCS and its partners therefore contributed to increasing compensation available to victims, and making the system easier to access.

More compelling examples of program outcomes can be found in the [BPCS Final Results document and the Outcomes Harvesting Evaluation Report](#). Overall, despite the considerable challenges facing civil society (both internal and external), and the many forces working against civic participation and government transparency, BPCS has demonstrated that positive change is possible, even in the midst of transition and crisis. This program demonstrates the ability and willingness of the Iraqi people to play an active and positive role in the changes affecting them, and their resilience in working towards a better country against all odds.

E. Annexes

[PMP table](#) - *Final, approved 18 December, 2014*

[Indicator rationale sheets](#) - *Explains differences between target vs. actual indicators*

[Index of all reports & information products produced](#) – *All BPCS reports and documents*

[List of all partners worked with and final evaluation results](#) – *CSO partners and recommendations*

[Organizational Capacity Index Comparative Analysis](#)

[Advocacy Index Comparative Analysis](#) *Rounds 1, 2, and 3*

[Outcome harvesting final report](#) – *Including annexes*

[Lessons learned report](#) – *BPCS Lessons Learned over the life of the program*