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A Non-Governmental Agricultural Policy Center for Iraq

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This essay proposes an assessment to determine feasibility of establishing an institutional arrangement that facilitates Iraqi private sector stakeholder participation in agricultural policy improvement and to define the characteristics of that arrangement.

In its most recent National Agricultural Development Plan, the Government of Iraq (GoI) proposes a market-oriented development strategy led by the private sector. Transitioning from the present stagnated and inefficient state-dominated “command and control” agricultural production, processing, marketing and consumption (PPMC) system to one that is private sector-led and market-oriented requires a substantial and sustained policy analysis, dialogue and reformulation effort. Private sector stakeholders can and should accept major responsibilities in “getting policies right” through informed advocacy, dialogue, formulation and public opinion leadership.

Currently, there is no organized structure for private sector agricultural value chain stakeholders to participate effectively in the national agricultural policy improvement process. Effective participation requires establishment of institutional arrangements outside GOI control to carry out on behalf of these stakeholders the following core activities:

1. Advocate for (and assist in generating) reliable information about actual conditions in the agricultural PPMC system, including constraints and opportunities for accelerating private sector-led market-oriented development,
2. Explore policy options to alleviate identified constraints and to encourage the private sector to take advantage of identified opportunities,
3. Stimulate public-private stakeholder dialogue based on information and policy options generated, and,
4. Inform and guide public opinion about the benefits to national welfare of a policy framework that facilitates development of a dynamic expanding and sustainable agricultural PPMC system, fully integrated into non-agricultural rural and urban economies.

This essay proposes that the Gol and donors provide financial resources to assess the feasibility of establishing and supporting start-up of a non-governmental “National Agricultural and Rural Policy (NARP) Center.” This includes assessing the potential for the Center to serve as a vehicle to inform agricultural value chain stakeholders and their representative organizations about the probable impacts of policy change options, and as the institutional interface with relevant Iraqi public sector organizations and other interest groups for carrying out informed policy change advocacy, dialogue, reformulation and implementation. Additionally, the assessment will evaluate the potential effectiveness of such a private sector policy improvement initiative: 1) as a “stand-alone” undertaking, and, 2) as a complement to a public sector agricultural policy improvement “partner” organization. Furthermore, sources of funding for establishment and start-up of the Center will be identified and assessed.

The following possible characteristics of the NARP Center and its activities will be assessed:

1. Options for and recommended preferred institutional arrangements, e.g., establish within an Iraqi university, create an independent non-governmental organization (NGO), or other option. Additionally, the assessment will identify and evaluate private sector agriculture-related organizations, agricultural value chain representative interest groups and/or individual agribusinesses that may be immediate or future sponsors of the NARP Center. This would include both Iraqi and foreign private sector organizations authorized to operate in Iraq and that represent a broad spectrum of agricultural value chain interests.
2. Representatives of sponsoring organizations and interest groups could serve as an advisory council to the NARP Center, evolving into an Advisory and Oversight Board of Sponsors. Additional organizations could become sponsoring members over time. This Board of Sponsors would advise technical staff in setting the agenda for the work of the Center. The Center would conduct rapid appraisals and applied analyses to examine benefits and costs (and “winners and losers”) for various policy issues that are placed on the agenda.
3. Armed with objective appraisals and analyses, the Center would interface with public sector policy-makers as a major participant in the policy

formulation and improvement process, as well as with public opinion leaders (both Gol and private sector) to inform them of the opportunities and means for agriculture to contribute to national welfare. These interfaces may be realized through conferences, seminars and workshops, as well as through direct dialogue with appropriate Ministry representatives, committee members of the Iraqi Parliament, officials of other Gol agencies, and a wide array of private sector organization representatives and groups.

4. The Center will operate with a small technical staff charged with developing the scopes of appraisals and studies to be contracted out to university faculty members and graduate students, and/or to private consultants or specialized firms, as appropriate. The objective is to find and contract the best Iraqi talent for the particular topic being examined. In some cases, surveys and analytical work may be undertaken directly by NARP Center technical staff. In all cases, NARP Center staff will exercise administrative oversight and technical quality control over all appraisal and analytical efforts. In addition, Center staff will take the lead in realizing interface with appropriate public sector entities.
5. NARP Center staff will organize and provide trained moderators for national and sub-national conferences, workshops and seminars, participate in national and international forums, and publish results of the appraisals and analytical studies conducted by or under the auspices of the Center. The NARP Center Director and staff will serve as a Secretariat for the Board of Sponsors. Members of this Board will serve without remuneration, but may be reimbursed for expenses.

The assessment will evaluate options and make recommendations for initial and on-going funding for the NARP Center. The Gol and one or more donors may provide initial capitalization funds and start-up operations funding through budget-support grants. It is important that the Center not be overly dependent on Gol funding so as not to compromise its independence from the government.

In addition, the assessment would explore the willingness of donors to fund senior international specialists for the medium term to provide professional guidance and technical assistance in setting the work agenda. These

international specialists also would advise and assist in designing and carrying out policy-related appraisals and analyses, and in carrying out other related technical and “quality-control” activities of the Center.

Additionally, the assessment should propose mechanisms for assuring adequate continued financial support of the Center when donor support ends.
