

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF IRAQ'S WOMEN

The inclusion of Iraq's women is essential to the country's successful recovery. Iraqi women professionals once held prominent positions in academia and the workplace. Today, their participation lags behind in all social and economic areas. Women make up over half of Iraq's population, yet they represent only a third of the country's current university students and less than a quarter of its workforce.

Expanding Women's Leadership in Engineering and the Sciences in Iraq

As Iraq rebuilds and recovers from years of conflict and turmoil, it has faced an acute shortage of engineers and applied scientists to manage its extensive reconstruction and development needs. Recognizing the valuable contribution that Iraqi women can make is part of the answer to this challenge. The Iraqi Women's Fellowship Foundation (IWFF) launched an initiative designed to provide specialized training for Iraqi women engineers and scientists with leadership potential and a desire to play a larger role in their country's development.

Established in 2009, the **IWFF Applied Science and Engineering Faculty Program** envisions bringing a total of 40 women to the United States to spend a year in study and research at top U.S. engineering schools. As visiting scholars, these specialists in engineering and applied sciences will be able to develop collaborative and working relationships that will continue after they return home and well into the future, and eventually lead to institutional partnerships between U.S. universities



Iraqi Women's Fellowship Foundation

Samah Mustafa

Engineering professor Samah Mustafa believes that Iraq's women have an important role to play in the rebuilding of their country after years of turmoil

and conflict. In Iraq, she notes, women had once gained prominence as lawyers, doctors, and engineers, especially during wartime, when they assumed positions of responsibility while the men were away fighting. "Our women bore great responsibility in their homes and work," she asserts. "I'm very proud to speak about Iraqi women."

After a period of decline, the participation of women in Iraq's professional life is slowly rebounding. Higher graduation rates for women engineering students are one sign of change. But whether graduates possess the knowledge, capabilities, and tools they need to be active and productive are reasons for concern, cautions Mustafa,

and counterpart Iraqi universities. For the second consecutive year, AMIDEAST worked with the IWFF to recruit Iraqi women faculty in engineering and coordinate their placement in visiting faculty fellowships for the 2010–11 academic year.

Strengthening Women's Role in Government in Iraq

Since 2004, the U.S. Department of State-funded **Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative (IWDI)** has been working to restore the capacity of Iraqi women to play an active role in rebuilding their society and take part in the democratic process in Iraq. AMIDEAST supported this initiative of the Office of Global Women's Affairs by organizing and implementing a program that brought female members of Iraq's Provincial Council to Washington, DC, for training and high-level meetings with American counterparts.

A two-week visit in March 2010 offered opportunities to expand participants' understanding of key aspects of the political process, including coalition building, advocacy, media, strategic policy planning, government management, transparency, the role of local government, and outreach to civil society, grassroots organizations, and their constituencies. Representing eight provinces, including Baghdad, Basrah, Diyala, Maysan, Najaf, Salah al-Din, Tameem, and Thi-Qar, the women were selected for their influential roles in their communities and their strong and active leadership on behalf of women's issues.

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a lecturer at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil. That's why she welcomed the opportunity to travel to the United States to receive advanced training through the Iraqi Women's Fellowship Foundation (IWFF). As one of three Iraqi women specialists in engineering to become the first IWFF Fellows, she spent a year in research and study designed to expand her knowledge base and develop her leadership potential so that she will be better able to help Iraq's universities recover from damage caused by years of isolation and war.

"The IWFF Program provided me with an amazing opportunity to learn and apply my knowledge practically during my fellowship year at a top tier American university," Mustafa said of her year-long fellowship at the University of California in Berkeley. "For someone who has spent her life in a war zone, the entire experience was incredible. Now that I am back in Iraq and working again at my home university, I am applying this new knowledge to my research and teaching."

ENCOURAGING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ABILITY OF WOMEN

As women in the region increasingly look to the private sector for opportunities for advancement, many are seeking training in the tools of entrepreneurship. During 2010, AMIDEAST supported a number of programs that responded to this growing interest in entrepreneurship as a viable and rewarding career path for women.

In Egypt, AMIDEAST entered into a partnership with the Women's Entrepreneurship and Learning (WEL) Center at the American University in Cairo, part of the Goldman Sachs *10,000 Women Initiative* launched in 2008 to provide business and management training to 10,000 underserved women worldwide. With assistance from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, the WEL Center developed the **Women Entrepreneurship Leadership Program**, with the goal of enrolling 500 Arab women in the customized certificate program over a five-year period. During 2010, AMIDEAST offices in three countries helped the WEL Center identify 116 women — 97 from Egypt and the remaining 19 from Jordan and Palestine — to take the certificate program. Echoing the confidence and sense of purpose that the program has instilled in graduates of the program, Azza El Sabrouty, a participant from Egypt, noted, "*10,000 Women* gave me hope. Now I am proud of what I have done with it and I will not give up."

In Oman, nearly 60 women have benefited from AMIDEAST's partnership with the Embassy of the Netherlands that has reached out to underserved women since 2008 to empower them through a combination of basic job-skills training and career guidance. In summer 2010, 14 alumnae of the Empowering Omani Women program returned to AMIDEAST for a follow-up course that included leadership and entrepreneurship components. Taught in Arabic over a three-week period, the **Entrepreneurial Awareness Program (EAP)** encouraged them to think seriously about their own entrepreneurial potential, define their skills and interests, and translate them into marketable business concepts. The program worked with participants to advance their understanding of the essential components of successful business initiative and to think creatively about pursuing business interests within the context of their other obligations.

The young women came away empowered to think in innovative ways about self-employment and equipped with basic business skills that would enable them to better understand the challenges of successful self-employment. The program also connected them to a network where they can receive practical support and mentoring after the program's end.

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Entrepreneurial Awareness Program

Kalimat al Mashari

Kalimat al Mashari had hoped to study graphic design in college. When that didn't work out, her love of art inspired her to paint scenes of Omani culture, which she sold to friends and family. With youthful dreams of building a career as an artist, she was attracted to the Empowering Omani Women Program and the opportunity it would provide to improve her English and learn new IT and other job skills. These small steps changed her life.



Soon after Al Mashari began the course, she began to set her sights more firmly on becoming a business woman. Helped by a government agency that supports small business development, she opened a shop that offers a variety of services, including printing, faxing, photocopying, and letter typing. In 2010, she returned to AMIDEAST to take a follow-up course in entrepreneurship. Designed to encourage women to think seriously about their entrepreneurial potential, the program also taught her leadership and management skills, how to balance her personal life with her career, and how to attract clients to her business.

Oman has made significant strides since 1970, when the vast majority of its women were illiterate. Today, literacy among Omani women approaches 75 percent, and most boys and girls complete 12 years of school. Building on this success, the government is seeking to expand opportunities for women and to address the challenges they still face. For example, while an increasing number of women are joining the workforce, the labor participation rate of women, at 27 percent, lags far behind the men's rate of 86 percent.

AMIDEAST is helping Omani women in their quest to acquire the skills they need to increase their economic participation. "Before taking these courses, I didn't have any serious goals in my life. I didn't believe in myself and my capabilities," Al Mashari recalls. "They have given me the courage and self-esteem I need to run my business successfully."

Towards the end of the fiscal year, AMIDEAST/Oman began to lay the foundation for a new effort to encourage women's engagement in the public sphere. The **Women's Leadership Program**, funded with a grant from the Shell Foundation, will reach around 150 women in five regions of Oman beginning in October 2010 with week-long "Leadership Essentials" workshops uniquely designed to help leaders-to-be prepare for professional and volunteer opportunities in their communities.