

Helping Iraqis chart a brighter future

At a glance

How do you lead a fledgling democracy to accept and respect the need for public policy? Find out how we did that in Iraq.

An inclusive approach breeds better policies

Our clients in the international development industry strive to strengthen democracies, making them more resilient. When a fledgling democracy grows, these nations become great trade partners and bring more stability and security to their regions. Despite the willingness of post-authoritarian countries to promote a democratic atmosphere, many of the crucial personnel and actors do not initially have the skills or systems in place to succeed. In the Middle East, countries like Libya and Tunisia still struggle with their fledgling democratic systems.

So, how do you instill democratic principles and systems that will be sustainable? What approaches work in a post-authoritarian democracy?

An inclusive approach breeds better policies

In Iraq, we have seen a positive change in the culture toward more inclusive public policymaking. For five years we've witnessed this evolution while working on United State Agency for International Development (USAID) projects called Tatweer and Tarabot for MSI, Coffey's subsidiary in the United States.

Both of those USAID projects sought to enable a more inclusive and efficient government. Our solution was to build capacity through training and consulting, establish systems, and encourage an inclusive process for public policy development.

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Prior to 2003, Iraqi civil society was nonexistent, so government officials in 2011 were skeptical of the benefits of reaching out to Iraq's non-governmental organisations, think tanks or private sector associations. But we helped set up outreach programs so that government officials met with citizens and civil society leaders on policy topics. Once the conversation started, they understood that the civil society organisations worked closer to the specific issues and had great insights into policy solutions.

A tipping point for policy interest

The disconnect between citizens and their governments was a large part of the Arab Spring in 2011. With the Arab Spring bringing a growing sentiment of discord, Iraqi officials understood that citizens would be asking for more results

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and responsiveness from their government. These officials saw that creating and passing public policies would help all citizens and show their responsiveness to the people's needs. That realisation corresponded favorably with our Tarabot project's assistance to help set up the structures for successful public policy development.

This was a tipping point of validation and legitimisation for public policy. Before the Arab Spring, we had built the skills of Iraqi government staff and officials under the Tatweer project. These trainings were designed for long-term systemic success. During and after the Arab Spring, we helped institutionalise public policy mechanisms as a viable avenue to legitimise the leadership of the government.

This all led to Iraq's first inclusively developed public policy documents, which now number more than 25. The policies touch on a diverse range of subjects of electricity, youth unemployment, pollution, and restoration of Iraq's higher education sector, and more. The government previously never had national policies on these critical issues that help all citizens, as well as the most vulnerable populations.

With our support, Iraq's first ever policy offices were formed in the Prime Minister's Office, the office of the Presidency, and several critical ministries, such as electricity, labor and social affairs, industry and minerals, and migration and displacement.

With an eye on sustainability, our solutions fit the context and need

Our support was technically oriented, flexible, and not attached to any donor's specific policy agenda. This approach helped to establish ownership early on and in turn saw the government increasingly receptive to broader public policy discussions on the subjects at hand. We also helped build relationships between civil society, citizens, and government officials while training government staff to serve as true inclusive policymakers.

In Iraq, continued assistance and pragmatic leadership is needed for the government to be successful. With other government struggles in the Middle East, this approach can be translated and lessons can be learned to help elsewhere.

Finally, we believe in tailored solutions for our clients and the local agencies, organisations, and people. We emphasised local ownership that showed the varied approaches that we take to give the best tools and skills to local people. We help them build the systems, but they are the drivers in lasting change.

How can we help?

Contact MSI to find out more about our public policy effectiveness work.