Introduction

Capacity building in the private sector is a priority for Iraq as it was isolated from global best practices and innovations during its period of authoritarian rule and sanctions. There is a strong need to help Iraqi women re-enter the labor force and build entrepreneurial skills, especially for those in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who face additional barriers working in the private sector. The rise in women-owned businesses is an important factor in increased female labor force participation, and will allow more women to take part in the economic reconstruction of Iraq.

The Training Program

As the third training program for Iraqi women organized by the World Bank1, the Capacity Building Training Program for Iraqi Women in Business responded to a direct request made by Iraqi Governing Council members, Dr. Rajaa H. Khuzai and Ms. Songul Chapook, in December 2003 for assistance in developing international business linkages and learning about best practice policy environments for women entrepreneurs.

FIAS/MNA Workshop

A delegation of twelve Iraqi businesswomen and policy makers with an interest in women’s business issues, led by Dr. Khuzai, attended a five day capacity building training program in Vancouver, Canada from March 30 through April 4, 2004. The first part of the program was a workshop designed and coordinated by the Private Sector Development (PSD)-Gender Program of the Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS), with financial support from Middle East and North Africa (MNA) Region (March 30-31, 2004). The second was an international businesswomen’s event called Women Trading Globally: Trade Mission and Forum (April 1-3, 2004).

The two day FIAS/MNA workshop covered both the policy dimension of women’s entrepreneurship and the practical aspects of women’s business associations and their various roles. It included an introduction to investment climate and gender issues, how to maximize backward linkages for women entrepreneurs in foreign direct investment (FDI) and make practical business connections, and the role of women’s business associations in providing both coor-
Corporated input on women’s business issues to policy makers and in supporting the practical development of women’s entrepreneurship in Iraq.

Two communications skills sessions were held to introduce the Iraqi women to the concepts of networking and strategic alliances to help them maximize benefit from the Women Trading Globally event.

A number of international experts presented, including a female CEO investing in Iraq, the Executive Director of the US National Women’s Business Council (US women entrepreneurs’ voice to policy makers), a panel of investors and buyers for the North American market that use women’s business associations in developing countries as intermediaries to purchase products from grassroots women entrepreneurs, and the Director of Women’s Financial Connection of Bank of America.

In addition, a session was held on comparison of women’s business associations of various countries. Ferdous Omran, President of the Iraqi Business Women’s Association (IBWA) presented IBWA’s current program which involves mostly English language and information and communication technology (ICT) training. Rola Abu-Taha, Head of Young Career Women of the Jordan Forum for Business and Professional Women (JFBPW) presented the advocacy role of the JFBPW and the support for women’s business development, notably through the Women’s Business Incubator program, legal and business counseling, and training and capacity building. Dana Shuqom, Member of the Young Entrepreneurs Association (YEA) of Jordan, presented the YEA’s mission to create an entrepreneurial and leadership culture as the cornerstone of national economic development and to produce outstanding entrepreneurs through enhancing the skill base. YEA is linked to international networks, including the World Bank-SME exchange program, and also offers a website (www.alriyadi.net) with information in Arabic for start-up entrepreneurs.

The final session involved roundtable brainstorming to bring together key learning and devise practical ways to translate these into tangible commitments to advance capacity building for women in business in Iraq.

Women Trading Globally

The final three days of the training program were under the auspices of Women Trading Globally: Trade Mission and Forum, organized by the Global Banking Alliance for Women and Royal Bank of Canada Financial Group. The event aimed to increase trade among women entrepreneurs at all levels, and was an ideal opportunity for the Iraqi delegates to gain exposure to women’s entrepreneurship, develop contacts with potential foreign investors, and network with international participants.

Women Trading Globally included sessions on investment climate and gender dimensions of public policy, financing, all aspects of international trade, Canadian women-owned business site visits and specific business matching opportunities.

Featured speakers included Kim Campbell (Canada’s first woman Prime Minister and President of the International Women’s Federation), Sergio Marchi (Canada’s Ambassador to the UN and the WTO in Geneva), Sarmite Bulte (Chair of the Prime Minister’s Task Force of Women Entrepreneurs) and Rebecca MacDonald (CEO and founder of the $1.2 billion Energy Savings Income Fund and Top Female Canadian Entrepreneur for 2003). Amanda Ellis, Senior PSD Specialist Gender, presented on the World Bank Group’s PSD/gender program and what the International Finance Corporation can do to help women entrepreneurs.

A number of Iraqi women made valuable business connections, including in procurement, construction, medical supplies and handicrafts. In addition, the Iraqi delegation attracted considerable media attention.
attention, which included prime time Canadian national television broadcast.

Dr. Khuzai was featured as a session speaker and shared her personal story of suffering, her work for widows (through micro-credit assistance) and women NGOs as Chair of the National Women’s Council (which has 25,000 members), and her subsequent appointment to the Iraqi Governing Council. She also gave the delegates an overview of recent political battles to ensure that Resolution 137 (restricting women’s rights) was overturned and to obtain a 25% quota of women in the new elected government.

**Dimensions of Capacity Building**

The Capacity Building Training Program for Iraqi Women in Business covered the following areas:

- Introduction to importance of investment climate in maximizing the benefits from FDI, with special attention to why gender matters to policy makers;

- Showcase of the US model of National Women’s Business Council, the conduit for women entrepreneurs, to provide input on economic, investment climate and women’s business issues to policy makers;

- Focus on FDI in Iraq, the involvement of women entrepreneurs and how backward linkages might be leveraged to bring more practical benefit to Iraqi women. President/CEO of Safe Haven Enterprises, Inc., showcased her award-winning company that is doing considerable work for the US Government in Iraq;

- Best practice in delivering financial services for women in business;

- Advice from four international buyers and investors with experience taking developing country women’s products from grass roots to global, using women’s business associations as their intermediary, with a focus on communication and transactions (Dr. Khuzai has a group of 300 grassroots women producing handicrafts looking for markets);

- How to build strategic business alliances to maximize the practical business matching component of Women Trading Globally;

- Comparison of different countries’ women’s business associations, with subsequent discussion on how aspects of these might benefit the Iraqi Business Women’s Association in its consolidation phase;

- Key learning in creating and consolidating women’s business associations in a post conflict environment shared by UNIFEM Afghanistan; and

- Working groups brainstorming to consolidate the learning from the FIAS/MNA workshop and devise practical projects to benefit other Iraqi women on return.

The Iraqi delegation made a big impression on the other 150 delegates attending Women Trading Globally and a fund to help raise money for Iraqi women entrepreneurs was spontaneously created, for which Dr. Khuzai’s office is to be coordinator.

---

**“Learning from other women’s business associations helps us to generate new opportunities for our members.”**

Ferdous Omran, President, Iraqi Business Women’s Association
Outcomes

Three Iraqi projects emerged as an outcome of the FIAS/MNA workshop’s brainstorming session.

1. Engendering Investment Climate
   Dr. Khuzai will further explore connections with the US National Women’s Business Council as a potential model for Iraqi businesswomen to provide input to policymakers on investment climate issues.

2. Business Incubation for Women Start-Ups
   Iraqi Business Women’s Association will work on introducing the Jordan Forum for Business and Professional Women business incubator concept to help support disadvantaged women starting their own businesses.

3. Train the Trainers: Knowledge Dissemination
   The delegates will undertake to run a training program in Iraq to highlight the main messages of the capacity building workshop, including FDI-SME linkages, and share their new knowledge with a broad range of Iraqi women.

Written progress reports will be presented by end of June 2004 on these practical projects the Iraqi participants will implement for other women as a result of the conference program learning.

Notes

1. First Training Program
   In November 2003, the World Bank Institute (WBI) and the World Bank’s Middle East and North Africa (MNA) Region organized a two day workshop in Washington, DC for a delegation of 18 Iraqi female leaders. The purpose of the workshop was to familiarize the delegates with the World Bank and its operations, and also seek their views on how to engender the ongoing work in Iraq.

2. Second Training Program
   The Iraqi Women Leaders Workshop took place in December 2003 in Amman, Jordan and was hosted by the MNA Region, in cooperation with UNIFEM, and Harvard University’s Women Waging Peace Program. This workshop allowed some 30 male and female participants from NGOs, ministries and regional organizations, and civil society to learn and exchange ideas on issues such as: women’s economic rights; various gender-related international laws and conventions; and women’s constitutional rights.

PSD Gender Notes prepared by Aya Okajima and Madan Gera (PSD).

The PSD-Gender Initiative, managed by Amanda Ellis (telephone: +1 202-473-1028, e-mail: aellis@ifc.org), was launched in October 2003. The Initiative considers gender dimensions of public policy development through the World Bank, and practical initiatives to support women entrepreneurs through the International Finance Corporation.

If you are interested in more information about the upcoming work program, please contact Aya Okajima (telephone: +1 202-487-7836, e-mail: aokajima@worldbank.org).