PROVISION FOR POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND
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EVALUATION REPORT

UDF-IRQ-10-372 - Civil Society Monitoring of Governorate Councils in Iraq

Date: 20 August 2014

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The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

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Table of Contents

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Project data

The project entitled *Civil Society Monitoring of Governorate Councils in Iraq* was implemented over a two-year period, with a total grant of $225,000. There was an over-expenditure of $16,500, which was covered by the grantee. The project was implemented by the Um-Alyateem Foundation, along with 20 implementing agencies, all civil society organizations, drawn from six participating governorates (provinces). Of the 20, six were selected as coordinating organizations, responsible for administration and coordination of activities within their respective territories. The selected governorates were: Baghdad, Kirkuk, Babel, Najaf, Wasit and Diyala. Of these six, Wasit and Diyala were added during project implementation, as replacements for the Governorates of Basra and Karbala, which proved unwilling to cooperate with project plans and objectives, despite earlier agreements.

The project's overall objective was: *to strengthen civil society organizations' (CSOs') participation in the democracy process by establishing a CSO monitoring group in 6 Governorates.* The two outcomes specified were:

- Strengthening CSOs participation in Governorate Councils' (GCs') monitoring process; and,
- Strengthening and enhancing the accountability of GCs.

Despite much international assistance since 2003, and as has been made abundantly clear as a result of the developments of 2014, Iraq is in the very early stages of both state-building and democracy-building. The project sought to contribute to strengthening democratic practice by enhancing the role of civil society at governorate (provincial) level in monitoring of the work of Governorate Councils (GCs) in the service of greater transparency of decision-making and enhanced accountability to citizens. Efforts were also made to provide information and training to elected members of the GCs (GCMs), to encourage greater attention to accountability, along with improved standards of integrity and good governance.

(ii) Evaluation findings

Both the objectives of the project and the strategy employed were directly **relevant** to the efforts to enhance democratic practice in Iraq. The Governorate Councils are relatively new as institutions. Iraq has a highly-centralized form of governance in a country of diverse ethnic, religious and territorial groups. There is a demonstrable need for decentralization of governance and the governorates, or provinces, are likely to grow in importance. Hence, there is demonstrable value in the project's initiative to strengthen the accountability to citizens and transparency of the Governance Councils - the legislative arm of government at provincial level.

The project design was built around the establishment of a monitoring process relating to the performance of the Governorate Councils (GCs) conducted by civil society organizations. The initiative was important, not only for strengthening democratic practice at provincial level, but also in providing evidence that civil society –often viewed by government as an antagonistic force- can play a constructive role in democratic governance.

The project's strategy was well planned, with two opinion polls and two Annual Monitoring Reports utilized to integrate the activities conducted at six separate project sites. The project also devoted consistent attention to media coverage and maintaining links with central government. This ensured that the character and value of the innovations championed by the project were widely known. Drawing on the solid experience of the organization and its leadership, and its knowledge of how to organize and maintain project activities in a challenging environment, UMF, the grantee, did an impressive job of both anticipating risk and making plans to mitigate it.

Effectiveness: The project strategy was built around a sound core logical framework, with a carefully-integrated sequence of outputs directed to the achievement of project objectives. Considerable care was taken in selecting the participating CSOs (three in each governorate) and the CSO monitors (one selected from each CSO), as well as the coordinating organizations. These selection decisions were crucial, since the project's ability to achieve its objectives depended on the strong performance of CSO project partners and participants.

Training provided to those selected was highly relevant and conducted professionally. Although perhaps too intensive in character, and implemented over too short a time, the training program covered all aspects of the monitoring process and its rationale. Through taking part in both the monitoring training and regular management meetings with UMF, the coordinating organizations were mostly well-prepared for taking on their responsibilities and proved capable of carrying them out.

The project was successful in delivering its long list of outputs, as intended. It also made considerable progress in the achievement of its overall objective and its two contributory outcomes. It was able to demonstrate that cooperation between government institutions and civil society could take place, and that it was possible to build sufficient trust between the two to facilitate the monitoring and reporting process. This was no small achievement, and it should be emphasized that the ongoing support and guidance provided by UMF, particularly in establishing trust with the GCs, was an essential factor in the overall effectiveness of the project.

The place in the project of the two integrating components: the two opinion polls and the two Annual Monitoring reports, was critical in placing the project in broader context, bringing its results to the attention of a broader and influential audience, and emphasizing its relevance at the national level. The investment of project resources in the services of two groups of top-level experts to undertake the work to design and organize the opinion polls and analyze the results, and produce the Annual Monitoring Reports, was entirely justified.

The grantee, UMF, planned and managed expenditures diligently and **efficiently**, with a careful assessment of how best to make financial allocations across budget lines to meet project priorities. There was an over-expenditure of $16,500, covered by the grantee.

Institutional arrangements proved to be both cost-effective and relatively efficient. UMF retained overall control concerning project direction and provided guidelines for all activities. The project team also closely monitored activities at provincial level, providing additional support to the coordinating organizations where required. In turn, the coordinating organizations took responsibility for organizing activities at the project sites, including monitoring of, and reporting on

the GC sessions. The arrangement worked well. For the most part, the work of the CSOs was undertaken on a voluntary basis. This represented a substantial in-kind contribution to the project.

As will readily be appreciated, under current conditions in Iraq (as of July 2014), it is difficult to assess the **impact** of any democratic governance project. However, it is apparent that the project has the potential to provide a model for introducing mechanisms to enhance the public accountability of governance institutions, while also improving the credibility of civil society in the eyes of the political class. By the conclusion of the project, senior government officials had indicated an interest in working with the grantee to replicate the project elsewhere, extending the CSO monitoring process to all of Iraq's governorates.

The Annual Monitoring Reports were circulated widely and publicized in the national and regional media. They brought to the attention of government leaders at national and provincial levels, as well as the broader public, the gap between public expectations and the actual performance of the Governance Councils. In response to issues and concerns raised, in the reports, as well as in the public dialogue sessions organized in each governorate, a number of the participating GCs have taken steps to improve the transparency of decision-making by making additional, up-to-date information available on their public web-sites. Further, several of the Councils have introduced weekly meetings between the President of the Council and community representatives.

Sustainability: On completion of the project, both UMF and some of its CSO partners, for example in Najaf, have continued the CSO monitoring process on a voluntary basis. In some cases, the GCs and GCMs continue to honour the terms of the agreements negotiated at the outset of the UNDEF project. Elsewhere, for example in Baghdad, GC officials have indicated that, with the ending of the period of international (UNDEF) support, there is no longer a basis for cooperation, and, accordingly, the monitoring process has come to a conclusion.

The project was successful in proving the effectiveness of what might be a sustainable model of civil society monitoring of provincial legislatures (governorate Councils), with most of the work at local level being conducted by volunteers. However, as in the case of most initiatives of value, continuing funding will be required to facilitate a continuation of the work.

There is a clear need for continuing provision of leadership and technical advice, as well as trouble-shooting, at the centre. In addition, a key element in the project's effectiveness and impact was the attention generated by the annual monitoring reports, drawing on opinion polling, as well as the regular reports of the CSO monitoring teams. Without a mechanism to analyze, summarize, contextualize and publicize the findings of the teams at provincial level, it is unlikely that there would be either impact, or an impetus to continue. Further, it is unlikely that the project's reliance on the provision of monitoring and reporting services by CSOs on a voluntary basis would provide a sound foundation for sustainability.

(iii) Conclusions

▪ The project design was relatively complex, but it was also logical and well-adapted to local conditions. The integration of two major initiatives to complement the work conducted at the six project sites strengthened the project's effectiveness and impact. It was

important to the credibility of the project that both the opinion polls and the Annual Monitoring Reports were managed and produced by top-level national experts.

- In the context of the conditions in Iraq at the time of the project, its objectives, along with the strategy to accomplish them, were both practical and relevant to the larger goal of furthering the agenda of democratic development in the country.

- The project managed risk effectively. The two major problems confronting the grantee and its partners were: firstly, the unwillingness of two of the six participating GCs to live up to the agreements to permit monitoring to take place; and, secondly, the four-month interruption to the project caused by the April 2013 GC Elections and the political realignments which followed. The project adapted well to both challenges.

- The attention given by UMF, the grantee, to selecting the participating CSOs, as well as nominating the six coordinating organizations, along with the training provided to them, for the most part, was effective in preparing the CSO monitors for their work. However, there were limitations to the results of the training, with its short-term and intensive character straining the capacity of trainees to absorb the extensive technical information provided by the trainers. Despite this, it is apparent that the ongoing support by the project team to the coordinating organizations proved sufficient to enable them to address any gaps in the knowledge required to ensure that implementation took place as planned.

- The two Annual Monitoring Reports brought together the opinion poll findings with summaries of the CSO monitoring observation reports on the performance of the Governance Councils (GCs) in an overall analysis which demonstrated effectively the distance to be travelled if the GCs were to meet public expectations.

- One potential weakness in project design was the decision to provide CSO monitor training to only three individuals (one representative of each of the three participating CSOs) for each governorate. Although the project managed to complete its program at the governorate level adequately, such an approach narrows the base of participation of CSO activists in the process, limits the opportunity to build CSO capacity and is likely to limit the depth of commitment of the participating organizations to the monitoring process. It also increases the likelihood of a CSO team being unable to meet its commitments to regular monitoring and reporting and to meeting the required standards in both.

- The project's effectiveness at provincial (governorate) level varied considerably from one location to the next, depending mainly on the political and security circumstances in each location, as well as the level of commitment of the CSO team. In those cases where the project was less effective than hoped for, the main explanatory factors were beyond the control of the project.

▪ The project budget was planned and managed efficiently and effectively. The allocation of resources to specific areas of activity was well-judged in ensuring that the project focused its work on achieving its objectives. Institutional arrangements worked well and were cost-effective.

▪ The project made a strong and successful effort to optimize the involvement of women and members of marginalized groups in dialogue and public awareness symposia.

▪ Under current conditions, it is particularly problematic to assess the impact of this project, or of any initiative in the democratic governance sphere in Iraq. Despite this, it is fair to conclude that the project has the potential to be influential in nurturing further steps in improving the accountability of government institutions, as well as advancing the credibility of civil society organizations as key actors in the democratic process. There have already been encouraging signs of government responsiveness, both to issues raised in the Annual Monitoring Reports, and (by central government) to the idea of the replication and expansion of civil society monitoring of GCs to cover all provinces.

▪ The project benefited greatly from the voluntary contribution of participating CSOs. For the future, much more can be achieved, but not on the basis of voluntary efforts alone. Sustainability for future efforts will depend on continuing financial support to leadership at the centre to facilitate provincial- or local-level initiatives, along with the provision of a national forum for dissemination of results and lessons learned.

▪ There was value in the UN label provided by UNDEF in strengthening the ability of the grantee to convince government and GC officials that the project was a legitimate effort to bring benefits to all stakeholders in strengthening public engagement in Iraq's emerging democracy.

(iv) *Recommendations*

It is recommended that:

▪ For training in future projects, UMF considers budgeting for a more extended period of training, or a sequence of training activities, to enable trainees to better absorb new concepts and technical information and to have more opportunities for hands-on practice during the training programs;

▪ In order both to minimize risk and to broaden the base of commitment and capacity of the participating CSOs, in future projects, UMF provides training to a larger group of CSO representatives -at least two, and possibly three, from each participating CSO;

- In future projects of this type, UMF makes provision to contribute more realistically to the costs of participation of CSOs and their representatives;

- In order to enhance the level of cooperation of GCs and GCMs with the project and the local CSO monitoring team, in future projects, UMF undertakes more sustained engagement with GCs to ensure a fuller buy-in to supporting the monitoring initiative. *It is further recommended that:* UMF also explores the possibility of offering more extended training to larger numbers of GCMs.

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

(i) The project and evaluation objectives

The project entitled *Civil Society Monitoring of Governorate Councils in Iraq* was implemented over a two-year period, with a budget of $225,000, including $22,500 for UNDEF monitoring and evaluation. There was an over-expenditure of $16,500, which was covered by the grantee. The project was implemented by the Um-Alyateem Foundation (UMF), based in Baghdad.

The Foundation was founded in 2007 and registered with the government a year later. It focuses on building community awareness of the principles and practice of democracy, and works to strengthen public participation in decision-making. It has completed a number of other donor-funded initiatives, including some supported by UNDP and USAID. It is also currently implementing a second UNDEF project, *The Initiative for Civil and Political Empowerment*, UDF-IRQ-12-501, which began in January 2014 and is scheduled to be completed by December 2015. The Foundation has a full-time staff of eight, along with 20 part-timers and volunteers. It is supervised by a five-member board of directors.

Civil Society Monitoring of Governorate Councils in Iraq was supported by 20 implementing agencies, all civil society organizations, drawn from six participating governorates (provinces). Of the 20, six were selected as lead agencies, responsible for administration and coordination of activities within their respective territories. The selected governorates were: Baghdad, Kirkuk, Babel, Najaf, Wasit and Diyala. Of these six, Wasit and Diyala were added during project implementation, as replacements for the Governorates of Basra and Karbala, which proved unwilling to cooperate with project plans and objectives, despite earlier agreements. Below is a list of the 20 CSO implementing partner organizations:

1-Al-Monqith for Human Rights Organization; 2-Ibn Sina Inclusive Establishment;
3-Iraqi Center for Human Rights; 4- Iraqi Pulse for Relief & Development Foundation;
5- Al-Warka'a Organization; 6-Human Rights in Wasit Organization;
7- Inbithaq Organization for Development; 8- Iraqi Association for Environment Protection;
9- Nisaba Center for Studies & Research; 10- Bent Al-Rafedain Organization;
11- Women's Cultural & Charity Center; 12- Charity Clouds organization;
13- Mirror for Media Monitoring Center; 14-Kirkuk Institute for Human Rights Studies;

15- Kirkuk "Our Home" Forum for Human Rights; 16-Iraqi Institute for Human Rights;
17- Al-Noor Universal Foundation; 18- Lelaf Center;
19- Cultural & Humanity Iraq Tomorrow Organization; 20- Sun Independent Foundation.

Despite much international assistance since 2003, Iraq is in the early stages of both state-building and democracy-building. The project sought to strengthen democratic practice by enhancing the role of civil society at governorate (provincial) level in monitoring of the work of Governorate Councils (GCs) in the service of greater transparency of decision-making and enhanced accountability to citizens. At the same time, efforts were made to provide information and training to elected members of the GCs (GCMs), to encourage greater attention to accountability, along with improved standards of integrity and good governance.

The project's overall objective was: *to improve the accountability of government institutions in six governorates in Iraq by ensuring civil society's active participation.* The two outcomes specified were:

- Strengthening CSOs participation in Governing Councils' (GCs') monitoring process; and,
- Strengthening and enhancing the accountability of GCs.

This evaluation belongs to a larger set of evaluations of UNDEF-funded projects from Rounds 2, 3 and 4. The purpose of these evaluations is to "contribute to a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project, which will in turn help UNDEF to develop future project strategies. Evaluations are also to assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved".[1]

(ii) Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted by an international expert and a national expert. Following consultations among UNDEF, Transtec and the international consultant, it was agreed that, because of current conditions in Iraq, the evaluation would be managed remotely by the international consultant. In turn, he would direct the field research, providing written guidance notes, along with ongoing direction and informal advice, to the national consultant, who would conduct the research in Iraq. The evaluation followed this plan. Given time limitations and difficulties of domestic travel in Iraq, it was decided by the Evaluators, in consultation with Transtec and UNDEF, to focus the field research on Baghdad, which was one of the six participating governorates, as well as the base for many of the project principals, and a second governorate, Najaf.

The evaluators reviewed basic documentation on the project, as provided by the grantee, as well as on the Iraqi context. The project was well-documented, though mostly in Arabic. The national consultant was therefore expected to summarize selected materials but was unable to complete this part of the work. With the support of Transtec, two professional Arabic-English translators were engaged and provided English versions of selected project documents.

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[1] See: Operational Manual for the UNDEF-funded project evaluations, page 6

The initial phase of the evaluation took place in March and April of 2014, with field work planned to take place in the first half of April 2014. Unfortunately, the work in Iraq did not proceed as planned, despite the full cooperation of the grantee. Although some initial interviews were completed, not all proved to be satisfactory. In other cases, the unclear English of the reporting of interviews has resulted in the loss of valuable material.[2] Further, a number of those interviews and meetings which were planned did not take place. In reviewing the report, the reader is asked to bear in mind that, due to unforeseen developments and the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, the outbreak of violence in the country and in particular in the North, as well as the related deterioration of the national consultant's personal and family circumstances, it was not possible to complete the planned program of data collection through interviews and discussions.

In order to fill in some gaps in data collected, the international consultant had arranged to conduct a long Skype interview with the Head of the Um Al Yateem Foundation in July, 2014. However, the blocking of all social media in Iraq from early in the month resulted in the adoption of a contingency plan, involving an "e-mail interview", through which the UMF Director responded in writing to a set of detailed questions prepared by the international consultant. This proved to be very helpful, but, under the circumstances, more reliance than is usual has been placed on documentary data. For this reason, and because of the extraordinary work environment, the international evaluator advises that there remain some gaps, and this has limited the prospects for arriving at firm conclusions on some aspects of the evaluation of the project.

The UNDEF Rounds 2, 3 and 4 evaluations follow a standard set of evaluation questions that focus on six critical issues: the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and any value added through UNDEF funding (see Annex1). This report follows that structure, with a chapter on each evaluation issue.

More specifically, given the objectives and character of this project, among the issues to be examined by the evaluation were the following:

- The relationship between the UNDEF project and others completed and planned by the Um-Alyateem Foundation (UMF);
- The role of the implementing partner organizations, and the qualities they brought to the project;
- The extent to which direct engagement and support by the UMF project team was required at the governorate level at different stages of the project;
- The impact of the security situation on the project;
- The evaluation sought to assess how effectively the grantee and its partners managed the relationship with central government, as well as with governorate officials and the GCs;
- The project operated in a number of different regions of the country, with a different blend of ethnic and religious groups in each case, and with different political configurations reflected among the GCMs. The evaluation assessed the project's ability to operate equally well in such different environments, and its strategy for dealing with any associated difficulties which might have emerged;

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[2] Since much of the reporting was prepared in English, there was no original text in Arabic to be consulted and translated.

- The relevance of the overall design and approaches to implementation to project objectives. The evaluation gave careful attention to the links across activities and the way in which these were employed to reinforce efforts to achieve overall objectives.
- The capacity of the grantee and its partners to manage and implement the plan effectively and efficiently; the quality of management arrangements, partnerships, the handling of finances and quality of internal communications in working towards achieving project results;
- In order for the project to meet its objectives, it depended to a substantial degree on the selection of the right candidates from participating CSOs, the quality of the training methodology and of training materials used, and the self-confidence and diplomatic approach of CSO trainees in undertaking GC monitoring, as well as dialogue with GCMs; the evaluation attempted to assess the project's success in this regard;
- The effectiveness and quality of the work of the CSO monitoring groups, and the impact of monitoring on good governance;
- The relevance and quality of the two annual monitoring reports and the effectiveness of the grantee's strategy for employing them in support of project objectives;
- How the two public opinion surveys, a key component of the project, were planned and conducted, and their place in supporting project objectives, including the annual monitoring reports and the work at governorate level;
- The extent of women's participation in the project, and assessment of the roles that they played;
- Dissemination and sharing of information on the project and its results was the focus of a number of high-level project events, held in Baghdad; reaching the media and a broader public was also one of the purposes of the project website. The evaluation also assessed the value of these activities;
- The contribution of each round of activities to the accomplishment of project objectives;
- The commitment of the grantee and its partners to continue the work begun during the project; the success of the grantee in attracting the interest of other organizations and governorates in continuing the work elsewhere in the country.

(iii) Development context

It is now 12 years since the invasion of Iraq (March 2003) and the overthrow of Saddam Hussain. However, the country has yet to establish a stable government with legitimacy in all regions and among all ethnic and religious groups. The violence which characterized the aftermath of the invasion continues, while international military forces have withdrawn (the last US troops left in November 2011) and international development assistance has been much reduced.

Although Iraq has succeeded in holding what have been regarded as largely free and fair elections, as has become all too apparent, democracy in a broader sense remains elusive. The effort to undertake the extraordinarily difficult transition from an authoritarian, repressive state to a democracy, responsive to the needs and priorities of its citizens, initiated under the most unfavorable conditions, has been unsuccessful thus far. Political leaders exploit ethnic and sectarian divisions in the struggle for power and have failed to work towards an inclusive democracy and society. The current *Shia*-based government has marginalized Iraqi *Sunnis* and

closed off opportunities for dialogue and engagement.[3] Political participation in decision-making and in the political process is restricted and increasing sectarian violence has discouraged the building of a strong, engaged and independent civil society.

Further, Corruption has been widespread and offenders have little fear of prosecution or other consequences.[4] According to the US State Department, "family, tribal, and religious considerations have significantly influenced government decisions at all levels", while "bribery, money laundering, nepotism, and misappropriation of public funds are common."[5] Iraq has been described as one of the most corrupt countries in the region, as well as globally, with corruption deeply embedded in all public institutions, and was ranked 169 out of 176 countries surveyed in Transparency International's *2012 Corruption Perceptions Index.*

These factors have contributed to the ease with which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) movement was able to seize control of large parts of the Sunni-dominated regions of the country in June 2014.[6] As a background to the current humbling of the Iraqi state, it might be noted that political discontent in the country grew during 2013, as the state proved unable to cope with rising levels of violence, stimulated by the continuation of the Syrian Civil War. The UN reported that 7,818 civilians were known to have been killed in 2013, marking it the worst year for fatalities since 2008.[7] The porous Syrian/Iraqi border has allowed for a regular flow of arms and fighters into Iraq and the strengthening of ISIL and local Al Qaeda affiliate groups, while the war has provided encouragement to *Jihadis* at local level in many parts of the country. Beyond this, popular alienation from government has grown in the face of gross deficiencies in service delivery, whether in security, electricity supply, garbage collection, or basic social services.[8]

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[3] International Crisis Group (ICG), "Make or Break? Iraq's Sunnis and the State": *Middle East Report 144*, September 14, 2013; "How did it come to this?", *Economist*, 21 June, 2014.

[4] "Iraq", *Freedom in the World 2013* Washington D.C., Freedom House; "Iraq: Ten Years Later is Less Threatening but Riven by Turmoil", Editorial Board, *Washington Post*, March 22, 2013; Salah Nasrawi, "Can Iraq be Saved?" *Al Jazeera*, November 14, 2013.

[5] US State Department, "Iraq", in *Country Reports on Human Rights 2012*.p.34.

[6] ISIL is also known as ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria.

[7] International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch 125*, January 2, 2014.

[8] "A Look Behind Surging Violence in Iraq", *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2013; Toby Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change: the Rise of a New Authoritarianism", *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, 2, 2013; see also International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iraq's Jihadi Jack-in-a-box", *Middle East Report*, 20 June 2014.

Citizen concerns over these matters have been raised repeatedly by Parliamentarians, but to no avail. More fundamentally, there has been a steady erosion of the independence and professionalism of core institutions of government, including the Parliament, which has failed to exercise its oversight responsibilities. As a result, the government exercises its powers free from fear of being held accountable.[9]

Not surprisingly, issues of accountability are as relevant at local as at central government level: hence, the decision of the Um-Alyateem Foundation to focus its project at the governorate level. Although Iraq has a highly-centralized system of governance, there have been some developments in recent years, delegating increased responsibilities to the governorates (provinces). The powers of Governorate Councils are set out in the "Provincial Powers Law" (Law Number 21) of 2008. In late June 2013, a number of amendments to the Law were introduced, strengthening the role of the governorates and increasing the financial resources available to them.[10]

The Head of the elected Governorate Council (GC) and his or her deputies are the highest-ranking government officers in the province, and are responsible for drafting general budgets for the governorate and implementing central general policies, with special responsibilities for development and reconstruction. Iraq conducts elections for GCs every four years.[11]

While the importance of the governorates in Iraq's political system have increased, their capacities to meet their responsibilities have not improved. Reports produced by the Ministry of Planning indicate the low capacity of the governorates, while also revealing high levels of corruption.[12]

Women in Iraq enjoy equal rights under the constitution. However, in practice, they face significant social and economic discrimination, and rape and domestic violence remain pervasive. Despite this, women have taken a stronger role in public life in recent years, with 25 per cent of seats in the parliament reserved for them.[13] Following the 2010 Election, there were 81 women of a total of 325 members of Parliament. However, there was only one female cabinet minister (of a total of 29), and reports suggest that women parliamentarians are often marginalized in decision-making.[14]

Since 2003, civil society organizations (CSOs) have flourished in the context of international donor programs in democracy-building and the provision of social services. However, while there is wide acceptance in Iraq of the role of traditional charitable organizations, the place of civil society in public life, in contributing to and leading public debate and influencing policy-making, is poorly understood. Those in power may also regard CSOs, along with an independent mass media, as a potential threat to their authority. Hence, it has not been easy for CSOs to take an

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[9] See: *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2013; International Crisis Group (ICG), "Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government.", *Middle East Report*, September 26, 2011.
[10] See: Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance and Human Rights", *Congressional Research Service* CRS Report 7.5700, 5 February, 2014, P.5.
[11] See: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), "Iraq's Political Climate Examined before the Governorate Elections", 13 April, 2013. http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Articles/2013/Iraqs-Political-Climate-Examined-Prior-to-Governorate-Council-Elections.aspx
[12] CRS Report 2014. ,
[13] See: *Freedom in the World 2013*; ICG, "Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government."
[14] See: US State Department, Iraq, 2012.

active role in holding decision-makers to account, or in finding opportunities for dialogue with public officials and elected representatives on policies and programmes.[15]

In many countries in transition, where legislatures and other institutions to ensure accountability are weak or compromised, civil society plays a vital role in filling the gaps in accountability and transparency by monitoring government performance. However, in post-conflict societies, it is often hazardous for CSOs to take on a public role in criticizing the weak commitment of governments and political parties to democracy. In Iraq, following a civil war which resulted in the fragmentation of civil society, the low tolerance of government and the politically powerful for dissent – in a country where many political parties have their own heavily-armed militias – has led many CSOs to maintain a low profile.[16] The approach by the grantee to seek to build trust on the part of GCs and senior officials of governorates, along with an understanding on their part of the benefits for their credibility with the public to be obtained from civil society monitoring, represented a well-thought-out strategy to facilitate change in this difficult environment, while minimizing the risk to participating organizations and their team members.

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[15] For background, see: NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), "Iraq's Civil Society in Perspective", April 2011.
[16] See Toby Dodge, *State and Society in Iraq*, p.254.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

(i)   Project strategy and approach

The structure of the project is not unlike that of many others among those supported by UNDEF: an overall framework and plan is developed by the grantee; locally-based partners are trained, and then given responsibility for implementation of many of the core activities at local level, with guidance from the grantee's team. A number of additional components are added to the project. In this case, the commissioning of opinion polls concerning the state of governance in the six participating governorates and the preparation and publication of annual monitoring reports, based on the work of the CSO monitors, constituted the key additional elements.

The overall vision the grantee has as a basis for implementing its plans, and the degree of integration of these additional components into the overall plan, are critical to the project's overall effectiveness and cost efficiency, as is be the nature of the relationship established between the project and relevant government authorities. In this case, the capabilities of the local partners, as well as the level of trust built between them and UMF, on the one hand, and the participating governorates (provinces), on the other, would be at the heart of the project's formula for achieving its goals.

The project began with visits from the UMF project team to each of the six governorates for initial consultations with CSOs in each province, prior to selection of 20 organizations to take part in the project: three CSOs from each of five governorates from outside the capital, and six from Baghdad. This was followed by an introductory meeting for the selected CSOs with the project team in Baghdad. Preparations for initial training workshops and the launching of the first opinion poll were also discussed at the meeting.

Meeting of Kirkuk Governorate Council

Each CSO then selected a representative to be trained as a member of the monitoring group. There followed an initial training phase, and the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the six selected governorates.

As noted above, the six governorates selected were: Baghdad, Babil, Karbala, Kirkuk, Najaf and Basra. In the course of the project, two governorates (Basra and Karbala), which proved uncooperative in permitting CSO monitoring to take place, despite earlier agreements to do so, were replaced by two others (Wasit and Diyala). This took place very early during project implementation, prior to the training workshops. The UMF team worked quickly to identify two replacement provinces, to select CSOs from the two territories, and work with the new CSOs to nominate trainee monitors, and, subsequently, to

support the signing of MOUs with the two governorates now joining the project, as well as with the other four.[17]

The project team then provided support to monitoring activities in the six governorates and also commissioned two opinion polls to measure progress in governance practice, along with two comprehensive annual monitoring reports. The participating CSOs in each province played an important role in the opinion poll process by organizing the collection of data from samples of respondents under the guidance of an expert team recruited by the project. The project also supported a series of meetings and fora at governorate level to involve local citizens and promote the ongoing engagement and cooperation of CSOs and the GCs.

The principal activities conducted included:
- The training by professional trainers of representatives of 20 CSOs through 2 workshops, of 4 and 3 days, respectively, on (i) monitoring skills and performance evaluation; and, (ii) access to information and building relationships with members of Governance Councils (GCMs);
- Holding two rounds of public awareness symposia for representatives of local communities, organized by the CSOs in the 6 governorates, on (i) the public right to obtain effective services, and (ii) Governorate Council (GC) accountability;
- Facilitating the building of relationships of trust between CSOs and GCs, and development and signing of 6 memoranda of understanding (MOUs), one for each governorate, to provide for ongoing cooperation;
- Design and implementation of 2 public opinion polls (the first administered in 8, and the second in 6, governorates); data analysis and reporting on results;
- Holding 2 "Dialogue Symposia" between GCMs and community representatives in each of the 6 governorates, organized and implemented by the CSO teams;
- Conducting a training workshop for selected GCMs from the 6 governorates on transparency, accountability and good governance;
- Holding 2 "dialogue meetings" between GCMs and CSOs in each of the 6 governorates on the rights and needs of local communities;
- Maintaining regular CSO monitoring of GC activities and performance in the 6 governorates; and,
- Preparation, publication and dissemination of 2 annual monitoring reports on GC activities and performance.

The project gave particular attention to publicizing its work through media coverage of public meetings held in Baghdad and in the capitals of the five other participating governorates. It also disseminated reports on its work widely. Central government officials participated in project events, while experts from the Ministry of Planning played a direct role in the design of the opinion poll instruments and methodology. Considerable resources were invested in preparation and dissemination of the monitoring reports and reports on opinion poll results. These reports played a central role in the effort to stimulate broader public and elite interest in the project's work on strengthening public accountability of government.

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[17] To be more precise, following an initial visit to GC sessions by CSO representatives in each province, two formal requests were submitted to the respective GCs by UMF and its local partners. The first was a request for approval for CSO representatives to attend Council meetings on a regular basis; and, the second, a request for each GC to sign an MOU with UMF and the participating CSOs in the relevant province.

(ii) Logical framework

The chart is based on detailed information included in the project's results framework, included in the Project Document, as well as the Final Report.

Project activities	Intended outputs/outcomes	Medium-term impacts	Long-term development objective
Initial consultation meetings are held between the UMF (grantee) team and 20 CSOs in 6 GOVs;	CSO consortium established with 20 active CSOs in 6 Governorates (GOVs) and CSO Monitoring Groups in each GOV.	1. Civil society organizations' (CSOs') participation in Governorate Council (GC) monitoring is strengthened	
Trainers recruited to train the CSOs on monitoring skills; CSO representatives selected; Training curriculum & training plan developed;			
	Capacity of 20 CSO representatives is developed through training		
Implementation of a 4-day training workshop on monitoring skills & performance evaluation, followed by a 3-day workshop on access to information & building relationships with GC members (GCMs) for the same trainee group;			
Organization and holding of 2 public awareness symposia in each of the 6 GOVs, with intended participation of 70 citizens per symposium;	Awareness of local communities on GC accountability in the 6 GOVs is built by the CSOs		
Five project management meetings between UMF project team and coordinating organizations for CSOs (1 Lead CSO selected for each GOV);	Management & coordination mechanism established for CSO engagement with UMF management team		
Initial meetings held between CSO groups and GCs; formal request to attend GC meetings and to sign MOU is put forward in each GOV;			The accountability of government institutions in 6 governorates in Iraq is improved by ensuring civil society's active participation
CSO groups and GCs meet to discuss the MOU and to sign it.	Relationships of trust between CSO groups and GCs in the 6 GOVs are built and formal agreements for cooperation on monitoring are put in place		
Contract signed with supplier to design, establish, maintain and update project website for life of project;	Project website established and operates throughout life of project		
Recruitment of public opinion			

polling expert; Under supervision of contracted survey design expert, design of survey instruments and drafting of questions to be included in questionnaire; determination of sampling frame for 6 governorates	Design, organization and implementation of 2 public opinion polls focusing on GC performance by the CSO monitoring groups;	2. The Accountability of GCs is enhanced.	
Survey Implementation: distribution of questionnaires; collection of survey data; inputting of data by qualified technical personnel; data analysis by 2 professionals, and preparation of summary reports on the polling results;	The results of the two opinion polls are summarized and presented on the project website; the results are used as a key reference tool in the 2 annual monitoring reports;		
CSO groups plan and organize 2 symposia in each GOV, the 1st on GOV planning strategies, and the 2nd on GOV budgets; invitations issued to GCMs and community representatives;	Two "Dialogue Symposia" between GCMs and local communities are organized by CSOs and held in the 6 GOVs, with average participation of 70 persons;		
Trainers on transparency and integrity of government are recruited; curriculum and training plan developed; Selection of participating GCMs from the 6 GOVs; 3 participating GCMs from each GOV, with 4 from Kirkuk to reflect national diversity selected in consultation with CSO groups;			
Timing, location and logistics of workshop are arranged; Implementation of 3-day workshop in Erbil, Kirkuk	19 GCMs are trained in transparency and accountability;	.	
Selection & recruitment of a team of experts to prepare the chapters of each monitoring report; data and information collection; preparation, editing and finalization of the report text; translation, printing and publication of the 2 reports; organization and holding of report release conferences	Two annual monitoring reports (2012 & 2013) are published and disseminated		
Regular attendance by CSO groups at GC sessions; continuing observation, information collection & reporting	Continuing monitoring of GC performance by CSO monitoring groups from 01 2012 to 11 2013		

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation is based on a framework reflecting a core set of evaluation questions formulated to meet the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The questions and sub-questions are listed in Annex 1 of this document.

(i)   Relevance

Development of the practice of democracy is at a very early stage in Iraq. Whether the focus is on senior government ministers and officials, elected representatives at all levels, or civil society organizations, none have the experience or knowledge that they need to build the communications and connections between government and citizens to energize public life and support responsive decision-making.

As noted above, the strengthening of the role of the Governorate Councils is a recent development in what remains a highly centralized country. Given the strong regional, ethnic and religious divisions in Iraq, there is likely to be strong pressure to find a new balance between the centre and the regions. The place of the governorates and some form of representative democracy at this level will receive increasing attention. While the project was modest in scope, it was clearly intended as a model for enhancing cooperation between civil society groups and the members of Governorate Councils. It also provided much-needed support to the building of civil society capacities and practice in monitoring the governance process at provincial level.

The attention to building an understanding on the part of elected members of the Councils for the value of facilitating civil society monitoring was also an essential part of the overall package prepared by UMF as a basis for achieving the planned results. Further, the credibility of the grantee and its leadership with central government, along with its attention throughout to maintaining open communications with senior central government officials and the governorates, also provided reassurance to both government and civil society partners in undertaking or supporting an initiative in a politically sensitive area.

Given the circumstances prevailing in Iraqi governance at the time, the project's objectives reflected an appropriate, well-judged and practical effort to take forward in a modest way the agenda of democratic development. The project sought to demonstrate that civil society – often viewed as an antagonistic force by government – could play a responsible role in the political process, and that measures to enhance the public accountability of government could add to, rather than detract from, the credibility and legitimacy of decision-making.

The project design was well thought-out, with the opinion polls and monitoring reports utilized to integrate the activities conducted at six separate sites, and careful attention to media coverage and links with central government, to ensure that the value of the innovations introduced by the project were widely known. Initial training and other activities allowed for a bringing together of CSO representatives from the six sites, while joint training for members of the six participating governance councils also encouraged a sense of ownership for the project across the six governorates.

Drawing on the solid experience of the organization and its leadership, and its knowledge of how to organize and maintain project activities in a challenging environment, UMF did an effective job of both anticipating risk and making plans to mitigate it. Among the possible risks identified was the non-cooperation of some of the groups of Governing Council (GC) Members. As noted above, this risk was realized in the case of two governorates, and the grantee took rapid action to replace them.

One unanticipated risk was the enforced interruption of activities as a result of GC elections in 2013. The elections took place in April 2013, followed by the formation of new councils, with the turnover in membership which followed on from the elections. This resulted in a 4-month hiatus in project implementation, beginning with the initiation of campaigning and including a suspension of council activities for 2 months. However, the project proved able to adapt; it established working relations with the newly-elected councils and was able to complete its overall program as planned.

(ii) Effectiveness

The project's strategy was well-crafted, with a logical and integrated sequence of outputs related very directly to the effort to achieve its objectives. Implementation was managed in a highly professional way, with great attention to detail by the project team throughout. In designing the UNDEF-funded project, UMF was able to draw on its experience in a previous initiative on the monitoring of the performance of women parliamentarians. Like the UNDEF project, the earlier venture also involved cooperation with a number of CSOs and the commissioning of an opinion poll.

Considerable attention was given to the selection of participating CSOs by the UMF team. All eight project sites (including the capitals of the two governorates which were later replaced) were visited before the initiation of the project, and meetings were held with CSOs under consideration for inclusion in the project. Many were already well-known to UMF and some had cooperated with it in earlier initiatives. Selection criteria focused on organizational capacity and a proven track record of performance. Bearing in mind the need to build strong working relationships with the GCs, with reluctance, a decision was made by UMF not to involve any organization with a history of problematic relations with the GC. This led to the exclusion of a number of well-known and effective organizations, which were visible and active in their communities. Detailed discussions took place with all candidate CSOs, and each of those selected was required to sign a partnership agreement, setting out its commitments to the project.

In the choice of coordinating organizations, additional factors were taken into consideration, including effectiveness and efficiency in managing projects and budgets, as well as ability to take decisions and complete reports in timely fashion. Ability to work with senior officials, and to organize and facilitate public meetings and dialogue sessions, were also assessed.

The training provided for CSO monitors was planned and delivered by well-qualified experts, who were also experienced trainers, from Iraq and elsewhere in the region. Design of the curriculum and determination of the appropriate training methodology was undertaken by the trainers with detailed advice from the UMF project team. The training was regarded as thorough and practical by the CSO participants, giving them the technical knowledge and guidance required to enable them to put the monitoring program into place. This included arriving at an agreement by the end of the second training workshop on a format and the components for each monitoring activity

report to be prepared by the monitoring teams, as well as the quality and depth of the information to be provided in the monthly reports.

Najaf: 1st Public Dialogue 12 2012

There were some limitations to the success of the training. It attempted to cover a great deal of detail, much of it technical, in two, short intensive workshops. It became apparent that more time should have been given to allow the trainees to fully appreciate the requirements of the monitoring and reporting process, including the indicators of Council performance. However, clear written guidelines were provided, and, with further support from the UMF project team, over time, any deficiencies in understanding were addressed.

In addition, a series of five management meetings, which took place regularly during the project, and which involved the coordinating CSOs and sometimes the other partner CSOs, was intended to ensure that all were equipped to take the next steps in project implementation at the governorate level. The early management meetings involving the UMF team and the CSO partners focused on such matters as: the format and content of the MOUs and Letters of Agreement to be presented to the GCs; the requirements to be met by the coordinating organizations; and, the need to for them to take the lead in developing a clear action plan for each CSO monitoring team, setting out roles and responsibilities.

The CSO partner organizations, three in each governorate, were well-prepared for taking on their assigned roles and responsibilities. This was particularly true of the six coordinating organizations. This emphasis on careful preparation proved to be essential to project effectiveness, given the complexity of the project and the need to coordinate and cooperate with a long list of actors.
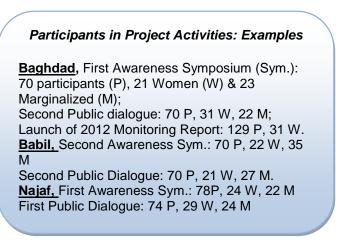
With a few minor exceptions, all items on the long list of intended outputs were delivered, despite a number of challenges encountered in the process. Beyond the initial preparations and planning, the UMF team continued to provide support to the CSO monitoring teams and coordinating organizations at governorate level, as required, throughout the project. Its role was of particular importance in supporting the building of cooperative relationships with the Governorate Councils (GCs), preparing the way for the decision by each of the participating Councils to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and an accompanying Letter of Agreement, permitting monitoring to take place on a regular basis.

For the most part, the CSO monitoring teams and coordinating organizations seem to have been highly-motivated to play their part in what all recognized to be an important and path-breaking project, contributing to the development of democracy in Iraq. Beyond the monitoring of Council sessions, the organization of public awareness and dialogue symposia went ahead as planned. In many cases, there was keen interest in participation in these events by both senior officials at the governorate level and CSOs and community representatives. In a political system

characterized by top-down decision-making, in most cases, there had been little if any prior experience of taking part in meetings where senior elected representatives made themselves available for discussion and dialogue with members of local communities and civil society groups.

UMF and its CSO partners were successful in their effort to involve a cross-section of the local community in the public awareness symposia (two held in each governorate). On average, 70 members of the local community took part in each symposium. Thirty per cent of seats were reserved for women and another 30 per cent for representatives of marginalized groups, including those with low incomes and Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs). The other attendees were local leaders. Project staff maintained a detailed record of participants in all meetings and events held by the project. Some examples are provided in the box accompanying the text, labeled Participants in Project Activities (Examples), below.

Overall, it appears that the selected CSOs and coordinating organizations lived up to the general expectations of the project team. In some cases, organizational and managerial skills were weaker than expected, and some coordinating CSOs had a tendency to monopolize the work, excluding their two partner CSOs from participation in handling important tasks. This was a matter of particular concern in Najaf. Despite these and other difficulties, problems were resolved and activities completed as planned, though with some adjustments in the schedule.

> ***Participants in Project Activities: Examples***
>
> **Baghdad,** First Awareness Symposium (Sym.): 70 participants (P), 21 Women (W) & 23 Marginalized (M);
> Second Public dialogue: 70 P, 31 W, 22 M;
> Launch of 2012 Monitoring Report: 129 P, 31 W.
> **Babil,** Second Awareness Sym.: 70 P, 22 W, 35 M
> Second Public Dialogue: 70 P, 21 W, 27 M.
> **Najaf,** First Awareness Sym.: 78P, 24 W, 22 M
> First Public Dialogue: 74 P, 29 W, 24 M

Project Objectives and Achievements: In considering the degree of success the project achieved in reaching its objectives, it may be concluded that progress was made in moving towards the overall objective of *improving the accountability of government institutions in six governorates by ensuring civil society's active participation*. Similar progress was made in contributing to the two subordinate outcomes, one focusing on *strengthening CSO participation in the GC monitoring process,* and the second concerning the *strengthening and enhancement of the accountability of the GCs.*

In all six governorates, MOUs and letters of agreement were signed, enabling the CSO monitoring groups to do their work. Beyond this, in two governorates, Diyala and Kirkuk, a mix of, on the one hand, political difficulties and an inability of the political party groups to work out a consensus on committee appointments and procedures, and, on the other, a declining security situation, resulted in infrequent meetings of the Council. Naturally, this limited the possibilities for establishing an effective monitoring process, along with reporting on the performance of the Councils. Elsewhere, the Councils were able to function on a regular basis, and, for the most part, the monitoring groups were able to operate as planned.

Although the project succeeded in establishing at least a basic level of trust in all six of the governorates where project activities took place, there remained considerable sensitivity on the part of GC members (GCMs) concerning the presence of independent monitors. This went along

with their unfamiliarity with the place of transparency of decision-making in the democratic process, along with doubts about the wisdom of taking steps to strengthen it.

At present, newly-elected GCMs receive no preparation to enable them to take on their new responsibilities. In this context, the training provided by the project on the mechanics of transparency for selected GCMs probably made a difference in improving the prospects for cooperation between the GCs and CSO monitoring groups. It may be that the project might have done better to devote more resources to training the GCMs as a means to enhance their understanding of the purpose and value of civil society monitoring and strengthening their engagement with the project.[18]

The project and the local CSO teams were obliged to accept some limitations on access in order to maintain trust and continue the monitoring process. In many cases, monitors were excluded from attending what were described as "secret" or "emergency" sessions. These took place particularly immediately after the 2013 Council elections, when issues dividing political parties, including agreement on procedures and committee memberships and chairs, remained to be settled. Other restricted sessions included those concerned with actions to be taken in light of a declining security situation in a particular governorate.

> ***Indicators Utilized by the Annual Monitoring Report Team***
>
> *Drawing on the regular reports compiled by the CSO Monitoring Groups, opinion poll data and proceedings of the public awareness and dialogue sessions held*
>
> 1. The ability of GCs to use the granted powers in the law (legislative, and exercising oversight in relation to decisions and actions of the executive);
> 2. GC ability to make decisions (the number of decisions, voting mechanism for decision-making);
> 3. The procedures for holding Council sessions (absences, quorum, the inner system procedures);
> 4. Transparency of the Council (publication of information and access to decisions by media)
> 5. Council priorities (decisions taken; relevance to, and impact on, quality of public services).
> 6. Action taken by Council to address issues identified in earlier CSO Monitoring Reports
> 7. Index of public satisfaction with Council

The overall effectiveness of monitoring, along with the value of monitoring reports, depended on three primary factors. The first was the ability of the GC to function reasonably well and to meet on a consistent basis. The second concerned the level of trust and mutual understanding established between the GCMs and the CSO monitoring team. The third concerned the level of commitment and engagement on the part of the CSOs who formed the monitoring group.

In this regard, the performance of the CSO teams in Wasit and Najaf was most impressive, with the monitoring teams able to produce thorough, informative and timely reports. By contrast, in Diyala, through no fault of the project or the CSO team, the major problems plaguing the GC, along with a deteriorating security situation, led to few sessions being held, and, consequently, a low level of activity by the monitors. In Kirkuk, the assistance of the UMF leadership was required by the CSO team in obtaining copies of the governorate's budget: a key document for monitoring, and one specifically mentioned in the MOU signed between the project and the GC.

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[18] There are some 200 GCMs in the six governorates. It was beyond the capacity of the project to train a group of this size. Instead, with the advice of the Council Heads, invitations were issued to three members of each GC, with an extra place for GCMs from Kirkuk, to reflect the ethnic/religious diversity there (Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and Christians). According to the registry of participants provided by UMF, only 14 GCMs took part in the course, instead of the 19 invited.

One limitation of the project was the focus on training only three CSO monitors (one representative of each of the three participating CSOs) for each governorate. Such a strategy increases the risk of the CSO team failing to maintain its commitment, since the group is too small to support the monitoring and reporting process on a regular basis over time. More importantly, it is likely to limit the level of interest, as well as the capacity, of the participating CSOs. A broader base of participation would do much to strengthen the prospects for entrenching the monitoring process and for enhancing the quality of the work.

The reports prepared by the six CSO teams were forwarded to UMF on a regular basis. They were later made available to a three-person expert team selected by UMF, with responsibility for preparing the two Annual Monitoring Reports for 2012 and 2013. In addition to drawing on the primary research conducted by the CSO teams, the experts drafting the Annual Reports also were able to work with the summary reports on the two annual opinion polls, where data was analyzed on a broad, cross-governorate basis, as well as by the individual governorates. The documents are of high quality, prepared by a knowledgeable, high-level academic/professional team. The findings set out in the report reflect willingness by the expert team (and UMF) "to speak truth to power". They provide a careful appraisal of the performance of the GCs, highlighting many deficiencies in procedure, while also assessing the capacity or willingness of the Councils to use the powers granted to them under law to formulate legislation and hold the executive accountable, and their ability to make decisions. In addition, the reports focused on public satisfaction (or the lack of it) with GC performance, while also appraising efforts made by the GCs at transparency and communicating with the public.

CSO Monitor Training: Small Group

Each draft report prepared by the expert group was then reviewed by a second team of senior academics, as well as by the Um Al-Yateem Foundation itself. The detailed attention to the production of the two reports, and the investment of the resources required to produce them, as well as two opinion polls, was well-justified. The reports received considerable attention, both nationally and at governorate level. They drew attention to the importance of the GCs as a component of Iraqi democracy and governance, while also emphasizing the distance still to be travelled in institutionalizing democratic practice. At the same time, their publication highlighted the contribution of the CSO monitoring teams and the cooperation between them and the GCs, representing an important step in strengthening mechanisms for accountability in the political system. The reports also underlined the value to Iraqi democracy of an independent civil society.

As noted above, the reports drew extensively on the findings of the opinion polling commissioned by the project. The two surveys were planned and managed very professionally, with the support of the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Statistical Directorates of each province (governorate).

A stratified sampling methodology was adopted to ensure representativeness by gender, age, education and urban/rural residence.

The first survey took place early in the project, with plans finalized before the decision was made to replace two governorates. Consequently, the polling went ahead in the initial six locations, and plans were also made to include as well the two additional governorates. For the first survey (2012), 12,000 questionnaire forms were distributed across eight governorates (1,500 in each governorate). In the second poll, 9,000 forms were distributed in six provinces. Rates of return were very high for both surveys, with 10,191 completed in 2012 (85 per cent) and 7,933 (88 per cent) in 2013. Though the percentage of completed questionnaires varied across provinces, the rate of return in each province was sufficient to provide a basis for comparing findings on levels of satisfaction with the performance of the GC.

The findings of the two surveys were invaluable in reminding the GCMs and members of Iraq's political class of the extent of the governance problem and democracy deficit in the country, and of the gap between citizens' expectations and current realities. Overall, in 2013, 57 per cent of respondents indicated their dissatisfaction with the performance of the Councils. In Wasit, where the Council failed to function, 83 per cent indicated their dissatisfaction. Fifty per cent expressed concern at deficiencies in service provision, while 47 per cent commented on the prevalence of corruption and bribery in daily transactions with public officials. The findings concerning service provision were striking when set alongside the findings of the CSO monitoring reports, highlighted in the Annual Reports, of the failure of the GCs to devote attention to the need to improve public services.

In Summary, the project may be regarded as having demonstrated how effective the mechanism of civil society monitoring of provincial legislatures can be in enhancing accountability and thus enhancing the practice of democracy in Iraq. There is a long way to go before such practices are institutionalized, but the project showed what could be done, and it also showed that trust between government institutions and civil society could be built and that it could be effective. In terms of the two sub-objectives, or outcomes, the project was able to make important contributions, though clearly much remains to be done –quite beyond the scope of a project of this kind - to build the capacity and commitment of the GCMs and Council staff to introduce and maintain mechanisms for accountability. Given the starting point, the achievements of the project were considerable.

(iii)   Efficiency

With a total budget from UNDEF of $202,500 for project operations (of a total budget of $225,000), a great deal was accomplished, all of it relevant to the achievement of project objectives. There was an over-expenditure of $16,500, covered by the grantee from other funds. Accordingly, the actual operational budget was $219,000.

As would be expected, given the core objectives of the project and the character of the major sets of activities to support them, meeting and training costs were relatively high, accounting for $98,258, or 45 per cent, of the overall budget. Expenses associated with the provision of services by expert consultants, principally for the public opinion polls and the Annual Monitoring Reports, added up to a further $53,540, or 24.5 per cent, of the budget, while staff salaries contributed

$24,000, or 11 per cent of operational costs.[19] The staff budget covered the salaries over a 24-month period of the Project Manager, Executive Assistant and Accountant. Given the project profile, this pattern of expenditures would seem to be entirely reasonable. In the experience of the international consultant, the expense associated with the recruitment of experts was unusually high for an UNDEF project. However, top-level professionals were recruited and the quality of the services they provided made a very direct contribution to the project's achievements, as well as the credibility of its reports and public presentations.

The additional funds provided by UMF were used in the following way: $5,500 was contributed to cover the cost of recruitment of the expert teams to prepare and review the two Annual Monitoring Reports; $6,000 was utilized to provide a monthly allocation to the 6 coordinating CSOs to cover out-of-pocket expense ($50/month x 6 x 20 months); and, $5,000 was added to the budget line for Meeting and Training Costs to fund the holding of meetings in five governorates to launch the first Annual Monitoring Report.[20] The costs associated with the replacement of two of the six governorates and selecting new CSOs to form the monitoring groups in those locations, as well as those required to support extension of the scope of the public opinion poll to include the two additional territories, were covered by funds freed up by cancellation of the third public awareness symposium to be held in each governorate.

Overall, the budget was planned and managed efficiently and effectively. The selection of activities and their relative financial weighting was realistic, given project objectives. The investment in high-quality reports, public presentations and dissemination of materials produced represented a good use of project funds in bringing innovations supported to a broader audience and increasing the prospects for replication elsewhere.

Institutional arrangements for organization of project activities worked well and proved to be cost-effective. UMF retained responsibility for setting directions and providing detailed guidelines for implementing all activities; it also monitored developments at the project sites closely, and provided additional support as needed. Responsibilities for coordination, administration and reporting at governorate level rested with the six coordinating CSOs. This division of labour seems to have been most effective. Much of the cost of the ongoing project work at governorate level was absorbed by the participating CSOs, which volunteered their time. This in-kind contribution enabled the project to accomplish far more than might have been expected, given the limitations of the budget.

(iv) Impact

Under current conditions in Iraq, with the state and its survival in its present form in question, it is particularly difficult to judge the impact of any project in the democratic governance sphere. Despite this, it may certainly be said that, the project has the potential to be influential in nurturing advances in the accountability of governance institutions, as well as in the strengthening of the role of civil society in public life.

UMF made a solid and apparently effective effort to ensure that the project and the innovations it supported were brought to the attention of the political class, as well as a broader public. The

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[19] The percentages cited here are calculated with reference to the complete operational budget, including the additional funds provided by UMF.
[20] Source: Details on the utilization of the UMF contribution based on email correspondence between international consultant and the president of UMF, 21-22 July, 2014.

major project events, both in Baghdad and in the other governorates, attracted considerable media attention.[21] For example, according to the Milestone Verification Report prepared by a representative of UN Women, the Conference held in Baghdad on I and 2, June, 2013 to launch the First Monitoring Report (2012) was attended and covered by nine TV Channels. It was attended by 140 people, including the General Secretary of the Council of Ministers, members of parliament, the Deputy Minister of Planning and other senior officials, along with academics, journalists and civil society activists. In addition to making the reports available at such events, UMF ensured that the Annual Monitoring Reports were also distributed to relevant ministries and parliamentary committees.

In terms of the results of these efforts, it may be noted that strong interest has been expressed by the government in engaging UMF as an advisor in seeking to extend the CSO monitoring process to all governorates in the country. This is certainly a positive development. However, whether such an initiative survives the current crisis remains to be seen.

Monitoring Report Experts Meet with UMF January 2012

There have been some encouraging signs of growing responsiveness to concerns raised about both disregard of formal procedures and an absence of transparency and indifference to public concerns in the operation of the six GCs which took part in the project. Wasit, Najaf, Baghdad and Diyala, have all made changes to their web-sites, enabling citizens to more readily access information on Council plans, activities and decisions. During a public dialogue seminar between community representatives and GCMs in Baghdad, concerns were raised about failure by the governorate to act on a plan formally announced several years earlier to build a new hospital. Shortly after the raising of this issue in the public forum, construction began in early 2014 with the Governor attending a ceremony to lay the foundation stone.

Baghdad GC is also undertaking a review of its rules of procedure and their application in response to concerns raised by the project in the First Monitoring Report. Other GCs have moved to improve public relations and communications by launching weekly meetings between the GC President and community representatives.

As to project beneficiaries, the project had a strong impact on CSOs, particularly the coordinating organizations, in enhancing their ability to plan for new projects building on the expertise developed through the experience they gained and capacity built through participation in the UNDEF project. While the project appears to have had an impact on the thinking of the GCs and GCMs concerning accountability to the public and transparency, it is difficult to know how far-reaching these changes may have been.[22]

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[21] The project has compiled an impressive listing of the substantial press and TV coverage devoted to it.

[22] One of the limitations of the evaluation, for reasons stated above, is that no direct contact was made with the GCs or GCMs.

(v)   Sustainability

The project succeeded in demonstrating the effectiveness of a what might prove to be a sustainable model of civil society monitoring of provincial legislatures (Governorate Councils), with most of the work at local level being conducted by volunteers. However, like most initiatives of value, continuing funding will be required to facilitate a continuation of the work. There is a clear need for continuing leadership and technical advice, as well as trouble-shooting, at the centre. Further, it is unlikely that the project's reliance on the provision of monitoring and reporting services by CSOs on a voluntary basis would provide a sound foundation for sustainability.

What really added value to the important work of the CSO monitors was the compilation of the Annual Monitoring Reports, which seem to have had impact at both national and provincial level, and which served to demonstrate the kinds of contribution such work could make in advancing the case for strengthening accountability of government institutions to citizens in Iraq's fledgling democracy. With continuing financial support, the civil society monitoring initiative, termed the "Governorates Council Observatory" by UMF, could make a real difference, assuming Iraq comes through the present crisis satisfactorily.

As matters stand, both UMF and some of the CSO teams, including that in Najaf, are continuing the work as best they can beyond the project. In some other locations, the GCs are no longer willing to cooperate, since, in their view the agreements and MOUs were no longer relevant in the absence of international involvement. As the head of the coordinating organization in Baghdad explained, "the GCMs believe that, without the support of an international organization, it will not be necessary for the CSO team to continue its role, because they do not have confidence in local organizations."

(vi)   UNDEF Added Value

As is made clear by the observations of the CSO representative in Baghdad, quoted above, there was considerable benefit to UMF and its partners in obtaining not only financial support from UNDEF, but also the availability of the UN label, to add legitimacy to the project in the eyes of the leadership of the Governance Councils.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

(i) In the context of the political conditions and the insecurity prevalent in Iraq at the time of the project, its objectives, as well as the strategy to accomplish them, were both practical and relevant to the larger goal of furthering the agenda of democratic development in the country.

(ii) The project design was relatively complex, but it was also logical and well-adapted to local conditions. The integration of two major initiatives to complement the work conducted at the six project sites was well-managed and added considerable value to the project. It was important to the credibility of the project that both the opinion polls and the Annual Monitoring Reports were managed and produced by top-level national experts.

(iii) The two Annual Monitoring Reports brought together the opinion poll findings together with summaries of the CSO monitoring observation reports on the performance of the Governance Councils (GCs) in an overall analysis which demonstrated effectively the distance to be travelled if the GCs were to meet public expectations.

(iv) The project managed risk very effectively. The two major problems confronting the grantee and its partners were: firstly, the unwillingness of two of the six participating GCs to live up to the agreements and letters signed to permit monitoring to take place, and. secondly, the four-month interruption to the project caused by the April 2013 GC Elections, the campaigning period preceding them and the internal reorganization of the Councils which followed. The project adapted well to both challenges. Two new governorates were brought into the project rapidly and absorbed into project activities without much loss of time. The project leadership and its local CSO partners also managed to build trust and understanding with the two added GCs rather quickly, as they did with the newly-elected councils in all six governorates. Hence, despite these developments, the project completed its long list of outputs and finished its work on time.

(v) The care taken by UMF, the grantee, in selection of participating CSOs, as well as in the nomination of the six coordinating organizations, along with the training provided to them, for the most part, was effective in preparing the CSO monitors for their work. However, there were limitations to the results of the training, with its short-term and intensive character straining the capacity of trainees to absorb the extensive technical information on the monitoring process. Despite this, it is apparent that the ongoing support by the project team to the coordinating organizations proved sufficient to address any gaps in the knowledge required, enabling them to ensure that implementation took place as planned.

(vi) One potential weakness in project design was the decision to provide CSO monitor training to only three individuals (one representative of each of the three participating

CSOs) for each governorate. Although the project managed to complete its program at the governorate level adequately, such an approach narrows the base of participation of CSO activists in the process, limits the opportunity to build CSO capacity and is likely to limit the depth of commitment of the participating organizations to the monitoring process. It also increases the likelihood of a CSO team being unable to meet its commitments to regular monitoring and reporting and to meeting the required standards in both.

(vii) The effectiveness of the project at provincial (governorate) level varied, depending mainly on the political and security circumstances in each location, as well as the level of commitment of the CSO team. In those cases where the project was less effective than hoped for, the main explanatory factors were beyond the control of the project.

(viii) The project attracted considerable interest from the mass media and senior government officials. As a result of the findings reported in the Annual Monitoring Reports, several of the participating GCs devoted greater efforts to transparency and providing information to the public. In a few cases, governments acted on stalled initiatives following the highlighting of the issues in the reports. Overall, the project succeeded in demonstrating the value of a civil society monitoring mechanism in strengthening the accountability of government institutions to citizens and stimulating greater attention to transparency in decision-making by government and elected representatives.

(ix) The project budget was planned and managed efficiently and effectively. The allocation of resources to specific areas of activity was well-judged in ensuring that the project focused its work on achieving its objectives. There was an over-expenditure of $16,500, which was covered by the grantee from other funds. Most of the work of participating CSOs was carried out on a voluntary basis, representing a significant in-kind contribution to the project. Institutional arrangements worked well and were cost-effective.

(x) The project made a strong and successful effort to optimize the involvement of women and members of marginalized groups in dialogue and public awareness symposia. Information collected on participants indicates high levels of attendance by both groups.

(xi) Given current conditions in Iraq, it is particularly problematic to assess the impact of this project, or of any initiative in the democratic governance sphere. Leaving this aside, it is fair to conclude that the project has the potential to be influential in nurturing further steps in improving the accountability of government institutions, as well as enhancing the visibility of civil society organizations as key actors in the democratic process. There have already been encouraging signs of government responsiveness, both to issues raised in the Annual Monitoring Reports, and (by central government) to the idea of the replication and expansion of civil society monitoring of GCs to cover all provinces.

(xii) The project had an impact on the coordinating CSOs in building both their capacities and their self-confidence to take on more challenging projects. As to the GCMs,

project impact is less clear, although it does appear to have made a difference in the thinking of the GCs on the need to devote greater attention to accountability and transparency. It is probably the case that the project would have been well-advised to budget for training of larger numbers of GCMs in order to enhance GC understanding of the monitoring initiative.

(xiii) As noted above, the project benefited greatly from the voluntary contribution of participating CSOs. For the future, much more can be achieved, but not on the basis of voluntary efforts alone. Sustainability for future efforts will depend on continuing financial support to continuing leadership and technical support at the centre to provincial- or local-level initiatives, while also providing a national forum for dissemination of results and lessons learned. It will also depend on the provision of some financial support to participating CSOs.

(xiv) There was value in the UN label provided by UNDEF in strengthening the ability of the grantee to convince government and GC officials that the project was a legitimate effort to bring benefits to all stakeholders in strengthening public engagement in Iraq's emerging democracy.

V.   RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

(i)   For training in future projects, UMF considers budgeting for a more extended period of training, or a sequence of training activities, to enable trainees to better absorb new concepts and technical information and to have more opportunities for hands-on practice during the training programs (based on Conclusion v);

(ii)   In order both to minimize risk and to broaden the base of commitment and capacity of the participating CSOs, in future projects, UMF provides training to a larger group of CSO representatives -at least two, and possibly three, from each participating CSO. (based on Conclusion vi).

(iii)   In future projects of this type, UMF makes provision to contribute more realistically to the costs of participation of CSOs and their representatives (based on Conclusion xiv).

(iv)   In order to enhance the level of cooperation of GCs and GCMs with the project and the local CSO monitoring team, in future projects, UMF undertakes more sustained engagement with GCs to ensure a fuller buy-in to supporting the monitoring initiative. ***It is further recommended that:*** UMF also explores possibilities for offering more extended training to larger numbers of GCMs (Based on Conclusion xiii).

VI.   ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value-added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc.). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Project documents:
Project Document, UDF-IRQ-10-372
Mid-term Progress Report
Final Report
Memoranda of Understanding between Project and CSO Partners and Project and Governorate Councils
Milestone Verification Mission Reports, 25 June 2012 and 01-02 June 2013
Project Documents on Training Workshops and Curricula
Reports on the 1st and 2nd opinion Poll Results on the Performance of the Governorate Councils, 2012 & 2013
Reports on Governance Council Performance Monitoring: (I), 15/1-15/12/2013, and (II), 1/1-1/11/2013

Other Documents and Reference Materials:

"A Look behind Surging Violence in Iraq", _Christian Science Monitor_, September 27, 2013

"How Did it Come to That?" _Economist_, 21 June, 2014.

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government": _Middle East Report_, 26 September, 2011.

International Crisis Group (ICG)," Iraq", _Crisis Watch 125, 2_ January, 2014.

International Crisis Group (ICG): "Iraq's Jihadi Jack-in-a-box", _Middle East Report_, 20 June 2014.

International Crisis Group (ICG): "Make or Break? Iraq's Sunnis and the State": _Middle East Report 144_, September 14, 2013.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES):"Iraq's Political Climate Examined before the Governorate Elections", 13 April, 2013. http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Articles/2013/Iraqs-Political-Climate-Examined-Prior-to-Governorate-Council-Elections.aspx

"Iraq", _Freedom in the World 2013_ Washington D.C., Freedom House.

"Iraq: Ten Years Later is Less Threatening but Riven by Turmoil", Editorial Board, _Washington Post_, March 22, 2013;

Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance and Human Rights", _Congressional Research Service_ CRS Report 7.5700, 5 February, 2014,

NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI): "Iraq's Civil Society in Perspective", April 2011.

Salah Nasrawi, "Can Iraq be Saved?" _Al Jazeera_, November 14, 2013.

Toby Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change: the Rise of a New Authoritarianism", _International Affairs_, Vol. 89, 2, 2013.
US State Department, "Iraq", in _Country Reports on Human Rights 2012_.

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

Please Note, for the reasons stated in II (ii) Evaluation Methodology, above, it is not possible to provide information on the Interview Schedule using the standard format. Field research took place in Iraq during April 2014 at a time of tension and increasing violence, during the run-up to national elections. Meetings were held with the following:

1. <u>Um-Alyateem Foundation (UMF), Baghdad (joint meeting):</u>

  - Dr. Amira Albuldawi, President; Engineer Essam al-Jubouri, Project Manager;
  - Doaa al-Janabi, Assistant Director, Project Administration;
  - Jafar Zaidi, Assistant (Technical) Project Manager;
  - Maytham al-Adly, Chief Financial Officer

2. <u>Members of Opinion Poll Team (joint meeting):</u>

  - Dr. Hassan Lateef, Poling Data Analyst and team members

3. <u>Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Representatives</u> (*N.B.: Some of these interviews were conducted by telephone or email)*

Baghdad:
  - Mahmoud Ali Hamad, Managing Director, Al Monquith for Human Rights organization (Baghdad) Coordinating Organization;
  - Sadia Salman Athab, Iraqi Center for humanitarian Activities;
  - Ehab Abdel Wahed Ali, Nabd Al Iraq Foundation for Relief and Development

Najaf
  - Mr. Jawad Al-Khalidi, Iraq Al Ghad Organization for Humanity and Culture, Najaf Coordinating Organization;
  - Mohamed Abdel-Majid al-Badran, international trainer (participant in project symposia in Najaf);
  - Akil Abdel Sayed Youssef, media representative (participant in Najaf symposia);
  - Kamar Hadrawy, community activist (participant in Najaf symposia).
  - Project Trainer: Dr. Waleed Al Adamy (Training of Governorate Council members)
  - Experts, Writers of Annual Monitoring Reports: Brief Email exchange only: Adil Mohammed Al-Lamy; Professor Haan Latif al-Zubaidy

Unfortunately, not all meetings were thorough and some produced very little of value in contributing to the evaluation report. Some planned meetings did not take place. In order to fill in at least some of the gaps, Dr. Albaldawi, President of UMF, the grantee, agreed to respond by email to a set of detailed questions posed by the international Consultant. The email exchange took place in July, 2014, during the crisis of the Iraqi state occasioned by the rise of ISIL (also known as ISIS) and its violent takeover of large parts of the country's territory (see *Development Context*, II (iii), above). Communications in the country were seriously affected, and a planned Skype call between the President of UMF and the international consultant proved to be impossible. However, the material provided through the email exchange has been of great assistance to the International Consultant in compiling the report.

ANNEX 4: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
GC	Governorate Council
GCM	Governorate Council Member
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Government Organization
UMF	Um-Alyateem Foundation
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
US	United States