



Norwegian People's Aid
Iraq

Soildaritet i praksis

**IMPROVING DEMOCRATISATION
AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAQ
2016-2019**

Midterm Evaluation Report Nov. 2018



Abstract

NPA commissioned an independent midterm evaluation to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and capacity of NPA and its partners from mid-2016 to late-October 2018. In addition to an in-depth review of available project reports and documentation, the midterm evaluation report draws data from 76 partner activity beneficiaries who participated in focus group discussions; 87 partner activity beneficiaries engaged through a supplemental online survey; and 11 key informant interviews with partner and NPA staff. The midterm evaluation applied a descriptive and comparative analysis, which outlined the strengths, challenges, and areas to improve towards the balance of the project.

DISCLAIMER

The author's views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the view of Norwegian People's Aid. It was prepared by Carfax Projects.

CARFAX PROJECTS

33 St. James's Square, London, SW1Y 4JS United Kingdom
www.carfax-projects.com
enquiries@carfax-projects.com

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ACRONYMS	iv
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	5
Background of Norwegian People's Aid In Iraq	5
Iraq Political Landscape.....	5
Human Rights and Democratisation In Iraq.....	6
Relevant Actors and Capacity	9
METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH QUESTIONS	11
Methodology	11
Evaluation Overview and Objectives	13
Limitations.....	14
Ethical Considerations	15
Evaluation Questions.....	15
KEY FINDINGS	17
Relevance to Context: Democratisation and Human Rights In Iraq	17
Effectiveness of Partners and Stakeholder's Activities.....	27
Effectiveness of Capacity Building.....	36
NPA's Organisational Capacity and Management Systems.....	39
RECOMMENDATIONS	46
Structural Recommendation For Broad Project Improvements	46
Specific Recommendation For Operational Improvement.....	46
CONCLUSION	48
ANNEXES	49

Acknowledgements

The Carfax Evaluation Team would like to convey our deepest gratitude to the Norwegian People's Aid for their generous support and assistance during the evaluation. We are also entirely grateful to the project partners for planning and coordination of the activity beneficiaries for focus group discussions and the supplementary survey. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Fadi Hanna, Ayad Sadiq, Luay Mahmood, and relevant peer reviewers in the final production of this report.

Front Cover

The Alliance of Iraqi Minorities (AIM) Network are comprised of human rights experts and activists, legal scholars, parliament members, and Iraqi minority community members working to advance minority rights across Iraq. AIM's activities include awareness campaigns, media outreach, and recent work to amend the Iraqi curriculum and provide general education and media initiatives highlighting minority challenges in Iraqi society. AIM is also preparing a shadow report on the situation of Iraqi minorities for the 2019 UPR in Geneva. AIM has been prominently featured in major news outlets and social media. Pictures featured in this report are taken during focus groups discussion on the lessons and programmatic challenges for this evaluation.

Acronyms

AIM	Alliance of Iraqi Minorities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EDP	Enhancing Democracy Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IAA	Iraqi Al-Amal Association
JNP	Justice Network for Prisoners
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
PAO	Public Aid Organisation
PFO	Peace and Freedom Organisation
PKK	The Kurdistan Workers' Party
RID	Reform Institute for Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

Executive Summary

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) has worked in Iraq since 1995, and currently assists more than 20 local organisations throughout Iraq. NPA's 'Improving Democratisation and Human Rights in Iraq 2016-2019' is a four-year project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). The project aims to support civil society organisations in promoting transparency, accountability, and constituent participation in governance at the Kurdistan Parliament and Provincial Council levels, as well as in advancing human rights in the areas of minority, labour, and prisoners' rights, consistent with the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review.

NPA commissioned an independent midterm evaluation to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and capacity of its partners from mid-2016 to late October 2018. In addition to an in-depth review of available project reports and documentation, the midterm evaluation report draws data from 76 partner activity beneficiaries who participated in focus group discussions; 87 partner activity beneficiaries engaged through a supplemental online survey; and 11 key informant interviews with partner and NPA staff. The midterm evaluation applied a descriptive and comparative analysis, which outlined the strengths, challenges, and potential areas for improvement.

This report offers the following key takeaways and recommendations according to the research questions. A fuller discussion can be found in the body of the report.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance to Context: Democratisation and Human Rights in Iraq

Overall, the project is relevant to the changing political landscape, and available data and documentation suggest that relevance is a strength of this project. While low levels of public participation and weak civil society are issues hindering progress, the project strategies and methodologies remain adaptable. It has focussed on contributing to ongoing work of human rights (e.g. UPR, NAPHR) in Iraq.

Partners and civil society organisations mobilise influence through direct lobbying of governmental organisations and engaging with elected politicians and civil servants. These efforts include informing the general public about issues of significance, engaging in activism, and building networks of activists that coordinate with one another and share best practices. Some notable examples include training of prison staff and justice system officials in human rights-compliant practices. Project activities have also enhanced the ability of civil society actors to access government decision-makers through community centres and committees.

The Effectiveness of Partners and Stakeholder's Activities

The project promotes partner NGO interests to the relevant governing bodies through lobbying and participation in the political process. NPA Partner-aligned politicians have become parliamentarians through the democratic process, possibly opening up a 'seat at the table' for future legislative drafting. However, some notable areas of challenges from the government include (1) limited political will and (2) resources in providing security and basic services. RID, PAO, and IAA and other NGOs are able to utilise key local partners to deliver specific projects on their behalf, but one key weakness cited was the constrained budgetary environment in which they operate.

Recent policy outcomes coupled with the testimony of survey respondents may be indicative of partner effectiveness. For instance, AIM reports that its activities shaped minority rights statute, (Law 5 in the Kurdistan Parliament) and its activities were instrumental in the development of a more inclusive religious studies curriculum in KRI. JNP noted that conditions have improved in the prisons and detention centres it has access to, and believes that instances of overt torture have declined, and that medical provision is more widely available.

There is a struggle to link near-term inputs to larger strategic objectives and a realistic, evidence-based Theory of Change (ToC). Further, it is not clear how some major areas of challenge were addressed during the project planning period. There are resource constraints and the transition towards partner NGO's self-sustainability following the project is not well understood and was not addressed meaningfully prior to the start of the project. It also appears that the Organisational Assessment Framework did not have its criteria well or systematically defined, nor has there been critical evaluation regarding those dimensions linked to improved short and long-term democracy outcomes.

Advocacy, awareness-raising, mobilisation and consensus-building, and engagement with government actors are some of the activities agreed with project partners. Partner organisations draw upon a wide network and create participatory bodies like councils and community committees. Some weaknesses with regard to partner NGO activities include a lack of standardised beneficiary feedback which precludes a reliable measure of participants' views and perceptions.

Effectiveness of Capacity Building

Capacity building in financial reporting systems contributed to the development of partner activities, and accountability was identified as an area of strength by multiple project partners. Respondents indicated that networks and alliances with other organisations both in Iraq and internationally were formed in the course of the project; this was highlighted throughout the project documents as a key area of success.

Some challenges with regard to capacity building were observed. Most notably, needs assessments were not undertaken at the outset of the project, nor were specific capacities targeted for improvement set. Capacity building sessions almost universally focussed on information sharing, and not on increasing the capacities or skills of beneficiary organisations to operate independently of NPA's support. Beyond the value of increasing the network and connectivity of partner organisations and staff, it is unclear what next steps would be achieved or how momentum would be sustained following the close of the programme.

NPA's Organisational Capacity and Management System

Implementation of key performance indicators was not well-articulated in the logical framework, making it difficult to measure the magnitude of change in performance. While the logical framework discloses lengthy output levels, it lacks outcomes, which has a knock-on effect towards tracking achievement of the results. It has also been reported that continuity of human resources made it difficult to properly carry out the activities, particularly with regard to knowledge management and reporting. Currently, NPA does not have formal and continuous training and learning opportunities to support their own in-country staff. Long-term mentoring and formal training such as results-based management were cited as key factors for improving organisational capacity.

Additionally, key informant interviews with staff members revealed no comprehensive plan for risk management, although NPA has continued to select partners on the basis of their reputation in the local community. Indeed, many of the partners interviewed for this evaluation work through a cohort of networks, minimising individual risks to the partner organisations. Some NPA partners have undertaken a study to identify their internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats – even as there is no systematic NPA policy on the matter.

Interactions with NPA stakeholders and review of relevant reporting suggest that there is substantial room for improvement with regards to monitoring and documentation. Documentation and storage systems from 2016 and 2017 were well-organised via partner Dropbox folders. Dropbox was found to be a very convenient and effective system, and partners expressed regrets that it is no longer being used. NPA Iraq is transitioning to using SharePoint, and concern has been expressed regarding whether or not the partners will be able to utilise this system for sharing their own files. Partners indicated that monitoring and reporting templates provided by NPA were a significant contribution, and that data collection training provided by NPA was particularly useful.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Structural Recommendations for Broad Project Improvement

Maintaining adaptive management in project objectives and methodologies. NPA should ensure there is sufficient project flexibility to enable partners and activities to adjust to the uncertain political context in Iraq. This has been and will remain important moving forward from the midterm. Projects should be strengthened by building a two-tier strategy that continues to establish and maintain relationships with government officials (both representatives and civil servants) while also cooperating and collaborating with NGOs and INGOs working in the thematic areas.

Promote participation of women and young people in partner activities. High-level key informants participating in the midterm evaluation indicated that female participation may not have always been afforded sufficient focus. NPA should also focus its efforts on increasing female participation in partner activities and engaging with women's rights groups working on similar key thematic issues in order to promote equal and equitable civic participation. Additional means to enhance the participation of young people should also be explored.

Specific Recommendations for Operational Improvement

Continuous learning opportunities for NPA staff and partners. NPA Program staff indicated that they could benefit from such assistance as results-based management and long-term mentoring and support from NPA staff. The NPA Head Office should provide systematic and continuous learning opportunities for its own internal staff. This includes formal training for results-based management and project designs. The NPA Head Office should prioritise building expert capacity for human rights, where appropriate, and provide mentoring and support to partner staff. This may entail having external experts in legal and policy reforms.

Outcome mapping and knowledge management platforms: More specific comments, statistical insight, and constructive feedback from partner activity beneficiaries could be facilitated through the use of standardised feedback forms. Closed and short-response open questions would enable both qualitative and quantitative assessments of each activity delivered, allowing for greater insight in key areas like relevance and effectiveness. NPA should also emphasise a knowledge-based management system (e.g. shared electronic policy) in order to capture activities against SMART outcome indicators.

Formal capacity-building assessments of partners. Proper monitoring and reporting templates were emphasised by most partner interviewees as a significant contribution to their organisations' system of monitoring and documentation. NPA should use standardised templates, which focus on measurable outcome indicators and are able to assess activity beneficiaries' perception of partners. This will provide continuous improvement of project delivery. Templates may use scales for ease of analysis. NPA should further refine the working definition of 'capacity' to include skills, abilities, processes, and resources of the partner and stakeholder as it relates to skills, and adaptation to the challenging Iraqi context.

Transparency of partner selection process. A few stakeholders from partner organisations indicated that they did not feel that there was always sufficient responsiveness from NPA when they provide feedback of on-the-ground realities as they implement their activities. Moreover, choosing the most politically, financially, or personally influential organisations and leaders – rather than relying on an open bidding process – puts the value of democratisation of how the project is executed in jeopardy. NPA should make clear the bidding process and policy when choosing partners. This should include clear criteria when choosing partners and in the bidding process.

CONCLUSION

Focus groups discussions and interviews with NPA staff reveal that the project is relevant and has been sufficiently flexible in response to political challenges. As indicated above, the methodologies employed during the period of performance have been adaptable, although partners have cited that more can be done with regards to youth and female participation in its programs. Further, partners have demonstrated resourcefulness in engaging the public and government officials, providing multiple modalities and platforms for advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, as well as mobilisation of a wide variety of actors.

Review of internal documents and field research discloses particular milestones in several key activities, such as (1) passing significant legislation through a participatory and consultative process; (2) the ability to engage high-level government officials; and (3) providing access to population otherwise not represented or underserved. While these achievements may have been reported, the nature and quality of these activities were not fully articulated through its outcomes or mapped out to demonstrate the causal attribution or nexus to the overall project goals and objectives.

Capacity building initiatives require careful assessments of the organisation, taking into account the timing, resources, and the continuity of human capital. There was a missed opportunity to engage in a formal organisational and needs assessment to support relevant partners and have it regularly tracked for continuous learning and adaptive project management. Further to this, NPA program staff can substantially benefit from external subject matter expertise and learning opportunities to reinforce and strengthen existing skills. This may involve bringing in external experts for mentoring, advisory, and long-term subject matter support.

Introduction

BACKGROUND OF NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID IN IRAQ

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) is the Norwegian labour movement's humanitarian organisation for solidarity. NPA's goal is to support human worth and equal rights for all, irrespective of sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual preference, or social status. The NPA vision is solidarity in practice. The vision demands commitment and action to protect life and health, build democratic societies, and strengthen people's ability to master their own lives.

NPA is politically independent but not a politically neutral organisation. NPA takes a clear position in important social debates and the goal of a more just world means that NPA often chooses partners that may be opposed to, or in conflict with, those in power. NPA believes that popular participation and organisation are important measures in securing human rights and giving people greater influence over their own lives and social development.

Norwegian People's Aid has worked in Iraq since 1995 with the country office located in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region. Among thematic activities, NPA works with local partner organisations to push for democratisation, social change and increased participation. NPA assists more than 20 local organisations throughout Iraq. Some of these organisations work in bringing human rights education into Iraqi schools, while others organise women and youth in the struggle for their own rights. NPA has also given priority to supporting organisations that work with the control and distribution of natural resources. NPA and its partner organisations play an important role as watchdogs, drawing attention to issues of power and distribution.

IRAQ POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the foundation of a new governing system thereafter, Iraq has faced difficulties with democratisation and the establishment of human rights laws and norms. More than fifteen years have passed since the invasion, and many of these have been scarred by sectarian violence. Additional challenges have emerged from the years-long battle against ISIS across a wide swathe of Western Iraq, which saw ISIS occupation and harsh governance over its parastatal entity. The military operations conducted by the Government of Iraq, its partner militias, and international supporters succeeded in recapturing most territory that ISIS had previously held, but at great cost to the people and infrastructure of those areas.

At the time of this report, multiple news outlets have reported that ISIS sleeper cells remain a security threat across many less-governed spaces, such as Kirkuk¹, largescale military operations are mostly confined to the Wadi Haroun area of Al-Anbar Governorate.² The process of reconstruction and reconciliation has begun, shifting the focus of the government from the defeat of an existential threat to improving democratic governance and meeting people's expectations, as well as complying with international humanitarian norms.

¹ 'Moata News Agency: PMU fighters dead bodies found after being kidnapped from Al-Sadonia village and killed by Islamic State,' trackingterrorism.org, 19 Fe 2018; Daraghi, Borzou, 'The new face of ISIS in Iraq calls itself the White Flags', BuzzFeed News, 1 April 2018

² AFP, 'Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi declares end of war against Islamic state in Iraq', AFP, 10 Dec 2017

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is an autonomously governed area with a contentious political history. Having gained de facto autonomy from Baghdad in the 1990s, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) held an independence referendum in September 2017, which succeeded. This referendum had a negative effect on Kurdish-Iraqi relations and resulted in a military and political realignment in Kirkuk, which had been a de facto part of KRI prior to the independence referendum. In October 2017, Iraqi Security Forces took control of Kirkuk and Kirkuk is no longer considered part of the KRI.

The complicated situation of the Kurdish people, who have populations in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, has resulted in tension and outright hostility with Turkey in recent years. As the Syrian Civil War continues, Turkey has stated that an enemy organisation called the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party) has taken refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan, and in particular in Sinjar. As such, there has been Turkish bombing in Sinjar since the spring of 2017.³

Kurdistan's regional election in 2018 resulted in a continuation in power for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, whose traditional base of power is in Erbil, over the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, whose traditional power base is in Sulaymaniyah.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION IN IRAQ

Norwegian People's Aid recognises that a robust civil society is a 'key feature to any democratic social order'.⁴ To that end, NPA partners with civil society organisations and governments to encourage sustainable development and democratisation. NPA holds the position that how power, and resources are controlled and distributed is the single most important factor in how societies develop. Therefore, social mobilisation to justice, labour, and rights, as well as public debate hold a key role in democratic development.

NPA also seeks to enhance such capacities in its support for local organisations around the world. In Iraq, in particular, NPA supports organisations working to increase governmental transparency and democratic participation. In the context of the 'Improving Democratisation and Human Rights in Iraq 2016 to 2019' project, NPA advocates for the rights of minorities and workers, as well as those involved in the judicial system and prisoners. These efforts are aligned with Iraq's reform requirements as highlighted in both the United Nation's 2014 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the 2030 Agenda.

2018 has been a pivotal year for Iraq as a new government has formed after five months of consensus-building following the May elections. The policies of the new government are uncertain. The new president, Barham Salih, and the new Prime Minister, Abdel Abdul Mahdi, have previously held senior positions in Iraqi politics, and are largely seen to be 'capable technocrats'.⁵ Whilst this likely bodes well for Iraqi political stability, Iraq's progress has proven in the past to be both fragile and reversible. In addition, Iraq continues to face enormous problems across multiple domains related to security, human rights, governance, and the democratisation agenda.

The Universal Periodic Review conducted by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) highlighted specific areas in which the Government of Iraq has fallen short of international humanitarian standards. The last review was conducted during the summer of 2014, a time of particular instability in Iraq during which the very existence of the Government of Iraq was threatened. The UPR highlighted multiple issues of grave concern in the areas of both human rights and democratisation. In 2019 in Geneva, the UNHRC will issue a new UPR. Advocacy

³ Coles, Isabel, Davison, John; 'Turkish jets strike fighters in Syria, Iraq's Sinjar', Reuters, 25 April 2017.

⁴ Staff, 'Key Areas of Work', NPA.org, updated 2010.

⁵ Hubbard, Ben; Falih, Hassan, 'Iraq's new leaders seen as technocrats, in break from sectarian politics', NY Times, 2 October 2018

organisations focussed on Iraq will specifically also issue a shadow report detailing their perceptions of Iraq's performance against humanitarian standards.

Specific areas of concern in the 2014 UPR included the treatment of prisoners and the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities in Iraq, as well as labour issues. Further, issues related to democratisation and transparency of governance were also raised.

The Judicial System and Treatment of Prisoners. Iraq has struggled to professionalise its judiciary in compliance with international standards. Some areas of concern include the broad application of the death penalty across a wide range of offences, including in cases with a low degree of transparency and a high possibility of judicial miscarriage.⁶ Judges and lawyers are frequently found to be the targets of violence⁷, as are journalists⁸, and it is required that the Government of Iraq do more to prevent these groups from falling victim to attacks by a wide range of forces. The 2014 UPR also notes that disappearances occur with relative frequency.⁹

More concretely, the UPR remarked on the widespread use of torture against detainees in areas of direct Iraqi government control, as well as areas under the control of the KRG. Between 2010 and 2012, at least 269 detainees died in custody.¹⁰ The UPR therefore urged Iraq to end the use of torture. Since the 2014 UPR, human rights reports have suggested that the use of torture remains widespread, especially among detainees suspected of involvement with ISIS, both directly and indirectly.¹¹ There have also been reports of families of ISIS suspects being similarly detained and tortured.¹²

To complicate matters, there are a large number of independent armed organisations fighting on the side of the Iraqi government against ISIS, some of whom have been linked to arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings. The command structures of these organisations are hard to establish, and the ability of international organisations to monitor these organisations and their detention facilities remains difficult. Additionally, there is a concern for gender with regards to the judicial system. In both Southern Iraq and the KRI, there have been issues ensuring access to feminine healthcare and hygiene materials within prison and detention centres. Furthermore, there are serious concerns regarding widespread sexual assault and rape of female detainees across Iraq.¹³

To improve upon all of these issues, NPA has been working with the civil society organisation Justice Network for Prisoners (JNP) to train prison staff on how to improve the human rights situation in Iraq and lobby for laws that protect the rights of prisoners and require legal representation for them.

The Protection and Promotion of Minority Rights. The Iraqi government has made an effort to improve the situation of minority groups; however, there remain significant challenges in this area. It is difficult to overstate the devastation caused to minority communities in areas that were at some point under the control of ISIS. In particular, the Yazidi community suffered greatly. ISIS killed many, displaced more, and instituted a policy of abducting and forcing young Yazidi women into sexual slavery. In 2018, Nadia Murad, a young Yazidi woman who had been abducted by ISIS, won the Nobel Peace Prize – becoming the first Iraqi to do so. This raised the

⁶ United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRQ/3, 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2014, paragraph 28.

⁷ Ibid, paragraph 32

⁸ Ibid, paragraph 31.

⁹ Ibid, paragraph 33.

¹⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRQ/3, 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2014, paragraph 34.

¹¹ Amnesty International, 'The condemned: women and children isolated, trapped and exploited in Iraq', Amnesty International, April 2018.

¹² Amnesty International, 'The condemned: women and children isolated, trapped and exploited in Iraq', Amnesty International, April 2018.

¹³ United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRQ/3, 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2014, paragraph 39.

profile of the suffering of women, as well as the plight of Iraqi minority populations; Nadia Murad was hailed on official Iraqi government social media accounts. This demonstrates a desire amongst some elements of the Iraqi government to provide more support for Iraqi minority populations.

Whilst the Iraqi government guarantees the rights of minorities in its constitution, the reality is more complex. As previously mentioned, minorities – including, but not limited to, Yazidis, Shabak, Christians, and Turkmen – were internally displaced and/or the subjects of violence perpetrated by ISIS. These groups face tremendous hurdles returning to their areas of origin. Discrimination against them is widespread, including by members of the Iraqi Security Forces and other armed groups. Additionally, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has noted that there have been instances of discrimination against members of the Bahá'í faith attempting to procure official documents, as Bahá'ism is not recognised in Iraq.¹⁴ In the 2014 UPR, it was noted that minority groups were granted quotas in the Council of Representatives and in local councils, but issues have been raised regarding the actual involvement of minorities in decision-making across both Southern Iraq and the KRI.¹⁵

To advocate for the rights of minorities across Iraq, NPA has partnered with AIM, which lobbies at the KRG and Iraqi Parliamentary level to enshrine protections for minorities in law, as well as to provide a meaningful involvement of minorities in governmental decision-making. Further, AIM has worked to amend Iraqi curriculum and provide general educational and media initiatives highlighting minorities in Iraqi society. AIM is also preparing a shadow report on the situation of Iraqi minorities for the 2019 UPR in Geneva.

Labour Laws & Syndicates. Like many developing countries, Iraq faces issues surrounding the weak protections in place for members of the labour force. This has manifested itself in abusive labour conditions as well as forced labour for various groups, and in particular, foreign workers. Iraq also has very low labour participation rates for women. On a societal level, the practice of creating and joining workers' syndicates and unions has not taken root. Further, the Iraqi Government has been working on a new social security law that would merge the social security systems for both public and private workers. Labour activists and syndicates have been working with the government in order to ensure that their views are considered in the drafting and implementation of this new law.

Peace and Freedom Organisation (PFO), one of NPA's partners in this area, has been at the forefront of advocating for workers, freedom of syndication, and efforts to provide better protections for professional women.

Democratisation. Iraq's route to democratisation since 2003 has been imperfect. Recent elections in Southern Iraq as well as in KRI have occurred without violence and have led to the peaceful transfer of power, which has been a positive development. However, at all levels – local, regional, and national – there have been issues regarding transparency and accountability to stakeholders. It was recommended in the 2014 UPR that the Iraqi government adopt a 'political parties' law. Crucially, such a law would prevent the interference of political parties in civil society organisations,¹⁶ which would help enhance the democratic process by providing greater transparency and constituent participation.¹⁷ Though protests are protected by the constitution of Iraq, there have been numerous incidents in recent years during which protests have been met by force.

¹⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRQ/2, 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2014, paragraph 61.

¹⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRQ/3, 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2014, paragraph 68

¹⁶ United Nations Human rights Council, Joint Submission 11 to the Universal Periodic Review (Iraq), 2010.

¹⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRQ/3, 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2014, paragraph 9.

Furthermore, corruption and the lack of accountability to the Iraqi people have marred Iraq's democratic development. The Iraqi government has taken steps to fix the culture of corruption and lack of transparency, but, in order to meet Iraq's own stated goal of involving all parts of society in decision-making and governance, significantly more work is needed. Transparency International ranks the government of Iraq as the 169th out of the 180 countries it monitors, with a score of 18 (where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean).¹⁸

Sectarian cleavages have also marred Iraq's democratic development. Since Iraq underwent regime change in 2003, there has been significant civil conflict between Iraq's different religious sects and ethnic groups that peaked in 2006 and later flared again in 2014 as ISIS swept across much of northern and western Iraq. Iraq has a majority Shia population (65%-69% of the population) and a significant Sunni minority (29%-34% of the population).¹⁹ As previously mentioned, there is also a cleavage between Arabs and Kurds, who principally live in the northern Kurdistan region of Iraq, which has significant de jure and de facto political, social, and military autonomy. To that end, NPA has been working across a large swathe of the country over the last several years and continues to work towards improving governmental transparency and accountability at the provincial council level through partnerships with Iraqi Al-Amal Association (IAA), Reform Institute for Development (RID), and Public Aid Organisation (PAO).

RELEVANT ACTORS AND CAPACITY

Key Government Stakeholder

Iraqi Parliament (Council of Representatives of Iraq). The Iraqi parliament is a unicameral legislature called the Council of Representatives of Iraq with 329 seats. The most recent parliamentary elections took place in May 2018, and the Prime Minister took office on October 25 as PM Abadi stepped down. The Iraqi parliament has a key role to play in democratisation and the development of a culture of respect for human rights. There are nine seats reserved for minorities. As the highest legislative body in Iraq, the Council of Representatives has the opportunity to enshrine into law issues of importance to minorities, workers, and the judicial system while fostering a culture of transparency and devolving administrative powers to lower bodies. The Iraqi parliament theoretically has significant capacity to effect change, but Iraq's numerous challenges and divisions have not always facilitated this capacity being exercised.

Kurdistan Parliament. The parliament of Kurdistan is a unicameral legislature with 111 seats, 11 of which are reserved for minorities from across KRI. Five seats are reserved for Assyrians and five for Turkmen, and one seat is reserved for an Armenian representative. The Kurdistan Parliament has the capacity to significantly and directly affect the lives of all residents of KRI through the passing of legislation. To that end, partner organisations have been lobbying the parliament of Kurdistan to alter draft laws related to protections for minority groups and workers, as well as to provide fairer conditions for detainees and prisoners in which their legal right to representation is respected.

Provincial Councils. Provincial Councils are locally-elected legislative bodies that coordinate government activities at the governorate level. In the past, there has been limited accountability and democratic transparency within these councils. As such, NPA-partnered organisations are working closely with them to increase their responsiveness to constituents on an ongoing basis.

¹⁸ Transparency International, Corruption Rank, 2017.

¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, CIA World Factbook: Iraq, Updated in 2017.

NPA Partner Organisations

Democratisation-Focussed Organisations. NPA has three partner organisations working on the portion of the 'Improving Democratisation and Human Rights in Iraq 2016-2019' project called the 'Enhancing Democracy Programme' or EDP. These organisations each undertake similar work, but focus on different governorates:

The Public Aid Organisation is an NPA partner focussed on enhancing the responsiveness and transparency of government actors – primarily at the provincial council level – while also increasing citizen participation in the democratic process. PAO works in Wasit, Maysan, Basra, Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil governorates. As part of their work to increase citizen participation, PAO provides grants to small, local CSOs to accomplish specific community-focussed tasks and to help build a culture of civic engagement in the governorates where they work.

Iraqi Al-Amal is an NPA partner focussed on enhancing the responsiveness and transparency of government actors – primarily at the provincial council level – while increasing citizen participation in the democratic process. IAA works in Salah al Din, Kirkuk, Najaf, and Al Muthanna governorates. As part of their work to increase citizen participation, IAA provides grants to small, local CSOs to accomplish specific community-focussed tasks and to help build a culture of civic engagement in the governorates where they work.

Reform Institute for Development is an NPA partner organisation focussed on enhancing the responsiveness and transparency of government actors – working not only at the level of the Kurdistan Parliament but also at the provincial council and university levels – while also increasing citizen participation in the democratic process. RID works in Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil governorates. As part of their work to increase citizen participation, RID provides grants to small, local CSOs to accomplish specific community-focussed tasks and to help build a culture of civic engagement in the governorates where they work. Additionally, RID has also established a digital platform in which the Kurdistan public can ask questions to their MPs.

Human Rights-Focussed Organisations

Justice Network for Prisoners is an NPA partner organisation working to improve the human rights situation of prisoners and detainees across Iraq. As an advocacy organisation, it works at the national and regional government level (KRG) to enshrine human rights principles into law. Further, it works to provide human rights training to prison workers, as well as legal representation to prisoners and detainees. JNP has good connections across the government, but the political situation in Iraq – particularly regarding certain categories of prisoners – limits the reach of JNP.

Alliance for Iraqi Minorities works to improve the human rights situation of Iraqi minorities. This takes several forms, including lobbying for the creation of new laws at the national and regional level (KRG), as well as for the more complete enforcement of existing laws related to Iraqi minorities. Several politicians with close links to AIM were recently elected to the Council of Representatives of Iraq. Further, there are politicians linked to AIM at the KRG level. AIM also implements projects to train members of the media to portray minorities in a positive light, and designs curricula featuring minorities positively.

Peace and Freedom Organisation is an NPA partner organisation working to promote workers' rights and the freedom of syndication across Iraq, with work taking place in Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. PFO seeks to lobby the Iraqi and Kurdistan Parliaments to strengthen legal protections for workers and worker syndicates, as well as to raise awareness of workers' issues and freedom of syndication.

Methodology & Research Questions

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation tracked all aspects of desk research and field-based data collection to ensure any gaps of information or inaccurate data has been fully addressed during the data collection process. As such, the evaluation team deployed a wide range of research methods to ensure data quality control. All NPA and Partner NGO interview transcripts were reviewed by the evaluation team following the initial interactions in order to assess whether or not particular areas required additional information to be followed-up on through email with the interviewee or additional conversations with other stakeholders.

Contact information for all project partner respondents was collected during the interview process, and consent was obtained prior to the commencement of the interview. Daily assessments were made so that any additional information required was followed up on in a timely manner as well as to confirm pertinent details of the interviews.

Key Informant Interviews. All in-country KIIs were conducted by the evaluation team. KIIs were undertaken through live interviews, or in some instances (where limited availability on the part of the interviewee was a concern) via Skype. While many of the KIIs were conducted in English, there were a few instances where they were conducted with the assistance of a translator. KIIs were completed during in-country field research; participants included senior NPA staff and partner staff with first-hand knowledge of the day-to-day activities of the NPA-implemented projects. All NPA staff and partner interview transcripts were reviewed by the evaluation team and coded for analysis. A full description of the participants can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Types	Qty. of Interactions	Female	Male	Total Participants
NPA Iraq Stakeholders	3	1	2	3
Former NPA Staff Members	2	0	2	2
AIM Stakeholders	1	1	1	2
IAA Stakeholders	1	0	1	1
JNP Stakeholders	1	0	2	2
PAO Stakeholders	1	0	2	2
PFO Stakeholders	1	0	3	3
RID Stakeholders	1	0	2	2
Total	11	2	15	17

Partner Activity Beneficiary Focus Group Discussion. Particular effort was made to speak to groups associated with a range of project activities implemented by each of the six partner organisations. Facilitators for the FGDs were independently employed by the evaluation team and were well-briefed on the activities to provide context. FGD facilitators followed a set research script to ensure compliance and consistency across all locations. With the exception of one IAA FGD intended to take place in Tikrit, all pre-agreed (with NPA) FGDs were completed in mid-October.

Tables 2: Partner Activity Beneficiary Focus Group Discussions

Associated Partner	Governorate	Qty. of Interactions	Female	Male	Total Participants
AIM	Baghdad	1	2	5	7
	Erbil	1	0	10	10
IAA	Tikrit	2	1	1	2
	Najaf	1	2	10	12
JNP	Erbil	1	1	6	7
PAO	Sulaymaniyah	1	2	9	11
PFO	Baghdad	1	2	4	6
	Erbil	1	2	6	8
RID	Erbil	1	2	5	7
	Sulaymaniyah	1	2	4	6
Total		11	16	60	76

Due to the relatively small sample size, coding and analysis of FGDs was done by hand by a senior member of the Carfax team in order to distil key insights relating to particular partners as well as trends across different partner organisations and beneficiary stakeholder groups. All information collected by Carfax’s FGD facilitators was uploaded via a secure network and maintained by Carfax Projects.

Supplemental Online Feedback Surveys. Given the wide geographic scope of this project and limited time for participating in Partner Activity Beneficiary FGDs, the evaluation team also deployed an online partner activity beneficiary feedback survey. NPA and the Partner NGOs communicated with the appropriate beneficiaries and provided follow-up reminders prior to the conclusion of the data collection period. The feedback survey is understood to be a supplementary form of data collection intended to strengthen the Partner Activity Beneficiary FGDs rather than to serve as a stand-alone instrument. Only activity beneficiaries unable to participate in the in-person FGDs were asked to participate in the online survey. These surveys were entirely anonymous in order to promote transparent responses and avoid issues regarding security.

Project Document Review. The evaluation team reviewed project documents throughout the in-country data collection period as well as the analysis and report-writing periods. Additional documents were requested after the project inception meeting with NPA in mid-September, as well as following in-country consultation with the NPA staff and partners during late September and early October. In addition to the interviews and focus groups discussion, project document review helped provide a fuller understanding of the project and insight regarding follow-up on any outstanding matter not covered by the KIIs, FGDs, or surveys. A list of documents can be found in the Annex of this report.

Tables 3: Supplemental Online Surveys

Associated Partner	Activity Beneficiary Type	Qty. of Surveys
AIM	Human Rights Activist	3
	NGO Worker	2
	Parliamentarian	1
IAA	Academic/Researcher	2
	CSO Member	5
	Government Worker	2
	Human Rights Activist	3
	Lawyer	3
	NGO Worker	16
	Parliamentarian	1
	Provincial Council Member	2
	Work in the Media	3
	Other	1
JNP	Human Rights Activist	3
	Staff from Prison or Detention Centre	1
PAO	Academic/Researcher	1
	CSO Member	4
	Human Rights Activist	2
	NGO Worker	9
PFO	Provincial Council Member	1
	Academic/Researcher	1
	Human Rights Activist	2
RID	Representative from Worker's Syndicates	10
	CSO Member	2
	NGO Worker	1
	Lawyer	1
	Human Rights Activist	2
Total	Parliamentarian	2
	Other	1
	87	

EVALUATION OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The midterm evaluation adopted a qualitative approach to address the research questions in accordance with the agreed scope of the Terms of Reference (ToR). It employed a wide range of generally accepted research methods including focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and online surveys deployed from mid-September 2018 and concluded in mid-October 2018. Results from multiple instruments were compared to secure 'triangulation' of the findings, strengthening evidence to inform the conclusions and recommendations.

Where appropriate, this evaluation also employed comparative analysis and meta-analysis against available data from reporting and project documentation produced by NPA and their project partners to assess any apparent changes between July 2016 to the end of September 2018 (period of performance). A full list of the documents consulted can be found in the Annex.

Objective of the evaluation. In keeping with the scope of the ToR, the evaluators undertook analysis of the potential project shortcomings and categorised the actions according to the following objectives:

- To reflect on project progress, achievements, and change achieved considering the baseline survey, which was conducted in 2016;
- To assess the relevance of the project;
- To reflect on the NPA model of working in local partnerships with civil society organisations to achieve project objectives;
- To assess the effectiveness of the methodologies applied by NPA and its partners; and
- To suggest key practical targeted recommendations and learning to be considered by NPA, in particular to inform with practical recommendations for the continuation and further implementation of the current project and provide a basis for decision making on necessary amendments and improvement.

LIMITATIONS

The midterm evaluation team overcame several limitations. Some of the partners' activities have been implemented in regions with ongoing conflict or instability, such as Basra, making it difficult to conduct primary data collection. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was also in the process of parliamentary campaigning and elections during the in-country data collection period, making it challenging to secure interviews with government officials. Additionally, due to time constraints and limited funding, the core evaluation team was not able to travel and collect data outside of Erbil. As such, this evaluation deployed local Iraqi facilitators to undertake FGDs in target areas outside Erbil.

Respondents' Recall Bias. The primary data relies on retrospective self-reported data. As such it is possible that participants did not recall events entirely accurately or may have felt pressured to give responses that they deemed to be desirable on the part of funding agencies. The consultants and FGD facilitators were instructed not to lead the respondents during FGDs and KIIs, and all evaluation staff were asked to read questions from provided scripts carefully, only providing different wording or additional information as appropriate.

Pre-Existing Data and Documents. This evaluation is supplemented by pre-existing data and documentation, often without traceable individual-level information about participants. Online surveys and FGDs were employed to gauge perceptions as to the significance of learning outcomes, and results were cross-referenced with available data. Moreover, although multiple data requests were made, the available documents were limited to (1) what documentation had been undertaken by NPA and their partners and (2) which of these documents were provided to the evaluation team between project inception and report writing.

Representation of Partner Activity Beneficiary Groups. Participants of the evaluation – in terms of not only KIIs with NPA and project partner staff, but also for FGDs and online surveys with partner activity beneficiaries – were selected in consultation with NPA's partners; the breadth and numbers of participant were too numerous to guarantee representation from all beneficiary groups associated with each project partners' work, especially given the limited time period allotted for primary data collection. Thus, for Partner Activity Beneficiary FGDs a cross-section of beneficiaries was purposively selected, which constitutes a substantial part of partners' activities. However, the online surveys sought to counter-balance this representativeness issue.

Project partners were encouraged to send the online surveys to as many of their activity beneficiaries as possible. While there is still likely bias with representativeness even with the addition of the online survey, a wide range of beneficiary types, from human rights activists to parliamentarians to media representatives, did participate, strengthening the more selective FGD sample. Readers should bear in mind that the evaluation's findings – and the FGD findings, in particular – may not be representative of the entire set of beneficiaries for

this evaluation. It only represents a snapshot of the perceptions and typology of activities engaged in this project.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation team recognises the potential security and privacy considerations for this report. Therefore, this evaluation had paid considerable attention to avoiding potential consequences and harm through primary data collection. This was achieved primarily by ensuring FGD facilitators' strict adherence to the scripted format of the research instruments approved by NPA Iraq prior to the start of data collection. Consent was obtained from all participants during the participant selection process as well as during the actual KIIs and FGDs. While information was collected for sex disaggregation, no personal identifiers or attribution were made without the consent of all participants. All of the online surveys collected were also entirely anonymous, with no respondent names collected.

FGD facilitators were briefed and trained on each of the projects prior to data collection. Training and briefings provided covered appropriate behaviours as well as deference for security, the dignity of respondents, project participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they might interact. Moreover, best efforts were made to ensure that all FGD participants understood the context of the evaluation.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following represents a non-exhaustive list of key questions, which includes project relevance, effectiveness, and capacity and management systems for analysis. In addition to the evaluation objectives highlighted above, the midterm evaluation also responded to a series of sub-questions. For the purpose of brevity, only the key evaluations are included below, and a full list of the sub-questions can be found in the Annex at the end of this report.

Relevance to Context of Iraq's Democratisation and Human Rights

1. To what extent is the project relevant for the political situation in Iraq and internationally with regards to the Iraqi crisis?
2. What are the main activities and methods carried out by the Iraqi government and KRG parliament, partners, provincial councils, and civil society to mobilise, influence, and change, and how is the project connected with those activities and methods?

Effectiveness of Partners and Stakeholders' Activities

3. What are the main strengths and weaknesses with regard to performance of the Iraqi and Kurdistan Parliament, provincial councils, partners, and civil society, and how are these addressed by the project?
4. How effective are the methods for strengthening the influence of parliament, provincial councils, partners, and networks on political processes and mobilisation/participation of constituencies?
5. Do partners and NPA have a clear common understanding of the process toward the desired change?
6. What activities/methods have been agreed with the project partners and what are the strengths and weaknesses in NPA's support to improve internal capacities of the parliament, provincial councils, and civil society in Iraq?
7. How has the project contributed to the development of partners and activities/methods (e.g. political dialogue, networking, funding, etc.), and the main strengths and weaknesses of this support?

NPA's Organisational Capacity and Management System

8. How is NPA Iraq's organisational capacity set up in order to achieve the intended project results? This includes implementation performance, work planning, NPA head office involvement, and the NPA external office management model.
9. How is NPA's capacity and how are its systems for risk management?
10. How is monitoring and documentation of outputs, outcomes, and longer effects organised and what monitoring systems are in place?
11. Assess the partnership process and partnership relationship between NPA and its local partners; identify what worked well and what did not work well and recommend possible changes.

No additional questions were requested or considered during the course of the evaluation beyond the ToR. Responses to the sub-questions are fully considered in the analysis and are bifurcated with the appropriate headers. A separate section on lessons learned has been provided as well to NPA senior management for general observations and reflection of the project.

Key Findings

RELEVANCE TO CONTEXT: DEMOCRATISATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAQ

1. To what extent is the project relevant for the political situation in Iraq and internationally with regards to the Iraqi crisis?

The 'Improving Democratisation and Human Rights in 2016-2019' project is part of a wider 'Partnership for Democratisation and Just Distribution of Resources', a multi-country initiative by NPA that aims to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in a cross-cutting way, contributing to people's organisation and mobilisation for their rights and for participation in decision-making. Under a new Cooperative Agreement with Norad that started in 2016, NPA has been working with partners in 17 countries, including Iraq, 'to influence decision-making processes and strengthen democratisation in their societies'.²⁰

In line with the Principles for Support to Civil Society (2018) of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), NPA's work for this project has been focussed on building a strong and independent civil society to promote sustainable development. As such, the general strategies and methods used for this project and assessed within this evaluation fall into two distinct categories:

- Financial and capacity-building support provided by NPA for local partner organisations working in the areas of democratisation and human rights
- Activities undertaken by NPA's local partner organisations engaging relevant in-country actors (activists, politicians, civil society organisations, etc.) relevant to the areas of democratisation and human rights)

However, a key component of this evaluation – and of NPA's evaluation questions, as outlined above – is to assess to what extent this project and these more general project objectives are relevant to the political situation in Iraq and internationally with regards to the Iraqi crisis more generally.

Adaptation of Strategy and Focus Areas in the Iraqi Context

NPA Iraq's former Programme Manager for Development indicated that special attention was paid during the inception and proposal phase to ensure the project was well-aligned with the particular democratisation and human rights situation in Iraq. KIIs also indicated that the project was designed only after a lengthy inception period, during which relevant stakeholders were engaged by NPA in order to gain perspective on the greatest needs in the country, as well as to understand what actors and organisations were already working in these areas. The funding application for Norad completed by NPA Iraq for this project shows evidence of this research and adaptation to the Iraqi context, with a particular focus on relevant state and non-state actors.

Democratisation strategies and partnerships with public and civil society organisations. With regard to democratisation, the proposal emphasises that 'in the area of accountable governance, the initiative will support the [partner] organisations to have effect with the provincial council at the governorate level and with Kurdistan

²⁰ NPA Progress Report, 2017

parliament at the regional level to involve the public and civil society in their decision-making and planning'.²¹ Relevant national and international stakeholders have raised concerns about the state of democratisation, transparency of government, and public political engagement in Iraq.²² Concerns regarding political engagement were echoed by some of the partner organisation representatives engaged during the evaluation:

'The public participation and role of civilians in political decision-making is very low; most people are unaware of the laws passed. People think they choose MPs and that they should not get involved afterwards. So we want to bring them into discussions, so they are more aware of their rights and responsibilities.' (High-Level Stakeholder KII with RID)

As such, the more general focus on involving the public and civil society in decision-making appears to be highly relevant to the Iraqi context.

The focus on provincial councils and the Kurdistan Parliament demonstrates a case of Iraq-specific adjustment, reflecting the movement towards decentralisation of decision-making towards the provincial council-level following amendments to the 2008 Provincial Powers Law (Law 21) during 2013. Although progress in the area of decentralisation has been limited, it was a salient consideration at the time of proposal drafting – and is likely to remain a substantial issue, given the 2018 protests in Basra and national-level conversations regarding political devolution away from Baghdad.

Human Rights focus areas are in-keeping with the current issues in Iraq. NPA Iraq's proposal to Norad indicates:

'In the area of Human Rights, the initiative will support the partners to be successful advocates towards the Iraqi government to apply National Plan for Human Rights (NAPHR) focussing: prisoners' rights, economic and social rights, labour law, the right to work and freedom to organise events as well as minority rights.'

It then goes on specifically to cite the NAPHR as a response to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) developed in cooperation between the Iraqi government and civil society – including NPA's partner organisations. As such, the human rights component of the project can be understood as highly relevant to the human rights context in Iraq and as understood at an international level with regard to its focus areas, working within existing national frameworks as well as country-specific recommendations from the United Nations.

This emphasis on working specifically within existing frameworks was mentioned by the former NPA Programme Manager, who indicated that although there is a Human Rights Commission in Iraq – as well as an independent Commission of Human Rights in Kurdistan – tasked with implementing the UPR recommendations, they do not know how to do this on their own. He added that a core component of the human rights portion of this project is to work with the Iraqi government on logframes and provide recommendations about implementing the UPR.

In addition to being relevant to the political situation in Iraq with regard to contributing to ongoing efforts in the country, the focus area of NPA's human rights-focussed partners (JNP, PFO, and AIM) appear to be relevant to national and international understandings of human rights in Iraq. The 2014 UPR draws direct attention to the treatment of prisoners, the protection and promotion of minority rights, and labour rights in Iraq.

In sum, the provided documentation suggests that, with regard to focus areas and strategies for improving democratisation and human rights, that the project has been adapted to the Iraqi context – including with respect to national and international identifications of the current political situation in Iraq.

²¹ Norad Proposal, 2015

²² Freedom House, 2017; UPR, 2014

Adaptation of Project Methodologies

As discussed above, the overall project methodologies fall into two more general categories: (1) financial and capacity-building support for local partners and (2) activities undertaken by NPA's local partner organisations engaging relevant in-country actors, including the general population as voting constituencies. The relevance of financial and capacity-building support to local partners will be discussed separately later in this report. For the purpose of this section, it will focus specifically on the relevance of the activities (as methodologies) undertaken by NPA's local partner organisations.

Democratisation and political shift and decentralisation may require further engagement. NPA'S project proposal to Norad clearly outlines their activity methodologies and stated aims with regard to activities undertaken by partner organisations working on the democratisation side of the project:

'The activities include establishing a baseline from which specific lobbying, education, training, and advocacy towards the two governments (Iraq and Kurdistan) will take place to effect change in a long term and systematic manner. Structures need to be put in place to formalise the desired change, not just passing laws and bills which are not implemented.'

The proposal goes on to emphasise the importance of partners working 'closely and repeatedly with individuals to ensure that they intellectually and compassionately believe in the changes required in their own behaviour to increase accountability and transparency'.

This proposal appears to be more-or-less consistent with the activities put in place by PAO, RID, and IAA, which have included establishing community committees (which include community leaders, local NGOs, academics, and media outlets); providing capacity-building training to local NGOs and community committees; and providing small grants to local CSOs. The work in this area has been less focussed on legislation, emphasising instead building longer-term participatory systems as well as providing financial and capacity-building support to local civil society organisations.

Given the low levels of public political participation in conjunction with a slow trend towards decentralisation of authority to the provincial council level (opening up the possibility for more meaningful, direct involvement of the public in decision-making), working to build public committees, as well as to support CSOs focussed on community issues seems relevant to the context. With that said, if the trend towards political decentralisation stalls or is reversed, particularly in light of current political instability, it is possible that the focus on building participation at the provincial council level in particular could be less relevant to meaningful political engagement in the long term.

Human Rights activities are appropriate for building understanding among community leaders and other relevant stakeholders. As with the democratisation portion of the programming, NPA's project proposal to Norad outlines their activity methodologies and stated aims with regard to activities undertaken by partner organisations working in the area of human rights:

'The partners will establish means and methods for implementing sustained change in attitudes, behaviour and laws throughout the government, parliament, the judiciary system, police and community leaders who uphold the norms and standards for society's attitudes. This will include lobbying, presentation of facts, arguments and international rights in a sustained series of meetings, conference, newspaper, internet, and TV campaigns.'

The activities of NPA's partners working in the area of human rights (AIM, JNP, and PFO) have been focussed primarily on:

- Developing expert committees and working with these committees to develop and propose draft laws and other legal recommendations to the government;

- Providing awareness-raising materials and activities to community members as well as to activists and members of the media; and
- Providing more specialised training on rights and existing legal frameworks to stakeholders like prison employees and representatives from workers syndicates.

In terms of methodology, these activities appear to be relevant to the Iraqi context. The legislative-focused activities have been stymied in relation to the Kurdistan Parliament up to the point of writing for reasons that will be discussed below. However, the training and awareness-raising methodologies are appropriate for building understanding among community leaders and other relevant stakeholders. Moreover, these activities are relevant to NPA and Norad's stated objectives of building the capacity of local organisations and actors.

Changes in the Iraq Political Context

One point mentioned repeatedly by stakeholders during data collection for the midterm evaluation is the ongoing instability of Iraq, particularly in regard to the political and security situation. A number of stakeholders from NPA and the partner organisations drew attention to the challenges that political instability and security have posed with regard to project implementation and impact. For example, PFO, JNP, and AIM all mentioned facing obstacles with regard to the government not prioritising human rights issues like prisoners' rights, minority rights, and labour rights. More specific obstacles in this area were also mentioned; for example, JNP noted that they struggle to maintain consistent access to prisons and prisoners because the prisons are made inaccessible during security incidents or when there is a conflict between political parties.

However, these challenges largely pre-date the start of the 'Improving Democratisation and Human Rights in Iraq 2016 to 2019' project – although the intensity of challenges related to politics and security do vary over time – rather than representing changes to the political context that might significantly affect any of the project premises. External to these, the evaluation brought up several relevant changes. However, there was one area of challenges that emerged most consistently and likely most impacted the premises of the project: namely, the suspension of Kurdistan Parliament starting in October 2015, as well as the September 2018 Kurdistan Parliamentary Elections. As such, this section will focus on this particular area as well as on adaptations to project strategies and methodologies that have been adopted by NPA's partner organisations to mitigate the impact of these challenges on the premises of their work and of the project more generally.

Suspension of Kurdistan Parliament & September 2018 Selections. One of the changes most frequently mentioned by stakeholders from the partner organisations was the suspension of the Kurdistan Parliament, which has brought legislation in KRI to a standstill since October 2015. The partner organisations' project proposals were put forward in 2015, prior to the suspension; for the partners working in Erbil and KRI more generally, this has had a considerable impact on their programming. For example, for the partners working on human rights issues (AIM, PFO, JNP) as well as RID, the proposed work involved pursuing direct involvement with parliamentarians in activities, as well as pursuing legislative change in their areas of focus:

'The main goal of the Norad-funded project is to make real changes in the law – but Parliament has not been working very well during the last few years, so this has been a core problem for our project: to implement any activity we need at least some parliament members to attend. Before activities we would contact and visit them to have them agree to attend the activity, but on the day, they did not come. Or they might come as an individual, not to represent the government in an official capacity.' (High-Level Stakeholder KII with PFO)

The partners generally indicated that they were optimistic about the September 2018 parliamentary elections easing the gridlock, enabling them to move forward with the project's legislative objectives. However, as one stakeholder indicated:

'With the newly elected MPs, it won't be hard to work with them, the challenge is that it takes time; we do not know when the cabinet will be formed, it will take longer, and there are still some disputes between the main parties.' (High-Level Stakeholder KII with RID)

Although at the time of writing the midterm evaluation, it appears that the parliamentary election results have been accepted, it is possible that continued animosity between the PUK and KDP could continue to create obstacles and delays in this area.

Partners' Adaptation to Change. One of the core focusses of this project is on creating change with regard to the law and working with members of Kurdistan Parliament; the suspension of parliament as well as the inherent instability and delays surrounding the September 2018 election have the potential to delay or derail portions of partners' projects. However, it appears that at least some of the partners were able to adjust their approach in order to continue moving forward with their objectives, despite the suspension of parliament. Both RID and PFO spoke specifically about how they switched their focus to awareness-raising and relationship-building with CSOs as well as advisors/counsellors from the Kurdistan Parliament in response to the suspension.

PFO indicated that in the most recent amendment of their project, they switched the focus to instruction rather than to law, working with bureaucrats rather than the politicians. They also emphasised that building relationships with bureaucrats and other decision-makers has been a key component of their work throughout the period where parliament has been paralysed. One of the core objectives of this approach is to ensure that PFO is well-known (and better known than they were at the start of the project) to politicians and bureaucratic decision-makers once parliament begins to undertake meaningful activity again.

When asked if any adjustments were made in project design to account for the parliamentary suspension, during a high-level KII a RID stakeholder answered as follows:

'The interactions with MPs is just a part of the project; we also worked with the parliamentary commissions...the MP's situation only affected the website.'

This suggests that RID saw the parliamentary suspension as less of an impediment to their work; however, their approach seems to have been similar to that adopted by PFO: working to build and maintain relationships with bureaucrats that may pay off in terms of recognition and inclusion when parliament restarts.

The cases of PFO and RID demonstrate that while the suspension of parliament did represent a salient political change, partners have been able to continue – at least with most aspects of – their work. During an interview, the former project manager from NPA emphasised that during the project design phase 'for ensuring that it remained relevant to the context, NPA emphasised remaining flexible in the goals and objectives of the project'. The cases of PFO and RID demonstrate where this flexibility appears to have been successfully used to ensure the continued relevance of programming despite changes in the political context.

Relevance to Project Key Target Groups

A number of stakeholder groups were targeted for activities by the partner organisations. Both the democratisation and human rights-focussed partners worked with CSOs and other community members engaged in related areas, including academics, lawyers, and representatives of labour syndicates. However, there was also more direct engagement with government actors, including parliament in KRI and provincial council members in Central and Southern Iraq.

A number of these stakeholders were engaged during the midterm evaluation through both FGDs and online surveys (for those unable to attend in-person FGDs for issues related to travel, scheduling, or security). Overall, these stakeholders – including CSOs and other community members, but also parliamentarians and provincial council members – indicated that they found the project strategies and methodologies relevant to their work.

Democratisation activities are germane but will require more participation from women. CSO members and other community members – including members of the media, academics, and even engineers – who participated in community committees, conferences, and other community mobilisation activities facilitated by the democratisation-focussed partners (IAA, RID, and PAO) were overwhelmingly positive about the relevance of this programming to their areas of professional focus. One thing that emerged in the FGDs and survey responses from community members in particular was that the respondents felt like their professional experience enabled them to meaningfully participate in and influence decisions made by the local government:

'I am confident that there was a strong correlation between the ideas and opinions of the committee and my work as an academic.' (IAA Beneficiary, Interview in Tikrit)

'We are ourselves engineers, so solving municipal issues is one of the main concerns of our job.' (PAO Beneficiary, FGD in Sulaymaniyah)

Civil society organisation members expressed similar sentiments, indicating that the programming gave them a platform for moving their organisations' work forward while also providing an outlet for them to engage directly with the government:

'Being a member of community activities is at the heart of my organisation's goals to tackle financial and administrative corruption.' (PAO Beneficiary, Online Survey)

The only area for possible increased relevance to the targeted communities more generally has to do with widening participation in activities; some respondents indicated that relevance could be improved by increasing the number of workshops and the number of people being involved so that they could learn about their rights. One FGD group supported by IAA mentioned in particular that encouraging more women to participate – in addition to encouraging more general community participation – might make activities more relevant.

Government actors engaged through the democratisation programming by PAO, RID, and IAA also indicated that they found the activities they participated in to be relevant:

'We work with people, we need input from CSOs to impact our daily work, and this project facilitated such interactions.' (RID Beneficiary – Parliamentarian in Erbil, Online Survey)

Although the sample of beneficiaries willing to take part in FGDs and surveys is likely biased towards PAO, RID, and IAA, the available data does suggest that community members, CSOs, and government beneficiaries found the democratisation activities provided by NPA partners through this project to be highly relevant to their area of work, as well as to their experiences.

Human Rights awareness and training activities are viewed as appropriate and useful. As with the democratisation-focussed programming, beneficiaries engaged through FGDs and online surveys spoke very positively about the relevance of human rights-focussed activities facilitated by AIM, JNP, and PFO to their area of work. One of the key types of activities undertaken by AIM, JNP, and PFO was roundtable discussions, conferences, and other forums for expert stakeholders to discuss legal issues and draft laws relevant to minority rights, prisoners' rights, and labour rights. These activities included not only lawyers but also activists, academics, and other stakeholders involved in these areas. FGD and survey respondents who participated in these activities drew attention to how the sessions were useful and relevant because they brought together people with different backgrounds and specialisations to provide recommendations for modifying laws.

However, the one recommendation that emerged in relation to this type of event came from an AIM beneficiary who thought that more could be done ‘to create a unified vision for enacting laws and working on them specifically by legal specialists’. This suggests that while the different backgrounds and opinions of stakeholders involved in discussions of legal issues and drafting laws may have been interesting, there may have been drawbacks in terms of how effectively this collaborative technique managed to accomplish set objectives.

Another activity focussed on by both JNP and PFO was training provided to relevant stakeholders. In the case of PFO, training sessions about labour rights and law were provided to representatives from workers’ syndicates as well as lawyers and activists working in this area; in the case of JNP, prison employees as well as lawyers and activists were given training regarding prisoners’ rights. Beneficiaries from both JNP and PFO indicated that they found these training sessions useful, specifically citing their practical benefits in relation to their jobs or activism:

‘This training was relevant because it contributes to the improvement of rights and contributes to raising awareness among the participants – this training helped me see the humanitarian issues in terms of how they affected the reality of this work.’ (JNP Beneficiary – Prison Guard, Online Survey)

‘This training was relevant because not only were the problems and obstacles that a union member may face during monitoring violations against workers discussed, but also appropriate solutions were presented.’ (PFO Beneficiary – Syndicate Representative, Online Survey)

Finally, the human rights-focussed partners also provided awareness raising sessions and other, related events primarily targeting community members, members of the media, students, and other community members. Less FGD and survey data was available from beneficiaries of these activities than from the other two groups; however, the feedback that is available indicates that beneficiaries found this information relevant, with several respondents indicating that they learned about issues they had not previously known about or that they now better understood how the human rights issues discussed connected with their lives.

All of this information suggests that the ‘Improving Democratisation and Human Rights in Iraq 2016 to 2019’ project is relevant to the political situation in Iraq and internationally regarding the response to the Iraqi crisis. Moreover, despite some change to the political context, the strategies and methodologies utilised have been flexible enough to ensure that the activities and premises have remained relevant up to the time of the midterm evaluation.

2. What are the main activities/methods carried out by the Iraqi government and KRG parliament, partners, provincial councils, and civil society to mobilise influence and change, and how is the project connected to those activities and methods?

Partner Organisations’ Mobilisation in Influencing Change

NPA’s partners can be grouped by focus on democratisation (IAA, PAO, and RID) or human rights (AIM, PFO, and JNP). Information about their topical and regional areas of focus can be found in the ‘Relevant Actors and Capacity’ section at the beginning of this report.

NPA’s Interactions with Partners. NPA Iraq works with partners in a range of ways beyond simply providing funding. Steering Committee meetings are held every three-months with the partner organisations to keep track of progress and discuss any challenges that might have arisen. Partners reported NPA follow-up of these challenges in a systematic manner, sending staff in-person to help partners resolve challenges and providing tailored capacity building.

Partners also report that NPA provided them with training in a wide range of subjects including M&E, HR, financial strategy, risk management, advocacy, and proposal writing. NPA partners reported that the extent of support can vary substantially. For example, PAO is the only partner who currently has a dedicated M&E team, meaning that other partners need more intensive support in this area. Other activities reported by partners include NPA introducing them to other organisations and networks with whom they could effectively collaborate, both within Iraq and worldwide.

These interactions will be discussed in greater depth in relation to capacity-building later within this report.

Relevance of NPA Interactions with Partners. The testimony of both partner and NPA staff suggests that interactions with partners are highly relevant. In terms of the selection of partners, an NPA stakeholder noted that working with networks such as JNP and AIM was a recent development, and one that created additional burdens regarding financial management and M&E than previous work with individual organisations. An NPA stakeholder argued that it was nevertheless worth working with these partners because of the extended reach of networks as compared to individual organisations.

In terms of interaction throughout the project, there was consensus among partner staff that NPA was attentive and provided individualised support that considered the particular needs of their organisation. Partners also unanimously expressed a high-opinion of the training they had received from NPA. This suggests that NPA's approach to building capacity is one that is relevant to the needs of partners. Some partners highlighted areas in which the support they received from NPA could be improved. One partner indicated a need for more help developing organisation wide policies around HR and support developing more secure approaches to data storage. They also expressed a wish that they could send more members of staff for training. This indicates that there may be opportunities to enhance relevance by providing more intensive support to partners with less organisational capacity.

Government Actors (Government of Iraq, KRI, and Provincial Councils)

The incoming Government of Iraq has inherited severe challenges in the domains of security, human rights, governance, and democratisation. The 2014 UPR highlighted multiple issues of grave concern in relation to both human rights and democratisation. The Government of Iraq theoretically has significant capacity to effect change, but Iraq's numerous challenges and divisions have not always allowed for its capacity to be exercised.

Torture and mistreatment of detainees has been recorded in all areas of Iraq, meaningful participation of minorities remains a challenge for both Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and protections for workers remain weak across the country. Throughout Iraq there remains a need to improve the accountability and transparency of government institutions.

Over the past five years the Government of Iraq has expressed an intention to de-centralise more power to provincial councils. As with other government institutions in Iraq these have historically operated with limited accountability and transparency. If the power of Provincial Councils is to increase, then improving their effectiveness and compliance with democratic norms must be prioritised.

Interacting with Government Entities: Democratisation. Activities under the democratisation component of the project have engaged with government entities in a variety of ways. At the level of Provincial Councils, PAO has established Community Committees of Provincial Council members and representatives from academia, industry and the community at large. These Community Committees engage with forums drawn from the local population to identify areas of particular concern to constituents. The Community Committees also conduct surveys and studies to provide information to the Provincial Council about matters of public concern. IAA has also engaged with Provincial Councils by offering training in public participation to its members.

RID have worked directly with the Kurdistan Parliament through taking MPs to meet with constituents, putting MPs in contact with CSOs and training MPs in public participation. RID have also established a digital platform in which the Kurdistan public can put questions to MPs.

Interacting with Government Entities: Human Rights. The human rights component of programming has also included extensive work with Government entities. Partner organisations have lobbied the government on a range of legislative priorities. For example, AIM has been engaged in efforts to create legislation attaching higher penalties to crimes motivated by hate towards minorities and has successfully engaged with the Kurdistan Regional Government to create a religious education curriculum in which children learn about all major religions found in Iraq. PFO has lobbied for laws protecting labour syndication, in particular lobbying the Kurdish Regional Government to adopt laws passed by the Government of Iraq that enshrine the legal freedom to labour syndication.

All partner organisations are involved in report writing and raising public awareness as a means to inform legislators about human rights violations and pressure them to effect change. For example, JNP visits prisons and produces annual reports on the state of the justice system in Iraq. One of their long-term goals is assessing the extent to which the Government of Iraq are serious about implanting the recommendations of the UPR with regard to the Iraqi justice system.

Interactions with Government Entities. Lobbying, building capacity of legislators, and establishing forums between politicians and civil society all appear relevant to helping government entities create positive change. All informants from partner organisations believed that they had good relationships with legislators and were able to affect some positive change, supporting the notion that programming is relevant:

'In Wassid governorate there was a huge conflict inside the Provincial Councils: they could not pass any resolutions or make any decisions. But after we decided that the Provincial Council sessions should be open for the community, they easily passed resolutions because they were held accountable by people watching.' (High-Level Stakeholder KII with PAO)

'There have been a lot of changes in prisons between 2016 and now: the delay in court procedures has changed, the number of prison staff who have been punished for mistreating prisoners has increased, and there is less overt torture, although prisoner abuse is still an issue.' (High-Level Stakeholder KII with JNP)

All stakeholders mentioned the challenging situation in which such activities took place. For example, during a high-level KII, one stakeholder from AIM stated:

'3 individuals who work with AIM have been elected to parliament. But in general, the situation for minorities has been getting steadily worse.'

The security situation and suspension of the Kurdistan Parliament during the state of emergency as well as the lengthy period negotiations following the May 2018 elections for the national government were cited as impediments to effective engagement with legislators. JNP also faced specific challenges regarding access to certain facilities and detention centres, and reported being unable to access to prisons and detention centres run by the Iraqi National Intelligence Service and the Asayish.

Stakeholders from all partner organisations expressed a belief that taking a long-term approach to dealing with government entries was necessary to ensure activities were relevant. In the words of one stakeholder from IAA:

'Democratisation is the process of changing people's attitudes and mentalities, as well as their opinions. This takes time and repeated activities.'

Three provincial council members and four parliamentarians responded to a short survey about their involvement in the project. All judged the relevance of activities they had been involved in to be 'Good' or 'Excellent' and all stated that they would participate in such activities again. All legislators stated that they appreciated the ways in which programming had helped increase participation of constituents and some stated that the project had helped them work more effectively with CSOs.

Suggestions of these legislators to improve the relevance of the project all revolved around meeting a wider range of constituents or increasing the intensity of cooperation with CSOs.

Civil Society Organisation and Wider Society

Data collected during the evaluation indicate that different CSO actors engage in a range of different activities and methods to try to mobilise and influence change. Iraqi NGOs and advocacy groups have engaged in lobbying efforts aimed at both the Iraqi Central government, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and Provincial Councils and responded to consultations about proposed legislation. Nevertheless, the historical effectiveness of such activities is not clear. For example, despite the fact that there have been concerted efforts by a number of actors to protect the rights of religious minorities in Iraq, huge numbers have left the country. Discussion with PFO suggests that established labour syndicates associated with political parties are not seen as effective actors for protecting workers rights but that new, less formalised syndicates are engaging in genuine activism on behalf of workers. Iraqi media has the capacity to mobilise influence and change, but freedom of expression is curtailed by fear of violent reprisals.

Interacting with CSOs and Wider Civil Society: Democratisation. In the area of democratisation, the project has engaged CSOs and wider civil society in several ways. PAO has established Community Committees engaging a range of figures from civil society, such as members from academia, professions, NGOs, and the general public. These Committees are intended to act as a bridge between Provincial Councils and the population as a whole. Committees identify the biggest needs in their area, such as access to electricity or corruption. Community Committees advocate to Provincial Councils about these matters but can also provide information for Provincial Councils and liaise with other organisations.

RID has also attempted to engage civil society figures in the political process through organising debates between intellectuals and politicians. RID has also attempted to facilitate political participation that supports civic institutions rather than being purely partisan, such as conducting seminars on electoral law and ways in which NGOs and the media can educate the public about elections. RID and IAA have also worked to strengthen civil society by streamlining the process for registering NGOs with the Government of Iraq.

Interacting with CSOs and Wider Civil Society: Human Rights. The human rights component of the project engaged CSOs and wider civil society. PFO has taken steps to build the capacity of labour syndicates to effectively protect workers by training activists in how to monitor and report violations of workers' rights and labour law. JNP has not only trained prison staff in the human rights of prisoners, but also civil society actors such as lawyers and activists. AIM has undertaken a range of different activities to engage minority communities. This has included engaging minorities in consultations regarding legislation to support minority rights, but has also involved some intra-community activity, specifically trying to build bridges between different elements of the Shabak community who had been divided over affiliation with the Baath party. Attempts to build bridges included establishing events across the whole Shabak community such as football leagues.

The rule of law and access to effective legal recourse are commonly held to be features of a strong civil society. Partner organisations have engaged in a range of activities supporting access to legal recourse for potentially vulnerable groups. For example, PFO has created centres to provide legal advice for workers and JNP has attempted to offer legal advice to those they encounter during visits to prisons.

Strengthening civil society through creating an informed public discourse around policy has been an aim of this project. JNP has aimed to raise awareness of the conditions of prisons and prisoners in the Iraqi media, and PFO has created radio content on the situation of workers in Iraq. PFO also reports having built connections in the Iraqi media that mean they are invited to speak on matters relating to the condition of workers.

Relevance of Interactions with CSOs and Wider Civil Society. CSO members surveyed as part of this evaluation judged the activities they had participated in to be highly relevant to their area of focus with all respondents judging the relevance of activities to be good or excellent. Some respondents simply stated that the activities they participated in were aligned with their area of work, but others gave more detailed responses. For example, an NGO worker who attended a conference run by IAA and the Iraqi Women Network stated:

'The conference was relevant as we are an organisation concerned with women's issues. The conference showcased the achievements of leading and successful women and informed us about their ongoing work.'

Further evidence that CSO members who participated in programming judged it to be relevant is given by the fact that all survey respondents, save one, stated that they would participate in activities hosted by the Partner NGO in future. The one respondent who said they would not write that they did not have the time in their schedule to take part in future activities.

Given this positive response, there were few suggestions as to how relevance could be improved beyond expanding the extent or duration of existing programming. One piece of feedback which may help improve relevance of programming to CSO actors was given by an NGO worker who had participated in programming with PAO and IAA. They reported involvement in the Freedom of Expression and Right of Information Initiative and attending a conference run by IAA and the Iraqi Women Network. This stakeholder wrote that there was a need to ensure that more organisations were involved in activities. This testimony also triangulates with the testimony of a Provincial Council member who stated that there was a need to engage more organisations in activities, especially those representing women and young people.

Interconnectedness of Activities Targeting Government Actors, Partners, and Civil Society

Available evidence suggests substantial complementarity and interconnectedness of activities. This speaks to the relevance of project activities. As discussed in detail in previous sections, activities by partners involved in democratisation have involved building the capacity of CSOs, creating opportunities for them to engage with legislators and influencing legislators to be more open to the engagement of CSOs.

Activities by partners in the Human Rights component of the project have involved both lobbying for stronger legal protections in the letter of the law, but also attempting to ensure that vulnerable groups have improved access to effective legal recourse. NPA activities to build capacity of partners exhibit interconnectedness to other activity types due to their potential to enhance the ability of partners to operate across all their activities.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDER'S ACTIVITIES

- 3. What are the main strengths and weaknesses with regard to the performance of the Iraqi and Kurdistan Parliament, provincial councils, partners, and civil society, and how are these addressed by the project?**

The Iraqi Government (Iraqi and Kurdistan Parliament, Provincial Councils)

The organs of the Iraqi government – the central government, the KRG, and the provincial councils – each have different strengths and weaknesses they bring to the table to enhance the overall probability of success for the NPA project to strengthen the democratic process in Iraq.

Strengths. The Iraqi central government is the supreme source of authority within Iraq; it therefore possesses significant leverage to effect change on a national scale. Most significantly, the Iraqi government's ability to draft new laws is a tremendous strength for firmly entrenching democratic and human rights-based principles within the government. With regards to the project itself, this specific ability of the government has been incorporated by the partner organisations through activities focussed on lobbying the central government to commit to new laws regarding workers' rights as well as those focussed on minority populations. Furthermore, commitments to legal procedures that protect the rights of those detained and accused of crimes also come primarily from the central government level.

The KRG operates at a similar level to the Iraqi central government for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It has broadly developed powers that functionally serve as a state within a state, including a separate judicial system. The KRG and its parliament have the same powers as the central government to draft new laws to effect change in areas under its control. NPA partners have worked with the Kurdistan Parliament to set curricula, as well as to draft laws regarding protections for the labour force and minorities. Additionally, laws and regulations related to prisoner and detainee rights are also decided at this level within the KRI.

Provincial councils have the strength of being the face of the state within a local area. As such, provincial councils – when functioning transparently – are able to dramatically improve the perception of local governance and the state itself in their locales. The democratisation side of NPA's programming therefore capitalises on this natural strength to assist provincial councils in their path to greater transparency and greater responsiveness to constituencies.

Weaknesses. While the Iraqi government does have its strengths, it is not without its weaknesses, which NPA's programming has also sought to address.

The primary weakness of Iraq's central government as it relates to this programming is the sheer breadth and depth of the problem that it faces. As such, prioritising democratisation and human rights has in some cases taken a backseat to other issues, such as providing security and basic services – areas in which the Iraqi government remains limited in its capacity to provide. Further, the enforcement of existing laws related to democratisation and human rights have not always reached the local level. For example, agencies of the central government remain unwilling or unable to enforce existing legislation related to protections of minority groups. NPA seeks to address this through the lobbying for more specific language in new draft laws related to areas of concern.

One area of particular weakness for the Iraqi central government relates to protections for detainees, particularly those related to the recent conflict against ISIS. The Iraqi government does not operate all detention centres, as some are operated by the Hashd al-Shaabi.²³ There is little that can be done about this at present aside from the further integration of such non-state armed actors into the Iraqi state structure, which could allow for more enforceable human rights protections for those detainees. A key weakness of the Iraqi state is the lack of monopoly on the use of force; organisations such as Hashd al-Shaabi and even the secret police make

²³ Wille, Belkis, 'Where are Mosul's Detainees Going?', Human Rights Watch, 19 March 2017.

jurisdiction over prisoners contentious, thus limiting the impact of hypothetical legal changes in the judicial system.

A compounding factor is a widespread desire for vengeance against anyone associated with ISIS, which has included vengeance against women and children, including through sexual exploitation and indefinite and extralegal detention. The tenuous control of the Iraqi state on the many different armed actors and the lack of a strongly developed culture of 'rule of law' have exacerbated this issue.

Similarly, the KRG benefits from NPA assistance. The KRG is accountable to a wide array of stakeholders and has limited funding to focus on the broad range of challenges it faces. NPA has been working specifically with the KRG to improve its systems of protections for vulnerable populations as well as to improve its responsiveness to its constituents and transparency.

Provincial councils have in the past been dominated by local power-brokers with allegiances to a wide range of tribal, corporate, religious, and national forces, and as such have not always been able to come to a consensus on even basic issues due to these differences. NPA's programming has specifically sought to limit the impact of more intractable differences between members of provincial councils by seeking to make them as transparent as possible, including the livestreaming of meetings, which is hoped to improve effectiveness. Provincial councils remain hamstrung by a constrained budgetary environment and relatively high levels of centralisation with regard to political decision-making.

Civil Society Actors

NPA has sought to strengthen democracy in Iraq not only through engagement with the government but also through the direct engagement of civil society actors, both as project partners, and as beneficiaries of activities. This works to enhance democratic development in Iraq in two ways. Firstly, it allows local organisations with expertise in relevant focus areas work with the government, activists, media figures, academics, and other civil society organisations to achieve their ends. Secondly, it aims to build an inclusive and participatory civil society to address a wide variety of issues, building links across issue areas and time in order to embed a culture of participation within the Iraqi political paradigm.

Strength. The principle strength of NPA's partners is their strong links with those who have the legal ability to change the law or policy. For example, the senior staff of the Justice Network for Prisoners has worked for decades in the Ministry of Justice, and the Alliance for Iraqi Minorities recently had AIM-aligned candidates win parliamentary elections, thus providing a 'seat at the table' at both the Council of Representatives of Iraq and the Kurdistan Parliament for those who have committed to implementing AIM's recommended legislative agenda.

A further strength of NPA's partners is their ability to work with other local civil society actors and organisations on the ground. For example, a large part of the work of democratisation and transparency-oriented partners (IAA, PAO, and RID) is to find suitable local partners. They then deliver training and grants to these local actors in order to achieve specific goals related to building the capacity of local communities to hold their provincial councils accountable and transparent, as well as to provide local mechanisms with feedback and prioritisation of agenda items.

Weaknesses. The primary weakness of NPA's partner organisations and the civil society actors they work with is the constrained budgetary environment. Many civil society organisations and partner organisations have a largely volunteer workforce, which limits their capacity, especially in relation to the time that staff can commit to working with the organisation. Often, neither the partner organisations nor civil society actors more widely are able to run programming without support from NPA. Whilst NPA seeks to address this weakness by providing

funding, in the future these organisations will have to determine alternative ways to entrench their legislative and societal agendas within their constituent communities.

4. How effective are the methods for strengthening the influence of parliament, provincial council, partners, and networks on political processes and mobilisation/participation of constituencies?

Approaching the variety of beneficiary-facing activities facilitated by NPA's project partners through three general activity areas – namely, awareness raising; mobilisation and consensus-building; and advocacy and engagement with government actors – this section assesses the effectiveness of NPA's partners with regard to (1) influencing political processes and decision making and (2) improving internal capacities of targeted government and civil society actors in Iraq.

Awareness-Raising Activities

Modality & Targeted Stakeholders. All six partner organisations have engaged in awareness-raising activities as part of this project, although the human rights-focussed partners (AIM, JNP, and PFO) have made greater usage of this activity type than the democratisation-focussed partners (IAA, PAO, and RID). Awareness-raising activities have included a mix of people-based and media-focussed communication. The former includes seminars, conferences, festivals, workshops, and meetings. The latter primarily consists of the printing and dissemination of hard copy leaflets, brochures, posters, and documents in large scale or SMS and social media campaigns. Awareness-raising activities also include TV and radio broadcasts, either live coverage of the aforementioned events or interviews with specific stakeholders.

A variety of stakeholder groups, from the general public to senior decision-makers, have been targeted by and included in awareness-raising activities organised by project partners. Overall, the human rights-focussed partners – particularly JNP and PFO – were somewhat more targeted with regard to their awareness raising, given the more selective relevance of their focus areas. The democratisation-focussed partners mostly targeted NGOs, CSOs, private sector organisations, and other civil society actors with awareness-raising activities – also seeking to mobilise them as community influencers.

Effect on Increasing Influence of Stakeholders on Political Processes. Out of the beneficiary-facing activity types described above, awareness-raising activities are likely the least-directly connected to effectiveness with regard to measuring the influence of targeted stakeholders on political processes. Awareness-raising campaigns are passive by nature; the targeted population is provided with information, which at most will create a 'halo effect' in relation to more targeted approaches like mobilisation and capacity-building activities.

As such, measuring the effectiveness of different types of awareness-raising activities is challenging and ill-defined even in the best cases. For example, while media coverage might provide numbers (ex: numbers of articles written, number of readers or viewers), it does not provide information about what actions were taken as a result of information learned. However, feedback from partner activity beneficiaries has the potential to provide at least a proxy for this information. Some partners have provided examples of feedback and success stories related to their awareness-raising activities within their project documents. However, this information is largely summary and general in nature.

More specific comments, statistical insight, and targeted, constructive feedback could be facilitated through standardised feedback forms, enabling both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of each activity delivered. However, no such centralised system is currently in place for this project. In some activity summaries, tangible outcomes have been reported in terms of how many copies of an awareness-raising document have been made

and where these copies are to be distributed, but the details are often limited and do not provide insight regarding reception and use by targeted stakeholders.

In terms of measurable effects that are available within the available documentation, numbers of attendees at awareness raising events were frequently observed to fall below target. For example, 40 provincial council members attended PAO's 2016 UPR meetings, although 80 had been planned. However, currently, the attendee number summaries that are completed for each event do not include target numbers, making such assessments in relation to targets challenging. Due to the passive nature of awareness-raising activities, the overall direct effects of such activities on political processes and influence is thought to be low. However, quantifiable objectives and feedback were not consistently reported by partners for these activities, making this difficult to verify one way or the other.

5. Do partners and NPA have a clear understanding of the process towards the desired change?

Project activities undertook to provide a goal, or a set of ideals, toward which beneficiaries and partners could work. These ideals covered areas from increased citizen participation in governance to improved labour and minority rights. As a set of positive ideals, these are indeed impressive for many of the participants, and in cases were cited as providing new energy or a new vision of what might be possible in the Iraqi context:

'Beneficiaries showed motivation to continue to implement the project and raise awareness and implementation of democracy.'

'I am a lawyer who needs human culture as well as legal culture. Humanism is the engine of the conscience of the citizen, which drives him to respect the rights of others. This is the best way to apply the law fairly among individuals.' (AIM Activity Beneficiary, Online Survey)

Similarly, the immediate project impacts appear to have been well-defined with regard to training, capacity-building, and government dialogues identified as core areas of activity towards achieving the grand vision described by the project objectives to strengthen democracy and inclusive decision-making in Iraq.

However, linking near-term inputs to larger strategic objectives and charting a realistic, evidence-based Theory of Change (TOC) in the intermediate period was an area of substantial challenge identified in the course of the evaluation. This was indirectly referenced by various respondents to KIIs as well as beneficiary FGDs and identified through the review of project documents by the consultancy team.

It also appears that the activities in this project were assumed to achieve the desired ends, with limited critical evaluation of whether predictable and well-known challenges would diminish desired impacts. Similarly, the need to address these challenges (in the interest of achieving change) did not appear to be clearly charted or articulated. Two examples of such challenges are as follows:

Government Disinterest, Inertia, Corruption, and Deep Divisions. Challenges with the Iraqi government's inertia and corruption, as well as with ethnic and sectarian divides that cross it, have been well-known by international actors for years prior to the design and launch of project activities. Beneficiaries themselves highlighted their struggle to understand how to overcome this barrier to change:

'The city suffers from weak government communication with the citizens and was singled out after the administrative changes that took place in the province. There are also drums knocking from some political parties to divide the people according to sectarian and national considerations.'

'Whenever we demand the amendment and chance of old [...] policies, we encounter a bitter reality dominated by corruption and dominated by sectarian, factional, and partisan ideas – and this would sabotage the society.'

'The problem is that the majority of Iraqi parliament members are radical Islamic, so it is difficult to convince them to support minority's rights. We prepared a law and discussed it with Iraqi presidential advisors, but they told us not to take it to parliament or federal court because a specific radical Islamic party strongly disagrees with such a law. Religious extremism is a difficulty for non-Muslim minorities'.
(High-Level Stakeholder KII with AIM)

Partner activity beneficiaries appear to assume that activities would change governance, in spite of many years of 'democracy-building' activities (costing many billions of dollars) delivered by both state and non-state actors in Iraq with limited desired effect. The mechanism for change, therefore, appears to be ill-understood by partner organisations as well as partner activity beneficiaries.

Resource Constraints & Dependence on Aid. Both partner organisations and partner activity beneficiaries highlighted the extraordinary limitations of funds facing their efforts to achieve desired change. The broad and varied focus areas of the project, in the interest of expanding potential beneficiary numbers, may have further 'spread thin' the potential impact of already limited project funds; questions that resources as allocated could achieve desired change do not appear to have been resolved prior to the project launch.

'[One of our biggest challenges is] lack or lack of financial funding, which leaves no opportunity for organisations to achieve their goals.' (Stakeholder from Partner Organisation)

'We suggest to increase grant, or instead of spending money on 12 projects with low quality of organisation and management, they can split this budget among 6 projects with a very high quality in terms of organisation and management.' (Stakeholder from Partner Organisation)

In the same vein, many of the partners and partner activity beneficiaries appear to rely heavily, if not exclusively on funds provided by NPA – and perhaps a small number of other international organisations. How transitions from aid dependence to self-sustaining local organisations serving as agents of change within Iraq could be achieved seems, again, ill-understood by many respondents at the time of interview. Again, this does not appear to have been meaningfully addressed or resolved prior to the project launch.

Even where project activities were seen to be long-term investments, there still does not appear to be alignment of vision or strategy linking the short-term impacts to the long-term outcomes and impacts, nor any practical discussion of how progress and change could be identified. Those key criteria, again feeding into a strong, evidence-based theory of change, are essential to identifying those areas of strength or impact in project delivery (allowing for building on best practice) and cutting (or strengthening) those activities which are not working.

At present, the project logframe (the primary means of identifying success) emphasises success of output (training delivered, meetings held, etc.). For example, if the training is delivered, the activity is considered to be a success, irrespective of whether the project has accomplished lasting change. Furthermore, it appears that the Organisational Assessment Framework did not have its criteria well or systematically defined, nor has there been critical evaluation regarding whether or not those dimensions are truly linked to driving improved democracy.

To summarise, understanding change requires both defining what change looks like and how it can be identified and measured in the short-medium-long term. Even the definitions and measurement approaches employed to track the change (for example, through an evidence-driven TOC and supporting logframe) require constant revisiting and refinement. Once these concepts, strategies, and approaches are well-defined and established, all activity can then feed into a unified strategy for affecting lasting impacts in the desired areas. Throughout the

project documents, as well as from evidence arising from the primary data collection, it does not appear that these criteria were met by the project, making understanding of change up to this point a substantial challenge.

6. What activities/methods have been agreed with the project partners and what are the strengths and weaknesses in NPA's support to improve internal capacities of the parliament, provincial councils, and civil society in Iraq?

Strengths & Challenges. One measurable strength with regard to awareness-raising activities is the breadth of contact in terms of beneficiary numbers. In terms of internal capacities, however, the lack of standardised feedback precludes a reliable measure of participants' key takeaways or resulting capacity developments. However, awareness-raising activities bring people together, and a KII with an AIM stakeholder suggests that 'connectedness, networking, and cooperation' were strengths of their awareness-raising activities. While the effect and added value of this networking might be easier to assess than political influence, without a system of beneficiary in feedback, even this evaluation of effect remains elusive.

Where awareness-raising likely has the most potential to be effective is in the specific areas worked on by the human rights-focussed partners: for example, PFO making workers aware of their rights within the existing legal framework enabled them to act accordingly where those rights were being violated. However, as yet, there do not appear to be good systems in place for connecting cause (such as strike action or a legal case) linked to effect (such as wage payment). Moreover, many of these impacts might be more long-term and difficult to track and record given the dispersed reach of awareness-raising activities.

There is little observed evidence of combined messaging between the six NGO partners where they overlap with targeted stakeholders. For example, AIM specifically targets women and minorities, and JNP focussed some of their activities on women's rights in the prison population in May 2016. IAA also worked with The General Assembly for the Development of Women, and PAO partners with Justice Network for Women and provided support programmes for girls and women with disabilities to complete their education. All of this similar work appears to have gone on without apparent inter-partner referencing or sharing of best practices and resources with regard to awareness-raising activities. Although these organisations have their own connections and networks external to their shared partnership with NPA, the lack of connection and collaboration between the different partner organisations – particularly in the area of awareness raising, where many of the same areas and beneficiary groups might be covered by multiple partner organisations – seems like a missed opportunity for improved efficiency.

Furthermore, awareness-raising activities are also compromised by high relative cost in conjunction with hard-to-measure effects. Provided budgets indicate that a considerable portion of funds allocated to each partner are dedicated to awareness-raising activities, but there is no concrete data to indicate the effect – if any – these activities and materials had on moving them closer to their medium- and long-term objectives in relation to this project.

Overall, there appears to have been minimal effectiveness in relation to mobilisation and influence – at least in terms that can or have been meaningfully measured – from awareness-raising activities undertaken by NPA's project partners. However, it is possible that assessment of effectiveness for awareness-raising activities could be improved through the integration of standardised feedback surveys or other feedback mechanisms into partner activities.

Mobilisation and Consensus-Building

Modality & Targeted Stakeholders. All six partner organisations have engaged in mobilisation and consensus-building activities as part of this project. In terms of the democratisation-focussed partners, PAO and IAA have focussed on community participation, including mobilising local CSOs. RID aims to build consensus in part by creating and maintaining a Public Participation Platform. All three democratisation-focussed partners have also empowered CSOs with grants mobilising community participation in decision-making across a range of sectors, including energy, education, and healthcare.

The human rights-focussed partners all have undertaken significant consultation and training components to enable mobilisation. AIM's work in this area has primarily involved bringing together committees of experts from different fields (activists, lawyers, academics, etc.) to discuss draft laws and other legal considerations pertinent to minority rights. JNP and PFO's work has included this kind of mobilisation and consensus-building to some extent, although they have also provided training and training of trainers (ToT) to stakeholders to help monitor and prevent abuses against prisoners and workers, respectively.

Given that consensus building is fundamentally aimed at a range of groups, these activities involved the widest catchment of specialisms and sectors of any activity group. The democratisation-focussed organisations focus on CSOs but also engage with everyone from the general public to senior representatives from the central government, including academics and private sector stakeholders. The human rights-focussed partners are necessarily more targeted based on their particular area of specialisation. All three organisations include CSOs and/or activists dedicated to these areas in capacity-building and mobilisation. AIM additionally has targeted minority youths and women for mobilisation and consensus-building activities; JNP targets both the prison population and prison employees; and PFO targets workers and syndicate representatives. JNP and PFO also frequently include legal advisors and lawyers in their mobilisation and consensus-building activities.

Effect on Increasing Influence of Stakeholders on Political Processes. The tangible effect of consensus-building activities is necessarily the bringing together of, and initiation of open dialogue between, different stakeholder groups. In this sense, the programming of all partners has been a considerable success. Community centres set up by IAA and PAO are also tangible outcomes of this type of activity.

To strengthen civil society's influence on policy, community members must be brought together. In this project, this has clearly been done with large numbers of participants, reaching multiple sectors and representing a significant achievement overall. What stakeholders went on to accomplish in terms of involvement in political processes beyond meetings and dialogue is less clear – and is caveated somewhat by the restricted timeframe of a midterm evaluation. It is challenging to determine direct correlation between mobilisation of stakeholders and influence on political processes, apart from the consideration that empowering citizens through public participation is a political process in itself.

With regard to the democratisation-focussed partners' CSO grants, results are still pending or so far unreported, so it is unclear how effective these grants have been or how efficiently money was spent. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of grants, a strict set of outcomes and success criteria would be necessary to monitor achievements. However, based on the documentation available, quantifiable objectives or success criteria do not appear to have been put in place.

Due to the specialisation of the human rights-focussed partners' targeting, it is expected that consensus-building and mobilisation is more limited – but perhaps more relevant to activity beneficiary groups that have been targeted. AIM has provided little detail regarding what kind of stakeholders have been brought together for their consensus-building and mobilisation activities, and therefore effectiveness in this area is difficult to assess. The mobilisation of lawyers and other stakeholders involved in monitoring of rights violations by JNP and PFO was a

clear outcome but the link between this and any wider political impact is not obvious from the documentation provided.

Overall, the documentation provided by partners indicate that different, relevant stakeholders have been mobilised for the purpose of consensus-building – including training and discussing draft laws – but the effect of this with regard to the influence of stakeholders on political processes is unclear given the apparent lack of structured cause-effect evaluation systems.

Strengths & Challenges. One overall strength of the project that is particularly relevant in relation to mobilisation and capacity-building activities is the breadth of its reach in terms of governorates and stakeholders. NPA has emphasised the strength of their partners' relationships with key stakeholders in terms of their effectiveness in mobilisation and capacity-building:

'[We have] great relationships with decision-makers and key stakeholders, some even reached the former president of Iraq. The work [the partners] did and the people they have on board – it is a strength. They are experts and people who can influence change.' (High-Level Stakeholder KII with NPA)

The ability of partner organisations to draw upon networks and even create participatory bodies like councils and community committees is apparent from the available activity documentation.

However, what is missing from project monitoring and documentation is a meaningful measurement of the effect of this mobilisation and capacity-building. There do not appear to be any useful systems for measuring the effect of this project's mobilisation and capacity-building programmes – or of its programming more generally. Partner reporting only includes short-term, shallow assessments (ex: 20 people intended training, or 10 organisations agreed to a new draft law) without any connection to medium- or long-term goals related to political influence or meaningful change in relation to the overall project objectives of improving democratisation and human rights in Iraq.

Advocacy and Engagement with Government Actors

Modality & Targeted Stakeholders. All six partner organisations have engaged in mobilisation and consensus-building activities as part of this project. In terms of the democratisation-focussed organisations, PAO and IAA primarily worked at the provincial council-level while RID worked mostly with members of Kurdistan Parliament, including through the Public Participation Platform, which seeks to connect MPs directly with constituents through an online forum. The human rights-focussed partners' work has been centred on changing laws (in line with the UPR) in support of minorities, prisoners, and workers. AIM, PFO, and JNP have worked to include parliamentarians and parliamentary bureaucrats in many of their awareness-raising activities and have also presented draft laws and other documents relevant to legislative changes in their areas of focus. AIM has also undertaken work with the High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq.

Effect on Increasing Influence of Stakeholders on Political Processes. Although effect in this area is difficult to quantify, the actual drafting and enacting of new laws provides a clear-cut, tangible effect of activities directed at influencing government actors. AIM drafted an amendment to the current minorities' rights statute (Article 5) 2015 through the Kurdistan Parliament; JNP made a UPR-compliant submission to KRG; and PFO influenced the enactment of a draft law protecting trade union organisation:

'After these efforts [including directing the influence of the ILO] the House of Representatives voted on 20 November in favour of a draft law that allows the Republic of Iraq to join the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention No. 87 of 1948. The President of the Republic, Dr. Fuad Masoum approved the law of accession of the Republic of Iraq to the Convention on Freedom of

Association and Protection of Trade Union Organisation on Thursday, 21/12/2017. The ratification of this Convention is a historic achievement for the trade union movement in Iraq, which it has long fought for. It will pave the way towards the legislation of the law on trade union rights and freedoms, which will require a serious effort by Iraqi unions for its enactment.' (PFO Final Narrative Report, 2017)

This represents an effective outcome and serves as an exemplar of well-directed, long-term, sequential, and responsive programming on behalf of PFO. Moreover, the protection of trade unions provides a solid platform for future influence with regard to national policy for workers and crosses over into the democratisation-driven objectives of the project by empowering local actors to be heard at higher levels.

Other examples of successful lobbying include the development of a Religious Education curriculum in KRG in consultation with AIM that teaches all children about Christianity and Yezidism, as well as Islam in earlier years, before teaching about world religions in later years.

Stakeholders from JNP expressed the belief that their activities had resulted in a range of positive outcomes in the justice system including reduced instance of torture, increased instance of disciplinary action against abusive staff and wider presence of medical professionals in prisons and detention centres.

In addition to policy outcomes there are other examples which point to increased stakeholder influence on political processes such as the election of three candidates affiliated with AIM to the Iraqi parliament and positive testimony from surveyed parliamentarians on efforts to connect them to CSOs and wider civil society through forums and Community Centres.

Strengths & Challenges. An unavoidable challenge in assessing the effectiveness of advocacy is determining the role that a particular advocacy campaign had in the final shape of legislation and governance. One way in which this can be mitigated is the clear articulation of specific objectives for advocacy campaigns. Although establishing causal connection between advocacy and outcome remains extremely challenging, it is at least possible to determine the extent to which actual legislation and practice resembles the intended outcome of advocacy. More precise articulation of advocacy objectives would make possible better evaluation of effectiveness.

It is likely that the effects and impact of the project's activities targeting government stakeholders will primarily be felt in the medium-to-long term, and therefore fall beyond the scope of the midterm evaluation. Ensuring that systematic and rigorous systems for not only assessing short-term achievements but longer-term effects with regard to overall project goals are not currently in place; however, establishing these will be essential to preparing for meaningful assessments down the line.

It has already been mentioned that a key strength of this project has been its breadth of reach, across most of Iraq and in some cases internationally via connections with INGOs. What is unclear is the depth of permeation within that achieved reach. More cohesive, consistent MEAL might enable a more directed assessment of all activities – and not just those involving specific examples of policy reform.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

7. How has the project been contributing to the development of partners and activities/methods (e.g. political dialogue, networking, funding, etc.)? What are the main strengths and weaknesses of this support?

Political dialogue, networking, and funding has already been fully discussed in previous section of this report. This section undertakes to discuss the degree to which NPA's programmes have built relevant capacities at

partner NGOs, assessing available data against the key evaluation questions guiding this evaluation. Examples of political dialogue and funding have already been discussed in previous sections and are not discussed here.

Challenges Underpinning Partners' Activities

Needs assessment is a precondition to measuring the development of partners. Prior to discussing whether any capacities have been built, it may be appropriate to discuss needs assessments and their relevance to both the project and this evaluation. A precondition of measuring improvements in capacity are strong needs assessments and baselines, ideally independent of internal and potentially biased self-reporting. The more closely these are linked to specific, measurable, skill or capacity gaps, the easier it is to both measure and demonstrate improvements in capacity. Without specific capacities defined, there are distinct limitations in measuring capacity improvements and ensuring funded activities align with demonstrated and documented capacity needs. It does not appear such assessments were undertaken at the outset of the project, nor were the specific capacities to be targeted for improvement defined.

Strengths—Activities and Methods Contributing to Partners' Activities

Bearing the preceding challenges in effective baselines and needs assessments in mind, conclusive establishment of improvement can be a challenge. Nonetheless, available data can provide some general indicative findings in this regard. Throughout the project documentation, there was one primary area where the specific capacities of partners were both identified as an area of weakness, and where targeted capacity building activities were undertaken: financial management and reporting.

Capacity building in the financial reporting system contributed to the development of partner activities and accountability. Financial transparency is an area of concern across all NGOs in Iraq. Seeking to address this challenge, NPA worked very closely with its partners to improve capacities in finance and reporting, seeking to promote excellent stewardship of donor resources. This was a particular concern given strict financial transparency and reporting requirements by donors; failure to comply with these could lead to a loss of support.

In response to these concerns, financial capacity building is an area where there appears to have been substantial investment and improvement. NPA provided the software, systems, training, and (most importantly) follow-up support and mentorship to partner organisations, ensuring their financial systems and processes met minimum standards. Review of reporting and documentation, as well as discussions with key informants, clearly identified this as an area of improvement. This combination of classroom training, provision of resources, and ongoing mentorship and supervision align well with research on what promotes strong capacity building in any context. This might be considered an example of good practice moving ahead.

Networking and Alliance. NPA also sought to improve the capacity of partner organisations to form alliances, and collaborate, hoping that joint initiatives would be established, and joint funding proposals submitted to funding bodies. Many respondents indicated that some such networks or alliances were formed in the course of the project; this was highlighted throughout the project documents as a key area of success.

Weaknesses—Working Definition of Capacity Not Clearly Defined

Project documents do discuss other areas of 'capacity building' but delving deeper into the evidence reveals that many of these sessions focus on information sharing, rather than developing real skills. Examples of this from the project documentation include:

'The training sessions were designed to educate the participants on the international treaties and guidelines for the protection of minorities' rights, best practice such as how the language differences are dealt with in the legislation of other countries or how independent commissions are formed to defend the rights of minorities; and highlight the Iraqi constitution and laws that are enacted for the protection of minorities' right. Hence, a significant increase in the number of advocators has been encouraged.' (2016 Annual Report)

The sessions almost universally focussed on information sharing, and not on increasing the capacities or skills of beneficiaries' organisations. One strong definition of 'capacity building' is offered by the UN, and generally accepted by a variety of organisations: '[capacity building is the] process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive'. A focus on information sharing, rather than on the strengthening of skills, systems, and abilities, cannot, therefore, be considered an adequate approach to capacity building.

'The activities should link concepts to practical application on the ground.' (Human Rights Activist, IAA)

This is borne out by the discussions and collected primary data, where most 'capacity building' is described as information sharing, with limited additional mention of real skills or abilities being intentionally built in the course of the programme. It must be mentioned that the information shared was cited by respondents as being valuable and motivating, and that NPA's partner organisations did share much of it with their downstream beneficiaries; this might be an indicator that the topics covered resonate with partner organisations and target communities.

'I have 18 years of experience in prisons, but it still added something in my personality to be more careful in my work.' (JNP Survey Respondent)

'When the trainer gave some examples of prisoners in developed countries, I felt sad why we cannot be like them in terms of prisoner basic rights.' (JNP Survey Respondent)

'We learned a lot about the international laws and the newest international laws and decisions regarding prisoner rights.' (JNP Respondent)

Further to the working definition of capacity building, it is unclear that the training provided by NPA facilitated the development of 'skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive' within the challenging Iraqi context. The primary barrier to partner effectiveness in Iraq comprised the lack of transparency and responsiveness of the government (both central and district); it does not appear that the capacity building programmes effectively dealt with (or sought to give appropriate skills) to address this challenge:

'Some organisations have expressed the importance of having a role in establishing activities and events focussed on dealing with cases of corruption' (PAO Partner Organisation Survey Respondent)

'Whenever we demand the amendment and change of old educational policies, we encounter a bitter reality dominated by corruption and dominated by sectarian, factional and partisan ideas and this would sabotage the society' (PAO Survey Respondent)

'[We] submitted the draft law to the presidency of the Kurdistan regional parliament. They received it positively but are they going to take it seriously? We are waiting.' (AIM Partner FGD Respondent)

Beyond the value of increasing the network and connectivity of partner organisations and staff, it was unclear what next steps would be achieved and how the momentum would be sustained following close of the programme. One quote from a partner (PAO) survey response illustrated this challenge well:

'[we formed] a partnership with all organisations wishing to combat corruption and to put forward proposals and recommendations. A partnership was formed, with verbal proposals and recommendations submitted; however, limited subsequent action or impact was stated to emerge from these partnerships.'

The three capacity-focussed dimensions of NPA's Framework for Change are: the capacity to make changes, influence and have impact; the capacity to make alliances; and technical and administrative capacities. Measurement of these have been a challenge for both NPA and the evaluation team because of a lack of specific definition and, consequently, a lack of baselines against which progress can be measured. Also, building on a lack of definition, the activities may not have been as well targeted to achieving specific outcomes as they could have been, resulting in potentially ineffective or less effective activities. There is an opportunity to invest in greater clarity and understanding of how activities drive improvement in capacity, and how those capacities are aligned to NPA's goals in Iraq.

NPA'S ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

8. How is the NPA Iraq's organisational capacity set up in order to achieve the intended project results? This includes implementation performance, work planning, NPA head office involvement, and NPA external office management model

In assessing NPA Iraq's organisational capacity, the evaluators were requested to inquire into the following key areas: a) implementation of performance; b) work planning; c) NPA's head office involvement; and d) NPA's management model. The midterm evaluation offers the following analysis based on the totality of the facts, separated by the order of the stated sub-enquiries.

Implementation of Performance, Work Planning, and Head Office Involvement

Key performance indicators are not well-articulated in the logistical framework. KIIs with NPA staff suggest several confounding factors, including the difficulty of measuring the magnitude of change in performance and a lack of well-articulated outcome-level results. Review of the recent logical framework disclosed lengthy output levels but a lack of well-articulated outcomes which had a knock-on effect towards tracking achievement of the results. There is no indication that the output levels are not what they are purported to be in donor reporting; however, the lack of outcome mapping contributed to the definable results in partners' performance.

Meanwhile, senior NPA members agreed that funding and resources are not at issue or a hindrance to performance, but the dearth of continuity of human resources made it difficult to properly carry out the activities. This is principally acute when it comes to collating documents for quarterly reporting and contributed to poor reporting of performance. This is notable where partner organisations have experienced high levels of turnover.

NPA project staff is currently in preparation for drafting a comprehensive partner work plan in November 2018. Among other considerations, the review includes revisiting project indicators and monitoring roles and responsibilities of all parties' concern. According to NPA staff, there have been several workshops coinciding with the arrival of new project staff, but work plans appear to have been stalled pending further information on

the needs and priorities of the partner organisations. Although there have been discussions of realigning monitoring plans to make the best use of project staff, there does not appear to be a consensus nor is there a common understanding of the approach.

NPA head office involvement appear to be nominal and project's staff perception of the support has been met with mixed results. NPA senior staff relayed that there has been support coming from the head office in Norway through regular monthly check-ins, while other project staff stated that there are no formal and continuous training and learning opportunities to support current NPA staff. Key informants also relayed that they could substantially benefit from project management training, such as results-based management and long-term mentoring and support from NPA staff. More specifically, subject matter expertise has also been cited as a requirement; this is especially true in the form of legal policy training, advocacy, and communication strategies to better understand project performance.

NPA Management Model

NPA works through selected local NGOs, and it has a longstanding and exceptional reputation among its peers. NPA primarily depends on self-reporting, and it has not performed a formal needs or capacity assessment for partners. KIs expressed more can be done to address and understand the partners' needs. Currently, there is no formal system to assess the progress of the partner organisations' capacity toward the performance of achievements. As of September 2018, project staff is in the process of formalising a capacity assessment and capability towards its intended results. Change in the management structure has been met with friction and the supervision of these changes requires a collective approach and alignment with the role and responsibilities—starting with a descriptive model of outcomes and a stronger understanding of the results-based management systems.

At the time of writing, the performance indicators and logistical framework are too lengthy and do not appear to be clearly defined, which has caused confusion in the reporting and documentation of results. NPA project staff expressed a need for stronger continuous learning and specific technical support from the NPA Head Office. While the original project work plan was implemented at the inception of the project, there are no formal mechanisms to trigger adjustments to the changing political landscape, nor has there been any evidence of an agreed strategy during the period of performance. This is imperative in light of the recent Kurdistan Parliament elections, which will require a formal communication and campaign strategy between the partners and their constituent activity beneficiaries. This will involve specific work plans with NPA partners with a clearly defined approach to engaging new parliamentary officials in key thematic areas.

The NPA head office and external management model is currently undergoing adjustments to provide technical and subject matter expertise; however, there is no definitive policy nor an agreed timeline at the time of writing. The existing NPA management model has seen considerable changes to its project staff – and it has been met with notable friction and confusion in reporting, monitoring, and documentary requirements.

9. How is the NPA capacity and how are the systems for risk management?

For the purpose of this section, risk management is broadly defined as policy and procedures to ensure organisational management of reputational risks associated with the award. These procedures can be conducted at a regular interval through the monitoring of the partners' activities/output levels and reassessing the partners' exposure to reputational harm.

KIs with staff members revealed no comprehensive plan or management of such risks, although NPA has continued to select partners on the basis of their reputation in the local community. Indeed, many of the partners

interviewed for this evaluation enjoy wide coverage in the media and generally work through a cohort of networks, minimising individual risks to the partner organisations. Some NPA partners have undertaken a study to identify their internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats – even as there is no systematic NPA policy on the matter. Further, there are currently no conditions to NPA funding, and a search of NPA documents revealed no analysis as to whether exposure to reputational harm has been factored in the partner selection process.

Activity monitoring and verification of activities and factors towards risk is fully discussed in the next section of this report (see monitoring and documentation section below).

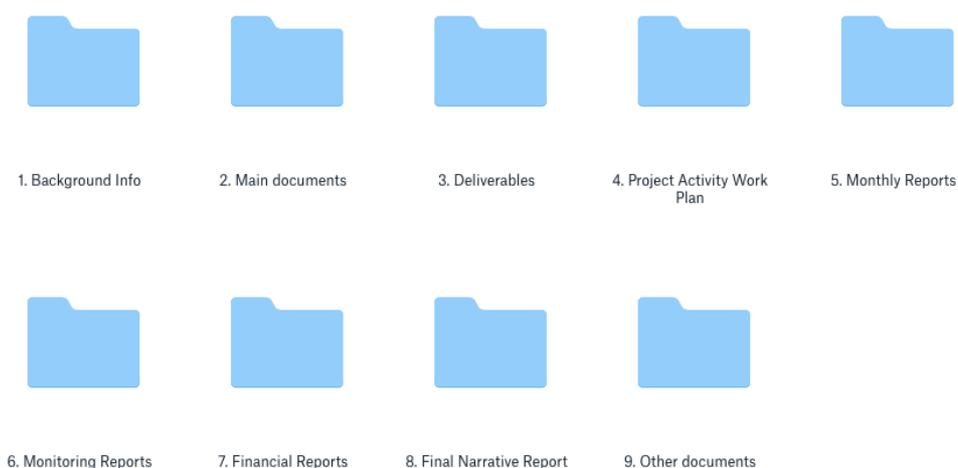
10. How is monitoring and documentation of outputs, outcomes, and longer effects organised and what monitoring systems are in place?

Partner Documentation

Overall, both interactions with NPA stakeholders and review of relevant reporting since 2016 suggest that there is substantial room for improvement with regard to the monitoring and documentation done by NPA's partner organisations.

Documentation & Storage Systems. During 2016 and 2017 the organisation of documentation and storage of information appears to have been well-organised via partner Dropbox folders. However, after the project stopped making use of Dropbox, no system has replaced it. As such, the quality of documentation and storage systems with regard to relevant partner organisation documents is currently poor.

During 2016 and 2017, NPA Iraq had put in place a system utilising Dropbox that allowed the partners to organise and store their documentation, enabling them to easily share documentation internally between partner organisations as well as with external stakeholders, as appropriate. Although the documentation from 2016 was somewhat sparse, the 2017 documentation from all partners was relatively easy to navigate. The same system of folders and organisation was used in the folders for each partner for each year (2016 and 2017), as demonstrated below:



Each partner folder included relevant monitoring and reporting templates provided by NPA for partners to use in their documentation. There appeared to be different levels of diligence with regard to populating the Dropbox folder with documents and reports. Some partners, including JNP, were quite thorough and consistent, uploading

documentation into the designated folders. However, others had empty folders. The same system of organisation was set up in each of these partners' designated folders, but no reports had been uploaded into them. Whether this is because planned events had not been conducted or because the reports on them had not been written or uploaded is not clear from the available documentation. Despite this variation, documentation appears to have generally been well-organised and presented within the partner Dropbox system.

However, due to concerns regarding confidentiality and security threats, the use of a centralised Dropbox was discontinued. This system has not been replaced by any central system of data organisation or storage; therefore, there is no centralised system used by the partner organisations to organise documentation and information. The impact of this shift was felt even in terms of document review for this midterm evaluation; while most of the documentation from all six partners from 2016-2017 was readily available and clearly organised within the Dropbox, it took multiple rounds of data requests to track down equivalent documents from 2018.

During interviews undertaken for the midterm evaluation, partner stakeholders indicated that they found Dropbox to be a very convenient and effective system for organising documentation and expressed regret that it was no longer being used. There appears to be uncertainty among the partners about what system they could use or should be using to replace it in order to match its benefits in a way that suits the new data security requirements from NPA.

Quality of Monitoring & Reporting. While the organisation and presentation of partners' reporting has improved substantially since the start of programming through NPA support with templates and other M&E-focussed capacity building, ultimately reporting remains focussed on top-line inputs and outputs without any more thorough assessment of effectiveness or impact.

Documents from Dropbox – as well as comparable documents from 2018 sourced directly from the partner organisations – were used to assess partner organisations' quality of monitoring and documentation up to the midterm evaluation period. The quality and detail of both monitoring and documentation stored via Dropbox increased noticeably between 2016 and 2017. In 2016, the partners primarily tracked activities (activity type, locations, required and received documents) and beneficiaries (direct and indirect beneficiaries by gender) using 2-3 tracking sheets. However, by 2017, partner documentation demonstrated a uniform system of folders and documents within their designated Dropbox folder. These folders included work plans, monthly reports, monitoring reports (including case studies, qualitative comments guiding monitoring towards a measure of analysis and outcome assessment), and related documentation.

Although organisation of folders and systems for documents during 2018 was an issue for the above-listed reasons, there appears to be continuing progress in terms of the presentation and organisation of reports submitted by partners during 2018. The NPA-provided templates are being used by all partners.

However, overall, partners' reports from 2016-2018 focus mainly on top-line inputs and outputs (e.g., total number of interviews, dates, activities, etc.) without any more in-depth or medium- and long-term focus on effectiveness or impact. NPA Iraq stakeholders also identified a lack of monitoring long-term effects by partner organisations as an issue; according to Fadi Hanna (the NPA MEAL Manager), monitoring is currently limited to output reports (e.g., the number of participants at an event), rather than more thorough assessments of outcomes (e.g., skill growth). This assessment is consistent with the overview of available monitoring and reporting by Carfax during the course of the evaluation.

One missed opportunity in relation to monitoring worth considering has to do with activity beneficiary feedback. Hundreds of beneficiaries participate in partner activities each year, but there does not appear to be a centralised system for tracking beneficiary feedback. Providing short feedback surveys (much like the ones Carfax has used for the midterm evaluation) would provide insights on the strengths and weaknesses of partner activities as well as some information relating to perceived relevance for participating stakeholders.

Capacity-Building for Partners

Existing Capacity-Building in Monitoring and Documentation. A number of systems and types of support provided by NPA in the area of monitoring and documentation were mentioned during interviews with NPA and partner organisation staff, including:

- Each partner shares their monthly event schedule with NPA in order to avoid overlapping events. According to NPA's MEAL Manager, this has helped the organisations plan their events more efficiently.
- NPA has shared both monitoring and reporting templates with the partner organisations, which appear to have been implemented in report writing by all partners.
- NPA has shared other, more general resources regarding M&E and data management with the partners. However, he also mentioned that additional training is required to ensure consistent update of effective practice.
- Every 3-4 months, there is a steering committee meeting bringing together all the partner organisations where training is sometimes provided by NPA and the partners are able to communicate with one another, as well as with NPA.

Support Documentation & Storage Systems. NPA Iraq as an organisation is transitioning to using SharePoint for document management and storage; however, some concern has been expressed regarding whether or not the partners will be able to access and utilise this system for sharing their own files. Based on the level of disorganisation and decentralisation exhibited currently with regard to partner organisation of document and data storage, this seems like an important area of focus for NPA moving forward. This project has a large number of partners undertaking many activities necessitating quite a lot of documentation, including both photos and reports. In terms of capacity-building and support with regard to project partners, as well as ensuring NPA Iraq's own easy access to partner documentation necessary for their own reporting commitments to NPA and Norad, providing support to partners in this area would likely be beneficial to the project overall.

Further Monitoring & Evaluation Support. Relevant NPA stakeholders indicated they felt the partners lacked understanding with regard to their role in monitoring – as well as to systems and approaches to M&E as a whole. They also indicated that data collection and management had also emerged as challenges among the partners in this project and that partner organisations appear unclear on what exactly they should report on, likely due to a lack of technical training.

Partner representatives reported the benefits of NPA's capacity-building and other associated support. The monitoring and reporting templates discussed above were emphasised by most partner interviewees as a significant contribution to their organisations' system of monitoring and documentation. The fact that the templates are flexible, enabling NPA to change them based on feedback, was considered an additional positive feature. The data collection training provided by NPA was also reported by some NGOs as the most helpful one they have received from NPA.

The information provided above suggests that monitoring and documentation – particularly the issues identified above – may be an important area of focus for capacity-building training and day-to-day support provided to the partner organisations from the midterm. Moreover, this is an area of capacity-building support that has been appreciated and well-received by NPA's partners in the past.

11. Assess the partnership process and partnership relationship between NPA and its local partners, identify what worked well and what did not work well, and recommend possible changes?

One of the qualities that most stood out about the partner selection process was that it was not fully open. Opportunities for partnership were not opened up for public bid from organisations working in relevant areas within Iraq. Rather, partners were selected based on a range of factors, including influence and previous working relationships with NPA.²⁴

NPA Iraq's former Programme Manager stated in his KII that from the beginning of the project, NPA wanted to change their partnership model from one that focussed on individual partners to one that focussed on multiple partners and networks of partners. Therefore, partners that constituted networks (e.g. JNP and AIM) were chosen due to their increased connections, influence, and internal capacity – as assessed by NPA. This shift to network organisations from a single provider appears to have presented logistical complications to NPA and was initially faced with internal resistance.

Information provided by NPA staff also indicates that NPA's Head Office also provided guidance (although it was not clear to what extent this was implicit or explicit) that NPA should contract with partner organisations that 'can influence change', rather than focussing on more traditional factors like staff qualifications. It is in the evaluation team's best estimate that the current policy needs to be revisited for future iterations, in light of the continued discussion on the matter.

Strengths of Partnership Relationship

Introduction of Procedures, Tools, and Frameworks by NPA. The evidence provided through interviews as well as available documentation indicates that NPA has been working to introduce their partners to procedures, tools, and frameworks to help the project run as smoothly as possible. Towards this aim, over the course of this project, NPA has introduced (1) systems of document sharing through Dropbox in the past, although its substitution remains to be seen; (2) templates for monitoring and reporting; and (3) provided training for data collection, indicators, and other areas related to M&E.

Training Provided by NPA. NPA-led training sessions were highlighted as one of the main strengths of the partnership relationship. Partner organisations appear to have benefitted from the training on monitoring and evaluation, financial systems support, and the NPA-provided reporting templates. Technical support is a substantial part of what NPA is expected to provide in terms of value added to the project, and stakeholders from all partner organisations appear satisfied with this.

Flexibility in Incorporating Feedback on Templates. According to the Former Project Manager as well as some partner organisation stakeholders, NPA has demonstrated some flexibility in relation to incorporating partner organisation feedback, such as changing some of the monitoring and reporting templates in response to feedback from the partners.

Challenges of Partnership Relationship

Lack of Clarity about Delineated Projects and Roles. Interviews and available documentation suggest that there is an element of doing the same work twice, or a lack of clarity regarding delineated projects and roles for

²⁴ NPA conducts actor analysis to identify partners with ability to mobilise, organise, build alliances and influence change and support their agenda. NPA sometimes open for call for proposals as a first stage in identifying new partners, but this is not something NPA repeat throughout the partnership.

NPA and the partner organisations. Sometimes, the lines are blurred, as exemplified by a report from Fadi Hanna that partners put NPA representatives' names in their event agendas, expecting this to be reciprocated by NPA. Prior to the introduction of calendar sharing as a practice, calendar events had also overlapped.

According to some interviews with NPA stakeholders, NPA themselves struggle with observing their own role as guides and technical assistants to the partners, as opposed to enforcers of their own projects and priorities. This suggests that independence of partner organisations is sometimes difficult to maintain. According to one interview with a former NPA staff member, more flexibility could be incorporated into NPA's decisions with regard to project areas of focus and need in response to partners' on-the-ground feedback.

Consistency with Norad's 'Principles for Support to Civil Society. NPA's approach is not fully consistent with Norad's 'Principles for Support to Civil Society', as the support they provide is rather prescriptive and limited in its flexibility. While some flexibility does appear to be demonstrated by NPA with regard to the support they provide, a few stakeholders from partner organisations indicated during KIIs that they felt that they were not always heard when they provide feedback of on-the-ground realities they are facing as they implement their activities. Moreover, choosing the most politically, financially, or personally influential organisations and leaders – rather than relying on an open bidding process – puts the value of democratisation in jeopardy with regard to how the project is executed.

Recommendations

This evaluation report offers the following broad structural and specific operational recommendations based on the evaluation findings. The recommendations aim to keep the NPA project relevant for the duration of the life of the project.

Structural Recommendation for Broad Project Improvement

Flexibility and Adaptive Management to Political Landscape

Maintaining adaptive management in project objectives and methodologies. Maintaining flexibility with regard to project objectives and methodologies to allow adaptations in response to changes in the political context. Multi-year parliamentary suspension in KRI as well as recent parliamentary elections in both Central Iraq and KRI have resulted in delays and uncertainty. It will likely continue to affect progress in this area. PFO and RID, have demonstrated notable adaptations of project objectives and methodologies in response to the aforementioned political adjustments.

- NPA should ensure there is sufficient project flexibility to enable partners and activities to adjust to the uncertain political context in Iraq, which has been and will remain important moving forward from the midterm.
- The project could be strengthened by building a two-tier strategy that continues to establish and maintain relationships with government officials (both representatives and civil servants) while also cooperating and collaborating with NGOs and INGOs working in the thematic areas.

Promote participation of women and young people in partner activities. FGD respondents mentioned that the inclusion of more women in programming, including in community committees established by IAA and PAO, was an area of possible improvement. This view was echoed by a number of survey respondents who indicated that they believe more could also be done to involve young people. High-level key informants participating in the midterm evaluation indicated that female participation in the programme may not have always been afforded sufficient focus.

- NPA should focus its efforts on increasing female participation in partner activities and engaging with women's rights groups working on similar key thematic issues in order to promote equal and equitable in civic participation. Additional means to enhance the participation of young people should also be explored.

Specific Recommendation for Operational Improvement

Continuous Learning Opportunities and Expert Capacity

Continuous learning opportunities for NPA staff and partners. NPA senior staff relayed that they have received support from the head office in Norway in the form of regular monthly check-ins, but other project staff stated that there is little or no formal and continuous training and learning opportunities available to support current NPA Iraq staff. NPA staff key informants also indicated that they could benefit from project management training, such as results-based management and long-term mentoring and support from NPA staff.

- The NPA head office should provide systematic and continuous learning opportunities for its own internal staff. This includes formal training for results-based management and project designs.
- The NPA head office should prioritise building expert capacity for human rights, and, where appropriate, provide mentoring and support to partner staff. This may entail having an external expert in legal and policy reforms.

Outcome Mapping, Knowledge Management for Proper Documentations

Outcome mapping and knowledge management platforms. More specific comments, statistical insight, and constructive feedback from partner activity beneficiaries could be facilitated through the use of standardised feedback forms. The use of both closed and short-response open questions would enable both qualitative and quantitative assessments of each activity delivered, allowing for greater insight on key areas like relevance and effectiveness.

- NPA should map out the respective activities and prioritised partner activities/outputs. This should include a collective and consultative approach with partners to ensure buy-in.
- NPA should emphasise a knowledge-based management system (e.g. shared electronic platform) in order to capture activities against SMART outcome indicators.

Organisational Capacity Development and Assessments

Formal capacity-building assessments of partners. Partner representatives reported the benefits of NPA's capacity-building and other associated support. As mentioned above, proper monitoring and reporting templates were emphasised by most partner interviewees as a significant contribution to their organisations' system of monitoring and documentation. The fact that the templates are flexible, enabling NPA to change them based on feedback, was considered an additional positive feature.

- NPA should use a standardised template, which focusses on measurable outcome indicators and is able to assess activity beneficiaries' perception of partners. This will provide continuous improvement of project delivery. Templates may use scale for ease of analysis.
- NPA should further refine the working definition of 'capacity' to include 'skills, abilities, processes, and resources' of the partner and stakeholder as it relates to skills, and adaptation to the challenging Iraqi context.

Feedback Loop for Better Transparency

Transparency of partner selection process. While some flexibility does appear to be demonstrated by NPA with regard to the support they provide, a few stakeholders from partner organisations indicated that they did not feel that there was always sufficient responsiveness from NPA when they provide feedback of on-the-ground realities as they implement their activities. Concerns of partner selection remain important to NPA partners and have been cited by previous staff members despite internal policy on the matter.

- Moving forward, NPA should make the partner selection process and policy clear. This should include clear criteria when choosing partners. The results of the actor's analysis may be useful in this regard and a good starting point for future reflection and discussions.
- NPA should offer a mechanism and feedback loop to ensure that partners' concerns are properly addressed.

Conclusion

Focus groups discussions and interviews with NPA staff reveal that the project is relevant and has been sufficiently flexible in response to political challenges. As indicated above, the methodologies employed during the period of performance have been adaptable, although partners have cited that more can be done with regards to youth and female participation in its programs. Further, partners have demonstrated resourcefulness in engaging the public and government officials, providing multiple modalities and platforms for advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, and mobilisation of wide variety of actors.

Review of internal documents and field research discloses particular milestones in several key activities, such as (1) passing significant legislation through a participatory and consultative process; (2) the ability to engage high-level government officials; and (3) providing access to population otherwise not represented or underserved. While these achievements may have been reported, the nature and quality of these activities were not fully articulated through its outcomes or mapped out to demonstrate the causal attribution or nexus to the overall project goals and objectives.

Capacity building initiatives require careful assessments of the organisation, taking into account the timing, resources, and the continuity of human capital. There was a missed opportunity to engage in a formal organisational and needs assessment to support relevant partners and have it regularly tracked for continuous learning and adaptive project management. Further to this, NPA program staff can substantially benefit from external subject matter expertise and learning opportunities to reinforce and strengthen existing skills. This may involve bringing in external experts for mentoring, advisory, and long-term subject matter support.

Annexes

A complete Annex can be found in the accompanying attachments and available upon request via NPA Country Office in Erbil, and includes the following items:

- **Annex 1:** Partner Activity Beneficiary Survey Datasets (Clean)
- **Annex 2:** Focus Group Discussions Results
- **Annex 3:** List of Document Consulted
- **Annex 4:** Midterm Evaluation Inception Report
- **Annex 5:** NPA and Partner NGO KII Questionnaire
- **Annex 6:** Partner Activity Beneficiary Survey Instrument
- **Annex 7:** Partner Activity Beneficiary FGD Instrument



Norwegian People's Aid

www.folkehjelp.no
facebook.com/folkehjelp
twitter.com/norskfolkehjelp

Norsk Folkehjelp
Postboks 8833 Youngtorget
N-002B Oslo

