USIPEACE BRIEFING

MEDIA FOR NEXT GENERATION PEACEBUILDING IN IRAQ

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INTRODUCTION

USIP's Center of Innovation for Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding organized an expert working group on April 26-27 in Erbil, Iraq to discuss how to create a multimedia program that will provide Iraqi teenagers (ages 14-18) the tools to help them grow into independent, empowered citizens within a complex society.

USIP brought together 25 Iraqi experts for the working group, consisting of educators, media personnel, youth NGO representatives, government officials and USIP-trained conflict resolution facilitators. Brett Pierce, a Sesame Workshop producer and youth media expert, moderated the two-day discussion.

The following brief provides an introduction to the youth media project, a summary of the experts' meeting and the next steps in developing the program designed to help Iraqi teenagers in becoming active contributors to peace in Iraq.

BACKGROUND: THE CHALLENGES FOR IRAQI YOUTH

In meetings prior to the working group, many experts on Iraqi youth, as well as the youth themselves, had noted that the general conditions for youth to seek and receive education and information, including on peacebuilding themes, are extremely difficult. They consistently identified the following challenges faced by youth:

- Unemployment (no hope for the future)
- Poverty (youth must work after school or university or in place of school)
- Lack of cultural identity
- Poor communication among youth and also between youth and government
- Weak educational infrastructure and administration
- Lack of recreational/entertainment options outside of school
- Little focus on gender, ethnic tolerance and human rights issues

THE "PEACE MEDIA FOR IRAQI YOUTH" INITIATIVE

In order to address some of these challenges facing youth in Iraq, USIP and its Iraqi partners agreed to create a multimedia program that provides young Iraqis, ages 14 to 18, with tools that can help them emerge as advocates for peace within their communities and their country. These youth are in the midst of some of the most formative years of their lives: a period during which they can develop into constructive, peace-building citizens or, conversely, can be drawn into violent extremist groups. The multimedia program therefore should attempt to create a positive medium for youth to express themselves and increase their awareness about peacebuilding, while also enabling them to collaboratively build a new community for peace in Iraq.

This initiative will include both a television and an Internet component. The television program will use proven entertainment formats to capture a wide array of thought-provoking and constructive content. Through a heavy emphasis on the use of youth-created content -- content that the youth create to express themselves and their place in the world -- this initiative will model for its audience new ways for young people to view themselves and their relations with others in a rich, multiethnic Iraqi society.

This television program will be supplemented by a Web site that will expand upon the creation of youth-created content and tap into the social networking capabilities of the target age group.

THE OBJECTIVES

During the two days in Erbil, the working group participants focused intensely on two main objectives:

- Developing an Intended Outcomes Curriculum - The experts built consensus on an overall curriculum document and intended outcomes to serve as the framework for the project.
- Providing Content Guidelines – The working group discussed sample formats and content for the multimedia program in order to guide the youth as they design and develop the program.

THE CURRICULUM

The working group experts agreed on the following overall project objective:

To build the foundations for peace by empowering Iraqi youth to be confident, responsible and participatory citizens of their society.

Specifically the experts agreed that the curriculum should:

1. **Create an awareness of the value of self-confidence and the means to achieve it.**
   a. Self-Awareness
      i. Encourage an exploration of characteristics unique to one's self, family and culture.
   b. Self-Esteem
      i. Convey the idea that in order for others to respect you, you must first respect yourself.
      ii. Encourage the practice of setting realistic goals for one's self as a measure of emerging self-respect.
   c. Self-Expression
      i. Model the act of storytelling, through a variety of media and formats, as a vital means of expression and identity building.
   d. Personal Responsibility
      i. Reinforce the concept of 'personal accountability' as an important vehicle to both increased self-esteem and community engagement.
   e. Decision-Making
      i. Communicate the idea that identity development is the result of the decisions an individual makes and to model effective decision-making skills.
      ii. Instill a desire for decision-making skills to be guided by non-violent, peaceful outcomes.

2. **Build an understanding that we are all vital members of a variety of communities -- local, national and global -- and that constructive participation in those communities is needed, desired and rewarding.**
    a. Community Understanding
        i. Understand that we are all a part of a multiple range of communities -- local, national and global -- all of which carry certain privileges and responsibilities.
    b. Power to Create Change
        i. Instill a belief that one's actions, large and small, have the power to change the way things are in one's community, country and around the world.
    c. Willingness to Take Action
        i. Create a desire and willingness to take action around relevant communal issues for the purpose of meaningful and peaceful civic improvement.
        ii. Define and model specific ways to effect change through community participation.

3. **Create awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in Iraq and the value of exercising those rights and responsibilities.**
    a. Citizenship
        i. Explore what it means to be an Iraqi citizen, legally and culturally, now and in the future.
    b. Equal Rights
        i. Reinforce the notion that all rights guaranteed to Iraqi citizens are shared equally, regardless of age or gender.
    c. Commitment and Responsibilities
        i. Reinforce the notion that citizenship in Iraq is based on the idea that all citizens share a commitment to a peaceful and prosperous Iraqi society, and this entails responsibilities to participate in the society -- responsibilities that are often new and challenging.

4. Foster open-mindedness through the cultivation of an appreciation of the diverse voices that make up and strengthen Iraqi society.

    a. Iraqi Diversity

        i. Promote an acceptance of Iraq as composed of a wide variety of people with different looks, languages, histories and beliefs.

    b. Common Humanity

        i. Promote an understanding that despite existing differences between individuals and groups, people share a common humanity.

        ii. Discover elements of common humanity among relevant diverse groups, including elements of common culture, heritage, values and attractions (i.e., sports, games, music, etc.).

    c. Otherness

        i. Promote an appreciation for the customs, rituals and accomplishments of individuals and groups from other cultures.

        ii. Respect the value of differences in a multiethnic society and world, and recognize that the presence of difference strengthens and enhances the fabric of society.

    d. Interdependence

        i. Understand that no individual or nation can effectively function independently of other individuals and nations.

        ii. Understand that peace inside of a diverse culture is premised on recognizing and respecting our interdependence—economically, socially and culturally.

        iii. Encourage the use of dialogue as a vital mechanism to build a peaceful community inside of a diverse society.

THE FORMAT AND CONTENT GUIDELINES

The second day of the working group featured the screenings of various international and Iraqi media programs about peacebuilding aimed at young people. These screenings included animation, one-minute videos, talk shows and documentaries. The

experts then divided into smaller groups to design their own sample formats and program concepts to help guide the Iraqi youth during the next phase of the project. While acknowledging the generational gap between the working group participants and the target age group, the experts put forward the following ideas:

- A game format that brings kids and their parents together, allowing the issues around the profound generational gap in Iraq to be addressed.
- A program that allows the live studio audience to vote on actions taking place on the studio stage. A call-in voting mechanism can be used.
- Short scenarios are presented that require decision-making. For example, a good friend has gone missing. How does one go about looking for that friend? *Should* one go about looking for that friend?
- A short format that features different traditional dances or performances originating from the 18 different governorates.
- Following the tradition of a rhymed speech used to salute a bride at a wedding, create a format in which kids compete to create rhymes about a topic related to the curriculum.
- Develop a basic quiz show format in which kids compete to display their knowledge about the diversity of people in Iraq.
- The audience votes on contestants in a talent contest which includes singing or dancing.
- Kids create short films on a curriculum-based topic. The studio audience or a panel of judges rates the films as part of a larger competition. Sample topics include, "What's holding you up from being you?"

THE NEXT STEPS

For the next phase, USIP and local partners will take the following steps:

- Conduct Formative Research – A survey of 80 Iraqi youth in the target age group will be completed in order to support and inform the overall program design.

- Organize Youth Summit – A diverse group of Iraqi youth from across the country will be gathered to develop the actual format and content of the television program and the accompanying social networking website.

- Produce TV Special Program - An Iraqi production company will be on-site at the youth summit to film a television program special which will serve as the pilot program for a future TV series.

- Broadcast the TV Program – USIP will negotiate with a network of Iraqi television stations to air the TV Special. The program and the curriculum will also be distributed through the education system.

- Web Outreach - The web interface will allow participating youth to interact with their peers and to spread the news of their peacebuilding experiences to others.

- Conduct Summative Research – By working with local and international partners, a brief summative research study will be completed to capture the lessons learned from developing and broadcasting of the program special, and launching the youth website. This research will be used to inform the production of a full season of peacebuilding television programs developed by Iraqi youth for Iraqi youth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This *USIPeace Briefing* was written by Theo Dolan, a program officer in the Center of Innovation for Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

ABOUT THE CENTER OF INNOVATION FOR MEDIA, CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING

The Center of Innovation for Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding focuses on harnessing the power of the media for peacebuilding as well as preventing the misuse of media to promote violent conflict. The Center conducts research, develops multimedia programming, and promotes cooperation and information sharing among policymakers, experts, media actors, and peacebuilding practitioners. Dan Serwer is vice president of the Centers of Innovation.

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