



Enhancing local protection of women and girls in northern Iraq

Submitting Agency	International Rescue Committee (IRC)	
Donor Agency	Australian Agency for International Development – AusAID	
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Project Goal	Local communities and structures in northern Iraq mitigate the individual and societal consequences of violence against women and girls by promoting their right to live free from violence and discrimination, with equal access to information and quality services.	
Project Objective	To enhance protection and empowerment of women and girls by supporting local mechanisms to appropriately address violence against women and girls, and by building the capacity of community structures to promote women and girls' choices and rights.	
Project Results	Expected	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG) have access to quality care and treatment services. 2. Government stakeholders, including the Directorate on Following up on Violence against Women (DFVAW), have an enhanced capacity to effectively report and respond to VAWG cases. 3. Community capacity to recognize violence against women and girls as harmful, to facilitate the recovery of survivors, and to engage in local prevention and awareness is increased. 4. Local and national efforts to address VAWG are strengthened through increased coordination and dialogue.
Beneficiaries	<i>Direct beneficiaries:</i> 6,760 individuals, including women and girls, local service providers and community members <i>Indirect beneficiaries:</i> 40,560 individuals	
Locations	Erbil Governorate, Sulaimaniyah Governorate and Dohuk Governorate	
Project Period	February 1, 2010 to August 31, 2012	
Amount Requested	AUD\$ 2,884,012	

Table of Acronyms

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BCC	Behaviour Change Communication
DFVAW	Directorate for Following up Violence against Women
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KJC	Kurdish Judicial Council
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MOE	Ministry of Endowment
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PAC	Protection Assistance Centre
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls

Executive Summary

The northern Kurdistan region of Iraq has one of the country's highest rates of recorded violence against women and girls (VAWG). Honour crimes committed in the region have received significant attention at the national and international levels; but they represent only one aspect – albeit an egregious one – of the problem. Domestic and sexual violence also have grave physical and psychological consequences for women and girls in Kurdistan, and likely occur at a higher frequency than honour crimes. All three types of violence damage the long-term well-being of women and girls, their families and communities.

Despite the severity and breadth of this problem, few services exist to address the health, legal, psychosocial and safety needs of survivors, or to tackle the long-term behaviour change that needs to take place to end VAWG. Service providers that do exist often view VAWG as acceptable under some circumstances, and approach it as something that can be easily mediated between the survivor and her perpetrator or family.

Exacerbating an already serious problem, is the complex context in northern Iraq, where although various forms of VAWG are punishable, those responsible for upholding relevant laws operate without accountability and rarely inform survivors about legal protections. Women run the risk of further violence for simply reporting a crime or seeking assistance and safety.

In response to the crisis of VAWG in northern Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government invited the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to provide technical support to the Ministry of Interior and its Directorate for Following up Violence against Women (DFVAW). Since late 2008, IRC has built the foundation to engage both government and civil society to improve response and protection for survivors in the region.

Within the project submitted to the Australian Agency for International Development, IRC will continue its work in Kurdistan by taking a four-fold approach:

1. Working with local service providers to ensure survivors' access to quality care and treatment;
2. Building the capacity of government stakeholders to effectively report and respond to VAWG;
3. Strengthening the efforts of local organizations and communities to engage in long-term prevention and behaviour change; and
4. Fostering increased dialogue and coordinated advocacy efforts at the local, national and international levels.

IRC will promote sustainability by supporting local partners and stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), health service providers, shelters and police, while at the same time addressing structural issues at the level of the Ministry of the Interior and the DFVAW. In addition, coordinated initiatives to raise awareness and advocate for women and girls in Iraq will further program objectives and lasting impact, and will contribute toward the UN Millennium Development Goals for Iraq.

IRC's proposed intervention in Kurdistan aims to support local communities and structures to mitigate the individual and societal consequences of VAWG by promoting their right to live free from violence and discrimination, with equal access to information and quality services.

To reach all project objectives, IRC requests a total of AUD\$2,884,012 over the course of 30 months; total funds requested include USD\$480,000 in sub-grant support to national partnering NGOs and USD\$65,000 in sub-grant support to Heartland Alliance.

Statement of Need

Background

Since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, Iraq has been marked by ongoing violence. The February 2006 bombing of the al-Askariyeen Mosque, a prominent Muslim shrine in the city of Samarra, triggered an upsurge in violence and sectarian “cleansing” that lasted throughout 2006 and 2007. The only parts of the country to have largely escaped the conflict, which has uprooted more than four million Iraqis from their homes, are the three northern governorates. According to UNHCR, nearly 2.7 million Iraqi civilians are internally displaced and in need of assistance; approximately 210,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are living in the northern, Kurdish governorates of Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Dohuk. This large influx of IDPs has had profound social and economic impacts on the host population.

As in many contexts, underreporting of violence against women and girls (VAWG), inefficient data collection and management, and inadequate service provision for survivors make it impossible to have accurate information on the prevalence of the problem among both host and displaced populations in northern Iraq. However, according to multiple qualitative and quantitative reports, Kurdistan has one of the highest rates of recorded VAWG in the country. Higher levels of reporting in the region could be linked to the basis of relative cooperation between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and civil society in responding to VAWG and promoting women’s rights.¹

The Iraq Constitution guarantees the rights to life, personal security, liberty and dignity, and prohibits “all forms of violence and abuse within the family.” But certain sections of the penal code and Revolutionary Command Council orders have not been amended accordingly, and so do not correspond with the Constitution or with international standards.²

Uniquely, important amendments to the penal code and concerted efforts to protect and promote the rights of women and girls have been made in the KRG. And yet, amendments are often ignored by the judiciary, and the physical discipline of women by what the law considers “male caretakers” is still permitted.³ This means that a woman reporting violence perpetrated by her male caretaker exposes herself to further violence by the state, which upholds the caretaker’s legal right to exert physical punishment for a perceived violation of “correct behaviour or conduct.”⁴ Women also run the risk of being prosecuted by the state for adultery when reporting sexual assault, or being killed by family members for seeking assistance outside of the family.

Despite the gravity of this problem, few services exist to address the health, legal, psychosocial and safety needs of survivors. National NGOs lack a sustained presence in rural

¹ “Gender-based Violence in Iraq: The effects of violence – real and perceived – on the lives of Iraqi women, girls, men and boys,” UN OCHA and UN Information Analysis Unit, 16 June 2008.

² “Gender-based Violence in Iraq: The effects of violence – real and perceived – on the lives of Iraqi women, girls, men and boys,” UN OCHA and UN Information Analysis Unit, 16 June 2008.

³ A “male caretaker” may be a father, brother, uncle, husband or any other male considered to hold authority within the family, extended family and/or community.

⁴ According to Iraqi Penal Code 111, Article 41 (1), acting outside the code of conduct accepted for women may include going out of the house without a male caretaker’s permission or unaccompanied by a male family member; dressing “inappropriately;” being the subject of gossip if seen talking to an unrelated male outside of the home; or receiving a telephone call or text message from a male outside of the family.

areas and typically offer only sporadic, roving programs, often designed around classes or workshops. Where services do exist, they are not centred on the needs of survivors and do not empower her to make informed decisions.⁵ Many service providers perpetuate harmful beliefs that further stigmatize the survivor and discourage women from reporting.⁶ As a result, national NGOs currently receive few – if any – direct reports from survivors seeking assistance.

In 2007, the KRG established a Directorate for Following up Violence against Women (DFVAW) within the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). Offices, which exist in the governorates of Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Dohuk, currently receive cases of VAWG and monitor the progress of investigations. Because there are no formal procedures, divisions of responsibilities or guidelines for how they interface with other service providers, the work of the various DFVAW offices is often confusing and varies widely between governorates.

Statistics provided by the DFVAW are acknowledged to be “conservative estimates,” as they include primarily reported cases that occur within the capital city of each state; according to officials, violence is higher in rural villages.⁷ The text box on this page offers examples of data collected by the DFVAW offices in Sulaimaniyah and Erbil.⁸

The practice of “honour killing” in Kurdistan has received significant attention at both the national and international levels, in part due to the egregious nature of the crime.⁹ The urgent need to challenge community perceptions of honour and to protect women and girls at risk of this crime has been widely documented. At the same time, domestic and sexual violence, which likely occur at a higher frequency than honour crimes, represent significant threats to women and girls on a daily basis and cause serious physical and psychological harm. All three of these types of violence also damage the long-term well-being of families and communities in Iraq.

Honour crimes: Approximately 1,270 honour crimes were reported in Iraq between 2004 and May 2008; of these, 980 or 77% occurred in Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁰ According to the KRG Ministry of Human Rights, 206 women were killed in Kurdistan in the first six months of 2008; 150 of those women were burned to death. This number represents a 30% increase over the previous six months.¹¹ According to an investigation into honour-related violence carried out by the local NGO ASUDA and the UN Mission in Iraq, the belief that women who have shown “dishonourable conduct” must be punished is viewed locally “as a result of societal norms

⁵ IRC GBV Assessment, Iraq, September to December 2008. Report available by request.

⁶ VAWG is often viewed a problem of the poor and uneducated. Service providers divide survivors into groups according to these labels, further discouraging less educated women from reporting or seeking out services.

⁷ “Eliminating Violence against Women: Perspectives on Honor-Related Violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Sulaimanya Governorate,” ASUDA and UN Mission in Iraq, February 2009.

⁸ Statistics cited here also include information from Garmian, a native regional subdivision surrounding Kirkuk.

⁹ “Honor killings” are usually perpetrated by male relatives as a means of restoring family “honor,” perceived to have been tarnished by a woman’s “immoral” behavior. While some claim that “honor killing” is a religious obligation, it is not condoned in the Koran or in the Hadith. Source: “Promising Democracy, Imposing Theocracy: Gender-based Violence and the US War on Iraq,” MADRE, March 2007.

¹⁰ “Gender-based Violence in Iraq: The effects of violence – real and perceived – on the lives of Iraqi women, girls, men and boys,” UN OCHA and UN Information Analysis Unit, 16 June 2008.

¹¹ “Iraqi Women: Attacked and Fighting for a Voice,” *Washington Post*, 7 December 2008.

rooted in the tribal system, religion, or the misinterpretation of religious or patriarchal values.”¹²

Domestic violence: While media, NGOs and government officials often focus on honour-related violence, other types of VAWG, particularly domestic violence, are more widespread and cause serious harm to women and girls on a regular basis.¹³ According to the Iraq Family Health Survey 2006/2007, 83.1% of the survey group reported at least one form of marital controlling behaviour; 33.4% reported at least one form of psychological or emotional violence; and 21.2% reported experiencing physical violence.¹⁴ While Iraq’s Penal Code legally entitles a husband to “punish” his wife, the only stipulation is “within certain limits prescribed by law or by custom.” As Amnesty International reported in 2005, “tradition all too often serves as a pretext for acts of brutality against women for daring to choose how to lead their lives.”¹⁵

Sexual violence: Sexual violence is rarely reported in KRG; however, anecdotal evidence and lessons learned from other countries indicate that it does exist. This means that survivors of sexual violence are not receiving appropriate services to meet their urgent needs, which could have a range of harmful if not fatal implications for the survivor’s physical and emotional health. Where services do exist and survivors seek out clinical care, their needs are most often still unmet.¹⁶ Doctors are not permitted to examine or treat a survivor if she is unmarried or if the sexual assault took place outside of marriage, if she is unaccompanied, or if is accompanied by a female relative. If a survivor seeks medical care in the presence of male relative, doctors refer the case immediately to the police. The alternative is for family members or police to convince the assailant to marry the survivor as a “solution” to the problem. So stigmatized is rape, that coming forward even for medical care puts a survivor’s life in danger. A recent report by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children called rape a “death sentence” for Iraqi women.

KRG is unique in Iraq in that there are laws in place to protect women. “Honour killing” is a criminal offense in Kurdish law, and domestic violence is punishable with time in prison. Those responsible for upholding these laws, however, most often view them as optional and there are no accountability mechanisms to ensure these laws are implemented. They choose not to apply the law and rarely inform survivors about legal protections. Police tend to take decisions on behalf of women and girls, steering them away from the courts and seeking instead to mediate with families or perpetrators.¹⁷ This perpetuates the notion that women bear some responsibility for violence committed against them, and that VAWG is a family matter rather than a criminal one. This culture of impunity does nothing to deter perpetrators from committing VAWG, and leaves women and girls unprotected and often terrified to seek assistance.

¹² “Eliminating Violence against Women: Perspectives on Honor-Related Violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Sulaimanya Governorate,” ASUDA and UN Mission in Iraq, February 2009.

¹³ An IRC GBV Assessment carried out in Iraq between September and December 2008 noted that domestic violence and honor crimes committed by family are consistently noted as a pervasive problem and the most urgent to address. [IRC GBV Assessment, Iraq, September to December 2008. Report available by request.]

¹⁴ “Iraq Family Health Survey Report 2006/2007,” Ministries of Health, Iraq and Kurdistan Region, COSIT, KRSO and WHO.

¹⁵ “Iraq: Decades of Suffering – Now Women Deserve Better,” Amnesty International, 2005.

¹⁶ IRC GBV Assessment, Iraq, September to December 2008. Report available by request.

¹⁷ Some women do request mediation. Mediation is not the role of police, however, who instead should provide safe and confidential information about a survivor’s options.

Another major obstacle to reporting is the police and judicial process, which is not only complex and difficult to navigate, but can also re-traumatize a survivor as the process is unsupportive and typically violates her rights again. Annex 2 includes a diagram that highlights the number of police and judicial officials involved when a survivor reports. This not only jeopardizes confidentiality but also perpetuates harm to the survivor, as she is forced to recount the violent event to as many as six different authorities, at least some of whom can be harsh, uncompassionate and imply that blame lies with the survivor.

Given the risks in reporting VAWG, the actual number of cases is likely far higher than statistics indicate. IRC experience around the world has demonstrated that the provision of confidential and safe services increases the probability that women and girls will report violence and seek assistance. In the KRG, low levels of reporting are likely linked to the severe dearth of appropriate services for women and girls at immediate risk or who are survivors of violence. This is compounded by the fact that services which do exist most often reinforce the power dynamics at the root cause of VAWG.

Meanwhile, prevention efforts in KRG tend to be ad hoc and duplicative. The difficulties and insecurities of addressing root causes lead most agencies to rely on repetitive workshops on women's rights, fostering a fallacy that raising awareness alone will keep women and girls safe. There has been limited community outreach, as most NGOs and government officials have not been exposed to theories of behaviour change or behaviour change communication (BCC). Prevention initiatives also tend to place primary responsibility for ending VAWG on women themselves, or focus on a perception of what women do to provoke violence. There is a prevailing fear among authorities, communities and even service providers that promoting women's rights will encourage women to "misbehave" or "take over" the rights of men.¹⁸

Finally, few service providers believe that VAWG is unacceptable under any circumstances. They often approach VAWG as something which can be negotiated or mediated between survivor and perpetrator or family, with all parties taking responsibility for making things better. This again implies that women are in some way to blame for the violence committed against them, enabling a dynamic in which VAWG is allowed to thrive.

In order to help build a society where women live with dignity, free from violence, the beliefs that perpetuate VAWG in Kurdistan must be challenged in both law and practice, while at the same time the immediate and long-term needs of individuals and communities are addressed.

IRC VAWG Programming in Iraq

In response to the crisis of violence against women and girls in northern Iraq, the KRG invited IRC to provide technical support to the DFVAW within the MOI. IRC deployed an Emergency Gender-based Violence (GBV) Coordinator in September 2008 to assess needs and to provide initial support to the KRG government and local NGOs in improving emergency response and protection for survivors.

Between September and December 2008, IRC's Emergency GBV Coordinator carried out informant interviews with service providers, including local NGO staff, officials from key government ministries and Parliament, DFVAW police and police investigation officers, and women in the Makhmour refugee camp.¹⁹ IRC also conducted workshops and programming

¹⁸ IRC GBV Assessment, Iraq, September to December 2008. Report available by request.

¹⁹ Meetings included: Ministers and general directors from the Ministry of State for the Interior, the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health; representatives from the Ministry of Justice and the Board of the

sessions with staff from local and international NGOs, with the objective of formulating a common understanding of the primary causes of VAWG in Kurdistan, priorities for intervention, and challenges. This initial assessment guided IRC's programmatic approach in the region.

Since February 2009, IRC has been working to establish partnerships with national NGOs, with the aim of building staff capacity and designing interventions that will reach and build trust with a greater number of women. Following extensive discussions with 10 different local NGOs and based on criteria including existing technical and staff capacity, existing presence in local communities and commitment to working on the issue of VAWG, IRC will continue formal partnerships with two local partners working in Erbil (Al Masalla) and Sulaimaniyah (ASUDA). Each partner has undergone a financial capacity check, during which IRC reviewed reporting and bookkeeping practices.

IRC's local partners adopted the program title "Healthy Women, Healthy Families, Healthy Communities," addressing the issue of VAWG through a public health lens. This approach mitigates risks that the program could be perceived as a threat to existing culture, and therefore helps protect the safety of staff, volunteers, partners, and participating women and girls.

Present attitudes and legal provisions toward VAWG in the KRG mean that disclosure and reporting can put women and girls at increased risk of violence and even death. Through its presence in multiple sectors, IRC seeks to gauge program impact and safety, and to ensure there is no animosity or negative attention focused on VAWG programming. This information helps guide IRC and local partners in their engagement with communities, local authorities and service providers.

As part of an effort to improve response to VAWG and to strengthen prevention and long-term behaviour change, UN agencies including UNIFEM, UNFPA and UNICEF have established a cohesive work plan in Iraq. IRC consistently provided technical support and contributed to the development of this plan, and will continue to play an active role in bi-lateral and multi-agency coordination efforts. IRC's program strategy and approaches have been discussed with these and other key stakeholders, including other international NGOs and counterparts in government and civil society.

Target Areas and Populations

This program will focus on the northern governorates of Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Dohuk, where the recorded incidence of VAWG has been increasing over the past two years. The KRG is host to 39% of IDP families belonging to religious or ethnic minorities, with the majority of those located in Dohuk.²⁰ Studies across the region indicate that the effects of trauma, displacement, variance in traditional family roles and economic uncertainty leave displaced Iraqi women particularly vulnerable to VAWG. Language barriers and cultural isolation increase the VAWG risk to IDP women in Kurdistan, and also prevent them from being informed of rights and services or seeking assistance and justice.

As is common in the KRG, most IDPs live among the host population in the northern governorates, rather than in camp settings. While access to services and the experience of

High Committee for Following up Violence against Women; Member of Parliament Zangana (advocate for changes in personal status law).

²⁰ "Erbil: Governorate Profile," International Organization for Migration, August 2009.

violence might differ slightly between the two populations, the problem of VAWG affects both groups and requires action targeting host and IDP populations.

IRC has a stable presence in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, and has an established relationship with the DFVAW and police in all three governorates. IRC local partners will operate in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, while training with other local counterparts and specialized service providers will target participants from all three governorates. Capacity building of the DFVAW and the police will also be carried out in all three governorates.

City centres, with high numbers of IDPs and the highest rates of recorded violence, allow for centralized service provision; at the same time, IRC is cognizant of the needs in underserved, rural areas of the KRG. IRC partners will inform choices around the specific targeting of activities, based on both need and accessibility.

The project will target a total of 6,760 direct beneficiaries, including women and girls, local service providers and community members.²¹ An estimated 40,560 indirect beneficiaries will be reached through project impact on families and communities.

Proposed Intervention

Project Objective

To enhance the protection and empowerment of women and girls by supporting local mechanisms to appropriately address VAWG, and by building the capacity of community structures to promote women and girls' choices and rights.

Expected Result 1: Survivors of VAWG have access to quality care and treatment services.

Output 1.1: IRC partners provide survivor-centred case management, psychosocial services and referral to survivors of VAWG.

Over the first 12 months of the proposed project, IRC will continue its partnerships with two local partners, providing sub-grants and material inputs to support programming, as well as ongoing technical support and training for staff and volunteers. These partners – Al Masalla (Erbil) and ASUDA (Sulaimaniyah) – will provide quality case management, psychosocial support, legal aid and referrals to identified health service providers. Staff and volunteers will be available to women throughout the life of the sub-grant, and will work to build trust with local communities and those seeking services through the local partners.

Case management: Currently, service providers often simply offer survivors the option of staying in a shelter or pursuing mediation with the perpetrator before returning home. IRC training for staff of local partners will focus on the provision of confidential, respectful and safe case management, through which survivors are empowered to make informed decisions in a non-threatening environment. Quality case management, which includes the development of individualized plans based on identified needs and wishes of the survivor, is critical in assessing the urgency of the survivor's situation, and in returning to her a sense of control as she makes decisions to help keep herself safe. Ongoing IRC visits to local partners will reinforce technical capacity and allow for regular monitoring of the quality of care provided.

²¹ Due to a lack of case tracking and monitoring systems and procedures in the KRG, both within state bodies and NGOs, it is extremely difficult to accurately estimate the number of direct beneficiaries the project will be able to reach. It is likely that 2,705 represents a conservative number. IRC hopes to strengthen stakeholder tracking and monitoring systems over the course of the project and will communicate any new information or changes in beneficiary numbers to AusAID.

Psychosocial: Due to the cultural stigma around reporting VAWG in Iraq, as well as a general lack of awareness and acknowledgment of the psychological impacts of violence, access to psychosocial activities and support is extremely limited. Local partner staff and volunteers will receive training and support for the provision of initial response, basic psychosocial support and referrals for VAWG survivors. IRC also will work with partner staff to develop locally appropriate psychosocial well-being activities, targeting at least 60 women/girls per month in each governorate (Erbil and Sulaimaniyah). These activities will shift away from the current model, which is heavily focused on workshops and training courses. Instead, by drawing on the input women and girls have given through focus group discussions, IRC partners will develop supportive activities that facilitate trust-building and the sharing of experiences among women and girls. These interventions, including literacy classes and simply supporting a space in which they can meet, will also serve as a protective cover for women and girls who want to seek support but cannot go directly to case worker staff or NGO offices. Women and girls will be able to seek supportive help through trained volunteers and local partner staff who will be present during psychosocial activities.

At the end of the 12-month initial sub-grants, IRC will evaluate the progress of each partner, their capacity to continue to improve service provision for women and girls, and their level of need for continued support. Based on this evaluation, IRC will either provide a second-round sub-grant of 12 months, or will close the formal partnership with one partner and will seek to identify another partner for the second round.

In the event that ASUDA and/or Al Masalla can both benefit from continued support and demonstrate the capacity for further growth, in the second-round sub-grant IRC will support these partners to establish standardized data classification and management systems. This step will be contingent upon the longer-term partnership as it requires extensive technical support and consistent training.

Finally, to ensure that quality care is accessible to both the host and IDP populations in Kurdistan, at least one Arabic-speaking staff within each local partner will be trained by IRC and all BCC and referral materials will be available in both Kurdish and Arabic.

Output 1.2: Relevant VAWG actors, service providers and community leaders respond appropriately to the multifaceted needs of survivors of VAWG.

IRC recognizes that improving the quality of local services and ensuring that they are in line with international standards requires a broader reach than formal partnerships with local NGOs. There are significant needs for training and support among other VAWG actors, including health and legal service providers, counterparts in other NGOs and community-based organisations, government ministries, local women's unions and staff of existing VAWG helplines. These individuals and organizations will receive technical training from experienced GBV, reproductive health and rule of law staff and consultants.

Health: IRC experience in other settings around the world consistently demonstrates that when good quality, confidential health services are available for survivors, they will try to access them. Though there might not be a substantial increase in the number of survivors of VAWG seeking healthcare, the availability of appropriate services helps to avoid further harm for survivors who do seek out medical care and treatment. It also helps to break the silence around VAWG and to emphasize the importance of survivor-centred care. As a first step in ensuring an appropriate medical response, IRC's reproductive health team will assess the current health context and services provided for women, and will identify those service providers (in particular female doctors) able to offer services according to WHO standards. The Reproductive Health Manager, an expert the program will engage for three months, will then design appropriate training materials for the identified health service providers. The Manager will develop and facilitate targeted training based on the identified gaps, and laying

the groundwork for any potential collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Health workers who successfully complete the training will provide competent, compassionate, confidential, survivor-centred care following approved clinical protocols for addressing survivors' needs. IRC will work with the health providers to assure that the layout of their clinic allows a survivor to access needed services while maintaining privacy and confidentiality. Trained health service providers will be incorporated into the referral network used by IRC partners and other key stakeholders, and will receive ongoing support from the IRC Senior Reproductive Health Officer.

Legal: Although many types of VAWG are considered criminal in Iraq, it is often addressed as a private, family issue, not a criminal one. There is ongoing confusion about what the laws actually stipulate in terms of VAWG and where laws are clear, they are rarely implemented down to the community level. Relatives, police officers and investigators, shelter staff and other outside mediators often seek to "solve" cases. This typically involves asking the husband or family to sign an agreement that they will not be violent again and sending the woman back home with the perpetrator.²² The fact that service providers believe that the problem has been solved indicates a basic lack of understanding of domestic violence as a cycle and pattern of abuse. Survivors' reliance on this approach also reflects the limited options available to women and girls, particularly with regards to seeking protection and legal assistance.

In 2009, IRC signed a memorandum of understanding with the MOI to carry out an initial training on VAWG targeting 50 police officers. With funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, IRC brought in an expert with extensive experience in working with the security sector around gender and VAWG issues. In preparation for trainings, IRC sought copies of the KRG criminal procedure code, Iraqi penal law, personal status law, and police policy and procedures manual. This brought to light the inexistence of any written policies outside of the initial training curriculum given to recruits at the KRG police academies, during which officers pledge to uphold laws and protect the people of Kurdistan. There is no formal breakdown of officer duties, codes of conduct or operational procedures, nor are there standard procedures on warnings and discipline. This has obvious implications for survivors, who must navigate a complex system that relies entirely on individual decisions of officers, rather than documented protocol or policy regarding domestic violence operations (see Annex 2).

IRC's experience in other settings shows that when survivors have a trusted advocate who accompanies and supports them through the legal process, they are more likely to remain involved and not drop the charges. While one Protection Assistance Centre (PAC) exists within each governorate in the KRG, staff receive limited guidance and monitoring. IRC's current partners in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah also have designated staff to offer legal aid to survivors, and while they do follow cases on a regular basis, staff have not received specialized training.

As part of an effort to strengthen legal service provision in the KRG and to build avenues for survivors of VAWG to seek support, IRC will provide training and ongoing support to legal aid staff within local partners, PACs and other service providers as possible. At the end of year one and year two, IRC will facilitate a workshop involving legal service providers that have participated in training throughout the year. Together, these actors will identify remaining challenges or obstacles they encounter in their work, and will make recommendations for specific training that is still required. Over the course of the project, these trained staff will

²² The crime of rape may be "corrected" under Iraqi law, reducing or eliminating any punishment of the offender if he marries the victim. (Iraq Penal Code 111 of 1969, Article 398)

accompany survivors through the KRG's complex justice system. At the same time, a dedicated IRC Program Officer will maintain links and facilitate discussion with the DFVAW, local police, family violence officers and judicial investigators, as well as trained mediators such as those working with Heartland Alliance.

Through a formal partnership with Heartland Alliance, IRC staff will participate in a training-of-trainers and will then in year one develop and carry out locally appropriate mediation training with local community leaders and elders often closely involved in "solving" cases of VAWG that are perpetrated by husbands, family or community members.²³ Heartland Alliance and other organizations have recognized the role that tribal and religious leaders play in mediation and decision-making in rural Iraq, often supplanting formal adjudication of civil and criminal matters.²⁴ While mediation does not represent a long-term solution for addressing VAWG cases, it is likely to remain an integral component of the cultural and legal response in Iraq in the foreseeable future. IRC's work with community leaders and elders will further mitigate potential harm done through mediation in the current environment, and to promote a greater focus on the rights and well-being of the survivor. Through partnership with Heartland Alliance, IRC will ensure that its work complements other efforts to strengthen the capacity and expertise of local social workers and NGO staff who also play a role in mediation.

In order to monitor how the year-one training is impacted mediation practices used in the KRG, IRC and Heartland Alliance will identify and train a local partner and/or community representatives to provide ongoing monitoring and to support those involved in local-level mediation. This pilot initiative will allow IRC to better capture learning around mediation practices being used in the KRG and to examine potential alternative approaches and/or means of strengthening future programming phases. The results of this process will be shared as appropriate with other counterparts, donors and relevant bodies.

Finally, within the proposed project IRC will work with existing VAWG helpline staff in the KRG. This will help ensure quality and consistency of services through technical skill-building and, where possible, support to establish systems that facilitate sustainable management and oversight of services. IRC experience in other contexts has demonstrated the effectiveness of a VAWG helpline that survivors can call confidentially and safely in order to access information, referral to appropriate service providers, and psychosocial support.

Output 1.3: Functional and confidential referral mechanisms help ensure women and girls' access to comprehensive services, including case management, health, psychosocial and legal.

In order for survivors to access the range of services to meet their needs, service providers in different sectors need accurate information on viable services in their geographic areas. Within the Sulaimaniyah and Erbil governorates, IRC will reinforce referral mechanisms between IRC partners, identified health service providers and/or female doctors, UNHCR-run PACs and shelters. IRC will provide all stakeholders within the referral networks with ongoing support and, where necessary, training on how to maintain confidentiality, safety and respect for the survivor throughout the referral process.

IRC will pay particular attention to advising on to what extent police and the DFVAW can be included in referral mechanisms in a way that ensures safety and confidentiality for

²³ A full scope of work outlining Heartland Alliance's commitments within the proposed project, is available upon request.

²⁴ "Human Trafficking in Iraq: Patterns and Practices in Forced Labor and Prostitution," Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, May 2007.

survivors. Based on the cultural and legal contexts in KRG, the development of safe referral pathways between civil society and police will require a long-term strategy, guided by the Do No Harm principle. Currently police do not systematically refer to NGOs for services for the survivor and might even arrest rape survivors for adultery. IRC's work with all key stakeholders, as well as an expert specializing police training on VAWG, will help to inform this long-term outlook and process.

As noted above, IRC will ensure that referral materials are available in both Kurdish and Arabic language. Where possible and safe, consent forms will be used to ensure that a survivor has indicated her decision and approval for referrals to take place, to share her information or to undergo a specific procedure. The application of consent forms will be included in all training and support sessions.

Output 1.4: Emergency shelter options are responsive to the multifaceted needs of women and girls.

Service provision in KRG is hindered by a reliance on shelters as a survivor's only alternative to staying in an abusive, threatening or otherwise violent situation. Police and other first responders are quick to send a woman to a shelter, regardless of whether she has made an informed decision to go or whether it represents the best option for her.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) is responsible for the supervision of government-run shelters, although in reality they operate with little to no accountability for the services being provided. Shelters can be extremely damaging to women and girls, who are locked in until their case has been "solved" or they have been taught to behave better.²⁵ Private shelters, such as one run by ASUDA in Sulaimaniyah, can be equally problematic due to an absence of systems or procedures to ensure that the shelter represents a positive, rehabilitative place for survivors.

Within the scope of the proposed project, IRC will take a two-pronged approach to improving conditions for women and girls who are referred to shelters.

First, as a means of improving basic response to the multifaceted needs of survivors, IRC will engage shelter directors and staff, as well as representatives from the MOLSA, on shelter management and protocols for addressing VAWG. The training will be developed by drawing on best practices and core principles of shelter management. IRC will incorporate information on the cycle of domestic violence in training with shelter service providers, reinforcing their role in supporting women to make informed decisions about available options, and supporting the development of rehabilitative activities. These activities will target at least one shelter within each governorate, including both government-run and private structures.

Second, based on experience in similar environments, stakeholder discussions and careful assessment, IRC partner Heartland Alliance will lead an initiative to study alternative options to shelters that would be feasible in the Iraqi context. Heartland Alliance and IRC will visit at least one shelter in a similar context in order to discuss alternatives and to gather lessons learned. After this visit, Heartland Alliance will facilitate dialogues with key stakeholders (likely from both the MOLSA and private shelters) to share lessons and discuss the application of these lessons and/or alternative approaches in the KRG. Heartland Alliance will develop a report based on the site visit experience as well as discussions with key stakeholders in the KRG. The report will be shared as appropriate with the MOLSA in order to facilitate further dialogue about means of providing safe spaces in which women and girls

²⁵ One shelter staff told IRC that their role was to "rehabilitate" women, helping them to behave and speak better.

can access information and psychosocial care, and can participate in activities that promote social cohesion and support. Heartland Alliance will then work with at least one local partner to develop a plan to institute either the key lessons or alternative models within their shelter programming. IRC will support the implementation of this plan as a pilot initiative and will monitor the results.

Expected Result 2: Government stakeholders, including the DFVAW, have an enhanced capacity to effectively report and respond to VAWG cases.

Output 2.1: DFVAW is supported to effectively fulfil its mandate to monitor reported cases of VAWG, to ensure appropriate response, and to collect and maintain accurate, confidential data.

In 2007, the KRG established the DFVAW within the MOI for the purpose of following up and monitoring cases of GBV. DFVAW roles have lacked clarity, however, and staff currently addresses cases themselves, leaving little time for appropriate monitoring of police station-level activity. The DFVAW's primary contact with police stations is through phone calls and reports prepared by station-level officers, making the DFVAW reliant on information that is not independent and is not rigorously monitored.

At the request of the KRG, IRC began cooperating with the MOI in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah in September 2008, providing technical support to improve emergency response and protection for survivors. Due to the absence of an official breakdown of duties between DFVAW directors, officers and social workers, and officers working at police stations, IRC's support role was particularly challenging at the outset.

To enable a functional, productive collaboration, under the proposed project IRC will work with the directors of the MOI and the DFVAW in three governorates – Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Dohuk – to more clearly define and carry out their roles and responsibilities within the respective bodies and their various departments. An IRC expert in security sector training on issues of gender and VAWG as well as policy and procedures development, monitoring systems and developing police codes of conduct, will facilitate a discussion with the MOI, with the aim of establishing a directive to clarify how the MOI and the DFVAW function and interface with other actors such as the police at the station level. After approval by the MOI and DFVAW directors, the directive will be shared with relevant stakeholders.

Once this groundwork is in place, IRC will work with the DFVAW to establish a strategy for the development of reporting and monitoring systems, including tools to monitor police stations and to collect and maintain data. IRC visits to the DFVAW in Sulaimaniyah and Dohuk will take place on a monthly basis, while visits to the DFVAW in Erbil will take place at a minimum of once each month.²⁶ IRC will also visit DFVAW sub-offices in each governorate, and will encourage each directorate to expand sub-office presence where there is identified need.

Because the strengthening of the DFVAW will be a long-term process and will require consistent engagement in each governorate, IRC will train and dedicate one Program Officer to this area over the life of the project. This position will work under the supervision and technical support of an IRC Lawyer, whose focus will be improving access to justice at the operative and systemic levels.

To reinforce these long-term efforts, IRC will also undertake training with DFVAW staff, covering topics such as basic concepts of VAWG, appropriate survivor-centred response

²⁶ The more limited role of IRC within the Erbil DFVAW is due to the regular presence there of the KRG's advisor on women.

services and referral mechanisms, and data collection and management. Because DFVAW staff are currently addressing cases themselves rather than focusing on their monitoring role, these trainings will help ensure that in the near-term survivors' needs are met according to international standards, and that services provided do not reinforce the power inequities at the root of VAWG. This will be of particular importance in Dohuk, where the DFVAW opened a new centre staffed by civilian social workers (referred to as "social investigators") and legal aid officers to respond to the needs of women and girls. IRC will closely support and examine the capacity of this centre as it develops over the life of the project.

Finally, where DFVAW offices also operate a helpline, IRC will build the capacity of all staff responding to calls. This activity will target not only DFVAW officers, but also social researchers who currently consider their primary role to be one of "calming down" survivors after an assault. In the long-term, it is envisioned that the directive and this training will lay a clear path for the DFVAW to be effective and instrumental in tackling and monitoring the issue in KRG.

Output 2.2: Police stations in Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Dohuk have increased capacity to respond effectively to cases of VAWG.

In interviews with police, investigation officers and supervisors report that they often act as "social workers." They seek to maintain the family unit at all costs and even over the security of the survivor, and therefore mediate and "solve" cases – typically seeking an apology and pledge from the perpetrator not to be violent again – rather than sending cases to court or to NGOs for additional services. At the same time, no legal or policy provisions exist requiring that police keep information confidential when obtained in the course of an investigation. Most police stations cannot ensure anonymity of survivors or confidentiality of information, as interviews are carried out in public spaces in the stations and police officers do not adhere to confidentiality standards so will likely discuss the survivors' case if enticed.

Building on the directive on DFVAW roles and responsibilities (see Output 2.1), IRC will seek to better map out the structure of police stations in the three governorates, particularly identifying which stations have dedicated family violence officers, and to whom those officers report. This will help IRC develop training targets and objectives for each governorate. IRC will also provide follow up training with police officers that participated in a first round of training in 2009. Based on this experience, areas for additional training under the proposed project are likely to include appropriate interview and investigation techniques, and the guiding principles of respect, confidentiality and safety. Trainings will also reinforce the role of police as upholders of the law when responding to survivors, rather than social counsellors, legal advocates or mediators, as well as to give clarity around how they are mandated to interact with the DFVAW.

Finally, in cooperation with the DFVAW, the IRC lawyer will support the development of pilot policies, procedures and tools that would improve the efficacy and efficiency of how police stations respond to VAWG. This will specifically address current deficiencies around protecting survivors and arresting alleged perpetrators by promoting the use of emergency protection orders and other similar mechanisms.

Output 2.3: MOI and Kurdish Juridical Council work jointly to improve response to VAWG.

The judicial investigator, which falls under the authority of the Kurdish Judicial Council (KJC), usurps many of the functions that police perform in other states. The judicial investigator holds responsibility for investigating cases, swearing oaths, deciding on what legal action should be taken, and advising the investigative judge. The role of the police, which fall under the MOI, is ambiguous with respect to investigations, attending crime scenes and

interviewing suspects. Despite this lack of clarity, police training programs and operational policies on VAWG traditionally include significant components on investigations.

Since the establishment of the KJC, there has been no official agreement between the MOI and the KJC as to the exact nature, scope of work or relationship between the police or judicial investigators. Practices vary widely from one region to the next, leading to serious inconsistencies and making the process extremely difficult to navigate. Multiple police and judicial investigators are often involved in a case, jeopardizing confidentiality and perpetuating harm to the survivor.

To date, the Chief Justice of the KJC and the Minister of the Interior have been reticent to discuss a plan of action for how the two bodies can work together to address VAWG. While outside actors have made some attempts to highlight the need for such steps, there has been little headway. To facilitate a deeper understanding of the current challenges within the system and the impact that has on victims of crimes, including survivors of VAWG, IRC engaged an expert with previous experience working with KRG legal bodies, high-ranking authorities and local police and investigators. A report, compiled in 2009 and shared with the MOI and the KJC in December, examined weaknesses within the judicial process, with a particular focus on how women and girls are impacted (see also Annex 2). The December 2009 report examined the link between the MOI/KJC mandates and the criminal procedure code, and highlighted problems due to a lack of a clearly articulated systems for criminal investigations.

Within the proposed project, IRC will revisit this report at the end of year one. This year-end progress report will highlight systemic problems that continue to negatively impact women and girls, and will provide further recommendations for addressing these issues.

Expected Result 3: Community capacity to recognize violence against women and girls as harmful, to facilitate the recovery of survivors, and to engage in local prevention and awareness is increased

Output 3.1: IRC local partners implement effective prevention interventions to address VAWG and support the overall well-being of women and girls.

Progress toward long-term behaviour change in the KRG will depend in part on the capacity of local organizations to understand prevention programming and BCC strategies. The majority of actors in the KRG have fallen into a pattern of equating awareness-raising with behaviour change, limiting the impact of their outreach and leading to false conclusions about what actions keep women and girls safe. Within the proposed project, IRC will support the staff and volunteers of two local partners, ASUDA and Al Masalla, to understand and develop effective BCC strategies, steps that follow awareness-raising, and moving communities from awareness to action and then sustained behaviour change. Training will incorporate aspects of the Raising Voices model for mobilizing communities to prevent domestic violence, which IRC has successfully adapted for various contexts around the world.²⁷

Following initial training on behaviour change strategies, IRC will guide local partners in the production of strong, culturally acceptable BCC materials in both Kurdish and Arabic, and will ensure that materials are disseminated to key stakeholders and community leaders. Partners will carry out regular community discussions and outreach into the communities in

²⁷ Raising Voices (www.raisingvoices.org) is an internationally recognized leader in prevention models to approaching VAWG, and has developed several publications to support community mobilization and prevention efforts.

Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, and will design specific activities as part of the “16 Days of Activism” campaign to end VAWG.

IRC recognizes that long-term behaviour change depends on finding positive, culturally appropriate means of engaging men and boys in VAWG prevention. As an initial step toward exploring this in Iraq, IRC will train partner staff and volunteers on effective methodologies for engaging men and boys, and will support them in a process of examining possible approaches and strategies for application in the KRG. This process, in the third year of the proposed project, will serve as a foundation for future phases of VAWG prevention programming.

Output 3.2: Religious leaders promote the overall protection and well-being of women and girls.

Although there has been growing concern about honour-related violence in the KRG among international organizations and the media, there have been few attempts to understand community perceptions of “honour” and to engage in discussion with influential religious leaders. A qualitative analysis of the issue, carried out by IRC’s local partner ASUDA and the UN Mission in Iraq, highlights the impact of unequal power relations in Kurdish society, “where women are regulated by a complex network of mutually constituted practices that reinforce the idea that women are by nature subordinate to men.”²⁸ VAWG, particularly honour-related violence, and the impunity surrounding such crimes serve to assert male authority and control. This pattern has been construed as “traditional” or “part of authentic Kurdish identity,” and therefore condonable.²⁹ This background to VAWG and honour violence in Kurdistan underlines the importance of engaging religious and traditional leaders in efforts to challenge community perceptions of “honour” and to promote the protection and well-being of women and girls.

The KRG Ministry of Endowment (MOE), or Al Auqaf, plays an integral role in shaping local understanding of the Koran and *shari’a* law. All local religious leaders, including imams, mukhtars, mullahs and sheikhs, fall under the authority of the MOE, making this government ministry a strategic ally in the long-term effort to change local understandings of “honour.” The current Minister, under whose leadership the MOE has regularly collaborated with local NGOs, has expressed a willingness to collaborate with IRC to address violence in the community. He views imams in particular as community resources, and has been supportive of efforts to build their knowledge on subjects such as VAWG. Within the proposed project, IRC and the MOE will first undertake a joint planning period. IRC will facilitate the development of a plan within the MOE, with clearly defined objectives for engaging religious leaders willing to speak out against VAWG and challenge community perceptions of “honour.” This will likely include awareness training to build understanding of VAWG and the continuum of violence women and girls face over their lifetimes and engaging the religious leaders in a process to reflect on that and their role to guide and protect all members of the community.

Expected Result 4: Local and national efforts to address VAWG are strengthened through increased coordination and dialogue.

²⁸ “Eliminating Violence against Women: Perspectives on Honor-Related Violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Sulaimanya Governorate,” ASUDA and UN Mission in Iraq, February 2009.[Also noted: “In-depth study on all forms of violence against women,” UN document A/61/122/Add.1.]

²⁹ “Eliminating Violence against Women: Perspectives on Honor-Related Violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Sulaimanya Governorate,” ASUDA and UN Mission in Iraq, February 2009.[Also noted: Mojab, Shahrzad and Amir Hassanpour, “Thoughts on the Struggle against Honor Killing,” *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, January 2002, page 88.]

Output 4.1: Key actors addressing VAWG at the national and local levels purposefully engage and coordinate in order to strengthen response and prevention efforts.

IRC's experience in complex contexts around the world has demonstrated the importance of building a consolidated approach among organizations seeking to address VAWG. Coordinated efforts facilitate the identification of gaps in service delivery, the establishment of action plans to address unmet needs, the strengthening of information collection and analysis, and the development of strategic advocacy to affect policy or legal reform. In addition, collective advocacy provides some protection when addressing sensitive social issues such as addressing VAWG and women's human rights, which are frequently referred to as western agendas; it is critical that the faces of advocacy are from the community and that the voices are collective so one individual or agency is not targeted alone.

While the US Department of State operates a GBV task force linking members of the INGO community in the KRG, key stakeholders such as police, social workers and members of the judiciary are not represented. To help strengthen coordination and advocacy, IRC will carry out an annual review within the first quarter of each year to identify opportunities for stronger links and coordination. IRC will encourage coordination through both formal and informal mechanisms, and will explicitly foster the participation of local partners and NGOs; key UN agencies including UNFPA and UNICEF; relevant government ministries; and the two women's unions in the KRG. Through its leadership role in inter-agency coordination mechanisms, IRC will support the development of joint objectives and strategies, particularly around VAWG-related policy reform priorities.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Gender

IRC is committed to freedom, human dignity and self-reliance, and recognizes that gender equality is a prerequisite to achievement of these goals. The IRC Gender Equality Policy, which is currently being finalized, articulates IRC's organizational commitment to ensuring gender equality in all aspects of our operations and programming and to ensuring that all staff are held accountable to this commitment. IRC ensures that staff and partners have a common understanding of gender equality, and that all organizational policies, procedures and actions demonstrate our commitment to gender equality. The Inter-agency Standing Committee's Framework for Gender Equality Programming is integrated into organizational programming, policy and planning tools, including IRC's Program Framework, Country Sector Strategic planning and programmatic approaches.³⁰ Guided by the above policies, IRC will promote the rights and status of women through the proposed project and will ensure the participation of all community members. Due to the significant number of NGOs headed by men in Iraq, their participation, as well as that of women, is of particular importance to ensure wide-reaching program impact. This is also key to supporting Iraq's progress toward Millennium Development Goal number three, to promote gender equality and empower women.

Internally Displaced Persons

Arabic-speaking women are even less likely than Kurdish-speaking women to seek support from the Kurdish police or from Kurdish service providers. While the proposed project will remain wide-reaching and will not focus specifically on one category of population, a special

³⁰ IRC's Program Framework is a common vision for IRC programs worldwide, with the ultimate goal of creating durable solutions. The framework is informed by five key principles: holistic and integrated programming, involvement of stakeholders in decision making processes, collaborative partnerships, building capacities and promotion and protection of human rights.

effort will be made to reach out to IDP women. Focus group discussions – conducted to better understand the specific dynamics at work in cases of VAWG among IDP populations – have informed the design of IRC’s VAWG program and efforts thus far. The project will reach out to IDP communities in proportion to the host community by promoting selection of Arabic-speaking volunteers and ensuring that partners offer services and information in Arabic.

Sustainability

IRC’s holistic approach to GBV programming makes it uniquely qualified to address not only the immediate needs of survivors but also the long-term sustainability and impact of response efforts. IRC and its partners will employ three central strategies for sustainability of the proposed project:

1) Building the capacity of local partners, service providers and government entities: IRC recognizes that an investment in capacity building of national NGOs and government entities increases sustainability by contributing to local human resources and technical capacity. For this reason, IRC emphasizes partnerships with national NGOs. IRC understands capacity building to be more than the typical classroom trainings including continuous mentoring, systems development and ongoing monitoring and follow up. Building the capacity of local service providers, government and non-government, will promote sustainable response and prevention efforts rooted in internationally accepted protocols. This will also reinforce the commitment government authorities have expressed to address VAWG and to avoid further harm being done to women and girls through poor quality interventions.

2) Supporting coordination and advocacy to raise awareness and increase knowledge: IRC experience throughout the world has shown that coordinated advocacy increases the effectiveness of prevention and helps create a society in which women and girls can live free from violence and stigma. Within the proposed project, IRC will foster coordinated advocacy among national and international actors in the KRG with the aim of strengthening prevention and contributing to the overall project goal of enhancing the protection and empowerment of women and girls.

3) Capturing learning and evaluating the impact of alternative approaches: IRC believes that opportunities to capture learning and document lessons learned are key to understanding VAWG in specific and global contexts, gauging the impact of alternative approaches to specific problems, and contributing to the further development of durable solutions. Within the proposed project, IRC and its partners will focus on unique opportunities to document learning around mediation, shelter alternatives and work with the DFVAW and police in the KRG. Captured learning will be used to inform new strategies the proposed project undertakes, and will be shared and discussed with key stakeholders so they can incorporate and build upon lessons learned.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation challenges associated with VAWG programming in complex settings are well known among humanitarian practitioners. IRC is committed to improving program effectiveness and furthering the evidence base for VAWG programming through the development of sound monitoring and evaluation methodologies. Technical staff linked to IRC’s programming in the KRG will carry out ongoing program activity and quality service monitoring to ensure continuity and consistent follow-up. Within this process, the following measures will be undertaken:

- IRC staff will carry out regular technical field visits to local partners, shelters and police stations to observe how activities are carried out and to respond to concerns and questions with regards to technical, organizational and financial issues.

- IRC staff will write monitoring reports as necessary following site visits and raise concerns as relevant during program meetings to ensure adequate support to local partners and other stakeholders.
- At established intervals, IRC will conduct project evaluations to assess whether or not objectives are being met, to discuss challenges and successes, and to brainstorm ways to improve program effectiveness.
- IRC will communicate successes and lessons learned from its VAWG programs to appropriate counterparts, including donors, UN agencies, local partners and government stakeholders.

The full performance monitoring and evaluation plan indicating what data will be collected and analysed, as well as how this will feed into program evaluation, reporting and captured learning, is included in Annex 4.

Risk Assessment & Management

While Iraq's security situation showed significant improvement in 2008 and 2009, the country remains volatile and unpredictable. Attacks against military and civilian targets throughout Iraq continue, and remnants of the former Baath regime, transnational terrorists, criminal elements and numerous insurgent groups remain active throughout the country. IRC is also mindful of the fact that the country will undertake national parliamentary elections in January 2010, which could present challenges during the election and post-election periods.

IRC places utmost priority on the safety and security of staff, volunteers, partners and beneficiaries throughout its operations in Iraq, and operates in a low profile manner, in coordination with local security officials. IRC-Iraq applies standard IRC global security protocols and principles, including neutrality, equality, primacy of life, proportionate risk and individual responsibility.³¹ In addition to global security guidelines, IRC-Iraq maintains strong country-specific security plans, procedures and provisions. These are continuously updated by a Security Manager and Deputy Director of Operations based in Baghdad, with support from Security Focal Points in Erbil. The Security Manager and Focal Points provide analysis and review all related security information, thereby helping to inform program-related movements and activities. These individuals are also responsible for disseminating all security policies to relevant staff through training, orientation and written documents.

To further ensure adherence with necessary security measures, IRC uses five specific phases for all duty stations. Changes in security phases and how IRC operates in a specific part of the country are taken in consultation between the Country Director, Deputy Director of Operations, Regional Director, and Security Manager based in Baghdad. IRC's team in Iraq also receives support and guidance from IRC's Global Security Focal Point, based in New York.

IRC remains aware of the particularly sensitive nature of VAWG programming in Iraq. Senior IRC staff regularly meet with field staff and partners to gauge changes in the local context and to ensure that program activities do not put staff, partners or beneficiaries at heightened risk. Within the proposed project, specific critical assumptions related to the security environment include:

³¹ IRC-Iraq's Security Management Plan, which includes details on IRC's global security protocols, is available upon request.

- Security levels remain sufficiently stable to allow IRC and partners to operate in targeted territories;
- Local context enables survivors to safely access services.

IRC maintains that the involvement of local government and communities is the key for a successful implementation of the project activities, and remains in constant communication with government representatives, senior UN officials, other INGOs and local counterparts in order to ensure high levels of mutual confidence and information sharing. This facilitates effective programme implementation and allows IRC to make informed choices, in communication with multiple stakeholders. Should security conditions threaten continuation of the project, IRC will discuss potential scenarios with AusAID, including the possibility of moving the project to a safer area.

Other critical assumptions made under this project related to the capacity of local counterparts and the political environment include:

- Local NGO partners are able to maintain stable administration and staffing;
- IRC communication and relationship with government counterparts remains positive and productive;
- DFVAW and police counterparts have continued support from the MOI to engage with IRC for capacity building and support;
- MOE remains willing to engage in and promote gender-sensitive dialogue with religious leaders;
- IRC, local partners and other key counterparts have continued support from the KRG to engage in coordination and dialogue aimed at improving response and prevention of VAWG.

IRC takes several measures to mitigate risks related to the above, including the regular monitoring and follow-up of partners; regular engagement with local leaders and government authorities; and regular bi-lateral discussions with UN agencies, other INGOs and local NGOs. Based on IRC's established presence in the KRG and the regional government's specific request that IRC continue its VAWG programming, it is expected that the envisaged outcomes of this project will be feasible within the parameters outlined here.

Institutional Capacity

The IRC operated in Iraq from 2003 until 2005, when security considerations forced its departure. Operations resumed in November 2007, when a main office was established in Erbil. IRC is currently present in northern and central Iraq, with offices in Baghdad and Erbil. The IRC has assisted more than 33,500 people in the country since 2007, and continues to expand programming.

IRC has developed close working relationships with government officials, NGOs and communities in target areas and is providing technical support at the regional level to the Board of the KRG High Committee for Addressing VAWG, the DFVAW (within the MOI) and the Ministry of Human Rights (via the NGO Advisory Board). Within the proposed project, IRC will also continue working with the Women's Union in an effort to improve coordination among stakeholders.

The IRC Iraq Country Program is supported through the Regional Office in Jordan, led by the Regional Director. The office provides programmatic technical, financial and operational management support to the Iraq Country Program.

IRC's GBV Technical Advisor is based at the New York headquarters and provides ongoing technical support to the Iraq program. New York headquarters also provides administrative and other technical backstopping.

The Country Director, based in Erbil, is responsible for overall IRC operations in Iraq and ensures programs are carried out professionally and meet IRC standards through oversight of IRC staff, regular monitoring visits and review of regular field reports.

The GBV Program Coordinator provides technical advice and strategic guidance, oversees program monitoring and evaluation, and is ultimately responsible for budget oversight.

IRC VAWG Programming

IRC has been implementing VAWG programs in refugee, IDP and other conflict-affected communities since 1996 and has gained a reputation as a global leader in this field. IRC currently implements GBV programs in 17 countries and maintains a fully staffed technical support unit in New York.

The proposed project is directly linked to the mission of IRC's global GBV Unit, which aims to meet the safety, health, psychosocial and justice needs of women and girls who are survivors of or vulnerable to gender-based violence. IRC seeks to empower communities to lead efforts that challenge beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate or condone violence against women and girls. This is done in partnership with communities and institutions to promote and protect women and girls' human rights and to empower them to enjoy these rights.

IRC recognizes that to be effective in protecting women and girls from violence in the short and long-term, interventions must take place at different levels, providing direct services to survivors, supporting systems and strategies to monitor and respond when those rights are breached, and establishing preventative measures to ensure rights are recognized and protected (through international, statutory and traditional laws and policies). IRC Iraq's mission puts capacity-building of local government and civil society at the centre of the organization's work in the region, supporting Iraqis in their own efforts. IRC is strongly committed to continuing to implement high quality VAWG programs in Iraq, striving for continuous improvement, empirical effectiveness and strengthened advocacy efforts.