

# UNITING THROUGH THE POWER OF FOOTBALL IN IRAQ

## PROJECT INFORMATION

### Locations

— 5

Baghdad (Karkh + Rusafa), Dhi Qar, Diyala, Muthanna and Nineveh

### Implementation Period

— 8 months

August 2021 - March 2022

### Trainers

— 2

YABC trainers from the Egyptian Red Crescent Society coached online on YABC & F4D sessions, tools & methodology

### Facilitators

— 34

youth completed the YABC & F4D in-person Training of Facilitators

### Participants

— 264

youth – at risk of violence and exclusion, in particular Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returnees, and youth with disabilities – completed the YABC & F4D Hybrid Curriculum

### Micro-Projects

— 24

youth-led & community-based Micro-Projects successfully implemented

### People Reached

— 6,700

community members served and reached through the Micro-Projects & the *No to Drugs* campaign including 122 Persons with Disabilities



IRAQ



Football is the most popular sport in Iraq and in the past has brought together the different communities living in the country. With the *Uniting Through the Power of Football in Iraq*, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society and its volunteers further demonstrated the powerful impact of Humanitarian Education and Sports for Development and Peace in promoting social inclusion, with a strong focus on the empowerment of women and persons with disabilities.

### Micro-Projects Thematic Areas



# Country Overview

## General Context

The humanitarian context in Iraq remains fragile despite the end of formal military operations. It is characterised by protracted internal displacement; eroded national social cohesion; extensive explosive ordnance threatening internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and communities.<sup>1</sup>

It is estimated that 60% of Iraq's population is under 25 years old, with the youth population of the country expected to jump to 10 million by 2030.<sup>2</sup> Despite its growing numbers and great potential, over the past decades **Iraqi youth have continuously suffered from stifling socio-economic conditions**. The opportunities to thrive have often been paralysed by a lack of resources, a failing job market, a stagnated economy and reduced access to essential services as a result of war, sanctions and internal political instability.

Geographically, Iraq is extremely susceptible to **natural disasters and human induced hazards**, including droughts, floods, desertification, sandstorms and earthquakes, which contribute to increased vulnerability, poverty and economic disparities.<sup>3</sup>

## The Covid-19 Pandemic and its Impact on the Project

Since the beginning of the pandemic, country officials estimate that more than 2 million people have been infected by the virus with a reported 25 thousand deaths. The government has continuously enforced containment measures, including lockdowns and border closures, which have severely affected the country's socio-economic development, with heavy consequences on the already **high youth unemployment rate**. This is seen to have significant negative repercussions on both the physical and mental well-being of young people.<sup>4</sup>

The movement restrictions and safety measures for the containment of the Covid-19 Pandemic represented additional challenges for the project implementation: it caused, for instance, a delay in the start of the project activities which could nevertheless all be successfully implemented though in-person modalities.

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1 FRC Country Program Overview for Iraq in 2019, 2019. Link: <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/ifrc-iraq-country-program-overview-2019>

2 Amirali, A. The 'Youth Bulge' and Political Unrest in Iraq: A political economy approach. K4D, Knowledge, Evidence, and Learning for Development, Nov.2019. Link: [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/687\\_youth\\_bulge\\_and\\_political\\_unrest\\_in\\_iraq.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/687_youth_bulge_and_political_unrest_in_iraq.pdf/)

3 Ibid.,2019

4 Calabrese, J. Iraq's Fragile State in the time of Covid-19, Dec.2020. Link: [https://www.mei.edu/publications/iraqs-fragile-state-time-covid-19#\\_edn1](https://www.mei.edu/publications/iraqs-fragile-state-time-covid-19#_edn1)

## Project Implementation Overview

### Inception and Training of Facilitators (ToF)

In the first phase of the project, 6 locations were chosen from 5 governorates (Baghdad, Diyala, Dhi Qar, Muthanna and Nineveh). The geographic selection was based on needs-based criteria which considered, amongst other variables: vulnerability context with a focus on socio-economic hardships, displacement, unemployment and the density of youth population.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society also engaged in a careful selection of the volunteers to become YABC & F4D facilitators, who were identified on the basis of their RCRC experience, their engagement in youth development programmes and additional facilitation expertise. Out of 85 applicants, 34 young people were selected to participate in the Training of Facilitators.

The ToF was delivered from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021 in an in-person format by two international YABC trainers from the Egyptian Red Crescent Society. Prior to being deployed to Iraq, the trainers had received further online coaching by the IFRC and GA on F4D, new YABC sessions developed, and the additional tools integrated related to Protection, Gender and Inclusion; Child Safeguarding; Project Cycle Management and Psychosocial Support and First Aid.



Training of Facilitators in September 2021.

Source: IRCS

## Hybrid Curriculum Implementation



The second phase of the project engaged 264 youth as participants in the YABC & F4D sessions conducted over a 1-month period.

This phase saw the delivery of the YABC & F4D activities and the use of creative monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools that also played a role in Psychosocial Support and in fostering self-reflection and self-awareness for participants. The *Tree Mirror activity*, for instance, enabled each participant to represent themselves as trees drawing what keeps them rooted, their skills, motivation and values, their aspirations, connections and achievements – whilst serving as a tool to notice the evolution and journey of each participant throughout the project.

Tahsin Yacoub, a young participant from Diyala, admitted that

*“at first I was afraid of expressing my thoughts and opinions, but I took courage | seeing the other participants drawing their trees and sharing without any fear.”*

As a component of the Hybrid Curriculum implementation, the YABC & F4D activities were accompanied by **friendly football matches and tournaments** suited to further foster cooperation, communication skills, inclusion, self-esteem and confidence among participants.



YABC & F4D Hybrid Curriculum implementation in Baghdad and Al Muthanna, Diyala, Dhi Qar and Nineveh Provinces in October 2021.

Source: IRCS

## Community-Based Micro-Projects

The third phase of the project focused on the design and implementation of 24 youth-led micro-projects. In addressing needs in their communities, the youth teams focused on the following thematic issues:

- **Access to and Promotion of Education, Sports, Art and Culture & Non-Discrimination, Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion:** organisation of art and culture festivals and innovation conferences to support young artists (especially women) and/or to promote peaceful coexistence among all ethnic groups with a specific focus on the inclusion of minorities; development of scout camps in the neglected archaeological site of Akkarouf and in Chabayish marshes to promote sustainable tourism; creation of a mobile theatre with plays focusing on social inclusion; organisation of inclusive sports tournaments with provision of the necessary equipment.
- **Climate Action and Environmental Protection:** awareness-raising campaigns on the risk of desertification coupled with reforestation and/or cleaning activities.
- **Infrastructure - Construction and Refurbishment:** rehabilitation of youth and sports centres and/or pitches to become safe spaces for gathering and the promotion of a culture of peace and social inclusion.
- **Livelihoods Creation, Support and Diversification:** IT training for unemployed youth; workshop on mobile phone maintenance for young people with disabilities.



*Micro-Project implementation, which included projects focusing on gender equality, non-discrimination, social inclusion, cultural and environmental awareness.*

*Source: IRCS*



- **Gender Equality – Girls’ and Women’s Empowerment:** sewing courses and provision of machinery to divorced and widowed women; training of young women to become good communicators and influencers, spreading awareness about Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and women’s rights; support to women’s inclusion in sports at university level (collaboration with Baghdad University).
- **Disability Inclusion:** training and sport tournaments for young athletes with disabilities in collaboration with the Paralympic Committee and local associations, awareness-raising activities for disability inclusive programmes in sports, education and art.

## Project Monitoring and Evaluation

IRCS constantly followed up at branch-level on the project implementation, maintaining constant connection with the youth facilitators and the staff on the ground. Through the administration of the self-assessment questionnaires to the youth participants, the National Society was able to detect a significant change in the attitudes and behaviours of participants and the success of the project in fostering

“*the spirit of cooperation among all and the sense of belonging to the society.*”  
| Karrar, participants from Dhi Qar.

## Highlights of the Project

*"We learned that a person can change the society and that a small project can bring a smile to a young man, a person with disability, a child or a woman."*

Mohammed Kamel, IRCS Project Manager

- **Local Collaboration:** for the planning and implementation of all Micro-Projects, IRCS was able to collaborate with national and local stakeholders, in order to reinforce the present impact and the future sustainability of the interventions. The collaborations included the Ministry of Youth and Sports/ Youth and Sports Forums, Ministry of Interior/ Directorate of Community Police, Iraqi Handball Federation, Iraq national team for people with special needs and the Paralympic Committee, several national universities, as well as local civil society and volunteering organisations.
- **Gender Equality Promotion:** IRCS carefully planned and conducted outreach activities to ensure young women's and girls' participation in the project – female facilitators were trained to lead and accompany young women and girls throughout the project, so that **safe spaces for female participants** only were created to allow their full engagement. Several Micro-Projects aimed at women's empowerment through the promotion of access to education, sports and culture as well as livelihood creation, with a strong focus on **making women aware of their legal rights and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence**.
- **'No to Drugs' campaign:** IRCS organised an additional comprehensive awareness-raising campaign to **promote inclusive and safe sports and prevent the use of addictive substances** both inside and outside the football pitch. The campaign consisted of several mutually reinforcing events and activities: a youth marathon, football and handball matches, additional vocational courses for unemployed youth and youth with disabilities focusing on mobile phone maintenance, environmental activities such as the cleaning of the Tigris River banks, awareness-raising lectures and theatre plays.
- **Outreach to Youth with Disabilities:** IRCS particularly focused on ensuring the **inclusion of young persons with disabilities** in the project activities. The organisation of sports tournaments, vocational training and other activities adapted to the specific needs of this target group aimed at **restoring the self-confidence** of the young people in their potential to play an active role in the society. The visibility of these events helps society at large in welcoming diversity thus opening more space for meaningful inclusion.

Rahman Ali, a facilitator who encouraged a young man who lost his left arm to take part in the project, stated

*"this project has made this man another person. He got to be integrated inside the community and he was really excited – at the end of the second stage he joined the team of people with disabilities and is now playing in Baghdad."*



## VOICES FROM THE PITCH

“ Hello, my name is Muhammad Fayyad and I am one of the trainees of the YABC & F4D project. I live in Sabat Abob in Baghdad. Because of my disability, if I had to go somewhere or do anything my mother would always be by my side to transport and accompany me. We would cover distances of 25 km and the costs of transportation are very high. When I entered the programme, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society provided all of us with transportation, courses on human development and networking, which made us engage more with each other and develop a spirit of cooperation and of coming together. Another thing that this programme brought me was the chance to practice another hobby, teaching me to work with computers, both hardware and software, with workshops about computer maintenance, as well as dealing with customers.

I couldn't be happier to have been a part of this project, everyone treated me with so much respect and I thank the Iraqi Red Crescent so much for making this possible. I wish success to everyone! ”



*Muhammad Fayyad, YABC & F4D project participant from Baghdad.*

*Source: IRCS*



**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.



**The Generation Amazing Foundation (GA)** is a human and social legacy focused organisation that launched in 2010 during Qatar's successful bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup™. GA operates its sport for development programmes in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Qatar's National Vision 2030, to promote sustainability, inclusion, and gender equality. GA's unique methodology utilises the power of football to impart crucial life skills including communication, leadership, teamwork and compassion to youth and communities in need across the globe. Since its launch, GA, in collaboration with key partners, has reached and positively impacted over 1 million lives in 35 countries and counting.