



## Gender in Iraq

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# **Iraqi Women's Contribution to the Iraqi Economy: An impressionistic view. By Amer K. Hirmis (PhD) \***

### **Abstract**

There is a large, and growing, literature dealing with the power of gender parity, rightly concluding that GDP would increase with increasing participation rate of women in the labour market at various skills and seniority levels. Iraq is not different. This body of literature had simultaneously been pioneered by the academia, international organisations and established consulting firms. This note attempts to quantify the potential contribution of Iraqi women to the economy, when/if women's participation rate in the labour force increases from 13.9 percent in 2014 (year under investigation) to 40 percent. Although women comprise 50 percent of population in working age, at 13.9 percent participation rate Iraqi working women contribute only 8.12 percent to non-oil GDP. This equated to US\$ 8.52 billion. A counterfactual scenario suggests that, on a *ceteris paribus* basis, if participation rate is raised to 40 percent, women's contribution to GDP would have been US\$ 24.72 billion, or 23.58 percent of non-oil GDP; nearly three times higher in real terms. Such an increase, however, would require an increase in the absorptive capacity of the economy, i.e. an increase in investment in social and physical infrastructure as well as in the productive and service sectors, the increase in GDP is likely to be much higher over the medium- to long-term. For this to happen, economic and social policies would need to be put in place, effecting change in attitudes towards the role of women in Iraqi society and the economy. This paper makes a number of policy suggestions which could be refined to deliver tangible results in promoting women's increased participation in the Iraqi labour market and the economy. It also recommends that the Iraqi Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) should refine the income approach to GDP, incorporating separately women's contribution as an important indicator of human development, and the degree to which Iraq attains economic development, as distinct from economic growth. This paper also recommends that the UNDP should incorporate such a measure – contribution of women to national GDP – in the Human Development Index (HDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Millennium Development



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Goals (MDG). Other international organisations, with concern about gender inequality, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and Economic Forum, should follow suit.

Key words: Women; Gender Inequality; GDP; Iraq; Social Norms in Iraq; Religious Codes in Iraq; UNDP.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper begins by providing a skeletal overview of the relevant literature at the global level, including methods used to calculate women's contribution to GDP. The paper then moves to outline Iraqi women's situation in society and the economy. This is followed by calculating Iraqi women's contribution to the economy – GDP. The question of *why* Iraqi women's contribution is so low is then addressed, touching on both social norms and religious codes that might explain this reality. A number of ideas are offered on *how* to rectify this situation, so that women's contribution to the economy rises. Finally, two sets of policy recommendations are offered; the first deals with *what needs to be done* urgently to encourage more women joining the labour force, the second deals with how the income approach to GDP could be refined by CSO/the UN, so that *women's contribution to GDP* should become a new measure to be adopted by the UN and other international organisations to gauge the degree of economic development in a country, as distinct from economic growth.

### 2. SKELETAL OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

Over the last few decades, contributions relating to gender parity have emerged from the academia, the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) the World Economic Forum (WEF), McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), to mention a few. The main thrust of this literature is that there is ample evidence that when women are able to develop their full labour market potential, there can be significant macroeconomic gains, including, principally, an increase in GDP. The 2018 MGI report puts it this way “Advancing women's equality in the countries of Asia Pacific could add \$4.5 trillion to their collective annual GDP in 2025, a 12 percent increase over the business-as-usual trajectory” (MGI 2018: vi). An area where change is needed to achieve this in Asia Pacific is a “Shift attitudes about women's role in society and work, in order to underpin progress on all aspects of gender equality” (*ibid*). Christine



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Laggard, Head of IMF has in December 2018 offered the view on the CBS News 'Face the Nation' programme that "In the United States, if there was equal participation of women in the labour market, GDP would be up by 5 percent" (www.cbsnews.com). This view apparently was not based on IMF research; rather, it was based on an *index* developed in 2012 by Aguirre DeAnne M. *et al* (of Booz&Co, on which more below) to evaluate and describe how countries increase the participation and effectiveness of women in the labour force, resulting in GDP growth.

Key reasons provided in the literature for inequality and much lower rate of participation of women in the labour market include discrimination against women (generally) due to social norms and/or religious codes that perceive women less capable to performing certain type of work (at the same level as men). Women are seen not to be capable of handling senior positions, or that their role in society should be in the home, in the private, not public, space. Given that in many (not all) developing, underdeveloped or backward economies (e.g. in Africa/Middle East), women are not sent to schools from an early age, they consequently lack proper education/skills to work; in some cases women are not allowed to work in certain sectors of the economy <sup>1</sup>. In Saudi Arabia, for example, unemployment rate amongst women was 35 percent in 2012; social and religious reasons were noted for restricting women's participation in the economy (IMF, 2013b: 5). An admirable 2013 World Bank report notes that "Although, most MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries have made admirable progress in closing their gender gaps in education and health outcomes, these investments in human development have not yet translated into commensurately higher rates of female participation in economic and political life" (WB 2013: 4) Indeed, MENA region recorded a 20.6 percent participation rate in 2017, against a world average of around 50 percent (See: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF...>).

Received literature also provides proposals for policy options open for governments to encourage women's increased participation in the labour market (IMF, 2013b). Essentially, these fall in the fields of monetary and fiscal policies, supported by other policies that encourage greater

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<sup>1</sup> An official account from Saudi Arabia remarks that "In a country where women have historically played a restricted public role... Traditional societal boundaries are changing in line with the belief that a more inclusive attitude will benefit overall economic progress... Saudi Arabia still operates a male guardianship system in which females must gain permission to travel or speak with members of the opposite sex...(a major goal) outlined in Vision 2030 (is) to increase women's participation in the workforce (from 15 percent) to 30% by 2030" (<https://www.alj.com/en/perspective/changing-future-economic-role-women-saudi-arabia/> accessed on 8 January 2019)



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participation. In the field of monetary policy, for example, such policies include enhanced access to finance; lending at affordable interest rates, and softer options for collaterals. In the field of fiscal policy, the support for increased participation typically includes reducing income tax for women, whether they are first or secondary earners through individual taxation, 'in-work' tax credits/benefits for low-wage earners, and reducing the net tax liability for participants.

In terms of improving social welfare, publicly financed parental leave schemes could help parents reconcile work and family life, maintaining their connection to the labour market through a guaranteed return to their job. An average duration of paid parental leave is devised in different countries at different stages of economic development. Ideally, the period should also consider that on return to work, skills (and wage) levels are not undermined. In addition, access to affordable, and high-quality, child care frees up women's time for formal employment. Last, but not least, pension contribution could be reduced by a certain proportion for working women, strengthening the link between labour supply and income, thus influencing the decision to join the labour market.

Moderating intra-household division of labour, in favour of changing attitudes, encouraging more women to join the labour market, requires a change in overall social attitudes towards women. In many, if not most, countries, legislation would be needed to curtail the obstacles that prevent increasing women's participation in the economy. Legislation might also be needed in many countries to improve child and elderly care so that women carers could join the labour force, generating their own income and enhancing their own earning potential.

It goes without saying that a fundamental prerequisite to increased women's participation in the labour market would, in the long-run, depend on compulsory good education (especially in rural areas), training and support networks among entrepreneurs, including an increased awareness of legal rights to equal treatment. Social acceptance of women in the labour market is critical; promoting women to high-level positions should also contribute to higher female participation in the formal labour force. Last but not least, both flexible work arrangements and part-time employment allow women to balance their employment with other demands on their time.



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### 2.1 Ascertaining women's contribution to GDP

We start with a brief sketch of the methodology used in recent reports that have quantified the potential contribution of women to GDP, and its marked increase when the participation rate of women in the labour force rises, in the age of digital technology.

Based on the earning power of women in the economy, and productivity, other studies have attempted to calculate the contribution of women to GDP, or at least have predicted that an increase in women's participation in the labour force would result in an increase in GDP<sup>2</sup>.

Booz&Co. (2012: 18) determined the relationship between economic activity and employment for a given country by using the following equation:

$$\text{Per capita GDP} = \text{labour productivity} \times \text{amount of work produced per person} \times \text{employment rate} \times \text{age factor}$$

The Booz&Co report (*ibid*: 19) suggests that raising the female labour force participation rate to country-specific male levels would, for instance, raise GDP in the United States by 5 percent, in Japan by 9 percent, in the United Arab Emirates by 12 percent, and in Egypt by 34 percent. The report goes on to suggest that the overwhelming majority of women worldwide who have the potential to contribute more fully to their national economies (some 812 million) live in emerging and developing nations.

Using data on average hours worked per week and employment in the USA from the 2014 population survey, Bahn, K. and McGrew, A. (2017) calculate the proportion of hours women work out of total hours worked by all workers. They found that women provide 43.8 percent of all labor hours in the U.S. economy. If all their labor were withdrawn, it would lead to a roughly proportional reduction in GDP.

In their 2018 report, MGI use a method developed three years earlier (MGI 2015: 101-146), to calculate the impact of increased participation of women in the countries of Asia Pacific, based on a supply-side GDP model:

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Booz&Co. 2012; MGI, 2015; and WEF 2018.



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GDP = working-age population x labour-force participation rate x employment rate x full-time equivalent rate x labour productivity per full-time equivalent employed

Thus the model calculates GDP using five inputs, each of which is estimated by gender. However, labour markets in most ‘developing countries’, indeed in developed countries too, include a small proportion of women aged 65+ who still work and contribute to GDP. There is also evidence of unpaid work undertaken by women, especially in rural areas, which is not included in GDP (*cf.* CSO, 2015: 4).

It should be noted though that in ‘developing countries’ in particular many children aged 10-15 also work to support their poor families. Both the Booz&Co. and MGI models calculations exclude output from these categories of workers, and so perhaps slightly underestimate the overall contribution of women to GDP. Further, in spite of their strengths (being rooted in economics), these models do not appear to accommodate the potential ripple effects that might ensue as a result of the increase in female employment, in terms of both the growth of the supply chain and the impact on wage levels of increased women labour supply.

Of course, the impact of increased participation of women in the labour market will take time to materialise; it will also require increasing the absorptive capacity of the economy. The 2020 and 2005 targets set by Booz&Co. and MGI’s need to account for the possible risks of not achieving these targets, especially given the spectacular speed at which change in digital technology impacts future productivity levels and employment patterns. These patterns might involve changes in men’s attitudes towards work when their wife’s work full time.

Despite such encouraging attempts to quantify women’s contribution to GDP, it is worth noting that none of the OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index, the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), the European Union’s Gender Equality Index, and UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index, incorporate the contribution of women’s in GDP.

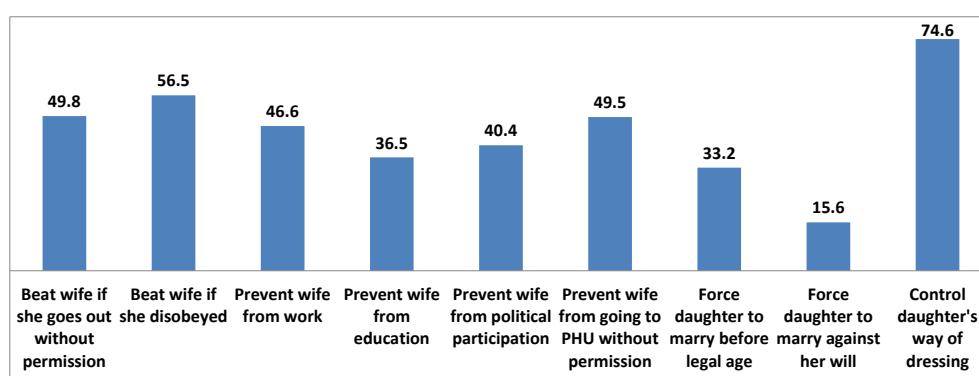
### **3. OUTLINE OF IRAQI WOMEN’S SITUATION IN SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY**



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A 2012 government's own report shows the damaging impacts of the centrality of man in the family and the wider social space in Iraq, as summarised in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Percentage of men (18+) who perceive that men have the right to undertake specific actions in specific situations, 2011



Source: Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organisation (2012: 57). Note that PHU under column six from the left denotes 'Public Health Units.'

In Iraq, the current debate cover increased levels of violence against women, thus the many representations made to high ranking officials, as well as promises made by politicians to protect women from violence<sup>3</sup>. At a different layer, the debate also revolves around women's position in the economy and society, consequent to inconsistencies in the 2005 constitution and recent proposals made at cabinet and parliament level to alter the 'Personal Status Law 188 for 1958.' The inconsistencies in the constitution (*cf.* Articles 14 and 41 set out later) are seen to further undermine women's (and minor's) position in society.

The situation of women does not appear to have changed much for a long time now. The following are excerpts from the 2018-22 National

<sup>3</sup> See for example, President Barham Salih's meeting with the Supreme Committee of the National Team of Resolution 1325, on Monday, December 17, 2018, in which he emphasised "the need to promote the status of Iraqi women and provide the environmental and social environment to protect them from all forms of violence... (and the) necessity to empowering them to play their role within our societies, and to lead government institutions, and assume political positions" (see: <https://presidency.iq/EN/Details.aspx?id=1143>, accessed on Dec. 20, 2018). In a meeting with Parliamentary women on Dec. 25, 2018, the President called for the need to "enact laws and legislations that ensure the exercise of women responsibilities and duties and realize their full rights." (See: <https://presidency.iq/EN/Details.aspx?id=1154>, accessed on Dec. 27, 2018, italics added).

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Development Plan (NDP) <sup>4</sup>, providing a summary of women's place in society and the labour market:

- The gender gap in society severely harms the basis for development. Social traditions limit the role of women; the male-oriented (*thikūri*) culture emphasises the centrality of man, and is deeply rooted in the Iraqi social fabric. This has led to low participation of women in social, economic and political activities, let alone taking leadership roles in legislative and political organisations (p. 19);
- In 2015, labour force in Iraq was estimated to be nine million; 86 percent of which were male workers and 14 percent female workers (p. 49);
- In 2014, the rate of unemployment among the male population was 8.4 percent; and 21.9 percent among the female population (p. 51);
- In 2014, 29 percent of employed women worked in the private sector; 46 percent worked in the public sector (p. 236);
- The three strategies designed to improve Iraqi women's situation in society and the economy have not been implemented effectively, as was aimed – these strategies being: the '2013-17 National Strategy to Stop Violence Against Women'; the '2014-18 National Strategy to Improve Women Situation in Iraq'; and 'The Rural Women Strategy' (ibid); and
- The challenges facing women's situation in Iraq include not implementing laws that aim to empower women; abolishing the ministry of state for women and the ministry of human rights, both of which stood to empower women in society and the economy; a notable increase in the marriage of minors, despite this being illegal (and contrary to the 'Personal Status Law'); the national federal budget is not sensitive to empowering women; and, last but not least, there is a significant flaw in the distribution of social and economic roles between men and women in Iraq, to the extent that it reflects a misogynistic bias, as reflected in increased violence against women (p. 237).

It appears that passing the 'Employment Law' (No. 37 of 2015) has not had much influence in changing Iraqi women's role in the economy. However, some nine years ago, the Iraqi economist Waffā' al-Mahdāwī (2010: 21) descried women's situation in the labour market as follows:

“Labour market in Iraq is male-oriented in spite of the increase of the

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://mop.gov.iq/static/uploads/8/pdf/1545899649c7e32a25a82e0dd6ae58c5531ceec1d2--الوطنية%20%التنمية%20%الوطنية%202018-%202022.pdf> (accessed on August 20, 2018, in Arabic)



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number of women in working age to 54.6% compared with 53.7% for men... job opportunities tend to go to men at the cost of women, giving men competitive power, and command over financial resources... also... women's participation rate in the rural areas is 24.5% compared 14.8% in urban areas in 2008, which indicates the predominance of women's participation in unpaid activities in the agriculture sector... consigning rural women's status to the household, rather than one of choice, her work at home is seen as part of her traditional role, for which she is not remunerated, but this role deepens her dependence on the man - her husband. Theoretically she is working, but the working conditions, manifested in paid work, and the feeling of independence and self-confidence, do not materialise, it is work that involves a degree of coercion and conscious and unconscious obedience, seen as an indivisible extension to her family activities."

Before moving to address policy issues that emerge from the analysis in this note, we turn to assessing the contribution of Iraqi working women to the national economy (GDP), and how this could be improved?

### 3.1 Ascertaining Iraqi women's contribution to GDP

Women's contribution to GDP is not reported separately in the national accounts, in Iraq, which follows the UN 'System of National Accounts' (SNA) guidelines. The latter does not provide gender-based GDP figures.

Here, an attempt is made to quantify the contribution of paid Iraqi working women to Iraq's GDP, taking 2014 as the year under investigation. This year is chosen because employment figures by gender are available from 'Iraq Household Social and Economic Survey' (IHSES). More recent data are unavailable. Given the dearth of pertinent information, assumptions had to be made, as set out in Appendix A.

### Methodology

Briefly, the methodology used in this note deploys the income approach to GDP, where productivity is implicitly incorporated. In particular it attempts to decompose three components of GDP by gender: the 'compensation of employees', 'gross operating surplus' and 'gross mixed income.' Official data do not split these components by gender. In this note, this is done using

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earnings gaps between male and female employees, as detailed in Appendix A.

As is known, the standard equation for the income approach to GDP is;

$$\text{GDP} = \text{COE} + \text{GOS} + \text{GMI} + (\text{Taxes} - \text{Subsidies})$$

**Where:** Compensation of employees (COE) measures wages and salaries, as well as employer contributions to social security and other such programmes.

Gross operating surplus (GOS) is the surplus/profit/interest/rent due to owners of incorporated businesses, though only a sub-set of total costs are subtracted from gross output to calculate GOS.

Gross mixed income (GMI) is the same measure as GOS, but for unincorporated businesses; it often includes most small businesses.

The sum of COE, GOS and GMI is called total factor income<sup>5</sup>.

Table 1 below shows women's contribution to non-oil GDP in Iraq, based on two scenarios.

Table 1: Women's contribution to the non-oil GDP in Iraq, 2014

Item	Key indicators	Comments
<b>GDP-related - 2014</b>		
Iraq's non-oil GDP	US\$ 104.82 bn.	Based on CSO's report 'Estimates of GDP and National Income for 2015, Table 2, p.8 (www.cosit.gov.iq)
Compensation of employees	US\$ 58.96 bn.	
Gross Operating Surplus (GOS)/Gross Mixed Incomes (GMI)	US\$ 50.70 bn.	Excludes oil, which equates to US\$ 86.46 bn. (2014)
Consumption of fixed capital	US\$ 23.26 bn.	Note: US\$ 1 = IQD 1214.36 (average for 2014)
Indirect taxes	US\$ 0.96 bn.	Central bank of Iraq (www.cbi.iq)
Subsidies	US\$ (28.10) bn.	
<b>Employment related - 2014</b>		
Total employment, 2014	8117925	Source: CSO based on IHSES
Female employment	1131966	(Iraq Household Social and Economic Survey), 2014
Male employment	6986859	
Participation rate in the labour force (Female)	13.93%	Derived from IHSES on ILO basis of calculating participation rate
Participation rate in the labour force (Male)	86.07%	
<b>Women's contribution to non-oil GDP - 2014</b>		
Women's contribution to GDP at 13.93 % participation rate	US\$ 8.52 bn.	Or 8.12 % of non-oil GDP [ 4.28 % of GDP]
Women's contribution to GDP at 40 % participation rate	US\$ 24.72 bn.	23.58 % of non-oil GDP [ 12.40 % of GDP]

Here, women's contribution to non-oil GDP is calculated. GDP from crude oil exports sector distorts GDP driven by human capital activities in the

<sup>5</sup> Total factor income is the income of all of the factors of production in society. It measures the value of GDP at factor (basic) prices. The difference between basic prices and final prices (those used in the expenditure calculation) is the total taxes and subsidies that the government has levied or paid on production.



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Iraqi economy. Oil forms ca. 45 percent of GDP in 2014 and employs only 1 percent of total employment (CSO 2015: 8; Hirmis A. 2018: 5).

It can be seen from Table 1 above that at 13.93 percent participation rate in the labour market, the contribution of women to non-oil GDP US\$ 8.52 billion, or 8.12 percent. This is the *factual scenario*, based on available figures. As available data is not gender-based, and as stringent assumptions had been made, the results reported here provide *an impressionistic view* of the contribution of Iraqi women to Iraqi non-oil GDP.

It goes without saying that, on a *ceteris paribus* basis, an increase in women's participation rate would lead to an increase in GDP. However, to illustrate this point here, a *counterfactual, what if, scenario* assumes an arbitrary 40 percent participation rate, which results in the contribution rising to US\$ 24.72 billion, or 23.58 percent of non-oil GDP in 2014. The purpose here is simply to show a measure of magnitude of a significant rise in participation rate of women in the labour force on GDP.

Our calculation starts by splitting the 'compensation of employees' component. Of the 56.26 percent which this component contributes to non-oil GDP, only 5.72 percent comprises women's contribution to non-oil GDP in 2014. In the counterfactual scenario where participation rate is raised to 40 percent, the contribution rises 18.96 percent of non-oil GDP.

The next step is to split the 43.74 percent components of GDP, which comprise GOS, GMI and taxes minus subsidies. Intuitively, both GOS and GMI should reflect the gender split as in the 'compensation of employees' except for the fact that GOS carries significant 'profits' (or rather *rent*) from crude oil exports; this has therefore been subtracted from GOS, as shown in Table 1 above.

However, data from the 2018 WB's 'Enterprise Survey' (Table 2 below) appear to suggest that the overwhelming majority of enterprises in Iraq are male-owned.

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Table 2: World Bank Enterprise Survey on Firms' Ownership

IRAQ 2011	%
Firms with female participating in ownership	6.8
Firms with majority female ownership *	n.a.
Firms with female top manager	2.3
Proportion of permanent full-time female workers	8.6
Proportion of permanent full-time female production workers **	3.3
Proportion of permanent full-time non-production female workers **	1.2

\* Statistics derived from less than or equal to five firms, and not reported for confidentiality reasons

\*\* This indicator is computed using data from manufacturing firms only.

**Source:** Enterprise Surveys (<http://www.enterprisesurveys.org>), The World Bank.

(posted at:

<http://www.enterprisesurveys.org/Data/ExploreTopics/gender>, accessed on 28 January 2019)

Most of GOS and GMI (i.e. profits, interest and rents from property) would presumably accrue to male-owned firms. Only 6.8 percent of firms are partly owned by female, though of what size is not clear. Speculating that approximately 5.0 percent of GOS and GMI were generated by women, this would equate to US\$ 2.53 billion.

Table 1 above clearly shows that indirect taxes (at US\$ 0.96 bn.) form a negligible proportion of GDP, and for the purpose of this note, they are ignored. The massive amount of subsidies (in the form of, say, electricity price discounts, or supplying crude oil to public sector refineries) constitute income transfer, provided for from Iraq's oil revenue, and therefore can be ignored. The amount of subsidies in fact nearly cancels out the provision for the 'consumption of fixed capital').

On this basis, the total contribution of women to non-oil GDP is the sum of US\$ 5.99 billion in the form of 'compensation of employees' and US\$ 2.53 billion in the form of 'operating surplus'/'mixed incomes.' This totals to US\$ 8.52 billion or 8.12 percent of Iraq's non-oil GDP in 2014.

Moving to the counterfactual scenario, it is assumed earnings remain constant and that at 40 percent participation in the labour market, women's ownership of firm's increases to an arbitrary 10 percent. In this case, women's contribution to the non-oil GDP would be US\$24.72 billion:



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US\$19.66 billion due to compensation of employees and US\$5.06 billion due to the rise in contribution to operating surplus/mixed income components. This is an important finding; it shows clearly the scale of the potential contribution to non-oil GDP that Iraqi working women could make, if they were to participate in the labour market at significantly larger numbers.

Such an increase in women's participation rate in the labour force would, however, require an increase in the *absorptive capacity* of the Iraqi economy, i.e. an increase in investment in social and physical infrastructure as well as in the productive and service sectors, leading to larger GDP, where women's contribution would be ca. US\$24.72 billion. For this to happen, fundamental change in would be needed economic macro- and micro policies, as noted in Section 6.1 below. And, unlike the past, these policies would need to be implemented effectively and efficiently. To this should be added necessary change in attitudes towards women in areas of social norms and religious codes, limiting women's participation in the labour market.

### **Limitations**

The above methodology is amenable to refinement. Firstly, it relies on data which is not gender-based. Thus the difficulties in splitting the various components of the income approach to GDP become apparent. Certain assumptions have to be made (Appendix A), and an indirect way is deemed necessary to estimate women's contribution to GDP. Nor does Iraqi CSO provide data on ownership of tax-paying companies in Iraq by gender, and WB's 2018 survey provides the 2011 data for Iraq (the latest available). In certain cases, the statistical sample does not appear to be large enough to secure confidentiality for certain entries.

### **Possibilities for refinement**

The above account suggests that there are possibilities for changes in the income approach to GDP methodology, to validate women's contribution to GDP.

As Iraq, and most countries, follow the UN's SNA <sup>6</sup> it is probably incumbent upon the UN to introduce some changes to the income approach

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<sup>6</sup> The System of National Accounts (SNA) is the internationally agreed standard set of recommendations on how to compile measures of economic activity. The SNA describes a coherent, consistent and integrated set of macroeconomic accounts in the context of a set of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules (see: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/sna.asp>)



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to GDP, advising on how to provide gender-based accounts, and the data required, including survey-based data.

Taking such a step by the UN would be consistent with other work that the UN currently undertakes, for example, providing the Human Development Index (HDI), which could incorporate the degree to which women contribute to GDP as an indicator of the human development level in a particular country, reflecting the stage of economic development. Other international organisations, for example, the WB, the IMF, the OECD and WEF might follow suit.

Should this happen, women in many countries like Iraq, will have an added evidence-based reason to advance the gender parity cause, strengthening their presence in and contribution to the national economy.

### 4. WHY IRAQI WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO GDP IS SO LOW?

This section attempts to provide a partial explanation of *why* and *how* women's participation in the economy is so low. A number of *key* social norms and religious codes<sup>7</sup> that might limit women's increased participation in the labour market are touched upon.

#### 4.1 Social norms limiting women's participation in the labour market

On the social front, there are at least three key issues that should be addressed.

First, based on perceptions and attitudes towards women reported in Figure 1 above, education is/becomes paramount. Single-sex school education prevails in Iraq, and it is logical to suggest that this situation denies boys and girls the opportunity to develop a good understanding, and respect for each other from an early age. Lack of understanding and respect is likely to be compounded by rote learning and degrading social

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<sup>7</sup> It is instructive to note that the 2014 UN-ESCWA report notes that "During the past 30 years, the participation of women in the labour force has increased at rates that merely exceed 1 per cent. If growth continues at this weak pace, according to the World Bank's World Development Report 2012, it would take women (in majority-Arabic speaking countries) some 150 years to catch up with their counterparts in (economically advanced countries) in terms of rights... The low participation of women in the labour market and the discrepancies between countries in the ('Arab') region reflect the complexity of the *legislative, economic, cultural and social norms* that are faced by women in the region, thereby creating many pressures that limit and narrow down further the choices for women. In addition, several business owners in ('Arab') countries still perceive women as less productive and more expensive to hire; these constraints lead to reducing their opportunities to move and choose their working positions, and make them less attractive to employers" (UN-ESCWA, 2014: 62-3 italics added)



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sayings that circulate widely in Iraq, such as “marry and get rid of her” and “women lack intelligence and faith.” Girls and women are degraded on the basis of their physical being. Compulsory co-education of both boys and girls based on critical, independent, thinking would be a material change in the current system, altering attitudes towards women in Iraq. Linking education with economic development, Nancy Birdsall (2003: 61) remarks “Development and democracy require a fast uptake of Iraqis, including girls and women, into secondary school. They require replacing a school system focused on doctrinal propaganda with a system responsive to new demands for marketable skills.” Education and economic development must be inextricably linked. University and vocational training graduates need to end up in jobs created by expanding productive and service sectors, taking advantage of the ‘digital revolution.’ In short, there must be close link between education (curricula) and the skills needs in the labour market. All girls and boys should have access to education to advanced level (up 16-18 of age), so that they would make informed decisions for themselves, in life and in participating in the labour market.

Second, recognition by the private and public sector of women’s potential in making a material change in the workplace, for the benefit of the enterprise they work in. As noted in fn. no 9 below, women are perceived to be less productive than men. The 2018-22 NDP (*op cit*: 40) notes that only 9.7 percent and 2.6 percent of senior positions at ‘Director General’ and ‘Deputy Minister’ respectively are occupied by women. The ministerial position occupied by women declined from six in 2004 to two in 2016 and none at the time of writing in February 2019. Table 2 above shows that only 2.3 percent of firms have women in the ‘top management’ team. Continuous professional development for women (and men) should be a central theme in people’s management in the private and public sectors, to improve productivity and to ensure that firms remain competitive in contested markets.

Third, strategies and laws that might encourage more Iraqi women to join the labour market should be implemented and enforced. The Labour Law 37 of 2015 appears to be consistent with the ILO internationally agreed standards; Article 45 (3) for example states that “Wages must be equal between women and men for the same type of work.” Chapter 10 in the same law is about ‘Protection of Female Worker.’ However, there is serious concern that this law is not being fully implemented (2018-22 NDP: 234-39). The same applies to three national strategies mentioned

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by the 2018-22 NDP, noted in Section 3 above; the NDP calls for these strategies to be fully implemented (*Ibid*). Women's situation needs to be supported whether in or out of the workplace. Serious policy measures should be taken, to create a conducive environment for the private sector to invest in the economy and encouraged to recruit more women, to overcome the structural stagnation that Iraq's economy so badly suffers from at present.

In such circumstances, women appear to be restricted in their choice and are unlikely to participate in the labour market, while others find it difficult to find work. In addition, most of the women entering the market prefer public sector jobs, especially in education and health services (*cf.* UN-ESCWA 2014: 63). In the informal sector, mainly agriculture, the majority of workers and labourers are (unpaid) women (*cf. ibid*; CSO, 2015: 4; 15).

### 4.2 Religious codes limiting women's participation in the labour market

There are many codes in the Abrahamic religions which clearly discriminate against women; they survive in our time in part because violence against women has been used for millennia as a technique to impose the authority and centrality of man (upon women) in both the public and private space.

In this note only three examples are observed, which serve to show that it is critical to initiate policies that protect Iraqi women from the imposition of religious codes, which appear to limit their chances to make greater contribution to Iraq's economy.

Firstly, the 'personal status law' (PSL) as it is currently applied follows religious codes not secular laws. For example, article 74 in the original PSL (No. 188 for 1959) stated that "the male gets equal portion of inheritance to that of the female." This Article was fiercely opposed by the clergy arguing that it was against Islamic shari'a. Several amendments were made to the 1959 PSL, veering away from the principle of equality/women's rights towards religious codes, giving way to 'religious courts' controlled by clerics in matters to do with personal status. Article 74 was eventually revoked, and replaced by Article 89 (1) in the latest version of the PSL, stating that "the male gets a portion equal to that of two females", which is interpreted to accord with the Qur'ān (al-Nisā': 11). Such a primogeniture measure immediately reduces women's potential to make major economic use of new resources available to them, as these resources are already fragmented. Even if

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women wish to open a business with small inheritance (capital), it is very likely that this venture would be small, not able to benefit from economies of scale (*cf.* Kuran T. 2012). Indeed such a view is corroborated by evidence from the agriculture sector in Iraq: "The agriculture sector in Iraq is characterised by different types of holdings and their small size, the result of a continual division as a result of (Islamic code of) *inheritance*. Large areas of arable land have been divided into small holdings that are uneconomic. This forms a big hurdle for agriculture production and is a reason for lack of stability in the sector" (Ministry of Planning 2010: 68, brackets and italics added).

Second, both the Iraqi parliament and the Iraqi government should address inconsistencies in the 2005 constitution, which severely limit women's chances of living the life they may wish to live if they had their free will. These inconsistencies have created (Indeed consolidated) a situation whereby girls at the age of nine are offered by their parent in some Islamic sects (e.g. al-Ja'fari sect) to marry. Typically, this action deprives young girls their education, and are made to live to bear and rear children. Thus the supply side of the labour market is denied the potential contribution of many women to the economy. Relevant examples in the constitution that could lead to this situation include Articles 14 and 41. Article 14 states that "Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief or opinion, or economic or social status." As this declaration for gender equality set out in the constitution, it should, theoretically, override the discrimination set out in the religious inheritance code. But that is not the case. What is more pertinent in this instance is the fact that Article 41 in the constitution is inconsistent with Article 14, as it opens the door for religious sects to apply their own codes to matters relating to women's personal status; it states that "Iraqis are free in their commitment to their personal status according to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices, and this shall be regulated by law." This inconsistency implies that Article 41 violates and fragments civil legislation, passing authority from civil courts to 'religious courts' to determine the future of minors and women in many sects and groups in Iraq. The effect is poorer representation of Iraqi women in the labour market and the economy.

Finally, the potential opportunities open to women in the labour market are apparently being purposely limited by the clergy who appear to be assuming increasing political and socio-economic power in Iraq. The

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country appears to be witnessing some practices imposed on women in the neighbouring countries, where secularism is objurgated by autocratic/theocratic state. Such practices limit women's freedom to have a more meaningful role in the economy and society.

According to Nasir al-Haj (2018) and Dr Amer Saleh (2018) many, if not most, young girls at school are obliged by parents to wear a headscarf/hijab<sup>8</sup>, a phenomenon that has become much more widespread since 2003. The same applies to universities and the workplace, where more and more women are seen wearing the hijab/abaya (black gown); scenes that were rare in the 50 years previous to 2003. Both al-Haj and Saleh report that students in the primary and secondary schools are taught that "my hijab is a duty and I am healthy and others (the unveiled) are unhealthy." In ('Islamic Education') textbooks taught to pupils in first year primary and fifth year secondary schools, such phrases are common; moreover, Iraqis who believe in other religions are condemned to be astray, and should be punished (*ibid*). Such a culture of intolerance breeds disadvantage to non-Muslim women. Both al-Haj and Saleh contend that such textbooks, totally new to education/culture in Iraq are likely to lead to the disintegration of Iraqi social fabric, giving room for a culture that nurtures ethical suspicion in daily dealings among men and women. It also appears that certain practices noted by ESCWA (2014: 63) in Iraq's neighbouring countries might creep into Iraq – such practices require women (by law) to participate in economic fields "suitable to their nature." If Iraq emulates such practices, this would exclude women from many fields, keeping such a sentiment open to interpretation, and leaving Iraqi educated women with few choices to consider<sup>9</sup>.

In short, the dominance of the clergy in political and social life in present-day Iraq<sup>10</sup> appears to translate into economic policies and decisions that limit women's participation in the labour force.

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<sup>8</sup> The root word for hijab is the three-letter word **hjb**, literally meaning seclude/isolate. The origins of this "social/religious norm" goes back to early Mesopotamia – Elam, and was institutionalised by the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser I (ca. 1100 BC), and in time transmitted across the Assyrian empire.

<sup>9</sup> It is not clear whether the president of ISCI's announcement (see fn. 14 above) that "the properness (*salāh*) of society depends on the properness of woman as she is the mother and the one who raises its boys (*li abna 'hi*)" is meant to imply that women will be found their suitable place in society according to Islamic School?

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that in December 2003, when Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI - a Shiite political party), cancelled the 1959 PSL through decree no. 137 during his term as president of the Interim Governing Council (now defunct). Strong opposition from civil society groups, decree no. 137 was revoked. Given the current pressures on government in relation to extensive violence on women in Iraq, including the widespread wearing of hijab, Humam Hammudi, the president of ISCI announced in October 2018 the inclusion for the first time the formation of a 'Central Women's Council' so that women participate in ISCI, taking

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### 5. POLICY ISSUES

Judging by the summary provided above from the 2018-22 NDP and the analysis published in the 2013 UN's 'Women in Iraq Factsheet' the situation in the labour market is unlikely to have changed since 2003, nor is expected to change much in the short and medium-term, unless radical policy changes are introduced and implemented effectively and efficiently.

Having said that, there is a long history of Iraqi women's strive for economic (and social) emancipation and empowerment. Perhaps one of the earlier examples in Iraq's recent history is an attempt by Maria Theresa Asmar (ca. 1804-1870) who set up a school for women in Baghdad, only for her project to be frustrated by the clergy and the ottoman government, which eventually gave the license to the clergy<sup>11</sup>. Iraqi Women continue to strive for equality in present-day Iraq<sup>12</sup>.

Many have suggested a path forward, to support greater women participation in the labour market; al-Mahdāwi, for example, suggests that a 'new partnership' consistent with agreed international (e.g. UN/ILO) norms of engaging women in development should be followed. Working together, the state, the private sector and civil society should, she continues, hopefully establish a market economy in Iraq, which aims to:

“...consolidate the economic role of working women through the improvement of institutions that would enable, and engage, women in the development process and the economic reform programmes, ... in all the macro-economic policies, especially monetary, fiscal and investment policies, which should be adapted to face the challenges that confront the working women in Iraq, limiting their participation in economic activity, and support their role in reconstruction and economic restructuring programmes, at the lowest costs possible. Thus, the new partnership for women in sustaining development should emphasise that women are part and parcel of the anticipated revival and an expression of the triumph of modern values, and renewal in Iraqi society, without which the developmental effort would be both deficient and limited” (al-Mahdāwi, *W. op cit*: 32).

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Zainb, the daughter of Ali bin Abi Talib (the fourth Khalifa) as a model, to emulate in accordance with Islamic School (see <http://ninanews.com>, accessed on 18 October 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Memories of Maria Theresa Asmar (2009) An Iraqi Woman's Journey into Victorian London (Edited by Emily Porter, Fadaat House for Publishing, Amman, Jordan).

<sup>12</sup> For historical origins of Iraqi women's situation in society/economy see Hirmis, A.K. 2018: 456-70 (App. 2)

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If understood correctly, what is being said here is that social (and religious) constraints on women's participation in the public space in Iraq, let alone in the labour force, should be addressed. Detailing these constraints is outside the remit of this note<sup>13</sup>. Efficiently and effectively implemented, however, al-Mahdāwi's proposals would in all probability go some way to create new *objective conditions* that might increase women's participation in economic activities across the economic sectors.

Indeed, Iraq's own recent history shows that this is possible, even without much support from the state/government. Adversity is creating conditions for Iraqi women to find ways to survive - as the daily grind of survival takes its toll on the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi population, enduring decades of hardship, Iraqi women, like many tens of thousands Iraqi men, gather in street vending waiting in public spaces in Baghdad, Karbalā', Hillah, etc. in the early hours of the morning to be collected by potential employees for that day. A phenomenon forced by hardship on widows, divorced and displaced women of working age, prepared to work, say, in construction, for low wages. As needs must, these Iraqi women deploy their energy and intelligence for survival, outside the private space – i.e. the home. In so doing, these women break the gender barrier; they also break the widespread (cultural) notions that working women compromise their feminine respectability in paid work. Work is obviously the way for economic independence, and for breaking the cultural and religious norms that would otherwise confine women to the private space.

### 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above analysis, two sets of recommendations are attempted in this note; the first set deals with policy issues, the second deals with technical issues. The policy recommendations address *how* to raise the percentage of women's participation in a country like Iraq. What pragmatic policies should be pursued to empower women to achieve their rightful place in society and the economy?

#### 6.1 Policy recommendations

Most *urgently*, the following policies need to be put in place to increase women's participation in Iraq's labour market in the medium- and long-term:

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<sup>13</sup> On this issue, see for example, Hirmis, A. K (ibid) and al-Hamadani, Tariq N. (1989: 66-89)



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Co-education in primary schools should replace the current single-sex system. Staff should comprise female and male, they deliver a secular curricula, based on latest scientific method of learning, instilling critical thinking in teaching, rather than doctrinaire propaganda. Co-education should be extended to both intermediate and senior schools, in the medium- and long-term. Single-sex schools are unlikely to foster social skills that would otherwise enable confident relationships between boys and girls. Girls/women must not be perceived as second-class citizens, and they must not be treated as inferior to boys/men. Politicians with strong will for change should overcome damaging ‘cultural and religious sensibilities’ and be able to take this recommendation forward, engaging specialist experts in the field, including lawyers, to design scientific and gender-neutral education programmes/curricula.

Reviewing relevant laws, for example, ‘Personal Status Law No. 188 for 1959 (and its amendments) and Labour Law No. 37 for 2017, to ensure total gender equality. In the case of the former, Article 74 in the original (1959) version which called for equality between male and female in the distribution of inheritance should be re-instated in the law. In the case of the latter, the law should be enforced, especially in the private sector. Most importantly, the inconsistencies within the 2005 constitution of Iraq should be ironed out, and the principles of equality among *all* Iraqis enshrined in Article 14 of the constitution should be reflected in every relevant law in Iraq, to secure that women enjoy every opportunity available to participate in the labour market, becoming more independent and engage in socio-political, as well as economic activities.

Iraqi parliament, state and government must assure Iraqi female population that every effort will be made to link education with the growth of economic sectors, providing new job opportunities for men and women, *matching new skills with the need of the industry*. Private investment in productive and service sectors must be encouraged by government, and close coordination between government and representatives organisations of the private sector and civil societies must take place to ensure that more women engage in the labour market. They should also have a work place environment where continuous professional development is encourages and senior posts are available for women to occupy.

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### 6.2 Technical recommendations

The two key recommendations in this respect are:

First, in order to establish a more precise contribution of Iraqi women to the economy *as a measure of human development and the extent of economic development (as distinct from economic growth)*, it should be a matter of urgency that the Iraqi parliament/government should take the initiative to instruct CSO to refine the income approach to GDP, to identify clearly women's contribution to GDP. Necessary data could be gathered via surveys to approximate women's share of two key components of GDP: 'compensation of employees' and 'gross operating surplus'/'gross mixed income.' CSO should coordinate this exercise with the UN's national accounts department, to duly refine the UN's System of National Accounts.

Second, at the international level, it is also recommended that the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) should incorporate such a measure – contribution of women to national GDP – in its Human Development Index (HDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Other international organisations, with concern about gender inequality, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and Economic Forum, should follow suit.

Once established as standard practice, this measure should identify those countries that are making progress in economic development in part due to higher participation rate of women in the labour force/the economy. Gender-based national/local policies will have an important evidence-based indicator to measure, as a result of implementing, or otherwise, policies that should encourage women's greater participation in the labour market.



(\*)The author is a UK-based practitioner economist, and is grateful for the assistance received in writing this note from staff at the Central Statistical

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Organisation (CSO) at Iraq's Ministry of Planning, for providing the 2014 figures of labour force; Monique Newiak at the IMF, for providing a list of relevant IMF research and publications; staff at the Office for National Statistics – UK, for their advice. The author is, though, solely responsible for all the errors and misrepresentations that occur in this note.

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<http://iraqieconomists.net/>

### Appendix A: Assumptions

Average compensation for <b>Female</b> employee per annum In 2014	US\$ 5,620 pa.	This assumption is based on the analysis of the 2013, 2015 and 2016 National Federal Budgets, and the assumption that 40 percent of the 'operational budget' comprises of salaries and wages of employees. It is also informed by the analysis total compensation of employees by gender in certain sectors of the economy, e.g. the financial and domestic trade sectors (CSO 2016 AAS, Tables 16/8; 19/20) and of household income (AAS 2017, Tables 15/62 and 15/63 in).
Average compensation for <b>Male</b> employee per annum in 2014	US\$ 7,890 pa.	
Average Earnings	Working female's earnings are <b>30 per cent lower</b> than working male's earnings	Based on the analysis noted in the above cell. Which suggests that women's average earnings is around 80-90 percent of men's  This assumption is also based on WEF (2018: 129-130), where it is suggested that the average earnings of Iraqi women is 20 percent that of men's on a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) basis.



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		It was decided to opt for an arbitrary 70 percent as a reasonable point on the scale of gender pay gap, reported above, as this is closer to official data from CSO.
Counterfactual, what if, scenario for female contribution to GDP, 2014	at 40.00 percent participation rate	This scenario is based on <i>ceteris paribus</i> basis. However, given the need to expand the absorptive capacity of the economy to employ significantly more female employees, the contribution in this scenario will be far greater than 8.12 percent. This scenario remains hypothetical, a crude approximation of increased participation rate of female workers in the labour force, as the amount of investment needed to absorb the additional female labour force would need to be known. Past experience should shed light on required investment in specific sectors for a new employee.
Gross Operating Surplus (GOS)/ Gross Mixed Income (GMI)	Women's share = 5% of the total US\$ 50.70 billion	This assumption is informed by WB's 2018 Enterprise Survey, though an element of value judgment is involved. The figures for Iraq though pertain to 2011 the latest available to WB.

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