

A Year After It Started: The Benefits of the Iraqi 4-H Program – A View from the Youth, Parents, and Volunteer Leaders of the Dar Al Salaam 4-H Club

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Abstract

In 2010, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) *Inma* Agribusiness Program sought new avenues to enhance the agricultural sector and support democracy while working with marginalized and displaced people (USAID, 2011). The 4-H program was the vehicle to usher in change in the country. With the help of the national Iraqi 4-H leader, 25 young people (ages 8 – 16) were identified in the Babil area, based on the child's desire to care for an animal and financial need of the families. The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to investigate the views of the youth, their parents, and the leaders of the first (USAID-*Inma* supported) 4-H club. The goal of the youth program was to strengthen the agriculture sector in the Babil area and increase family incomes, while instilling democratic values and providing young people hope and an opportunity to succeed. Data from this case study indicated youth from the Dar Al Salaam 4-H club embraced the idea of democracy, shared new ideas, inclusiveness in their actions, and yearned for change and a brighter future; positive indicators for any nation, developing or developed.

Keywords: Agriculture, Community, Iraq, 4-H Youth Development

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Introduction

After the fall of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, the country divided based on ethnic and religious fronts (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2008). Open elections ushered in quasi-democracy, but sectarian cleansing became routine (Kock & Smith, 2014). Sunnis killed Shias and vice versa, while the Kurds watched from the north. This strife was evident in many sectors of society including agriculture, thus disrupting the production and marketing of commodities throughout the country (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2011). In 2010, after three years of work, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) *Inma* Agribusiness Program sought new avenues to enhance the agricultural sector and support democracy while working with marginalized and displaced people (USAID, 2011). Iraqi widows and young people (youth) were included in those two groups.

Rural youth have always played a role in Iraqi agriculture, primarily as field workers and at times working in processing centers (Kock & Altimimi, 2012). Moreover, culture suggested youth and women were not permitted to own agribusinesses; they were looked at as field labor and incapable of running a business. Historically, children were conceived for one purpose, to become “future soldiers” for the Hussein regime. According to Jacobson (2008), young boys ages five to fifteen belonged to *Ashbal Saddam* or Saddam’s Lion Cubs paramilitary program, a program designed to teach the use of small arms and light infantry tactics. Today, children and women lack opportunities in the job market, with sociality, ideology, and insecurity making it hard for many to leave their homes or neighborhoods, leaving them to provide for themselves (Al-Ali, 2005).

Identified as the largest population of citizens, the youth in Iraq equal 50% of the demography (CIA, 2013). However, very little international assistance was implemented in the area of rural youth programming that would allow these young Iraqis the ability to become contributing members in Iraq society. Research conducted by Hynes, Swan, Swanson, and Cano (2008); Lindner and Dolly (2012); Ngomane (2010); Shinn, Wingenbach, Briers, Lindner, and Baker (2009); and Shinn, Ford, Attiea, and Briers (2012) suggests gender equality and involving youth in agriculture development could provide many benefits to a country through adoption of new technologies and economic development.

In 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture-Provincial Reconstruction Team (USDA-PRT) program began working with rural youth in the Baghdad area (USDA-FAS, 2010). In the fall of 2010, the USAID-*Inma* Agribusiness Program stepped in as the U.S. military and the USDA-PRT programs were beginning to pull out of Iraq. With the help of the national Iraqi 4-H leader, 25 young people (ages 8 – 16) were identified in the Babil area, based on the child’s desire to care for an animal and financial need of the families. The youth came from families where the bread-winners (fathers) had been killed during the war. Those families struggled to provide even the basic necessities like food and shelter and never would have been able purchase livestock on their own.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to investigate the views of the youth, their parents, and the leaders of the first (USAID-*Inma* supported) 4-H club. Moreover, it was important to record the outcomes from the first year of

the program. The goal of the youth program was to strengthen the agriculture sector in the Babil area and increase family incomes, while instilling democratic values and providing young people hope and an opportunity to succeed. Additionally, this program was driven by community members and not the USAID-*Inma* development project, therefore the researchers believed it was important to study the outcomes and impact of the program.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses social capital as the theoretical framework for the study; social capital provides a pathway to better understand the connections between members in the community and the development process (Radcliffe, 2004). According to Weller (2006), social capital builds upon and realizes relationships have meaning and are valuable to the community. It is grounded in shared values and trusts and could promote forms of civic engagement. Research conducted by Ngomane (2010) indicated extension's role in building social capital is gaining clarity, which could foster economic growth. The researcher also suggested youth development is an important aspect for building social capital and long-term sustainable societal development. Social interaction is an important step in creating change; extension programs should embrace the role social capital has on effective programs. Research also has shown Farmer Field School (FFS) programs have increased communication skills and social capital as a means to collective action (David, 2007). These FFS programs are important in extension work and are widely used throughout the world.

Iraq is not a country known for building positive social capital in youth. During Saddam Hussein's regime youth programs were designed around military

training camps and teaching survival concepts. Youth programs in rural areas were nonexistent. Development programs designed to teach youth democracy and civic responsibility were not available, as the politics of the country did not condone such programs.

According to Silver (2007), Middle Eastern countries are historically known for youth exclusion, such that youth have limited opportunities in civic involvement and few opportunities to enhance social capital. Social capital is the "glue" that binds societies together, creating connections between social organizations and communities (Radcliffe, 2004). Radcliffe indicated social capital is positively correlated to favorable development and higher incomes of individuals and communities; however, some researchers undervalue or neglect the idea that young people create and utilize social capital in their daily lives (Weller, 2006).

With the U.S. military invasion and the fall of the dictator, the trauma of war exacerbated the problem. Young people experienced violence firsthand, as they watched family members killed leaving no family or social outlet to turn to for help. Researchers (Robinson & Meikle-Yaw, 2007; Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010) have indicated 4-H youth programs work as a vehicle to build social capital in communities, allowing youth to facilitate meetings and the democratic election process through hands-on participation, indicating youth programs like 4-H are designed to create social groups for youth and adults, bringing different generations together (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). The 4-H program allows youth to build positive relationships with adults, serving as an instrument for teaching young people how to organize and work together. Additionally, teaching adults the power of youth, giving both youth and adults a greater

voice and more control in their daily lives (Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010). Through these organizations or relationships, youth develop the leadership skills needed to effectively build their communities (Putman, 2000).

Methods

This ethnographic case study gleaned data from three different sources: (a) quarterly field reports, (b) personal interviews (video), and (c) focus group interviews (three groups) for qualitative data collection. Researchers used multiple data sources (data triangulation) to enhance the validity of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Questions for the interviews were developed according to the Performance and Monitoring Plan (PMP) output and impact indicators for the USAID-*Inma* Agribusiness Program. All questions were posed to host country nationals (Iraqis) who were employed in leadership positions on the project for cultural correctness (sensitivity) and were approved by USAID officials (the funding agency that paid for the program) and *Inma* program management representatives overseeing the development project.

The personal interviews were videotaped with approval of youth participants and their parents and focus group interviews were recorded with approval of participants. Researchers collected video data in January of 2011 and returned in April 2012 to interview members and their families after completing a year in the 4-H program. Two families (from the original twenty-five families enrolled in the program) agreed to be video interviewed for this study; both families were recipients of the USAID-*Inma* assistance (dairy heifers) program and less concerned about potential security issues.

The audio data was derived from focus group interviews conducted in May

2012. Of the original members of the USAID-*Inma* supported Dar Al Salaam (Home of Peace) 4-H club, only five families and two club leaders agreed to participate in the focus group interviews. Those 13 participants were divided into three groups; group A (club leaders) which consisted of two male adults, group B (parents) consisted of 4 adult women and 2 adult men, and group C (youth) was made up of five children (1 boy and 4 girls). The researchers felt it would be better to interview the groups separately and all participants agreed. An open-ended twelve-question instrument was designed by the researchers and read to the participants in Arabic by Iraqi field officers working on the *Inma* program. Prior to use in the focus group interviews, questions were presented to national staff for cultural sensitivity issues. According to Creswell and Miller (2000) and Guba and Lincoln (1995) open-ended instruments that are contextualized (sensitive to place or situation) increase the trustworthiness of the findings.

Two USAID-*Inma* staff members (Iraqi citizens) conducted the focus group interviews; the researchers (expatriates) were not allowed to travel to the village because it would draw attention to the families causing severe security issues. The Iraqi staff members had been working in the geographic area for about two years and were known to the participants. One staff member conducted the interviews and the other staff member recorded the sessions. The interviews were conducted in a village outside of the city of Babil in a home of one of the participants. All the respondents sat in a room containing no Western-style furniture; participants sat on rugs and pillows during the interview just as they would during a normal family gathering. Many Iraqis in rural areas use these traditional methods of minimal furnishings

in their homes; it is common throughout Iraq.

The 4-H youth program was not accepted by the insurgency. The al Qaeda (insurgency) viewed it as a “Western” program designed to influence Iraqi youth to move from Middle Eastern values to Western ideals; therefore, participants did not want to meet in a public area during the interview. The data was translated into English and grouped into themes according to the answers by participants. Because of the violence in the area and concern of possibly being identified by the insurgents, the participants did not want to be identified in any manner during the interviews, thus answers were not associated (by letter, number, or name) to any participant. This area of Iraq was known as the Sunni Triangle of Death during the U.S. military “push” in 2007 and al Qaeda were still present throughout the area in 2012.

Results

Based on security issues and the present culture in the region, the respondents (primarily the parents) were not comfortable providing long detailed answers to many of the questions. It was a cultural norm for people in the Babil area to keep to themselves and not communicate with people outside their families. Therefore, many of the answers given during the interviews were short and not as descriptive as desired, thus making follow-up questions more difficult to generate; however, the researchers believed responses provided by participants contained adequate detail to gain an understanding of the phenomena being studied.

Field Reports (USAID-Inma Agribusiness Program Staff Reports)

Data indicated all twenty-five families were still active in the club, and of the original 25 Holstein-Friesian heifers granted to the

families, all of the animals were healthy and 18 calved, thus providing raw milk for consumption or sale. Moreover, *Inma* field staff reports indicated owners of the livestock had adequate feed available and the cows had a constant supply of water. However, families that raised a dairy heifer that did not calve spent a year and feed expenses with no income generation, creating a hardship on those families. Therefore, the USAID-*Inma* Agribusiness project replaced those animals with vet-checked bred cows, guaranteed to calve, thus reducing the financial strain on the families.

Video

Data collected indicated a segment of youth in the program helped other community members with the formation of another club, learning new skills, sharing what they were taught, and helping generate incomes for their families. Findings also suggested young people were in the process of learning the basics of democracy, voting on club issues and officer elections. Children were learning responsibility by caring for the dairy heifers, regaining and building trust with adults, cooperating with others, and generating new interests in a variety of subjects.

Data derived from parent video interview indicated youth were inclusive in their thoughts and actions by including youth from all sectors of society. The parent stated: “There was no separation between Sunni, Shia, or Kurdish . . . girls and boys belong to the same club . . . it provides them new possibilities in their lives.” Families are becoming more open regarding the lives of their daughters. Young women participated in community events and some families began allowing their daughters to continue their education.

The 4-H volunteer interview data postulated 4-H membership helped kids heal

from their emotional wounds, taught them leadership, and to become civic minded. Club participation spurred new interests in the youth, some wanting to become doctors or teachers. The volunteer stated, "It has increased their trust in strangers and people in uniforms," something that was shattered during the war. These young people saw family members killed by people in uniform, causing distrust for adults. Data also indicated youth were becoming more involved with their learning, sharing the skills they learned in 4-H with their classmates at school. However, based on the cost of raising the animals, club leaders decided not to have the youth members donate the first-born calves to others in the community. The youth kept the newborn heifer calves to increase their herds and planned to sell the bull calves in the market.

Focus Group Interviews with Club Leaders

The interview with the club leaders provided data indicating the youth were growing as people and beginning to understand how they fit into Iraqi society. One club leader stated, "For the first time, children began setting goals and plans necessary to achieve them . . . they began to care for the future." Another leader stated "they are more confident . . . believe that they own something in this country." The leaders indicated they believed the animals (dairy cows) would have been sold by the parents, but that did not happen. The club leader stated "in our tradition, the sons and their possessions belong to the father, this applies to daughters also . . . I was surprised that the cows are still possessed by the children."

Regarding youth sharing, a leader stated he had a child come to him and state "I have a friend and I told her about the program and she wants to join." The respondent also indicated they cannot take

on more children; the Iraqi society does not understand volunteer work, therefore, they lack trained volunteer staff. When asked how or if 4-H benefited the community, the respondents indicated youth became involved by helping other students, cleaning classrooms, stacking chairs, and planting trees in the community. A quote from one leader gives a clear outcome of the 4-H program, "acceptance was achieved and the bond between the members was strengthened." Another respondent stated, "as a way for the youth to show appreciation for the people in uniform" . . . "youth distributed flowers to soldiers in nine locations and various checkpoints" in remembrance of National Army Day (Iraqi federal holiday). Moreover, when asked about how the community and officials perceived the program, the respondent repeated a quote from the Governor of the province regarding 4-H, "if we want to eliminate terrorism in Iraq we have to help increase the numbers of these 4-H clubs."

Focus Group Interview with Adults (Parents)

Data indicated parents believed the youth were committed to the project, open-minded, and inclusive with other youth. A mother stated "our children are closer to other children . . . they share ideas." Based on findings girls were able to leave their homes other than for school, attend hands-on activities, promoting youth entrepreneurship to others. The community was better with more families participating and the youth learning new life skills. Another parent stated "more families want their children to participate . . . children learn how to deal with life." Youth were creating new opportunities for themselves (sewing, and poultry production) while serving their communities. Youth seemed to show trust for others and express happiness.

Focus Group Interview with Youth

Youth indicated they were learning to think for tomorrow, setting and attaining goals, helping each other, and learning to be patient. Data indicated youth participants were sharing new information. One youth expressed a desire to share and teach others “I gather my friends and relatives and tell them what I have learned.” As for how the 4-H program helped them, youth suggested they thought of others first and were learning leadership and teamwork. One child stated “4-H made us believe we are going to be the new Iraqi generation.” Another child stated “4-H made us feel how important we are in society and we can be different than others.” Information gleaned from the data reinforced that youth are learning how to manage anger and become better people. A quote from another respondent highlighted the positive effect that “before 4-H program I had anger mismanagement and my friends were complaining about this, but when I joined the center they taught us some rules about how not to be angry it was so useful, and I feel I became a better person.” Data also suggested they started to perform civic service programs that will help in the development of their communities.

Conclusions

The youth were very active in the club, serving as mentors to others, as officers, and in conducting community service in their villages. Parents and volunteers saw positive outcomes in the youth, citing cooperation and sharing with others as two of the indicators. A volunteer stated, “Arabs are good as individuals, but bad as groups . . . 4-H has helped change that, children are thinking as (we).” Parents and volunteers also indicated the 4-H model instills inclusiveness, bringing together Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish people. A quote from a parent explains it best, “politicians have failed in bringing sects together, 4-H

succeeded in that mission, there is no discrimination between Sunni, Shia, and Kurds . . . they all belong to one group.” As supported by previous research, individuals indicated age and gender make no difference when belonging to the club, an important issue in an adult male dominated country like Iraq (Jones & Perkins, 2006; Kock & Smith, 2014; LaVergne, 2013).

Researchers suggest diversity and positive youth-adult relationships could be a determining factor in addressing both community and larger provincial issues. This ultimately could help develop a country that is recovering from years of hardship. Iraq certainly would fall into that category, after ten years of war and the fall of a dictator, a move towards democracy and the separation of religious sects would be difficult for the progress of any country. The community supported the 4-H club; adults volunteered their time working with youth providing training programs in livestock production, feed and nutrition, and business management. The program was supported by local governmental officials at various levels in the Babil area. Nevertheless, if the al Qaeda or other violent militant groups return to the region the long-term impact of the Iraqi 4-H program will be less certain. These authors would surmise the community will revert to old customs of living behind stone walls avoiding societal interaction, thus limiting the opportunities for their children.

Building positive youth-adult partnerships is vital for societal success in Iraq; it will prepare the next generation for things to come (Jones & Perkins, 2006). Youth have taken ownership of community development activities that benefit the masses. They are thinking of tomorrow, working in teams, and understand they are the leaders of the future and hope for peace and a safer Iraq. Astroth and Haynes (2002) and Kock (2010) suggested youth-adult

partnerships are needed to create positive learning environments for young people and serve as a bridge between the two generations. The dairy heifer 4-H project was beneficial for most families; however the length of time (months) before milk production (income generation) was too long and not all heifers gave birth. This created an undue hardship on families that were already struggling to survive, so the open heifers were replaced. However, the social capital the youth and adults built through the 4-H program was evident. Children looked towards the future hoping for peace and adults saw young people playing a key role in the process.

Recommendations/Implications

Data from this case study indicated youth from the Dar Al Salaam 4-H club embraced the idea of democracy, shared new ideas, inclusiveness in their actions, and yearned for change and a brighter future; positive indicators for any nation, developing or developed. According to Al-Obaidi and Piachaud (2007), a key to social stability is the development of youth, and their families through educational opportunities and positive human interaction. Over the last 100 years the 4-H model was successful in the development of rural American youth (Jones & Perkins, 2006). 4-H may need to be adjusted to fit other societies, but the idea of youth development transcends even the oldest cultures.

Youth development activities may provide positive long-term outcomes and impacts for international development projects, as young people may be more open to try new things and more willing to share what they have been taught (Kock & Smith, 2014). This willingness to share new knowledge and ideas increases the effect of the program, increasing the social capital value and reach of the program. However, it

is important to note this qualitative study was intended not to generalize beyond that of the Dar Al Salaam 4-H club and its members, it was to provide evidence based on inquiry of the phenomena and the changes in the individuals involved in the 4-H program (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach & Richardson, 2005).

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