



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

## The ABC 's of Empowerment

UNESCO Iraq Office

In the community learning centre for life skills development in Samawah women of different ages are working on the sewing machines in front of them. Samawah is the capital of Muthanna, one of the governorates with the highest female illiteracy rates in Iraq. "I heard in the market about the centre," says Jamilah, one of the women attending a sewing course. "They told me they taught people how to read and write and I decided to come."

Adult illiteracy in Iraq is now the highest in the Arab region, especially in rural areas. An estimated five million people or 30% of the population is unable to read or write. This includes 14% of school age children who are currently out of school, either because they have no access to suitable schooling or are obliged to contribute to household income. Significant gender disparities are particularly a matter of concern with illiteracy rates higher than 40% among women.

Jamilah is one of the lucky ones, but also among a growing number of people, especially women, who are



Literacy and IT training at Community Learning Center in Muthanna

### UNESCO & Literacy

**Institutional Capacity Building:** 1 National Literacy Resource Centre established and 100 MoE staff in the field of NFE and literacy

**Literacy and Life Skills:** More than 2000 women illiterates enrolled in 5 Community Learning Centres received literacy and life skills training / 1 Centre established in partnership with Norwegian Church NGO in Basra to provide literacy and life skills courses to 300 youth

**Literacy and Peace Education:** Around 2000 adult illiterates attended literacy courses and peace education in the Marshlands in cooperation with AMAR International Charitable Foundation

taking advantage of a unique UNESCO program providing literacy and life skills training. Aiming at reducing illiteracy by 50% by 2015, the UNESCO Iraq Office is working together with the Government of Iraq, NGOs and other stakeholders to find effective solutions to promote literacy and non-formal education.

In addition to addressing the immediate challenges, UNESCO is working strategically at the level of policy planning when it comes to eradicating illiteracy. More than 100 Ministry

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of Education staff have been trained in planning and managing effective literacy programs. National Literacy curricula have been reviewed and new literacy textbooks are being developed to increase the quality of literacy programs.

Since 2004, the programme on “Literacy and Life Skills Development” has led to the establishment of the National Literacy Resource Centre (NLRC) in Baghdad and five Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in Baghdad (2), Basrah, Diala, and Muthanna to provide learning opportunities and life skills to illiterates, targeting vulnerable youth, girls and women.

“I want to thank the teachers and



CLC Drawing

headmistress for their efforts,” Jamilah says. “They taught me how to spell and now I can read”. Jamilah, like other women in the centre, has not

only learned to read. She has also been able to attend sewing and other life skills courses that will help her in her future endeavours. Building on this successful experience, new Community Learning Centres are being established in the governorates of Salahaddin, Thi-Qar and Sulaymaniyah to provide education opportunities to more than 1000 illiterate Iraqis every year.

The CLCs are just one example of the positive impact that initiatives addressing illiteracy can have in Iraq. Within the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), a National Literacy Action Plan is being developed in coordination with the Ministries of Education in Baghdad and Erbil to provide a concrete solution to the main literacy challenges. “Literacy is a basic human right. It is a tool to achieve empowerment and contributes to economic and human development in Iraq,” states Mohamed Djelid, Director of the UNESCO Iraq Office. “The Government of Iraq is committed to address the challenges of an illiteracy rate on the rise by launching a national literacy campaign. It is our top priority to assist the Government of Iraq to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goal of reducing illiteracy by 50% by 2015,” he adds.



Sewing course at Community Learning Center in Muthanna