



*Iraq*

**United Nations Development Programme, Iraq**  
The Media Development Programme

**FINAL PROJECT REPORT**  
C9-10 E

**Involving the Iraqi Journalists and Media in  
Covering the Constitutional Process**

Amman, March 2007

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# Summary

The Aswat al-Iraq project was designed to strengthen media coverage of the Iraqi political process, in particular the draft constitution in the run-up to a national referendum and general elections in late 2005, so that all Iraqis had equal access to balanced reliable media coverage to make their voting decisions. The project sought to provide the Iraqi public with accurate, impartial and timely news coverage relevant to the debate on a new Iraqi Constitution by expanding the web-based news exchange Aswat al-Iraq – established with previous funding from the Spanish International Cooperation Agency (AECI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) -- and then move towards the establishment of a permanent independent news agency in Iraq.

The most apparent risk to the project was the fragility of the security environment. The targeting of journalists in violent attacks affected Aswat al-Iraq's ability to report all events and issues. A second risk was that biased or distorted news coverage by other Iraqi media could undermine the positive effects of the news exchange's output.



The project sought to expand the network of contributors to Aswat al-Iraq to all parts of Iraq and to ensure that 300-400 textual news items were carried on the Aswat al-Iraq website every month, providing a full range of coverage of important national and regional developments. The project also had a training component, which included on-the-job experience in sub-editing for up to six journalists on the news exchange's Cairo newsdesk and training courses for 40 journalists in the region.

Despite the relentless deterioration of the security situation in Iraq, Aswat managed to exceed its targets. Aswat also succeeded in expanding its operations, thanks to the courage and determination of its reporters and editors. The project also exceeded expectations because of additional funding from the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and UNDP, which extended this phase of the project until December 2006. Results exceeded targets on a variety of fronts including:

- News output, which grew to 2,000 items (initial target: 300-400)
- Training: 9 Aswat journalists received one-on-one sub-editing training (initial target: 6); more than 50 journalists attended training courses (initial target: 40)

- Scope: Aswat moved from being a news exchange to a fully-fledged news agency, surpassing targets of just moving in that direction. The project stretched beyond coverage of events related to the Constitutional process and elections to include all aspects of Iraqi politics, economics and society to give Iraqi citizens the information they need to become active participants in their country's future.

The worsening security situation did lead to a number of setbacks, including delays in setting up a pictures service and registering Aswat al-Iraq, resignations, and violent attacks on staff and their families.

During 2006, the project has grown from a news exchange to Iraq's first independent news agency, which provided 2,000 articles a month from about 40 reporters in all of Iraq's 18 provinces by the end of the project period. Dozens of Iraqi journalists have received journalism training. A news pictures service was brought near the point of launch. A constitution for the agency was drafted and finalized. An Iraqi management team and board of directors were recruited.

Thanks to the financial support, UNDP has helped create a unique and recognized voice in the Iraqi media scene, providing all Iraqi citizens with equal access to impartial, independent news to underpin their fledgling democracy.

## PROJECT DATA

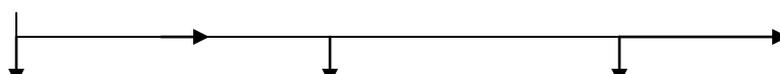
<b>Title</b>	<p><b>Involving Iraqi Media and Journalists in Covering the Constitutional Process.</b></p> <p>This project was split in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 00046540 Reuters Media Constitution</li> <li>- 00046535 UNDP Media Constitution</li> </ul>				
<b>Location</b>	Nationwide				
<b>Project Cost</b> (See UNDP ATLAS report for final figures)	<p>Total Project Cost <b>Involving Iraqi Media and Journalists in Covering the Constitutional Process:</b> US\$ 1,625,751</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- US\$ 993,751 + 335,000 (Dec-06) from Iraq Trust Fund (IRFFI)</li> <li>- US\$ 217,000 from TRAC 1.1.1. UNDP own resources</li> <li>- US\$ 60.000 from Spanish Agency for International Cooperation</li> </ul> <p>Total Project Cost <b>00046540 Reuters Media Constitution:</b> US\$ 1,523,341</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- US\$ 826,341 + 65,000 + 355,000 (Dec-06) from Iraq Trust Fund (IRFFI)</li> <li>- US\$ 217,000 from TRAC 1.1.1. UNDP own resources</li> <li>- US\$ 60.000 from Spanish Agency for International Cooperation</li> </ul> <p>Total Project Cost <b>00046535 UNDP Media Constitution:</b> US\$ 102,410</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- US\$ 102,410 (Jul-05) from Iraq Trust Fund (IRFFI)</li> </ul>				
<b>Duration</b>	<p>Duration <b>Involving Iraqi Media and Journalists in Covering the Constitutional Process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- July 2005 to September 2007</li> </ul> <p>Duration <b>00046540 Reuters Media Constitution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- July 2005 to December 2006</li> </ul> <p>Duration <b>00046535 UNDP Media Constitution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- July 2005 to June 2007</li> </ul>				
<b>Approval Date (SC)</b>	United Nations Constitution Umbrella Programme Approval Date (SC)	<b>Starting Date</b>	July-05	<b>Completion Date</b>	April 2007
<b>Project Description</b>	<p>This project sought to strengthen media reportage of the current Iraqi political process, in particular of the draft constitution in the run-up to a national referendum and a general election in December 2005; and to collect and disseminate throughout the country reliable, impartial reports so that all Iraqi communities have equal access to the information they need in order to make their voting decisions and to take part in national, regional and local politics and civil society. The project also moves towards successfully establishing a permanent independent news agency in Iraq.</p>				

## FOUR STAGES OF THE PROJECT

UN Agency:	United Nations Development Programme, Iraq
Implementing Agency:	Reuters Foundation



### THE INDEPENDENT NEWS AGENCY FOR IRAQ, ASWAT AL-IRAQ (VOICES OF IRAQ)



Duration	OCT 04 – JUN 05	JUL 05 – DEC 06	JAN 07 – JUN 07	JUL 07 – JUL 09
Project Title	Public Affairs Reporting Workshops and News Exchange	<b>Involving the Iraqi Journalists in Covering the Constitutional Process</b>	The establishment of the Independent News Agency for Iraq, Aswat al-Iraq	The consolidation of the Independent News Agency for Iraq, Aswat al-Iraq
Project ID:	00015748 Media Development I	<b>00046535 UNDP Media Constitution</b>  <b>00046540 Reuters Media Constitution</b>	00051137 Media Development II	
Donors	Spanish Agency for International Cooperation Approx: \$500,000  United Nation Development Programme Approx: \$160,000	<b>European Union Approx: \$1,300,000</b>  <b>Spanish Agency for International Cooperation Approx: \$60,000</b>  <b>United Nation Development Programme Approx: \$217,000</b>	Spanish Agency for International Cooperation Approx: \$1,150,000	Spanish Agency for International Cooperation Approx: \$3,500,000
Main Document(s)  <i>Available upon request</i>	Project Cooperation Agreement  Project Document  Final Progress Report  Reporters Handbook	<b>Project Cooperation Agreement</b>  <b>Project Document</b>  <b>01 UNDP-UNDG TF Six Month Progress Report</b>  <b>02 UNDP-UNDG TF Six Month Progress Report</b>  <b>FINAL Progress Report</b>	Project Cooperation Agreement  Project Document  Aswat al-Iraq Brochure	UNDP Governance: Justice and Media Proposal – IRFFI (submission in Apr07)
Financial Reporting  <i>Available upon request</i>	FINAL Progress Report  ATLAS Financial Reports/Records	FINAL Progress Report  ATLAS Financial Reports/Records	ATLAS Financial Reports/Records	

# IRFFI FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

## Summary

**Participating UN Organisation:**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

**Cluster:**

C - Governance

**Project No. and Project Title:**

C9-10/E  
Involving the Iraqi journalists and Media in covering the Constitutional Process

**Project Location/Region/Province:**

Nationwide

**Reporting Period:**

July 2005 to mid-December 2006

**Report no:**

3 (Final Progress Report)

**Counterpart organisations / implementing partners:**

Reuters Foundation  
United Nations Development Programme

**Project cost:**

\$1,523,341 (a)+ \$102,410 (b)  
Total: \$1,690,075

**Abbreviations and acronyms:**

UNDP:  
United Nations Development Programme  
RF:  
Reuters Foundation

**Project Duration:**

July 2005 to mid-December 2006 (a)  
July 2005 to June 2007 (b)

## I. Purpose

### **Main objectives and outcomes expected as per approved Project/Programme/project document:**

#### Main objectives:

This project sought to strengthen media reporting on the current Iraqi political process, in particular of the draft constitution in the run-up to a national referendum in October 2005 and a general election in December 2005. The project sought to collect and disseminate throughout the country reliable, impartial reports so all Iraqi communities could have equal access to the information they needed to take part in national, regional and local politics and civil society.

The project also aimed to lay the foundation for a permanent independent news agency in the belief that Iraq cannot develop democratic politics or an efficient economy without an independent, reliable source of national news. The objective during the project period was to expand the network of contributors to include all parts of Iraq and to more than double the output of news carried on the *Aswat al-Iraq* website to approximately 2,000 items a month, covering all important national and regional developments. The viewpoints of all main ethnic and sectarian communities of the country were to be reflected.

The project was also designed to include a training component that would give up to six journalists intensive on-the-job experience in sub-editing on *Aswat al-Iraq*'s newsdesk, temporarily based in Cairo. Courses would be run in other venues such as Amman, Beirut or Cairo to train journalists in news reporting skills and train photographers ahead of the launch of a planned photo service.

#### Main outcomes:

*Aswat al-Iraq* expanded its network of correspondents to cover all 18 Iraqi governorates, from 10 at the beginning of the period.

- The number of *Aswat al-Iraq* correspondents increased to about 40 from around 10.
- A team of senior Iraqi journalists was recruited to manage and develop the news agency. The team received training in leadership, human resource management and financial planning in Beirut.
- *Aswat al-Iraq* nearly doubled its output to around 1,500 news items a month in Arabic, some 350 per month in English and 150 in Kurdish. *Aswat*'s service can be viewed at [www.aswataliraq.info](http://www.aswataliraq.info)
- *Aswat*'s comprehensive coverage included hundreds of articles on political developments related to the drafting of a new constitution and the election of a new National Assembly.
- *Aswat*'s news reports were widely published in the Iraqi and Arab regional media. For example, one leading Baghdad paper published 11 *Aswat* items on its front page on one day. Leading Iraqi papers featured several *Aswat* articles on their front pages every day, not to mention those articles included inside the papers.
- More than 30 members of the *Aswat* team received journalism training during the project period: the 3-member editorial management team received intensive one-on-one management and sub-editing training; 9 *Aswat* journalists received one-on-one sub-editing training on the Cairo newsdesk, exceeding targets; more than a dozen others attended intensive journalism training courses run by a veteran Reuters Arabic

Service journalist. Training workshops on reporting constitutional affairs were held in Amman in 2005 for almost all of the roughly 30 correspondents and stringers Aswat had at the time.

- Two training courses in business news were held in Beirut for a total of 12 journalists from Aswat and 9 from other Iraqi media.
- A training course in photo-journalism, with lectures on personal safety, was run in Baghdad for 12 journalists from Aswat, 4 from Iraqi newspapers and 5 new recruits.
- Two Aswat photo editors received intensive training in Cairo from a former Reuters photographer on photo editing, photo-journalism ethics and photo-related technology.
- A timetable was drawn up to train all Aswat journalists who have not yet received any Aswat-related training.
- A planned move of Aswat's newsdesk and training to a safe place in Iraq was postponed amid rising security concerns, especially in Baghdad, as well as direct threats which often targeted journalists. Plans were put in place to move the newsdesk to Erbil or Amman as a possibly lengthy interim measure. Amman was considered due to its proximity to Iraq, the frequency of visits by Iraqi politicians, business executives and other newsmakers to Jordan, and the presence of large numbers of Iraqis already in Jordan, for possible future recruitment.
- *Aswat al-Iraq* became a recognised and important part of the national media of Iraq. One of its correspondents was selected for the small pool of reporters allowed to cover Saddam Hussein's trial.
- Relationships were opened with some 50 Iraqi newspapers, 14 TV channels and 13 radio stations. Response to Aswat was overwhelmingly positive.
- *Aswat al-Iraq* succeeded in expanding its operations despite the perilous security situation in the country. This was achieved through the determination and bravery of its managers and staff and the resilience provided by a sub-editing desk outside Iraq. However, two key staff and several stringers left the agency after being threatened and several others have had to move cities within Iraq or leave the country altogether. Threats forced the closure of Aswat's headquarters office in Baghdad and the temporary removal of two editorial managers to Cairo and one to Sulaimaniya, to retain a management presence inside Iraq.
- A news pictures service was brought near to the point of launch. A network of around 20 stringer photographers was identified throughout Iraq; camera equipment was purchased for three photographers in Baghdad; a web-based publishing platform was licensed and implemented and more than 500 photos were gathered. Launch was delayed by security problems, which caused the resignations of two key staff and by technical problems uploading photos from Baghdad.
- A new, more powerful web publishing system was customised for Aswat al-Iraq and a new website interface designed in preparation for selling Aswat's news services commercially. The new website will be launched once journalists have completed a short training period on the new system.
- A constitution was finalised to register *Aswat al-Iraq* as an Iraqi non-governmental organisation. The constitution enables the participation of a wide range of Iraqi media and civil society institutions in the governance of Aswat while protecting its independence.

**Reference to how the programme/project relates to the UN Assistance Strategy to Iraq 2005/6 and how it aims to support international and national development goals including the Millennium Development Goals and other goals as pertinent:**

*Aswat al-Iraq* was launched in November 2004 in the belief that Iraq could not develop democratic politics or an efficient economy without an independent, reliable source of national news.

Media in Iraq before the project started, while free from the censorship and government control of the past, lacked the human and financial resources to cover political and economic developments adequately. In the absence of a national news agency, each newspaper and broadcaster was struggling to report the country with its own network of correspondents, hampered by political violence and poor communications. Specialist coverage of the economy and business was rudimentary.

Some Iraqi editors argued that the entire survival of independent media in Iraq might depend on the establishment of a news agency. They said even the biggest newspapers were fighting to stay afloat financially; revenues were limited because political violence was hampering distribution and constricting advertising. The only thriving publications were those funded by political parties or other outside sources, which were clearly not independent. A news agency would provide a mechanism for independent media to cut costs by sharing the expenses of newsgathering.

International and Arab media, government and business also required an improved level of news coverage from across Iraq to inform public opinion and provide a firmer basis for policy-making and investment.

**Main international and national implementing partners involved: their specific roles and responsibilities in project implementation and their interaction with the project team:**

International partner – Reuters Foundation

The main international implementing partner is Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Reuters Group Plc. Reuters Foundation has provided project management, training and planning support to *Aswat al-Iraq* from its inception, aiming to transfer Reuters' unique knowledge of how to finance independent news reporting.

The Reuters Foundation's general management was provided by a RF project manager and supervising consultant, an Arabic-speaking former senior editorial manager for Reuters who project-managed *Aswat al-Iraq* part-time. The supervising consultant was succeeded by an Arabic-speaking veteran Reuters reporter and manager, who managed the project full time from the end of September onwards.

Day-to-day editorial supervision was provided by a temporary Cairo-based editing desk set up by Reuters Foundation and managed by the former editor of Reuters Arabic Service, who also directed all of the Arabic-language training courses and workshops for *Aswat al-Iraq's* journalists. The General Counsel's Office of Reuters provided internal and external expertise to guide the structuring of the agency's legal entity so that *Aswat al-Iraq* will be properly constituted as an independent news service, with suitable guarantees to protect it from improper influences and biased direction. Reuters Foundation's accountants managed the financial resources deployed during the project and provided reporting to donors.

Reuters also provided free internet access to Reuters' Arabic service, allowing editors at *Aswat al-Iraq* to see what news Reuters was publishing in Arabic and how news was being covered.

#### National partner – *Aswat al-Iraq* Board of Directors and Editorial Committee

The main national implementing partner is the Board of Directors and Editorial Committee of *Aswat al-Iraq* itself. A team of senior Iraqi journalists was recruited to manage and develop the news agency:

The Editorial Committee is responsible for day-to-day management:

- Editor-in-Chief
- Managing Editor
- Editorial Secretary
- Editorial Secretary (Kurdish service)

The Board is responsible for strategic direction:

- Chair of Board is the distinguished Iraqi sociologist.
- Three editors of independent newspapers (from Baghdad, Sulaimaniya and Basra) are non-executive directors.
- The Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor and Editorial Secretary are executive directors

Monitoring has been achieved by the following mechanisms:

- Daily monitoring of editorial quality by the news-editing desk (temporarily located in Cairo) and senior editors
- Monthly reports from the management team to the project supervisor and from the project supervisor to the UNDP project manager
- Three-monthly meetings between the project supervisor, the head of the Cairo desk and the Iraqi management team outside Iraq (in London, Amman, Beirut and Cairo)
- Frequent telephone and e-mail contact between the UNDP project manager, the project supervisor and the Iraqi management team.

## **II. Resources**

### **Total approved budget and summary of resources available to the programme/project from the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund and non-Trust Fund resources where applicable:**

Funds (please see UNDP Atlas report for final figures):

Total Project Cost: "Involving Iraqi Media and Journalists in Covering the Constitutional Process": US\$ 1,625,751.

- US\$ 993,751 + 335,000 (Dec-06) from Iraq Trust Fund (IRFFI)
- US\$ 217,000 from TRAC 1.1.1. UNDP own resources
- US\$ 60,000 from Spanish Agency for International Cooperation

Additional funding has been granted by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation

and has been committed to the project from mid-December 2006 through June 2007.

The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation has earmarked to UNDP-Iraq extra funding to the *Aswat al-Iraq's* project for July 2007 through 2009 to complete *Aswat's* development into a national news agency able to sustain itself through grant requests and revenue from its services. An additional \$550,000 is being sought to complement the funding in the third phase of the project to develop a sales structure and bolster editorial to ensure the structures are in place that will make *Aswat al-Iraq* a self-financed, subscription based service within a few years.

#### Human Resources:

The following chart shows the 50 staff of *Aswat al-Iraq* by job function at the culmination of the project period:

<b><u>Job Function</u></b>
<b><u>Editorial managers (4)</u></b>
Editor-in-Chief
Managing Editor
Editorial Secretary
Ed Secy, Kurdish Service
<b><u>Baghdad reporters (8)</u></b>
Parliament, Presidency, Prime Ministry, Foreign Ministry
Prime Ministry, Parliament, Presidency, Ministry of Housing, Special Tribunal (trying Saddam)
Prime Ministry
Central Bank, Ministries of Trade, Oil and Electricity, Stock Market
Ministries of Defence, Interior, Health, Education
General coverage, political interviews
Ministries of Sport and Youth, Olympic Committee, sports associations
Ministries of Culture, Civil Society, Women
<b><u>Arab Governorates (16)</u></b>
Ninewa (Mosul)
Tameem (Kirkuk)
Salah al-Din (Tikrit)
Anbar (Ramadi)
Wassit (Kut)
Babylon (Hilla)

Kerbala (Kerbala)
Missan (Amarah)
Qadissiya (Diwaniya)
Najaf (Najaf)
Dhi Qar (Nasiriyah)
Muthanna (Samawa)
Basra (Basra)
<b><u>Kurdish governorates (7)</u></b>
Dohuk (Dohuk)
Irbil (Irbil)
Sulaimaniya (Sulaimaniya)
<b><u>Abroad (1)</u></b>
<b><u>Photographers (1)</u></b>
Photographer (Baghdad)
+ 14 photographers in 10 governorates paid per photo
<b><u>Arabic sub-editors (8)</u></b>
<b><u>Kurdish sub-editors / translators (1)</u></b>
<b><u>English translators (2)</u></b>
<b><u>Support staff (2)</u></b>
Admin assistant, Cairo
Driver, Baghdad

In addition to the staff of Aswat, the UNDP and Reuters Foundation's team based in Amman and London respectively are involved in the project management and implementation.

### III. Results

**An assessment of the extent to which the programme/project component / programme /project is progressing in relation to the outcomes and outputs expected:**

During the project period, *Aswat al-Iraq* expanded its editorial network to cover all of Iraq's 18 governorates and doubled its output of news items in Arabic, English and Kurdish to nearly 2,000 news items a month covering politics, business, sports and culture. An Iraqi editor-in-chief was recruited.

This progress was achieved despite increasingly threats to the safety of staff, which forced the temporary evacuation of the senior management team from Baghdad to Cairo and closure of the agency's main office in Baghdad. However, security threats and recruitment problems delayed the launch of a much-needed photo service.

Here is a summary of the main project developments:

- *Aswat al-Iraq* published a comprehensive news service from a network of correspondents across Iraq, emphasising particularly political and security news but with increasing numbers of stories on the economy, particularly oil, and on culture and sports. The number of stories published in Arabic increased from less than 1,000 a month at the start of the project to around 1,500 a month. English output almost tripled to 350 stories a month and Kurdish output rose to 150 from about 100 stories a month.
- The most-read story was a detailed investigation of the killing by US forces of the insurgent leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in April. The most popular subjects, judged by the number of retrievals from the website, were business (particularly oil), freedom of the press, women, off-beat human interest stories and exclusive political stories – as well as news on the death sentence and execution of former president Saddam Hussein.
- *Aswat*'s network of correspondents was expanded to around 40 covering all 18 of Iraq's governorates, from 15 at the start of the year. Additional and replacement correspondents were recruited in a number of governorates where coverage had been weak, notably Basra and Anbar.
- News items from *Aswat al-Iraq* were extensively published in all of Iraq's leading daily newspapers, whether independent, government-funded, or party-funded. Iraqi newspapers regularly crediting *Aswat* stories included: *Al-Sabah*, *Azzaman*, *Al-Sabah al-Jadeed*, *al-Mannarah*, *al-Mashriq*, *al-Dustour*, *al-Jarida*, *al-Adala*, *al-Iraq al-Yawm*, *al-Mada*, *al-Bayan*, *al-Ittihad*, *al-Taakhi*, *al-Ahali*, *al-Bayina*, *al-Dawa*, *al-Safir*, *al-Siyada*, *al-Iraq*, *al-Fatah*, *al-Mutamar*, *al-Manar al-Yawm*, *Kull al-Iraq*, *Bahra*, *al-Haqaeq* and *Tariq al-Shaab*. Non-Iraqi publications regularly using and crediting *Aswat* stories included: the pan-Arab dailies *Asharq al-Awsat* and *al-Hayat*, the Egyptian newspapers *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, *al-Masri al-Yom* and *Akhbar al-Adab* weekly. The German news agency *DPA (Deutsche Presse Agentur)* also regularly uses and credits *Aswat*.
- Despite the challenges of finding a suitable, experienced Iraqi with the appropriate background to lead *Aswat al-Iraq*'s management team and be based in Iraq, *Aswat* managed to recruit a veteran journalist with more than 25-year journalistic career, as editor-in-chief. The editor-in-chief identified and secured new recruits to the network of correspondents, worked with Reuters

Foundation's project manager and represented Aswat effectively in international meetings.

- Increasingly threats to Aswat staff disrupted the agency's operations. Three key reporters in Baghdad decided to leave the country because of increasing violence.
- Security threats and recruitment problems delayed the launch of Aswat's photo service, which had been planned for March. Competition for competent photographers made it difficult to recruit a suitable chief photographer to run the service, and when one was found he resigned after being threatened. Resignation of our computer support engineer disrupted efforts to solve technical issues with uploading of photos to an Internet publishing platform.
- A mixture of technical and project management problems delayed Aswat's move to a new website publishing system, Campsite. Essential customisation of the system was completed on time by the developers in February. But a series of floods at the company engaged to host the system, caused delays, as did the lack of a full-time project manager at Reuters Foundation to drive work forward.
- The text of a constitution was drafted to register *Aswat al-Iraq* as an Iraqi non-governmental organisation with the Iraqi Planning Ministry. However, the drafting was much delayed by the difficulties of coordinating work by an Arabic-speaking lawyer in Baghdad with patchy Internet access and English-speaking lawyers advising Reuters Foundation in London. Too much translation and redrafting work fell to the part-time project manager at the Foundation.
- Reuters Foundation recruited a full-time project manager to start work at the end of September to ensure sufficient management resources are available to meet future work deadlines.

The project's measurable indicators included the website logs recording the number of news items carried each month. When Aswat still had a fully functioning office in Baghdad – now closed apart from administrative staff for security reasons – it monitored usage of news items in Iraq's main print media. Reuters Foundation, as project implementing agency, provided UNDP with a list of governorates covered, the names of stringers in each, and regular updates with quantitative assessments of developments.

### **Main activities undertaken and achievements/ impacts:**

#### Operation of the news agency

- Reporting of more than 50 news items every day by a network which totalled around 40 correspondents in all 18 Iraqi governorates by mid-December.
- Direction of the file by a team of three Iraqi editorial managers, based until May in Baghdad and after that in Cairo as a temporary security measure.
- Editing of news items in Arabic by a team of 5 Egyptian sub-editors in Cairo, and more recently also by newly trained Iraqi sub-editors.
- Translation of news items into English by an Egyptian specialist journalist in Cairo. An Iraqi specialist journalist came on board in early August, significantly boosting output.
- Editing of news items in Kurdish and translation of news items into Kurdish by a team of three Iraqi sub-editors in Sulaimaniya.

### Recruitment of new editorial staff

- Editor-in-chief Zuhair al-Jezairy recruited
- Correspondents were recruited to expand coverage network from 15 to all 18 of Iraq's governorates and strengthen coverage in Basra and Anbar.

### Office space

- Aswat moved into temporary new office space at the Egyptian Press Syndicate in mid-January 2006. Reuters had provided office space, computers, Internet access and an international telephone line in its Cairo bureau for more than a year at no charge. But space was limited. The new office allowed the immediate recruitment of a full-time chief translator for the English service and an additional sub-editor for the Arabic service. As a result, output of the English service quadrupled in February, and the Arabic service processed more than 1,000 news items in a month for the first time. The new office also gave space for intensive on-the-job training of Iraqi sub-editors.
- Aswat closed its headquarters office in Baghdad because of security threats.
- Aswat rented a house to provide larger office premises in Sulaimaniya, moving out of a very constricted space in the offices of the Kurdish newspaper partner. The aim of the new space was to provide a base inside Iraq for the editing desks currently in Cairo and to provide facilities to run training courses inside Iraq.

### Training

- Nine Iraqi journalists, including the three members of the Aswat editorial management team, received intensive on-the-job training in sub-editing in Cairo.
  - Two training courses in business news were held in Beirut for a total of 12 journalists from Aswat and 9 from other Iraqi media. One was run by Reuters Foundation and the other by Aswat itself in conjunction with the NGO *Reseau de Liberte*
  - A training course in photo-journalism, with lectures on personal safety, was run in Baghdad for 12 journalists from Aswat, 4 from Iraqi newspapers and 5 new recruits.
  - Intensive training in use of Adobe Photoshop image editing software was run in Baghdad for two senior photographers.
  - Two Aswat photo editors received intensive training in Cairo from a former Reuters photographer on photo editing, photo-journalism ethics and photo-related technology.
  - The Editor-in-Chief spent several days observing Reuters editorial operations in London. He joined editorial meetings and shadowed journalists on Reuters World Desk, Picture Desk, Sports Desk, Energy Desk and London reporting unit.
  - Six Aswat journalists attended a one-week Journalism training course in December 2006 run by Euro Arab Management School (EAMS) in Spain.

### Security-related issues

The security situation in Iraq worsened sharply in February 2006. The security situations continued to deteriorate thereafter. A complete report on security-related issues concerning the implementation of *Aswat al-Iraq's* project is available upon request to UNDP-Iraq.

### Photo service development

- A network of 14 part-time photographers was recruited in 10 governorates.
- Camera equipment (Nikon D70 digital SLR cameras) was purchased for three full-time photographers in Baghdad. Computers and software were purchased to edit photos.
- A web-based publishing platform, webdesk, was licensed and implemented at <http://www.photos.aswataliraq.info>.
- More than 500 photos were gathered from photographers and stringers, concentrating on stock shots of people and places.
- Launch of the service was delayed by security problems, which caused the resignations of two key staff and by technical problems uploading photos from Baghdad.

### Website publishing system development

- The Campsite website publishing system ([www.campware.org](http://www.campware.org)) was customised for the essential requirements of a real-time news agency.
- A computer company which has developed and hosted successful Arabic implementations of Campsite, created an implementation of Campsite for Aswat. This included a new, more user-friendly layout for the site and new more colourful graphics, and a full Kurdish interface.
- Illustrated user guides to Campsite in English and Arabic were created for journalists and editors.
- Logon identities were created for all Aswat's current reporting and editing staff.

### Registration of legal entity

- After expert advice from Aswat's Iraqi lawyers, it was decided that the agency could not be registered in Iraq as a commercial company with a governance structure that would protect the agency from being dominated in time by a single interest group or faction. However, the agency could be registered as a non-governmental organisation at the Planning Ministry, which would allow an appropriate governance structure without restricting its ability to generate commercial revenues.
- The Aswat's Iraqi lawyers redrafted Aswat's proposed constitution to make it appropriate to an NGO rather than a commercial company.
- Reuters, supported by its pro-bono legal advisers Slaughter and May, prepared registration of a separate UK entity, owned initially by appointees of Reuters, to act as the Council of Trustees of *Aswat al-Iraq*, protecting the agency from any attempt to undermine its editorial or managerial independence.

While the absolute impact of the project may be difficult to measure without a sweeping countrywide survey, informal feedback from a variety of Iraqi and foreign media indicate that the impact has been notable and positive. A broad spectrum of Iraq and foreign media have come to rely on Aswat al-Iraq's balanced reporting, giving some quantitative and some anecdotal indication of the impact the agency is having.

The expected impact of the project longer term is that Iraqi citizens will have balanced news coverage they need to become active and knowledgeable participants in their country's politics, economics and society.

The impact will include greater public trust in at least one element of the Iraqi media scene. The impact will also include an increase in the professionalism of a sector of the Iraqi media and Iraqi journalists, who have been trained by, worked for, read, used or subscribed to *Aswat al-Iraq*.

**Implementation constraints, lessons learned from addressing these and knowledge gained from assessments, evaluations and studies that have taken place during the project duration:**

Security

The relentless increase in violence, particularly in Baghdad obstructed every aspect of the development of *Aswat al-Iraq*. From the beginning of the organisation's activities in November 2004, the growth of *Aswat*, particularly the training of its journalists, has been hampered by the inability to send non-Iraqi experts into Iraq.

During the project period from July 2005 to mid-August 2006, worsening security has caused the following additional problems:

- The forced removal of the Iraqi senior management team from Baghdad to Cairo/Sulaimaniya, making coordination of the reporting network, recruitment of new staff and every aspect of management of both day-to-day operations and new projects much more difficult.
- The forced closure of *Aswat's* headquarters office in Baghdad, making it impossible to carry out our plan to develop the agency's Arabic editing and English translation desks to Baghdad or to run journalistic training courses in Baghdad.
- The forced resignation of *Aswat's* excellent computer support engineer and its prospective chief photographer has delayed launch of the photo service.
- The flight from Iraq of experienced and valued correspondents has weakened *Aswat's* news file, including from Baghdad.

*Aswat* has been able to continue operations despite increasing security problems because of the courage and determination of its managers and staff, its initial decision to base the editing desks in the safety of Cairo, and the flexibility it enjoys through use of a web-based publishing system allowing news items to be uploaded and edited anywhere a journalist has access to the Internet.

As security seems unlikely to improve in the short or medium term, the agency had to plan on the basis that its senior management team and editing desks will not be located in Baghdad for at least the next 12 months. The current plan is to base the management team and newsdesk in Erbil or Amman until security and logistics inside Baghdad improve.

Lack of secure long-term funding

Difficulties to secure long-term funding for *Aswat* have led to over-caution in spending the funds that have been available to the project. Delays in recruiting new staff or training existing staff have been accepted too readily because they meant that money was being saved which could extend the life of the project. If substantial long-term funding had been committed, *Aswat al-Iraq* would have had the confidence to invest more, earlier, and more progress could have been made before worsening security in the last few months made every aspect of the project more difficult.

*Aswat al-Iraq's* management team, UNDP and Reuters Foundation agree in their analysis of this and are committed to drive the project forward more quickly during its next funding phase, which started in mid-August and continues until February 2007, working on the assumption that further substantial funding will be available for at least the 12 months from March 2007 through February 2008.

#### Project Management

The lack of a full-time project manager for *Aswat al-Iraq* at Reuters Foundation has delayed implementation of key activities, particularly the re-launch of the agency's website using the Campsite publishing system and the registration of the agency as an Iraqi NGO. The initial decision to have a project manager working only 4 to 6 days a month was made partly to concentrate available funds on investing in the Iraqi staff of the project and partly because the most appropriate project manager available was not able to commit more time.

Reuters Foundation and UNDP have recognised the need for a full-time project manager to ensure that activities are completed on deadline, and the Foundation has recruited a suitable person, a senior Arabic-speaking Reuters journalist, to fill this role from late September.

#### **Key partnerships and inter-organisations, inter-media collaboration, impact on results:**

Collaboration between the *Aswat al-Iraq* management team under Editor-in-Chief, Reuters Foundation and UNDP has become closer and more effective, particularly in the latter part of the project period. UNDP has involved *Aswat al-Iraq* and the Reuters Foundation in different UN media events and in its thinking about the whole range of media development projects in Iraq, and *Aswat* has started to play a role in supporting UNDP to reach out more effectively to Iraqi media.

As an example, *Aswat al-Iraq* participate in a UNDP brainstorming session with a dozen heads of Iraqi television channels in Amman in July 2006 to meet the former director of RAI 24 hours to discuss how the Italian government, through UNDP, could strengthen independent television in Iraq.

This project called on the worldwide experience of the United Nations Development Programme and on a range of editorial and managerial skills developed over many years by Reuters Foundation and its parent Reuters Group Plc. From the aftermath of World War II until today, Reuters has mentored a number of nascent news agencies in countries in transition. This experience and expertise mean the project and its components are eminently replicable in other situations and territories.

Because *Aswat al-Iraq's* model is based on transferable core principles of media freedom, independence and impartiality, sustained over the long-term by paid-for subscriptions, the model can be applied to other regions, including in countries in transition. In fact, Iraq's unusually dangerous and volatile security situation highlights that if a project of this kind can succeed here, it can succeed virtually anywhere.

**Highlights and cross cutting issues pertinent to the results being reported on, e.g. gender disaggregation, policy engagement and participation of the public:**

From its inception, *Aswat al-Iraq* has sought out broad-based input, buy-in and backing from media organizations across the country and across all religious, ethnic and cultural groups. This has included face-to-face meetings, remote contacts, free access to the news agency and regular requests for feedback. Management has put great effort into ensuring the agency's work force is representative of the country it serves, hiring journalists from all segments of Iraq's diverse society.

*Aswat al-Iraq* has ensured access to its services by even the poorest sectors of society by providing news using an inexpensive internet-based platform that can currently be accessed for free. The internet platform also reduces the risk of disruption in the face of security or other problems. *Aswat al-Iraq* provides news in Arabic as well as Kurdish – the two national languages of Iraq – and English in an effort to reach out to all sectors of society. By its nature, a news agency helps lower the operating costs of other Iraqi media, helping keep access to news reliable and affordable for all Iraqis.

*Aswat al-Iraq* recruits male and female staff from all religious and ethnic groups in Iraq and seeks to reflect the make-up of the society it serves. As the staff list above highlights, there were 13 women among *Aswat's* 50-strong team at the end of the project period.

In an effort to make its service relevant to all Iraqis, *Aswat's* news coverage goes beyond the day's political and security stories to include reports on those hit hardest by the violence in Iraq, including refugees, the unemployed, the underemployed and the sick. This broad and comprehensive coverage helped raise awareness and provide as accurate a picture of the country as possible.

#### IV. Future Work

**Priority actions planned for the future to overcome constraints, build on achievements and partnerships, and use the lessons learned during the previous project:**

##### **1 Produce news coverage of Iraq in Arabic, Kurdish and English**

The *Aswat al-Iraq* news agency operation producing textual news coverage of Iraq in Arabic, English and Kurdish will continue throughout the period from mid-December 2006 through June 2007 – and beyond, as funding allows. With funding from the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), in the mid-December 2006 through June 2007 period, the project's implementation will include the following activities:

- A network of more than 40 correspondents in Baghdad and Iraq's 17 other governorates.
- A team of 3 Iraqi editorial managers directing news coverage and supervising editing of content in Arabic, and supervising the editors of the English and Kurdish services.
- Arabic editing desk and English translation desk in Cairo moving to Amman in early 2007.
- Kurdish editing and Kurdish/Arabic translation desks in Sulaimaniya directed by editorial manager.

Production will rise to approximately 2,100 news items a month in the three languages combined. There will be particular emphasis on developing business news coverage, concentrating on oil and reconstruction news, and on expanding services in English. This will support the earnings potential from Arab and international business, government, NGO and media customers.

The editorial management team and *Aswat's* Arabic and English desks will move from Cairo to Erbil or Amman in early 2007, once sufficient Iraqi sub-editors and translators have been recruited and trained, so that the headquarters of the agency will be located closer to Iraq. The current temporary training centre and sub-editing desk in Cairo will be scaled down. A news office will be set up in Erbil or Amman on a temporary but probably medium-term basis, until conditions in Baghdad improve enough to make a return there safe and logistically viable.

A very productive *Aswat al-Iraq* Board meeting was held in February 2007 to review its plans for 2007 and prepare to admit a number of Iraqi media and civil society organisations as members of the agency (see Annexes for report on *Aswat al-Iraq* Board meeting Feb-07)

##### **2. Launch news pictures service**

*Aswat al-Iraq* will launch a still photo service in early 2007. This operation will include:

- Network of two staff photographers based in Baghdad, and stringer photographers and text correspondents trained to shoot photos in Iraq's 17 other governorates.
- Two desk editors in Amman directing photo coverage, editing photos and captions and uploading photos for distribution.

##### **3. Commercialisation of *Aswat al-Iraq* news services**

A marketing and sales operation will be established to begin selling *Aswat al-Iraq's* textual news and photos services commercially to customers in Iraq and internationally. This operation will grow to include:

- Sales and Marketing Manager – probably based in Amman or Sulaimaniya -- able to travel to sell to international media.
- Sales executive selling to international media.
- Three sales executives selling to Iraqi media.
- Location of sales executives to depend on who is recruited and security considerations.
- Training for sales manager and executives

The Campsite textual news website publishing system and the WebDesk still photo publishing system will be implemented to support secure Internet delivery of Aswat al Iraq's services to paying customers.

#### **4. Train Aswat al Iraq journalists, managers and sales staff**

A programme of training workshops in Spain and attachments to Spanish media will be organized. The provisional timeline is as follows:

- Up to 6 Aswat journalists will attend a second Spanish training course in March 2007
- 2 Aswat photographers will do a training attachment at a Spanish media organisation
- 2 journalists will do a training attachment at a Spanish newspaper (El Pais)
- 2 journalists will to a training attachment at the Arabic service of the Spanish news agency EFE

Follow-up training will be conducted on a regular basis for new Arabic sub-editors who have already received their training in Cairo.

Two new translators for the English service will receive intensive training from current translators Nadia and Saleem. One of the prospective recruits is based in Baghdad and will be trained remotely with exercises, including written and verbal follow-up, by e-mail and telephone. The second prospective recruit is based in Cairo, and will receive face-to-face on-the-job training.

#### **Indication of major adjustments in the strategies, targets or key outcomes and outputs:**

UNDP and Reuters Foundation's aim is to equip *Aswat al-Iraq* to be managerially self-sufficient and to have started to earn revenues from its services by the end of 2007. From 2008, the agency needs to be well enough established to handle its own fundraising from donors and manage its own development without the need for day-to-day supervision by a project manager provided by UNDP and/or Reuters Foundation, even if UNDP and/or Reuters Foundation continue to offer a range of support in training and advice.

This goal can only be achieved if sufficient donor funding is committed to *Aswat al-Iraq* to cover the entire June 2007-end 2008 period.

#### **Estimated Budget required (including any major funding shortfalls):**

Estimated budget for Aswat al-Iraq (new funding):

- (a) AECI (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation) covering from mid-December 2006 to June 2007 – new Project: Media Development II (ongoing).
- (b) AECI (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation) from July 2007 to July 2009 – Proposal (in the process of being submitted for approval).

**Lessons Learned:**

- We have learned that a project like this greatly benefits from a full-time project manager. A project like this requires daily contact and follow-up by the project manager with the local colleagues involved. This was particularly true because the security situation in Iraq meant the project manager could not travel there and, meant senior Iraqi managers and editors had to be evacuated to different locations.
- We have learned that security in Iraq is even more volatile and logistics far more challenging than even Iraqis anticipated, requiring far more lead time on project developments, training, travel, payments etc. The security situation led to the evacuation of the senior editorial management team, the displacement or resignation of several staff members, the inability of the project manager to travel to Iraq and the increasing difficulty of Iraqi editorial managers to travel within their own country. The security situation has also led foreign countries to tighten visa restrictions to the point of making it extremely difficult for the project manager and project staff to meet outside Iraq, with few exceptions.
- We learned that the absence of longer-term funding commitments makes hiring and retaining good staff difficult because employment contracts could not be signed and salaries could never be agreed beyond a few months at a time. Staff continually expressed concerns about the absence of contracts and job security. Editorial managers said it significantly undermined their ability to recruit suitable members for the Aswat team. In the absence of longer-term funding guarantees, it is also more difficult to invest in the expansion of the project, particularly into areas such as video footage or radio.

**Recommendations:**

- Ensure all projects of this kind have a full-time project manager, Arabic speaking (if possible).
- Allow for greater lead-time on project developments, training, travel, payments etc. In recognition of the many security factors beyond anyone's control, and the high likelihood of injury or worse befalling a project participant, the project should provide a special hardship fund separate from the project's budget for emergency support to families of Iraqis injured or killed during their work for the project. It may never be needed, but would make all the difference to the lives of those affected.
- Provide funding commitments for longer periods with longer lead-time (e.g. one full year guaranteed at a time, with 12 months' notice) to ensure good staff can be hired and retained, and investments into key project equipment and other resources can be made in a timely and more confident manner.

**Other issues and documentation:**

See Annexes for:

Annex 1a	Selection I - of News Items from Aswat al-Iraq's coverage on the Constitutional Process
Annex 1b	Selection II - of News Items from Aswat al-Iraq's coverage
Annex 2a	Aswat al-Iraq's Service (Website: Home page in Arabic)

Annex 2b	Aswat al-Iraq's Service (Website: Home page in Kurdish)
Annex 2c	Aswat al-Iraq's Service (Website: Home page in English)
Annex3	Aswat al-Iraq's Logo
Annex 4a	New Aswat al-Iraq's Service (Website: Home page in Arabic)
Annex 4b	New Aswat al-Iraq's Photo Service
Annex 5a	Front-page credit in Baghdad newspaper for Aswat al-Iraq
Annex 5b	Front-page credit in newspaper "Al-Manarah" for Aswat al-Iraq
Annex 6	Board Aswat al-Iraq's Meeting in Beirut, December 2005
Annex 7	Reuters Foundation Reporter Handbook for Aswat al-Iraq (Arabic and English version)
Annex 8	Aswat al-Iraq's Brochure
Annex 9	Aswat al-Iraq: Donors, Implementation Agency and UN Agency
Annex 10	Summary of Legal Framework of Aswat al-Iraq
Annex 11a	01 UNDG Progress Report July to December 2005
Annex 11b	02 UNDG Progress Report January to July 2006
	<i>Financial Reports 2005 and 2006</i>
Annex 12	PROJECT FINANCIAL REPORT Summary
Annex 12a	Total Budget Reuters Media Constitution 2005
Annex 12b	Total Budget Reuters Media Constitution 2006