Outcome Harvesting Evaluation

Final Report

Broadening Participation

through Civil Society, Iraq

27 November 2015

I. BACKGROUND

Mercy Corps, in coordination with consortium partners Mercy Hands and PAO (and previously ACDI/VOCA, ICNL and Internews) have been implementing the Broadening Participation through Civil Society (BPCS) program since October 2012. The program is due to end in December 2015. The stated program goal and USAID direct objective is to ***strengthen Iraq's transition to participatory democracy***. The program objective is to foster an increasingly professional, interactive and interconnected Iraqi civil society that offers greater opportunities for citizens to contribute to and benefit from the country's development. It has been a complex program implemented in an unstable setting, which has been required to respond to numerous changes, not least of which was an escalation in insecurity, displacement and upheaval created by the ISIL invasion of parts of Iraq from June 2014. Furthermore, despite the program's robust monitoring system, program management observed that many outcomes were not being adequately captured, organized or analyzed. This gap was limiting the understanding of the program and its progress towards its objectives.

The purpose of this evaluation was to establish, using an Outcomes Harvesting approach, the most significant outcomes for strengthening Iraq's transition to participatory democracy achieved by the BPCS-supported CSOs or a BPCS consortium member[1] (together hereafter referred to as "BPCS partners") and the contribution made to these outcomes by the BPCS program. In particular, the evaluation looked for changes in behaviors, actions or decisions of Iraqi citizens and government entities. Then, Mercy Cops BPCS staff made sense of the outcomes in the light of the evaluation questions that guided the exercise. That is, this was an internal evaluation facilitated by an external evaluator.

Mercy Corps contracted the lead evaluator, an independent international consultant who developed the Outcome Harvesting approach, to serve as the external evaluator and lead the evaluation process in August-November 2015 with considerable participation of Mercy Corps staff. The co-evaluators were the Team Leader of Mercy Corps-Jordan and BPCS Advocacy Program Manager. The BPCS Chief of Party, Mercy Corps Iraq Senior M&E Manager; and BPCS Senior Program Director took the lead for the BPCS team as the main stakeholders in the evaluation. In this report, the three evaluators and the three BPCS team members are referred to as the "evaluation team" or simply the "team", led by the lead evaluator.

II. EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation was carried out with the understanding that Mercy Corps is the *primary intended user* of the evaluation process and findings. The evaluation was designed to serve two *principal uses*. The first has two dimensions. On the one hand, the Mercy Corps team in Iraq required evidence of change that would help understand the results of the program and enable it to communicate this internally and externally. On the other, Mercy Corps aimed to inform future programming by better understanding the process of change or the causal linkages between civil society programming and improvements in democracy and governance. The second is to test the

[1] ACDI/VOCA, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Internews, Mercy Corps, Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid, and Public Aid Organization (PAO)

efficacy of Outcome Harvesting as a methodology that could be used by Mercy Corps for other purposes.

The *evaluation questions* were agreed considering what could practically be achieved within the time available, as well as the two principal uses.

1. To what extent have BPCS partners contributed to increased civic participation?
2. To what extent have BPCS partners contributed to more participatory government processes?
3. What do the outcomes of BPCS imply for how governance[2] strengthening programs in societies in transition should be designed?

The *criteria* of what constitutes an "outcome" in the BPCS context is understood as an observable change in "behavior" writ large: a change in the relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of an Iraqi citizen or civic group, community leader or organization or in an Iraqi governmental entity. To be, however, a BPCS outcome, it had to be a change *influenced* by a BPCS partner, including Mercy Corps. That is, a change that the BPCS actor controls would not be an outcome: i.e. if a BPCS partner paid for a societal actor to take a new initiative or do something different, it was not counted as an outcome. Thus, the evaluation harvested outcomes to which BPCS directly and indirectly contributed. The influence of the BPCS partner can range from inspiring and encouraging, facilitating and supporting, to persuading or pressuring the societal actor(s) to change. The *standard* was that these changes be sufficiently concrete and specific so that they are verifiable.

The evaluation set out to identify up to 10 significantly positive outcomes influenced by the work of each of the BPCS partners since October 2013, although the program team knew it would be unlikely to find so many for each partner. In 1–2 sentences, the evaluation team identified and described 148 demonstrated changes that 25 CSOs and 6 BPCS consortium members influenced that potentially, or actually, contributed to strengthening Iraq's transition to participatory democracy as indicated by changes in civic engagement or government openness.

Since the BPCS partners may inadvertently contribute to changes in societal actors that significantly detract from, undermine, or obstruct the intended strengthening of Iraq's transition to participatory democracy as indicated by changes in civic engagement or government openness, the evaluation team also sought to identify negative outcomes. These undesirable outcomes can be important for learning. In addition, if only positive outcomes are reported, there is a risk of third parties assuming: 1) there are no undesirable outcomes, 2) the claims of achievements are not credible or 3) the BPCS program did not take enough risks. Therefore, the evaluation strove to harvest up to 3 significantly negative outcomes from the BPCS partners. In the end, however, the team only identified 6 undesirable outcomes from 3 CSOs and Mercy Corps itself as a consortium member.

[2] Originally, the interest was phrased as "civil society strengthening" but in the course of analyzing and interpreting the outcomes Mercy Corps and the evaluators realized that it is more correctly expressed as "governance strengthening" since civil society is only one part of wider governance programming that the outcomes were proving relevant to.

III. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation process customized the first five of the six Outcome Harvesting steps,[3] which are more guiding principles than rigid formulae to follow. The customization was done very much in an iterative process with a continuous process of decisions being made between the BPCS team and the evaluators as the evaluation process unfolded and outcomes emerged.

1. **Review of documentation and drafting potential outcomes**: The evaluation was designed and launched 4-6 August 2015 in Erbil during a workshop of the BPCS and evaluation teams (with Team Leader Mercy Corps- Jordan attending virtually). The next step was review of documentation by the co-evaluators who extracted potential outcomes from 11 quarterly reports and approximately 380 monthly reports. In addition to draft descriptions of the outcome, its significance and the contribution of the BPCS partner, the evaluation team posed questions where more detail was required. The documentation review was completed in mid-September.

2. **Engagement with "focal points":** Outcome Harvesting is highly participatory not on principle but for a basic methodological reason: you have to be informed by the people who are closest to the 'action'; they know best what they are achieving and, furthermore, are motivated to report on their achievements. We considered that BPCS consortium staff are the people best placed to identify and formulate the outcomes the BPCS partners themselves have influenced.

   Therefore, between mid-September and mid-October the co-evaluators consulted with 24 "focal points": BPCS consortium staff who are a) knowledgeable about the changes BPCS partners have influenced in Iraqi civil society and government, b) motivated to share what they know, c) willing to go on the record with their knowledge, and d) available to devote several hours to engaging with the evaluation team. In addition to completing and enhancing the information harvested from the documentation, the focal points identified and formulated additional outcomes.

   This consultation proved to be especially challenging because co-evaluators and focal points alike faced a steep learning curve. In addition, because of time and distance, especially for Team Leader Mercy Corps, Jordan who is based in Amman, personal interviews were not possible; the focal point and co-evaluator sitting physically together to review the outcomes proved to be more effective than engaging through email or telephone.

Once the outcomes were formulated with the focal points, the BPCS Chief of Party and BPCS Senior Program Director reviewed all of them for factual accuracy and especially for legibility, meticulously editing numerous outcomes. The lead evaluator served as a safe-guard to ensure that any change in content — including proposals by the BPCS Chief of Party and BPCS Senior Program Director to not include some draft outcomes — was questioned and resolved. As a result, approximately 10% of the potential outcomes were not accepted.

3. **Substantiation of the most questionable outcomes**: What will make the whole set of outcomes credible enough for the uses of the evaluation? Since all BPCS consortium staff

[3] Design the Outcome Harvest, review documentation and draft outcome descriptions, engage with informants in formulating outcome descriptions, substantiate, analyse and interpret, and support use of findings.

who served as focal points knew that the information they provided could be subject to verification, that provided an element of credibility. Nonetheless, the BPCS team decided that if 20% of the outcomes were verified by a third party, it would give the whole set of 148 outcomes sufficient credibility for the uses of this evaluation. Therefore, in their factual and style review of the outcomes, the BPCS Chief of Party, Team Leader Mercy Corps, Jordan, Senior Mercy Corps Iraq M&E Manager and BPCS Senior Program Director identified the outcomes that they considered were the most significant or potentially, questionable either in terms of the reported change or the BPCS partner's contribution. The evaluation team then agreed on the roughly 20% on which there was most agreement.

These 31 outcomes were then consulted by the Team Leader Mercy Corps, Jordan and BPCS Advocacy Program Manager with equally knowledgeable and authoritative but independent third parties who had participated in the outcome. These substantiators went on record with their opinion about the outcome as formulated. One substantiator disagreed with the formulation of one of the outcomes of a BPCS partner [127]. This outcome was not taken into consideration in the final list of outcomes.

For two outcomes the substantiators partially disagreed description, the significance or the contribution. For one [102], the disagreement was not about the accuracy of what was described but that the substantiator considered that more could be said to better describe the outcome and the BPCS contribution. For the second [153] the substantiator agreed with the description and partially agreed with the significance and the BPCS contribution. Although the substantiator did not explain his partial agreement, since he agreed with this negative outcome the evaluators did take accept it as a valid outcome. Lastly, for two outcomes [72, 95], the candidates for substantiation did not reply to repeated requests for their opinion. Consequently, these four outcomes were taken into account in the analysis and interpretation. In sum, the positive substantiation of 28 of the most questionable 29 outcomes was, in our judgment, good enough to establish the credibility of the whole set of outcomes.

4. **Analysis and interpretation of the outcomes:** The evaluation and BPCS teams agreed what would be the appropriate categories by which to classify the outcomes so that they would be manageable for answering the three evaluation questions. The BPCS Chief of Party and BPCS Advocacy Program Manager undertook the task of classifying each outcome according to sixteen categories grouped under three classification headings, corresponding to the evaluation questions: civic engagement, government openness and civil society strengthening.

The BPCS Advocacy Program Manager prepared tables in Excel analyzing all the outcomes. Team Leader Mercy Corps - Jordan, BPCS Advocacy Program Manager and the lead evaluator prepared and then 26-28 October facilitated a mini-workshop of key BPCS consortium staff to make sense of the outcomes and to provide their input on how they would use the data to answer the evaluation questions. The fruits of their work form the basis of the evidence-based answers in the findings chapter of this report.

Methodological considerations: Outcome evaluation is not a process of scientific research. Nonetheless, although the criteria are different for evaluations, they are no less rigorous than for scientific research. Throughout the evaluation, the evaluation team was guided by the four standards of evaluation of the American Evaluation Association, which are fairly well accepted world-wide:

- Propriety: Ensure that the evaluation is conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.
- Utility: Ensure that the evaluation serves the information needs of intended users and be owned by them.
- Feasibility: Ensure that the evaluation is realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.
- Accuracy: Ensure that the evaluation reveals and conveys technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.

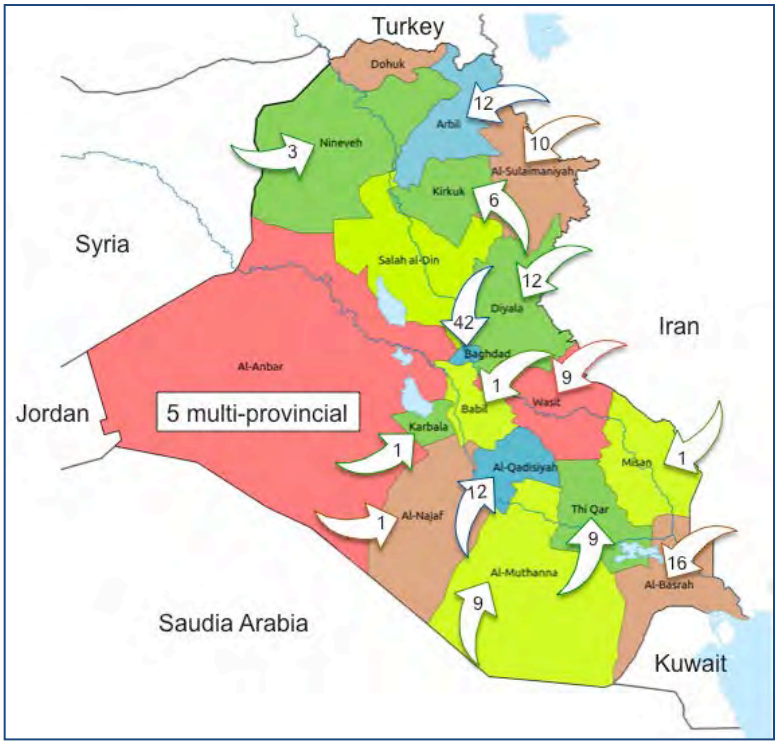
The concept of an "outcome" as used in this evaluation was relatively new for our sources of information the 24 focal points. Furthermore, they are more comfortable with reporting on outputs. In addition, the evaluation was carried out in English, which is the second, third or fourth language for over 90% of the people who participated in the evaluation, including the co-evaluators. Because of these limitations, the lead evaluator played a significant editing role that in the case of the statements of significance of each outcome, although approved by the co-evaluator(s) and the focal point, may be over-stated.

Nonetheless, the credibility of the 148 outcomes harvested resides in the following:

- The sources of information for each outcome are people who worked directly with the CSO who contributed to the outcome or with the consortium member. They went on record with their views of what changed, how the BPCS partner contributed and each outcome's significance.
- The focal points served as sources knowing that the information they gave would a) be public and b) might be verified with independent third parties.
- The evaluators examined all the outcome formulations for a plausible rationale between what was reported as achieved and the stated contribution of the BPCS partner.
- The role played by the BPCS team (BPCS Chief of Party, BPCS Advocacy Program Manager and Senior Mercy Corps Iraq M&E Manager) helped to correct factual errors.
- The BPCS team and the evaluators identified 20% of the most questionable outcomes and only 1 of the 29 outcomes was not substantiated with an independent external authority knowledgeable about each one.

IV. MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS: ANSWERS TO THE THREE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The 148 outcomes were achieved right across Iraq in 15 of the 18 provinces (see map). Similarly, the outcomes "populate" the different dimensions of the BPCS program's priority: enhancing participatory democracy in Iraq. That is, the incidence[4] of the 148 BPCS outcomes constituted changes in civic participation, good governance and strengthening of civil society in the northern, central and southern regions[5] of Iraq (Table 1).



In each one of the next sections, the evaluation team answers the three evaluation questions. These answers were informed by a three-day workshop in which key BPCS staff identified the trends represented by the outcomes that answer the three questions. The lead evaluator synthesized these discussions into a draft of this report, in consultation with his co-evaluators the Team Leader Mercy Corps, Jordan and BPCS Advocacy Program Manager. The BPCS Chief of Party and BPCS Advocacy Program Manager reviewed the draft report and with the lead evaluator resolved any differences of opinion about the evidence-based answers.

Table 1: Incidence of BPCS outcomes by region

	North	Center	South	Multi province	Total
Civic participation	43	52	40	5	140
Good governance	27	45	27	0	99
Strengthening civil society	41	53	44	3	141
Total	111	150	111	8	

Furthermore, the BPCS program staff identified significantly more recent outcomes than outcomes farther in the past (Figure 1). We consider this is due to two reasons. First, the logical lapse of time before a program's activities have effect on the level of outcomes. Second, it may have also been

[4] Each outcome was classified by only one of the categories under each one of the three dimensions. Thus, some outcomes qualified to be classified three times, once each under the four categories of civic participation and good governance and under the eight of strengthening civil society the three The classification of the outcomes

[5] **North**: Diyala, Ninawa, Sulymanaiya, Erbil, Kirkuk, Dohuk, Salahdin; **Central**: Baghdad, Wassit, Babil, Anbar, Karbala; **South**: Basrah, Qadisya, Maysan, Dhi Qar , Najaf and Muthana

related to contextual changes and strategy decisions that focused more efforts on particular behaviors and relationships in the second half of the program than in the first.

Since a large majority of outcomes came from the quarterly and monthly reports, the team did not consider that this clustering of outcomes in the last quarters was due in any major way to the natural tendency for people to remember more recent outcomes.

Now the team will answer the evaluation questions one by one. Since the majority of outcomes correspond to all three questions, in order to avoid repetition the team will cite and exemplify more outcomes in the first and second question than in the last. All the outcomes can be found in the Excel file

Question 1. To what extent have BPCS partners contributed to increased civic participation?

The broad development hypothesis that underlies BPCS is that if civil society is strengthened in a way that increases citizen input into Iraq's social and political development, then democracy in Iraq will be more participatory. The first four of the five[6] predefined intermediate results (IRs) of the BPCS program aimed to foster an increasingly professional, interactive and interconnected Iraqi civil society that offers greater opportunities for citizens to contribute to and benefit from the country's development. Therefore, the team answers this question through the lens of those four IRs.

Table 2: Incidence of civic participation outcomes per BPCS intermediate results and per region

	North	Center	South	Multi province	Total
IR 1. Increased democratic engagement of citizens	12	8	10	3	**33**
IR 2. Increased institutional capacity of CSOs	0	3	0	2	**5**
IR 3. Increased impact of civil society on public policy & services	26	36	23	0	**84**
IR 4. Enabling environment for civil society improved	6	5	7	0	**18**
Total	**43**	**52**	**40**	**5**	

The first intermediate result that the BPCS program set out to achieve was ***increased democratic engagement of citizens*** by mobilizing diverse and marginalized groups to broaden democratic participation at community, sub-national and national levels. We identified 33 outcomes that the evaluation team considered represent progress towards this goal, ranging from activities to

[6] The fifth intermediate result concerns the implementation of the Iraqi War Victims Fund, which is a special project to assist civilian victims of war and terror. These activities were only taken into account when they explicitly generated outcomes related to the three evaluation questions.

benefit internally displaced people (IDPs)[7] to youth, women, provincial councils and civil society organizations (CSOs) taking new initiatives to participate in Iraqi society in non-traditional ways.[8] The 33 BPCS program outcomes were spread over 12 provinces and grew from 1 outcome in late 2013 to 10 in 2014 and 22 in January-August 2014. They pertain primarily to increased volunteerism and activism of youth, and an ability among youth to work together across traditional divisions and of traditionally marginalized groups such as tribes and women.

One important breakthrough was that in May, June and July 2014 some tribes in the north of Basra, for the first time in recent history, allowed government officials to visit, discuss and understand their needs and include them as priorities in of the Basra government's planning of government services [89].

Shortly after the ISIL crisis, large numbers of youth volunteered for civic actions, ranging from training in first aid with the Red Crescent Society in Basra [5], donating blood [124], and launching as "peace ambassadors" a Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) for community needs assessment with 428 families in Kirkuk city [123], to serving mediation roles to resolve conflicts amongst students in high schools [132] and collecting donations for orphans during Ramadan to buy clothes and gifts for orphaned children and distribute them before Eid [139].

In February 2015, the head of the local council in Basra district publicly offered his support to young people to be involved in the decision-making process within the local councils until the law to reduce the age of eligibility for nomination to the local council from 30 to 22 years to promote youth participation in decision-making is passed. [61]

The fruits of youth volunteerism also included initiatives for policy change, with a Network of Volunteers, composed of five Kurdish youth CSOs, producing a draft law to make volunteerism a part of government agencies [74] and a youth campaign submitted a project proposal to the Canadian embassy in Baghdad for activating the role of the primary schools in spreading a culture of tolerance among children [119].

Equally important, the BPCS program across Iraq influenced action to enable youth to be more formally involved in provincial council decision-making in Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar [61, 62, 66].

Women, too, have been influenced. There are outcomes expressing solidarity on a very individual level, such as one woman paying a widow's child cancer medical expenses [10] or another buying a sewing machine for widow to set up her own business [11]. Thirty women volunteers in Najaf participated in a project to help IDPs funded by UNICEF [77] whereas the Provincial Council in Diyala agreed to include 20%

In February 2015, the head of Shiite Waqf had read the WTDC letter about the adverse impacts of marriage outside the court and called his daughter who was engaged and has no legal contract and asked her to go with her fiancé to the court as soon as possible to certify the marriage contract. [146]

[7] [13, 28, 31, 99, 125]. In this report, numbers in brackets [0] refer to the outcome IDs in the Annex. When there are numerous outcomes, as in this case, the numbers will be in footnotes.

[8] Not all outcomes will be cited in the text.

women in the annual public meetings held in each district to discuss provincial issues [1]. Individual initiatives also occurred amongst men but were less noteworthy because Iraqi women are less likely than men to participate in civic discussions.

CSOs themselves have ventured into controversial, cutting-edge issues. CSOs approached government officials in Sulaymaniyah to discuss the need for protecting children born from unknown fathers from public perceptions of inferiority by amending the Nationality Law 23/2006 [32]. Ten CSOs in partnership with the local government in Shatra established the Civil Society Council of Al Shatra, Dhi Qar province to identify obstacles faced by government services departments [133] and most recently in July-September 2015, representatives of the CSO-organized anti-sectarian, pro-reform demonstration movement met with Prime Minister Al-Abadi for direct discussions to share information and voice their concerns [109].

The second intermediate result the BPCS program aimed to achieve was ***increased institutional capacity of CSOs*** to contribute to Iraq's development through effective constituent-focused service delivery and policy impact, engaging organizations at various levels of capacity and scale. The majority of the BPCS outcomes (i.e. 111: 148 minus the 37 of the BPCS consortium members) were achieved by CSOs that benefited from the BPCS program's capacity development support. Nevertheless, in this evaluation the evaluation team decided to draw the line and consider as BPCS outputs, and not as outcomes, when CSOs improved their own capacities since those changes depended so heavily on the quality of the training and other support they received from BPCS. Notwithstanding, since December 2013 the evaluation team identified 5 outcomes that represented changes in the attitudes and behaviors of BPCS partners in ways that were beyond the program's sphere of control. For example, some began to collaborate [108, 121], especially on advocacy [116, 117]. These are important outcomes for the program, as these changes demonstrate more sophisticated approaches.

The third BPCS intermediate result aimed at enhancing democratic engagement of Iraqi citizens was the area where BPCS had the most effect with 84 outcomes representing ***increased impact of civil society through influencing decision-making on public policy and services*** right across 12 provinces in the country.

Advocacy efforts that led to tangible change were in service provision (water and electricity) in southern Iraq and Diyala, demonstrating that civil society has a strong role to play in these regions to ensure improved access to services in Iraq[9].

The BPCS partners have influenced local, provincial, regional and federal government to increasingly see civil society as an expert voice to offer technical support and consultancy in decision making processes, particularly in the north and center[10]. Coalitions and alliances between various civil society groups and community leaders are particularly strong and active in Baghdad, especially on women's rights issues[11].

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[9] [2, 3, 4, 7, 22, 37, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 90, 128]

[10] [8, 18, 35, 40, 48, 75, 76, 93, 94, 129, 130, 145]

[11] [6, 36, 48, -111[11], 141, 142, 143, 149, 150, -153]. A negative sign before a number, e.g. "-111 and -151", indicates that it was an undesirable and of course unintentional outcome of BPCS that to some degree undermined progress towards participatory democracy in Iraq.

An interesting pattern of change — a chain of interrelated outcomes—, and the most significant one revealed through this evaluation, concerned the campaign to stop marriage outside the court waged by the Widow Training and Development Center's (WTDC) with the Baghdad Women's Association (BWA) and Women for Peace (W4P), all BPCS partners. This struggle centered on Baghdad since the goal was a federal law:

- ✓ *On 25 September 2014, the Bar Association and Jurists Union expressed their willingness to support the advocacy campaign to combat marriage outside the court by developing policy proposals in technically legal language terms to be presented to parliamentarians [150].*
- ✓ *Then three months later, on 24 December, 2014, the vice chairwoman of the civil society committee in the House of Representatives and other parliament members expressed their readiness to pass a draft law to resolve the issue of marriages outside the courts [148].*
- ✓ *The same day, the spokesman of the information department in the Shiite Endowment emphasized in a speech that the Endowment is ready to issue an official letter to all Waqf employees encouraging people to register marriage contracts in the court [149].*
- ✓ *Momentum gathered in the new year and on 18 February 2015, an adviser in the Iraqi federal Ministry of Human Rights confirmed that the Ministry is ready to support the advocacy campaign to combat marriage outside the court by facilitating and arranging a formal meeting gathering BWA's team and the ministry to come up with a proper solution [40].*
- ✓ *Five days later, the educational supervisor in Sadr City confirmed that the Ministry of Education is ready to assist and support by issuing a letter to concerned schools in Sadr City to prepare and participate in those awareness sessions as mandatory, as well as calling their attention to the disadvantages of marriage outside the court [39].*
- ✓ *Then, on 25 February 2015, 19 members of the Council Of Representative expressed their willingness to support the campaign of reducing marriage outside the court and the proposed solutions through filling out a questionnaire [147]*

All was not rosy, however, because two negative outcomes emerged.

- ✓ *From early January through April 2015, four advocacy CSOs conducted an opposition campaign against WTDC's advocacy campaign goal because of a conceptual conflict about the approach taken to combating marriage outside the courts [-153]*

  Furthermore, in March, a judge wrote an article against WTDC's advocacy initiative in a local newspaper, condemning their policy goal that gave religious figures powers to conduct legal marriages that should only belong to judicial authorities [-151].

And the campaign was having effects outside of Baghdad

- ✓ *In April 2015, in Erbil the Iraqi Women's Network accused Mercy Corps of undermining women's rights in Iraq due to its support of WTDC's advocacy campaign on marriage outside of courts [-111].*

- ✓ *Nonetheless, on 8 April 2015, the Minister of State for Women's Affairs expressed her interest to work in cooperation with BWA's team on drafting a policy paper regarding taking action against conducting marriage outside the courts [35].*
- ✓ *Then in Dhi Qar province, on 28 April 2015, the Sunni Waqf[12] Offices of Religious Affairs issued official instructions for employees of clerics not to be involved in conducting religious marriage ceremonies unless the applicants have marriage certifications from appropriate courts [141].*
- ✓ *The next month, the Sunni Waqf stated that the new instructions not to perform marriages not certified by courts will be mandatory for all clerics who belong to the Waqf and receive government funding to maintain and protect religious facilities [143].*
- ✓ *During May – July 2015, the federal government's Ministry of Migration and Displacement, Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs started to conduct awareness sessions about the negative consequences of marriage outside the court though their sessions for IDPs and others [144].*
- ✓ *Finally, on 26 August 2015, the Shi'ite Waqf Endowment also issued official letters prohibiting religious leaders from conducting any marriages that were not certified in the courts [142].*

This acceptance by government and religious leaders of the need to protect the rights of women and girls rights through court-certified marriages is a critical and significant step forward. Especially important is that BPCS partners were successful in influencing broad and strong support for the issue, in particular from both Shiite and Sunni religious officials.

The BPCS success in contributing to increased impact of civil society on public policy and services is further demonstrated through outcomes of government demonstrating support for citizen participation in its decision-making and in providing oversight (e.g. through public forum activities and open meetings) as well as supporting greater rights for citizens to be involved politically (e.g. through supporting greater freedom of expression and right to demonstration), particularly in the north and center of the country[13].

While policy change or legislation (outside of service provision) does not make up a large percentage of advocacy outcomes, government across Iraq has demonstrated some willingness to listen to and support civil society advocacy initiatives, and ultimately to change policies to align with civil society advocacy objectives.

In addition, government officials, particularly in the north, are beginning to take on a lobbying role with other government offices advocating on issues brought to them by civil society. For example, on 12 February 2015, three parliamentarians in Sulaymaniyah committed themselves to convincing colleagues to support changes in the Nationality Law No 26/2006

[12] The Iraq government maintains three Waqfs (religious endowments): the Sunni, the Shia, and the Christian and Other Religions Endowments. The endowments, which operate under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, receive government funding to maintain and protect religious facilities. Source: http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171735.pdf

[13] [15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 41, 43, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 54, 112, 140]

Article 3 Section B in Iraq in order to alleviate the socio-economic impacts on vulnerable people [34]. Also in 2015, the Senior Deputy for the Federal Speaker of Parliament, committed himself to propose to the Speaker that the suggestions of BPCS partner Bustan about mitigating offensive language concerning children born to single mothers be incorporated into the draft amendment of the same law[14].

Lastly, while advocacy efforts in the south were particularly successful around service provision, they have been less successful in areas of increased participation in decision-making or civil society receiving public government or coalition support for campaigns. This is unsurprising given the relative sensitivity and complexity of the issues.

BPCS advocacy successes

- ✓ *In Erbil in the third quarter of 2014, the Kurdistan Parliament formally accepted the proposed changes for two main points in the new draft law "Independent Commission on Elections and Referendums", before issuing the law [70].*
- ✓ *In Sulaymaniyah, between January-March 2015, Kurdistan parliamentarians agreed to support a draft amendment to protect female employees' rights in labor law 71/1987 be submitted to Kurdistan parliament by the Kurdistan Regional Government [42].*
- ✓ *In Wasit in February 2015, the provincial council agreed to change their policies and make information available to NGOs and the media [55].*
- ✓ *In August 2015, the Basra governor agreed to make publicly available the provinces' three budgets: 1) petrodollars, 2) provincial development budget; and 3) allocations through the line ministries for the first time [155].*

The fourth BPCS intermediate result was ***improving the enabling environment for civil society***, that is, to enhance the legal freedom and protection for civil society to speak with a collective voice and constructive collaboration with the general public, government actors and the private sector and thus ensure civil society leadership is given its rightful place in Iraq's developing democracy. Following the ISIL crisis, it was difficult to gain the government's interest or attention on the NGO Laws. Starting in early 2015, BPCS therefore changed its enabling environment strategy from a national to a regional approach, and focused on strengthening relationships between civil society and provincial-level government.

The program has been successful in contributing to 18 outcomes across half the provinces of Iraq to influence change for an enabling environment for civil society. The BPCS partners accounted for the lion's share of these outcomes (13 of 18) and CSO partners for the others.

The provincial governments in Dhi Qar, Erbil,

In the second quarter of 2015, the chair of the Shatra Local Council in Dhi Qar endorsed the Civil Society Council of Al Shatra – Dhi Qar, whose purpose is to serve as a conduit between district level government officials and citizens and promote good governance [134].

[14] [33, see also 68, 69, 144]

Karbala, Sulaymaniyah and Qadisiya recognize the need to develop inclusiveness, accountability and transparency, and see civil society as a means to do so[15]. The Diyala governor and the provincial councils of Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Dahuk have adopted a more participatory approach with CSOs[16] (see box) and increased coordination and commitment to action with civil society, recognizing the role and importance of civil society in meeting community needs and supporting marginalized groups [118].

The provincial governments in Ninawa and Qadisiya provinces showed their commitment to working with CSOs to meet the challenges that citizens in Iraq face and demonstrates openness to community service delivery for the marginalized IDP population in partnership with civil society [8, 53]. Nonetheless, BPCS suffered a setback when on 16 August 2015, the Muthanna governor issued an order prohibiting the Civil Defense building to be used by BPCS partner Iraq Foundation for Cultural Liaison (IFCL) to distribute food baskets and hygiene kits to IDPS in Khidur District. Although understandable since during the first seven months of 2015 IFCL participated in demonstrations demanding reforms be made by local government in the Khidur District, governor's order appears to be a set-back for government relationships and cooperation with civil society, or at least with this CSO [85].

Finally, although working with the business community has not been a major focus of the BPCS program, some progress was made starting back in 2013. In the last quarter of that year, in Erbil, Fresh Company donated the entire proceeds of its sales at a civil society fair to support Syrian refugee children in Iraq [12]. More recently, on 8 and 20 April 2015 in Qadisiya and Baghdad respectively, the Iraqi Federation of Businessmen (IFB), the Iraqi Federation of Industries (IFI) and the Iraqi Federation of Chambers of Commerce (IFCC) hosted civil society-business sector roundtables that resulted in verbal commitments between the Iraqi Bank league interested in funding NGOs and to develop a system of transparency and accountability for this potential fund, and unions of contractors who are ready to support CSOs in advocating for a revision of tax legislation that creates a tax incentive for charitable giving [105, 106].

Overall, concerning achievements corresponding to the BPCS program's four intermediate results, *BPCS partners have contributed to increased civic participation* in all, and across the north, central and southern regions of the country. The most success has been in supporting organized civil society to have effects on public policy and services, and creating a framework to make further progress in this area, particularly at the provincial level. The involvement of citizens and especially of women and youth to participate in new and effective ways has been a highlight of the achievements in individual citizen engagement.

Although the first evaluation question focuses on *what* was achieved rather than *how*, it is noteworthy that the innovations in BPCS's way of working proved to be successful. For example, civil society fairs were a new way of working for Iraq, and built on the use of innovative social media and other mechanisms for sharing information. Previously, CSOs met government behind closed doors for a specific purpose, rather than throwing the doors open to the community, or creating opportunities for the community to directly ask questions of the government. These fairs also attracted marginalized groups. Generally, Iraqi women would not

[15] [67, 72, 73, 101, 102]

[16] [19, 103, 104, 107]

attend public events such as this, but some women paved the way, which encouraged other women to join. The same is true for youth.

Throughout the outcomes there are many instances of citizens, both as individuals or organized in CSOs, meeting with government officials face-to-face to exchange views and negotiate action. This was the first time for many citizens who did not previously believe that they could actually approach government. For young people, their participation demonstrated its value to themselves and to civil society and potentially to government too. Also noteworthy is that government officials were open to meetings and discussions, after different degrees of prying by civil society.

There is little evidence, however, in the outcomes that the BPCS program has contributed to a permanent shift in relationship between citizens and government, but certainly many citizens and government officials alike have opened their eyes to the benefit to communities that these interactions bring.

Question 2: To what extent have BPCS partners contributed to more participatory government processes?

In order to answer this question the evaluation team looked at Mercy Corps's four categories of good governance[17] outcomes (Table 3): there were no multi-provincial outcomes but all four categories were represented across the country.

Table 3: Incidence of good governance outcomes per region

	North	Center	South	Total
2.1 Accountability, including transparency	5	12	4	21
2.2 Equity and inclusiveness	11	10	14	35
2.3 Responsiveness	8	10	16	34
2.4 Participation	9	13	3	25
Total	33	45	37	0

The 21 outcomes that correspond to government ***accountability, including transparency*** demonstrate that Iraqi CSOs worked effectively in partnership with local, regional and national government across Iraq to create more accountable and transparent governance. Twelve of these government changes were achieved in 2015.

Mercy Corps considers that accountability is a key requirement of good governance. This dimension of good governance refers to government actors' demonstration of responsibility, willingness and capacity to answer for their actions and decisions to the people affected by them. Mercy Corps considers an outcome transparent when it embodies the act of sharing information openly, and ensuring that decisions, and their enforcement, follow established rules and regulations.

Especially noteworthy were changes influenced by civil society at the level of provincial councils (PCs). For example, in February 2015 the Wasit PC members agreed to attend a civil society conference and meet face to face with the public, CSOs and media to discuss the performance of the PC for the last three years [56]. Then in July the Council established a new

[17] Based on 1.3. Principles of Good Governance, pages 8-10, Mercy Corps' *Guide to Good Governance Programming*, no date.

committee for public participation [57], and accepted that university academics would study the performance of the Wasit PC [60] and in August the PC invited CSOs to monitor and supervise the performance of the Council [59].

Governments consulted with citizens on policy processes in the north, center and south of the country[18]. CSO efforts to promote transparency were effective beyond governments agreeing to consult, with governments inviting CSOs to participate and monitor government processes and performance[19].

> *In the second quarter of 2014, the Kurdistan Regional Government's NGO Department formed a neutral committee to evaluate around 400 proposals from the second round of proposals for the KRG civil society support fund. [73]*

For example, the Baghdad Provincial Council, a year and a half after holding in 2013 an unprecedented one day open-to-the-public conference to discuss and analyze the Council's Budget for 2014 [112], in the second quarter of 2015 issued provincial decree "Code 41/2015" stipulating that all local official entities operate transparently in their budget expenditure and project implementation [92]. The Council requested that BPCS partner, the Iraqi Institute for Economic Reform (IIER), train Council campaign staff to ensure budget transparency in implementing the decree. Furthermore, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal government of Iraq implemented policy reforms or passed new legislation in response to citizen demands [73, 100, 109].

Mercy Corps believes that a society's wellbeing depends on ***equity and inclusiveness*** to ensure that all citizens feel that they have a stake in society, do not feel excluded, and therefore want to participate. This requires that all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being. The 35 outcomes that correspond to this aspect of good governance represent important regional trends.

Government officials in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region supported advancing and strengthening working women's rights through legislative action culminating in Kurdistan parliamentarians agreeing in the first quarter of 2015 to support a draft amendment to Labor Law 71/1987 that would protect female employee rights[20].

The cross-cutting government support, from heads of councils to the governor and members of parliament, suggests that reducing the nominating age for local councils is gaining acceptance in Iraq. Lowering the age requirement could be an important step toward facilitating greater youth leadership in government decision-making. In south Iraq, government officials in Basra both publicly supported [65, 61, 62] and took formal steps [63, 64] toward reducing the eligible nomination age to local councils, from age 30 to age 22. Involving youth and community members in advocacy efforts proved valuable in garnering support from a variety of government actors in Basra and Saybah, including heads of local councils, parliament members, and the governor and minister of youth and sports.

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[18] [56, 60, 76, 93, 94, 112]

[19] [59, 67, 92, 134]

[20] [42, 43, 44, 45]

Actions by various government entities across Iraq demonstrate that government and CSOs can work together using participatory approaches, and CSOs have a vital role to play in Iraq society. In central Iraq, a cooperative policy was drafted by the office of the governor and chairman of the local civil society committee in collaboration with civil society representatives [72], representing a legal framework for the collaboration. In south Iraq and the northern Iraqi Kurdistan Region, various government functions took an even more significant step forward through signing or drafting memorandums of understanding with CSOs [101, 107], and one government amended its pubic works contract forms to include partnering with CSOs [102].

Government support for protecting vulnerable populations in south Iraq and in the northern Iraqi Kurdistan Region demonstrate that government recognizes its role and its authority to support the most vulnerable people in Iraq through addressing community needs and strengthening the rights of the vulnerable. The support consisted of three approaches: a commitment by high-level government officials to support an amendment to the National Law No. 26/2006 [33, 34], to expanding literacy programs to vulnerable people in remote rural areas [91], and to complete a public works project to deliver drinking water to a community in Muthanna, the country's poorest province, in south Iraq [81].

The third dimension of good governance for Mercy Corps is ***responsiveness***: state institutions are able to provide solutions to the problems or needs raised by constituents in a timely and appropriate manner. In contrast to the three other areas of good governance, almost half of the 34 outcomes that BPCS achieved in this area are in the south. Here and in the center and north too, local (district and provincial) governments appear to be responsive to civil society action to improve service delivery, particularly in water and electricity. This is seen in many provinces across the south (particularly Muthana), some provinces in the north (outside the Iraqi Kurdish Region), and even the Baghdad Provincial Council demonstrated responsiveness on water issues.

The variety of BPCS partner-influenced successes regarding water are especially noteworthy. For example:

- ✓ *Between, April – June 2014, the Baghdad water directorate took action to begin solving the lack of water and within one week, the government had started on several projects after the press conference held by BPCS partner BWA in Baghdad. [37]*
- ✓ *On 16 December 2013, the Chairman of the Planning Commission in Basra province, promised to support civil society efforts to address water problems by attending the events, providing IFS with official letters and PC plans related to the water sector, and include waters issue on the Basra PC agenda. [87]*
- ✓ *In August and September 2014, the majority of Basra Provincial Council members wrote letters supporting the IFS advocacy campaign for water projects and increased the amount of money for water projects in the budget of Basra PC for 2014. [90]*
- ✓ *Between July – September 2014, Baquba local government officials in Diyala province promoted cooperation by holding a meeting to address and solve water problems such as accelerating the payment process in order to move forward the implementation of water delivery to the al Joba area in the Baquba district during which they promised to help solve the water problems in the affected areas. [4]*

- ✓ *By December 2014, government officials in Diyala had agreed to restart the implementation of the Hamrin water project for five villages, which had been suspended. [2]*
- ✓ *Between January – March 2014, the Muthanna Sewage directorate closed the pipes that throw "black water" (water that includes human waste products) into the rivers, which are the sole sources for drinking water in the governorate. [83]*
- ✓ *In September 2014, the water office manager agreed to operate the water pumps 24 hours/day to deliver water to Alardhyat village in Muthanna Province. In the past the water pumped only 6 hours a day. [78]*
- ✓ *Between October – December 2014, the directorate of water of Muthanna Province agreed to increase the number of water trucks transporting drinking water to the villages of Alhillal District to 2 trucks daily, morning and evening. In the past, there were 5 trucks per week. [80]*
- ✓ *In the second quarter of 2015, the Qadisiya governor communicated (letter No. 8022) to the Ministry of Water Resources and Agricultural Ministry his decision to implement the Qadisiya Provincial Council's recommendations on the re-rationing of water. [22]*
- ✓ *During the same period, the Qadisiya Provincial Council adopted several civil society recommendations to address the re-rationing of water, which would have left many farmers unable to cultivate their land. These recommendations resulted from a series of dialogue sessions between the Provincial Council Agricultural Committee, the Agricultural Advisor to the Governor, and civil society. [21]*

In many cases, the government actually changed, improved or re-activated projects in response to civil society advocacy, resulting in improved services. Service responsiveness was also seen, but to a lesser extent in the central region (particularly Wassit), but not until mid-2015 [114, 115]. Similarly, local government also took direct action to respond to the needs of IDPs brought to their attention by civil society in Kirkuk [41], Qadisiya [53] and the national level [95].

In more sensitive areas, however, such as elections, compensation for war victims, and corruption, the government's response has been more through expressions of support rather than direct action. If the patterns the evaluation team saw with expressions of support for water action are an indication (i.e. occurring months before action is taken), these softer manifestations of commitments could be a precursor towards more direct government response.

In the Kurdish region, there is evidence that civil society's voice has influenced the regional government's views on draft laws [70, 71]. There are also indications that the government -- at least at the provincial council level -- is willing to be seen to be cooperating with civil society [90, 104], which may indicate that the government would like to appear to be responsive, and that civil society may be a useful partner in this.

Mercy Corps proposes that good governance is the active promotion of ***participation*** by state actors of the chance for all members of society -- men and women, girls and boys -- to have an informed and consequential voice in decisions that affect them. The 25 outcomes that represent this public sector

In the second quarter of 2014, the Kurdistan Regional Government's NGO Department asked 3H to review and analyze a draft Law on Volunteerism according to international standards and criteria and in terms of the compatibility with existing KRG laws. [75]

openness to the participation of citizens and their organizations were primarily in the north and center of the country.

For example, in the second half of 2014, in the north, the Provincial Council (PC) of Diyala took different actions to enhance citizen participation in Council deliberations:

> *i) The PC chairman agreed to citizens' recommendations about general service policies [15]*
>
> *ii) and rejected projects submitted by the PC because the local councils had not been consulted [16].*
>
> *iii) The Council decided to allow citizens to participate in PC meetings and thus in the decision-making of government priorities [17] and*
>
> *iv) agreed to obtain citizens' opinions about their community's needs and priorities and submit them to the provincial council for the purpose of inclusion in the general budget [19].*

In the center of the country, the official spokesman of the judiciary (Supreme Judicial Council), Ministry of Education, an adviser in the Iraqi federal Ministry of Human Rights and Wasit Provincial Council committed themselves to partnerships and increased cooperation with civil society, which demonstrates government willingness to work with civil society on social issues and enable more participatory democracy[21].

Question 3: What do the outcomes of BPCS imply for how governance strengthening programs in societies in transition should be designed?

The third evaluation question focuses on the extent to which the outcomes achieved suggest what are effective civil society strengthening strategies in societies such as Iraq. Mercy Corps believes that there are eight strategies that potentially will be effective in building participatory democracy in post-conflict transitional societies. Although virtually all the outcomes correspond in one way or another to these eight areas of civil society strengthening, and in the 15 of the 18 Iraqi provinces, there is a considerable difference in the relative number of outcomes for each of the areas (Table 4). This appears to reflect both program design and emphasis, as well as the general evolution of civil society development and influence. Not unexpectedly from the evidence-based answers to the first two evaluation questions, influencing government (or community leader) decisions registers an incidence of 3 to 6 times or more outcomes than do the other areas.

Table 4: Incidence of civil society strengthening outcomes per region

	North	Center	South	Multi-provincial	Total
3.1 CSO direct service delivery	1	0	3	0	4
3.2 Technical assistance to government	1	5	3	0	9
3.3 Sponsorship of community mobilization opportunities	2	2	7	1	12
3.4 Promotion of volunteerism	9	1	2	0	12

[21] [38, 39, 40, 57]

3.5 Influence community decisions	1	6	2	1	10
3.6 Influence government (or community leader) decisions	19	28	20	0	67
3.7 Create space for citizen participation in government processes	7	6	5	0	18
3.8 Watchdog function	1	5	2	1	9
Total per region	**41**	**53**	**44**	**3**	

The BPCS program registered quite modest success in the first two areas of ***CSO direct service delivery*** and ***technical assistance to government*** simply because direct service delivery was often a paid activity (output), and therefore not recorded as an outcome. In addition, these were not BPCS focus areas for supporting participatory democracy. Nonetheless, there were some innovative initiatives amongst the 4 and 9 outcomes, respectively. In 2015, one CSO provided direct service delivery to IDPs through "peace ambassadors" trained and mobilized to conduct assessments, which they shared with local government officials [123]. CSOs provided technical assistance to government in connection with other CSO initiatives: on budgeting [93, 94], on legislative developments concerning volunteerism [75], on MOUs and processes related to government-CSO cooperation [67, 101], and on ensuring that women are able to gain the benefits provided by government when their marriage is certified by the courts [145].

Between April – June 2015, 82 women and 102 men representing CSOs and government in Sulaymaniyah participated in advocacy workshops and press conferences to discuss the need for protecting children born from unknown fathers from public perceptions of inferiority by amending the Nationality Law 23/2006 [32].

The slightly greater success in ***sponsoring community mobilization opportunities*** and the ***promotion of volunteerism*** with 12 outcomes corresponding to each, is noteworthy because Iraqi CSOs are learning how to effectively reach out to others, and involve their communities in new ways. Also, BPCS's involvement of diverse sectors of Iraqi society in controversial areas of work is an important indicator of success. We described the results of BPCS initiatives promoting volunteerism when answering the first evaluation question (see page 8). But progress in other areas is equally important.

On February 28, 2015 three Baghdad CSOs (Widows Training and Development Center, Women for Peace, Baghdad Women's Association) agreed to work together for the first time. The cooperation was on advocacy against marriage outside the court and the illegal marriages for women [117].

Similarly, the business community in Iraq has traditionally been concerned with doing business. Thus, BPCS influence on the private sector to demonstrate interest in social issues, participate in community events and accept civic responsibility, as shown in answering the first question (see page 13), is nonetheless noteworthy.

The 10 outcomes around ***influencing community decisions*** suggest that traditional non-governmental organizations are looking beyond themselves and are increasingly reaching out and influencing community

On 25 September 2014, the Bar Association and Jurists Union expressed their willingness to support the advocacy campaign to combat marriage outside the court by developing policy proposals in technically legal language terms to be presented to parliamentarians [150].

members, and other types of civil society groups who can support their causes, e.g. chambers of commerce [105], unions [48, 150] and the media [96, 137]. This may represent a more assertive and sophisticated approach to influencing change, particularly at the central regional and national levels since these outcomes were recorded in Baghdad. The fact that diverse groups (particularly representatives of the private sector) were willing to meet with civil society may also indicate greater recognition of the important or potential role that civil society can play.

There are also outcomes to suggest that CSOs are able to raise sensitive and controversial issues for discussion in the community [32, 117], which may have otherwise remained hidden or unaddressed. This is exemplified by increased discussion and media coverage around women's issues in the conservative south of the country [137, 138]. The examples of media coverage also represent progress, as traditionally media do not appreciate civil society's role. The opposite is also true; e.g., CSOs thought media would only provide coverage of events for a fee, rather than be interested in stories related to the issues of concern to CSOs.

On 15 June 2015, Sawsan Kamel, a CS activist in Dhi Qar, talked on Al-Waad local radio about the reality of women in Dhi Qar, and discussed other issues important for women in Iraq and in the province of Dhi Qar in particular.

The majority of outcomes representing influence on the community occurred in 2015, the later part of the program, which again keeps with the overall trend suggesting that it takes time to build capacity and trust and influence in order to bring others to the table.

The BPCS strategy with 67 outcomes that correspond to ***influencing government (or community leader) decisions*** was the most successful in strengthening Iraqi civil society, which in the light of our answers to the second evaluation question above will be no surprise. With its success in influencing change in service delivery across the country, civil society has demonstrated the ability to influence local government (municipality, district and provincial), particularly in relation to water[22] and to a lesser extent, electricity[23]. In addition to improving the quality of many people's lives, this appears to demonstrate (a) local government's openness and willingness to listen and respond to community concerns, as presented by civil society, and (b) the growing ability of civil society to persuade the government to make decisions or take action. It is interesting to note, however, that none of these changes occurred either at the Kurdish regional or national level, which may suggest that civil society is able to have more influence on government service delivery at lower-levels of government.

It is also significant that these changes were brought about through constructive non-violent approaches, e.g. through discussions and dialogues, town hall meetings, presenting research, and the use of traditional and social media. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of these changes were preceded by examples of the provincial government in the south expressing

In the second quarter of 2015, the Qadisiya Provincial Council adopted several civil society recommendations to address the irrational water allocation, which would have left many farmers unable to cultivate their land. These recommendations resulted from a series of dialogue sessions between the Provincial Council Agricultural Committee, the Agricultural Advisor to the Governor, and civil society [21].

[22] [2, 3, 4, 21, 22, 37, 78, 80, 81, 83]

[23] [7, 79, 82, 84, 128]

support and attempting to facilitate civil society work to improve public services. The more responsive the government is seen, the less disgruntled citizens are likely to feel, with implications for reducing conflict and enhancing social cohesion.

Civil society's role in improving government's service delivery potentially enhanced CSOs' credibility in the eyes of the community, as legitimate groups who are able to represent their needs, influence the government and effect change in the community. While not necessarily evident from the outcomes, this could indicate that the government welcomes suggestions and does need more community input in selecting priorities and making resource decisions.

Another strategy that paid off for CSOs was cooperation between the government and civil society, particularly to improve the lives of marginalized and vulnerable people. There has been cooperation around women[24], children[25] and civilian victims of war[26]. Conceivably, the fact that a third of the outcomes that represent government changes are related to vulnerable and marginalized groups, this could be seen as an area of common ground between civil society and the government, with both sectors recognizing that more needs to be done to protect human rights, and more significantly - that this should be done in cooperation.

What may also be significant to note here is that unlike service delivery, which influenced the local level only, cooperation around vulnerable and marginalized groups occurred at all levels of government across the country: sub-district, municipality, provincial council, Kurdish regional and nationally, including in the independent judiciary. We found, however, less cooperation around these issues in the south regarding marginalized and vulnerable people, particularly women. The type of this cooperation varies, and may include expression of support, facilitation of civil society's work, or direct cooperation in developing or supporting legal changes) that relate to the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups

Perhaps cooperation around vulnerable groups is not surprising as it is relatively uncontroversial. There are many CSOs who work with women, children and war victims (at least under BPCS for the latter), and demonstrating concern for these groups is politically safe for the government.

Between October-December 2014, the independent governmental Integrity Commission responsible for fighting corruption sent an official letter to the State Council urging it to accelerate review of a draft law related to freedom of expression prepared by the Council of Ministers (CoM) [46].

While supporting vulnerable and marginalized groups may be politically uncontroversial, freedom of expression is more contentious. Civil society organizations secured some commitment to the right of every individual to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, at least at the national level in late 2014 to early 2015, which they were able to achieve through peaceful means. They were able to secure at least verbal, public commitment to the principle of freedom of expression from national figures [46, 47] and different parties [49, 50], which may indicate multi-party support-- including from

[24] [1, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45, 118, 144, 147, 148]

[25] [33, 36, 38, 39, 40, 147, 148]

[26] [8, 9, 140]

parties who are generally considered more conservative [50]. While this may not be widespread enough to be a strong trend, it is an indication that civil society is able to influence thinking in sensitive areas.

Civil society has been able to influence the practices of tribal [6] and religious leaders [118, 147, 148], something that Iraqi CSOs do not tend to do, and were successful in doing so across sectarian lines. In all cases, the changed practice resulted in the protection of women's rights, and had both immediate [6] and long-term implications [147, 148]. This is encouraging as it demonstrates traditional leaders' openness to listening to civil society and taking action to respond to the issues raised-- even when it results in changing traditional practices. It also demonstrates that civil society recognizes that traditional leaders are very influential in communities and can be agents of change. The fact that changes were made in response to non-confrontational methods, such as roundtables [141, 149], conferences [6] and dialogue [142, 143] again demonstrates the potential to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways. This was particularly significant in the south where civil society's ability to influence tribal practices such as using women as chattel to settle tribal conflicts may indicate greater acceptance of mediation to resolve conflicts [6].

> *In July 2015, for the first time tribal leaders in Basra signed a commitment to no longer use women as currency to settle tribal conflicts. [6]*

In addition to policy advocacy progress on vulnerable and marginalized groups, the evaluation team identified other cases of civil society influencing laws and policies across the country, particularly in the Kurdish region [68-71, 76]. There is evidence of increased openness to civil society input on laws [29, 76], as well as willingness of government decision makers to have their actions and decisions be influenced by civil society views[27]. Most impressive are steps towards creating more transparent government systems that would allow for public scrutiny of public budgets at the provincial level in Baghdad [92] and Basra [155]. Perhaps it is unsurprising that these more challenging wins came towards the end of the program. Nonetheless, traditionally the legal process is murky and often politicized and closed. There are very few CSOs with the technical capacity or clout to influence laws and policy. It is also significant that Kurdish government is using civil society justifications to try to limit political party influence (who many believe have undue influence in the region).

> *In the third quarter of 2014, President Masaud Barzani in Erbil returned unsigned to the Parliament the "law of organizing demonstrations in Kurdistan region of Iraq" number 11, issued in 2010 by the Kurdistan parliament, in 2014, due to the fact that CSOs opposed amending this law. [71]*

In summary, these outcomes influencing government decisions indicate that CSOs can achieve change through non-confrontational means. Securing concrete change (e.g. in service delivery) was most possible at the local (provincial, municipality or district) level, but that it is possible to gain cooperation from other levels of government on other issues (e.g. the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups). It is also encouraging to see examples of civil society influencing tribal and religious leaders, and see that influence can cross sectarian and party lines.

[27] [68, 69, 70, 71]

One important dimension of influencing government decisions was the ***creation of space for citizen participation in government processes***, as also demonstrated in the answers to the second evaluation question. These 18 outcomes represent a movement to adopt the democratic participatory approach, although only one [116] concerns women's rights.

Lastly, BPCS was successful supporting CSOs to serve a ***watchdog function***. This is a good example that the number of outcomes — 9 — does not necessarily correspond to the importance of the change they represent. CSOs are monitoring government performance at the local and national levels, ranging from accessing government information and monitoring government service delivery [112, 59], to producing academic reports on government performance [60], and successfully advocating for inclusion of a watchdog function in new legislation [100]. Furthermore, CSOs have also utilized BPCS skills to organize peaceful demonstrations with tens of thousands of citizens in the center and south of the country to hold government to account that have resulted in the launch of a new set of reforms by Prime Minister Al-Abadi, and in-person meetings between CSOs and the prime minister [109].

In July - September 2015, 15-20 BPCS partners have taken leadership roles in organizing anti-sectarian, pro-reform demonstrations across the center and south of the country. They have coordinated messaging across the country and promoted peaceful assembly during the gatherings. The protests have had such a high level of visibility that PM al-Abadi has held direct discussions with representatives of the protest movement to share information and hear their concerns [109].

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

BPCS has clearly produced some valuable outcomes that point towards both greater civic participation and more participatory government processes. These outcomes can be seen across the country and at different levels of government. From the BPCS program team's perspective, in many ways the number and variety of outcomes surpassed expectations in terms of how much the government would respond to civil society needs and open possibilities for them to participate in government processes. At the very least, the BPCS outcomes demonstrate that change is possible, and that openings do exist, as do the skills necessary to take advantage of them. The challenge in concluding what this means in terms of the overall influence of the program is in understanding whether these outcomes have resulted in an overall change in the status quo, or represent isolated examples.

When drawing conclusions, it is worth remembering that BPCS is not interested in measuring its influence on specific issues such as service delivery, or women's rights per se – but rather how the process of making change has shifted. Project partners were selected more on the basis of (a) their potential capacity and openness to strengthening skills and (b) whether they had a viable plan that responded to general learning objectives. While some effort was made to ensure geographic diversity, the topics selected for advocacy initiatives, for instance, were almost incidental. So, to what do the 148 outcomes add up and what can be learned?

The BPCS program registered progress towards ***four of its intermediate results to foster civic participation*** but with more success in some rather than others. Since the *modus operandi* of BPCS was to achieve outcomes by increasing the institutional capacity of CSOs, this stand alone intermediate result understandably had fewer direct outcomes. Improving the enabling

environment for civil society requires governmental changes of a different magnitude than supporting citizens to engage in a democratic manner and to influence public policies and services. Thus, there were fewer outcomes for this intermediate result. None of this, however, detracts from the BPCS's achievements in mobilizing diverse and marginalized groups to take democratic action, or from the many outcomes of civil society directly influencing decision-making in the different Iraqi governmental institutions. In sum, BPCS supported processes to influence change that cast wide nets, used different approaches to attract people, and did not under-estimate potential interest and goodwill on the part of civil society.

BPCS's influence on the four dimensions of ***participatory government processes*** was more even and the two areas with more outcomes are also changes that are less politically controversial for government: to be equitable, inclusive and responsive so that all sectors of society, but particularly the most vulnerable, have their problems solved and opportunities broadened. Especially at the lower levels of government but also at the national, BPCS influenced outcomes that expanded civic participation in government processes on a range of issues from service delivery to human rights. This implies that government is willing to take on civil society issues, whether they were on the political agenda or not.

Although related, government enabling all sectors to participate in public decision-making and especially to acting in a transparent and accountable manner appear more difficult for government officials. We assume that this is because they require some sharing of power, and structural change.

To achieve these outcomes, BPCS partners employed a variety of non-violent means[28] to influence and engage with government, e.g. roundtables, meetings, lobbying, community activism, research, use of social and traditional media. If program efforts had been focused on specific policy or topical outcomes, potential for impact would be even greater (which was not the case with BPCS, which supported a wide range of organizations and issues as proposed by a variety of CSOs based on their interests, in order to strengthen capacity and transform relationships. Efforts were therefore spread over a variety of policy goals rather than concentrating on a specific policy outcome across the board).

Through its civic participation and governmental outcomes BPCS demonstrated that ***civil society strengthening*** programs can result in important outcomes for citizens, the government and potentially the country as a whole. The principal conclusions from the BPCS experience in generating outcomes that relate to the design of other governance strengthening programs in transitional contexts include:

- *Allow sufficient time for outcomes to emerge*. This is especially true for advocacy outcomes because legislative processes take a long time, and require multi-year programming to complete a full cycle. The achievement of major outcomes can take years, depending on the starting point. The outcome patterns demonstrate that influencing government tends to begin with establishing relationships and trust, and

[28] Typically we refer to "non-confrontational" approaches, however to promote good debate, constructive confrontation can be both necessary and desirable, and therefore should not necessarily be discouraged. In this case, we are emphasizing that the approaches used were non-violent (both physically and verbally).

eliciting expressions of support. Later, this may translate into direct action, and perhaps policy influence.

- *Provide multiple tools*. The outcomes demonstrate that influence can come from a range of activities, e.g. town hall meetings, use of traditional and social media, roundtables, community mobilization, and demonstrations. It is unusual for one action alone to create an outcome. Thus, CSOs need to be equipped with a wide range of tools and skills that can be employed strategically in order to effect the desired change.
- *Create opportunities for collaboration*. Among nascent civil society, organizations do not always consider the benefits of collaboration. The patterns of BPCS outcomes, however, suggest that collaboration is effective. It is important to not only connect groups with similar missions and approaches, but to connect more technical CSOs with specialized expertise, with grassroots organizations that can mobilize large groups of people into action.
- *Consider multiple levels of government*. BPCS partners managed to have influence at many different levels of government, from the municipality to the national level. Each of these serves different purposes and may be appropriate for different types of CSOs. Each level, however, represents a different way for civil society to have influence and demonstrate to their constituents how their voices are being heard by the government.
- *Consider sector-specific technical expertise necessary*. As BPCS was focused on strengthening civil society as a mean to enhancing participatory democracy, the thematic focus of different projects (e.g. human rights) was a secondary priority. Therefore the BPCS team did not have nor invest in technical expertise in areas such as women's rights. This did actually result in negative outcomes, which could have been avoided had the technical team been better versed in these issues.

It should be noted that this evaluation does not highlight the importance of organizational capacity strengthening and technical assistance provided by BPCS to its partners, since the outcomes document the achievements of CSOs but not the process through which they acquired the ability to do what they do so effectively. That should not suggest that these components are not critical elements of capacity strengthening. If the BPCS CSO partners could not operate a professionally-run organization, they would have been unable to achieve what many of the CSOs cited in this report have done.

Usefulness of the Outcome Harvesting methodology for BPCS

The BPCS program has undergone many changes in context, scale and strategy since its original design. Many of the originally planned activities were not implemented, or were re-designed, and many unplanned activities were added to respond to changes and lessons learned. A traditional evaluation comparing results to the original plans of action and objectives would therefore have not been appropriate to capturing all the changes that the program managed to bring about.

The outcomes harvesting methodology allowed the program to capture specific examples of change, organize them by time and location, which helped the team to see patterns and draw conclusions. This proved to be a useful way to start quantifying qualitative aspects of the process of participatory democracy to which BPCS contributed.

This methodology serves as a useful complement to other M&E methodologies used by the program:

- Monitoring of quantitative (mainly output-level) indicators: outcome harvesting complemented this by focusing on outcomes, so that we can better understand the results of the activities conducted, as well as have clear examples of what those results look like.
- Large-scale baseline, midline and endline population surveys of citizen attitudes: outcome harvesting was program-specific so that there is clearer attribution to the program of the changes being observed. It also provides examples of outcomes that may have influenced changes in public opinion observed in the population survey.
- External evaluation carried out by a USAID contractor: outcome harvesting looked backwards at changes, rather than comparing results to original plans. In collecting and substantiating outcomes, it provided an objective way to view results, rather than relying on perceptions.

In addition to understanding what the program had achieved, outcome harvesting directly contributed to improved messaging of the program, as there are specific examples to draw upon to demonstrate the program's contribution. This information has therefore also been used for internal and external communication, and advocacy purposes.

Potential uses for Mercy Corps

BPCS's experience with outcome harvesting reveals many potential uses for Mercy Corps, particularly since its principle-based and flexible approach mesh well with many agency priorities:

- Adaptive management in complex crises: with complexity being a constant part of our landscape, outcome harvesting allows us to look at what happened, even in complex situations. It also means that the outcomes of adaptations of programs can be captured, and the methodology is adaptive by nature.
- Campaign for impact and the 3I's: outcomes harvesting lends itself well to capturing actual examples of changes that can show impact, influence and innovation
- Evidence-based programming: while we traditionally rely more on quantitative data, outcomes harvesting can help serve as a qualitative evidence base with which to design future programs and iterations with more confidence.

There may be potential uses for outcomes harvesting for measuring Mercy Corps' results in challenging and less tangible areas such as resilience, climate change adaptation, and (market) systems change. It could also be employed to identify at country-level outcomes that look beyond program-specific results. The harvest itself lends itself to internal and external communication, and results may be of interest to a wider audience than just program and technical people, but also communications, marketing and advocacy.

While less a use and more of a benefit, outcome harvesting is a practical way to include program stakeholders in program evaluation, where Mercy Corps can consult beneficiaries and other external stakeholders as experts and seek their input and opinion. This in turn helps Mercy Corps demonstrate accountability to those we serve.