



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



INSPIRED BY IRAQ: STORIES OF EMPOWERMENT AND RESILIENCE

TURNING POTENTIAL INTO PROSPERITY



Empowerment is the key to unlocking potential

With this spirit of belief and determination that I share with you the success stories from the “Investment Promotion for Iraq – Phase II” project. This initiative, spanning Baghdad, Thi Qar, Basra, and Erbil in Kurdistan Region, showcases the incredible potential that Iraq holds for private sector and, more importantly, for uplifting its people.

At the heart of Iraq’s progress is one of its greatest assets: its people. The vibrant human capital, including the willfulness of its women, who have increasingly become vital contributors to Iraq’s development. We have worked closely with our beneficiaries, equipping them with training and capacity-building programs that provide the skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to turn potential into prosperity.

Implemented by UNIDO ITPO Italy with the support of the Italian government through Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, this

project has empowered local Enterprise Development Centers (EDCs) to offer top-tier services to both national and international companies, facilitating joint initiatives that drive Iraq’s economic expansion.

The support to the private sector delivered in Iraq further underscores Iraq’s potential as a hub for local and international investments. Our work in fostering international business partnerships, particularly between Iraqi institutions and their Italian counterparts, is laying the groundwork for sustained economic collaboration and growth, thanks also to the dedication of our team of experts and their on-the-ground effort.

As we move forward, these success stories serve as powerful reminders of what can be achieved when we invest in people and their dreams. The path ahead is filled with promise, and together, we can continue to build a prosperous and inclusive future for Iraq.

DIANA BATTAGLIA
Head of UNIDO ITPO Italy





The UNIDO ITPO Italy project “Investment Promotion for Iraq – Phase II” (#IPI) supported by AICS - the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation - promotes investments in Iraq for expanding the role of the private sector, creating employment opportunities and accelerating economic growth.

www.unido.it/IPIraq



OBJECTIVE

To promote investments in Iraq for expanding the role of the private sector, creating employment opportunities and accelerating economic growth.



STAKEHOLDERS & BENEFICIARIES

Iraqi and Italian companies, startups & business associations; Enterprise Development Centers (EDCs); Provincial Investment Commissions & KRG BoI; Iraqi Industrial Zones and relevant ministries.



OUTPUTS

To increase investment promotion capacities, facilitate international business partnerships and improve institutional infrastructures.



PROMOTIONAL TOOLS

Ad-hoc training and workshops; country presentations; study tours, company visits and participation to international fairs in Italy; UNIDO Delegate Programme.



BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Identify local investment and trade opportunities, technology transfer needs, and facilitate linkages with local governmental authorities and private sector associations.

Key Results

50+ training sessions carried out
200+ Iraqi companies involved
1,000+ B2B meetings organized

20+ international fairs and events attended
6,000+ companies reached

Creative, Unapologetic, and born to Inspire

QAMAR AL-KIREMLI QAF



"It started off with an ambitious idea, and a few months later the world saw that idea on the catwalk of one of the most extravagant international fashion hubs in the world."

Creativity and culture converge in the work of Qamar Al-Kiremlı, a multimedia designer born in Baghdad, creator of the QAF brand and passionate young ambassador of Iraqi culture.

After graduating from the College of Architecture, Art, and Design at the American University of Sharjah, UAE, she knew something bigger was waiting for her and pursued her dream of inspiring others through her culture. ***"My lifelong goal has always been to represent Iraq the way I see it: not the way it was imposed on me, but creatively and unapologetically,"*** she says.

Qamar created **QAF concept**, a contemporary clothing brand whose slogan defines her goal: "Made in Iraq to turn heads everywhere". Most of her work is abstract inspiration of Mesopotamian fashion practices, represented through fluidity, layering, color juxtapositions, and curvature outlines, nostalgic of the organic trails of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

"Fashion seemed like a distant dream, it started off with an ambitious idea, and a few months later the world saw that idea on the catwalk of one of the most extravagant international fashion hubs in the world."

Qamar was part of the Iraqi delegation of women invited in Rome by UNIDO ITPO Italy to attend the **Phygital Sustainability Expo® 2024**, the most important event organized by the Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society.

A huge visibility platform, as she was one of the artists who presented their designs in the event's Narrated Fashion Show® in front of hundreds, and

shared her inspiring testimony by joining as panelist the conference session "Iraqi women's stories of fashion, culture and sustainability" which spotlighted women's capabilities in overcoming challenges and achieving their goals.

Flashes of cameras, bright lights, and the applause of the audience accompanied her first professional experience at Trajan's Market at the Museum of the Imperial Fora. ***"Seeing our work displayed on a global platform was not in the cards so early on, but both UNIDO and the Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society believed in my concept and made it happen. Having the privilege of doing so in Rome, was an experience I cherish profoundly; not only was it an incredible professional opportunity, but it was also a catalyst for hope, a hope to see a continuous direction to diversity by embracing Iraq and its capabilities."***

This inspiration was shared by the Iraqi delegation, which included talented and innovative representatives in the field, such as Iraqi House of Fashion and Makers of Baghdad. After the Phygital Sustainability Expo®, thanks to UNIDO all the Iraqi delegates had the opportunity to participate in a study tour in Florence, and expand their knowledge to contribute to sustainable innovation in fashion. Qamar's mission goes beyond fashion, aiming to celebrate her heritage and inspire others to see Iraq through her lens.

"My participation with UNIDO left me a broader perspective, it was an unexpected accelerator to my vision. Debuting QAF Concept was beyond a brand's professional launch, it was my hard launch into the inner workings of the world of fashion", she recalls.

Nurturing the Land, Building a Greener Kurdistan

HAZHA HASSAN AHMED



"This project is important for Iraq because the water scarcity is a big challenge in Iraq and for Kurdistan too, particularly in the agriculture sector."

Hazha Hassan Ahmed was born in Sulaymaniyah, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. As she grew up, she witnessed the struggles of farmers in her community and felt a deep calling to make a difference. As an agricultural engineer specializing in soil sciences and plant nutrition, she has dedicated many years to exploring innovative techniques to enhance soil fertility and revitalize the agriculture sector.

"In many Middle Eastern countries, especially Kurdistan-Iraq, farmers often use poultry waste directly on agricultural land without proper management. This practice has severe negative impacts, including environmental pollution. Poultry waste contains high levels of ammonia, bacteria, and viruses, and leads to the accumulation of heavy metals, which directly affect plant health", she explains.

Driven by her endless curiosity and passion for studying, Hazha pursued an MSc degree in soil science and plant nutrition in Turkey in 2022. This experience inspired her to establish her own factory.

"The idea for the 'Hazha Factory' originated from my master's thesis research. I utilized scientific data on organic biochar fertilizer production and examined its effects on fruit and vegetable production in the agricultural sector. I then decided to implement it as a project in Kurdistan-Iraq, integrating my findings into agribusiness", she shares.

Hazha's thirst for knowledge led her to a one-week technical study tour at CIHEAM Bari, organized by

UNIDO ITPO Italy. ***"As a self-employed individual running my enterprise project, this was a fantastic opportunity. The field visits were particularly impactful, especially the treated wastewater project in Bari. The techniques used to treat and convert it into usable irrigation water were impressive. It was also my first journey to Europe for studying, and I learned a great deal and connected with project owners from Iraq and Italy."***

Hazha and the delegates explored smart water management, advanced innovations, and digital solutions for efficient irrigation, as well as investments in organic agriculture value chains that could be applied to her project.

"This project is crucial for Iraq, where water scarcity poses a significant challenge, particularly in the agriculture sector."

Other inspiring initiative involved producing organic fertilizer from various wastes, processing these wastes into compost, and converting the separated liquid waste into natural gas.

"My aspiration is to guide more farmers in applying organic fertilizers instead of chemical ones, preserving our land against contamination" she says, reflecting her profound commitment and dedication to sustainable agriculture through an innovative approach. She seeks to transform agricultural practices for her community, retributing to the very land that nurtured her as she grew, ensuring its vitality for future generations.

Cooking Dreams: a Food Innovator from Basra

HIND YOUSIF KADHIM AL-ZAIDI



"The feasibility study enabled me to obtain official approvals to convert the kitchen into a company and the possibility to provide employment."

In 2010, Hind Yousif Kadhim Al-Zaidi embarked on a modest home-based cooking and catering project in her house in Basra. Initially, her only clients were supportive friends and family. Fourteen years later, she is cooking up success. Now a seasoned entrepreneur, Hind runs two thriving companies in Basra and has her sights set on expanding across Iraq.

Akel Ahelna Kitchen, which means "our people's food" in Arabic, is the name of her venture. What began as organized food deliveries to customers' doorsteps has now evolved into a successful restaurant.

"It started as a small woman-led project, catering a few kinds of food and fulfilling special requests on my own. Then, I joined the first Training of Entrepreneurs (TOE) course at the UNIDO Enterprise Development Center (EDC) Basra in 2013, where I learned invaluable insights about management, business planning, and marketing. Also, my participation in fairs in Milan and Rimini, Italy, in 2014 and 2015 helped me keep up with the latest technologies in foodstuff catering and cooking equipment," she says.

As orders began to pour in, Hind could no longer keep up with the growing demand. She hired a few women workers and rented a house in a bustling commercial area, transforming it into her first real workspace, where she began preparing ready meals and frozen food for a nearby hospital. ***"In this second phase of the Iraq project, the EDC in Basra presented me with a***

free feasibility study, enabling me to obtain official approvals to convert the kitchen into a company and providing the opportunity to offer employment. This allowed me to employ 14 people and secure numerous contracts," she details.

Building on the success of her first project, Hind established AL SEEMAA Company with her brother. This company caters to the oil & gas, defense, NGOs, and construction sectors, as well as government directorates, providing them with fresh meals and fruits. ***"We prepare around 1,000 portions daily, with each portion representing a moment of nourishment, comfort, and care."***

Today AL SEEMAA offers services of the highest quality, employing dozens of workers in the food supplies & catering sector. The company's growth includes an 8% revenue increase, an 11% return on investment, and 4% in cost savings. AL SEEMAA also provides housekeeping, laundry, and gardening services for both national and foreign companies.

"We've built something meaningful, something powerful. We are looking to establish new branches in different regions of Iraq," she says with eyes set on the future. Hind Kadhim has transformed from home cooking to industry leader, and continues to uphold high quality standards and safety in all her business operations, inspiring others to follow in her footsteps and pursue their own culinary dreams.

Sewing her Way to Global Ambitions

IKHLAS AHMED MEHD



"Soon I found myself improving with each piece I made. I developed myself after suffering in all aspects of life."

Her atelier is filled with colorful fabrics, patterns, and sketches of her latest designs. The versatility of her creations ranges from an elegant wedding dress adorned with fine embroidery and sparkling embellishments to playful outfits for the youngest members of the family. This vibrant space reflects the heart of Ikhlas Ahmed Mehdi's journey — a journey that began in 2019 with a small space in her home, dedicated to meeting the needs of local women in her district. Today, Ikhlas, creator of **"Flower"**, is a well-known fashion designer in Basra, with her sights set on international recognition.

"After participating in the UNIDO EDC TOE course 2022 and many seminars, my name began to be well-known in Basra. Now, my wish is to visit Italy and learn from its high-fashion industry."

Ikhlas's career in fashion began almost by chance, in 2019. What started as a hobby, sewing dresses for ladies in her district, soon blossomed into something bigger. With just a sewing machine and a few basic tools, she taught herself the craft, relying on online tutorial videos and her innate creativity. ***"It was just for fun at first,"*** she recalls, ***"but soon I found myself improving with each piece I made."*** Little did she know that those early days of trial and error would unexpectedly become the keystone of her career.

However, the road wasn't easy. ***"I developed myself after suffering in all aspects of life,"*** she says, reflecting on the challenges she faced during Iraq's turbulent times. Despite the difficulties, Ikhlas's determination to hone her skills never wavered. She spent countless hours learning the complexities of design, from sketching and sourcing textiles to mastering the art of pattern making. Slowly, her

hobby began to generate income, and she realized that this could grow into a profitable business.

She knew how to turn her inspiration into a concept and was ready to elevate it to the next level. She presented her project to the United Nations and secured resources that allowed her to expand her workshop, equipping it with the necessary tools and machines to create more sophisticated designs.

"UNIDO staff in Basra helped me to acquire a grant from IOM, which allowed me to purchase modern computerized sewing and embroidery machines."

These machines enabled her to produce high-quality evening dresses, uniforms, and more, elevating her brand's status in the local market. ***"I started developing collections for institutes and universities, including graduation gowns,"*** she explains. She began to make a name for herself, but she knew she needed more than just technical skills to grow her business.

In 2022, she participated in the UNIDO Basra EDC training course (TOE), where she learned about business planning, innovation, and marketing. This training was a turning point for Ikhlas. ***"After the seminars, I understood how to market and trade between businesses, and my name became well-known in Basra,"*** she shared. The training also inspired her to enhance her presence on social media, reaching a broader audience and becoming more competitive.

Now, her ambitions extend beyond Basra. ***"I want to transform my workshop into a company with official approvals so that I can participate in international fairs. My dream is to visit Italy and learn from its renowned fashion industry, to bring a piece of that world back to Iraq,"*** she concludes with determination.

A Mechanic's Path to Industrial Prowess

MUNDHER ABDULKHALEQ JASIM AL-MARHOON



"My goal is to further enhance my operations through automation, pushing the boundaries of what my company can achieve."

In the heart of Basra, Mundher Abdulkhaleq Jasim Al-Marhoon started a small workshop. Working alone with simple tools and manual equipment, he has now turned it into **Al-Marhoon Company for Mechanical Works**, a key player in the local industry.

Despite the challenges, Mundher's passion for machining, fabrication, and structural work never stopped. 2013 marked a turning point in his career as he joined UNIDO's Training of Entrepreneurs (TOE) course. This opportunity opened doors to invaluable knowledge about management, business planning, and financial analysis. Armed with these newfound skills, Mundher's perspective shifted. His participation in international fairs in Taiwan, Turkey, and Iran, organized by UNIDO and the Basra Chamber of Industry, exposed him to global standards and innovations in his field.

With a clear goal in mind, Mundher acquired a workplace in the industrial zone, transforming his small workshop into a large, well-equipped facility. New lathe machines, electric tools, and a team of skilled workers marked the beginning of **"Al-Marhoon Company for Mechanical Works"**. The feasibility study conducted by Basra EDC in the second phase provided

critical insights and the official approvals needed to formalize his business.

Today, Al-Marhoon Company stands as a testament to Mundher's relentless drive and dedication, with a revenue growth of 6% and cost savings of over 8%. Employing twelve technicians and workers, the company specializes in manufacturing unique spare parts for tracks and vehicles, addressing the market's critical needs for components that have no substitutes. Mundher's expertise extends to repairing intricate and damaged machine parts, ensuring the smooth operation of production lines for foreign oil companies.

"I'm looking to the future now; I would like to participate in Italian fairs to acquire cutting-edge CNC machines and equipment. My goal is to further enhance my operations through automation, pushing the boundaries of what my company can achieve."

Mundher's journey from a solitary mechanic to the leader of a thriving company is a poignant reminder of what can be accomplished with passion, knowledge, and relentless perseverance.

The Road to a Greener Iraq

HUSHAM ABDULZAHRA HUSSAIN ALNAHI



"It wasn't just about expanding; it was about making a meaningful contribution to our environment."

Husham Abdulzahra Hussain Alnahi is at the forefront of Iraq's battle against environmental degradation and desertification. As the founder of **Huqool Al-Taqa Company**, he leads efforts in waste recycling, environmental services, and sustainable agriculture, making significant contributions to Iraq's ecological future.

Husham's connection to nature dates back to his childhood, where he spent hours exploring the land. This early fascination with the environment deeply influenced his career.



His journey as an entrepreneur began in 2012 with a small project providing anpower for local contracts. Initially focused on basic services, his vision quickly expanded. The company's growth into an innovative and influential force was driven by his participation in the Training of

Entrepreneurs (TOE) and international fairs organized by the Basra UNIDO Enterprise Development Center (EDC). This extensive program covered key areas such as business planning, marketing strategies, and sustainable development practices.

"The training gave me the tools to think bigger and act smarter. As a result, we achieved a growth of 15% and a return on investment of 18%," he states.

Iraq faces a critical environmental crisis with desertification and land degradation: according to the Iraqi Ministry of Environment, only 14 million dunams of land remain suitable for farming.

And precisely, one of **Huqool Al-Taqa's** key initiatives is combating this desertification through afforestation and agricultural investment. Husham and his team cultivate vegetation that improves soil quality and resists the encroachment of deserts. In addition, the company runs a factory for processing and canning agricultural crops, ensuring that food production meets the highest industrial standards and minimizes waste.

The Company not only recycles waste but also provides comprehensive environmental impact assessments, helping project owners mitigate negative effects on both the environment and their workers, fostering sustainable development in Iraq.

"Our company contributed to planting 4,500 coastal mangrove seedlings on the Iraqi coasts, which will significantly reduce the impact of carbon emissions. It wasn't just about expanding; it was about making a meaningful contribution to our environment."

This initiative supports efforts to combat climate change, mitigate the effects of global warming, and create new habitats for biodiversity, while developing tourism.

A Blend of Tradition, Color, and Modernity

MARWA IMAD ATWAN



"I try to reflect the natural beauty of Iraqi women in every piece I create."

"I've always believed in the beauty of handmade work, but I never expected my hobby to become a source of pride for both me and my community," says Marwa Imad Atwan, a talented accessory designer from Basra.

Gems, stones, crystals, and pearls are beautifully arranged in her vibrant and colorful workshop. Each piece patiently waiting to be carefully crafted and transformed into unique jewelry for her upcoming orders. Her passion for design was evident early on.

She nostalgically recalls how it all began in 2003, when she spent her free time at home crafting bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and other accessories, and sharing them with friends and family.

"For me, every piece is a reflection of who we are as people: our history, our resilience, our beauty. It's part of my essence too."

Marwa's turning point came after attending several seminars alongside 20 other participants. The events were organized by the UNIDO EDC Basra center. ***"The guidance and support from the center allowed me to turn my hobby into a growing business. I gained the tools and, most importantly, the confidence in myself and my talent,"*** she explains.

The free economic feasibility study gave Marwa the financial, technical, and risk insights she needed to expand both her product line and her sales strategy.

"I began focusing more on craftsmanship and launched my Al-Fayrouz Accessories website on social media. I also participated in charity markets, and soon

my name started to spread across the province. I began selling my products online and during seasonal events."

Al-Fayrouz, meaning "turquoise" in Arabic, now boasts over 7,000 followers on Instagram. The variety of creations are delivered across Iraq, ranging from minimalist bracelets to elegant pearl purses for special occasions. Every accessory is sent in carefully crafted, detailed packaging, a reflection of the care and quality that empowers her brand.

"This support helped me participate in local and national festivals. I had the honor of being recognized by the Ambassador of the Italian Republic to Iraq and the Embassy Commercial Attaché in July 2023, something I never imagined years ago."

Twenty years later, Marwa is ready to take her business to a new stage. She plans to adopt modern technology to automate production and incorporate silver and precious stones into her designs. Her vision is to venture into luxurious collections while preserving the charm and authenticity that define her work.

"My goal has always been to create something that resonates with people. Every piece tells a story, and each one has its own personality. But it's not only about me, I want to share prosperity and provide jobs for others as I grow." she ends.

The Colors of Hope and Determination

TAQWA IMAD ATWAN



"Art, in its essence, connects people and builds bridges, and we need that in this global context."



Taqwa Imad Atwan is an English teacher by profession and artist by heart. Her connection with paints and brushes began when she was a child. As she grew, abstract art transformed into a personal escape, and there was no turning back. Her passion immersed her in a world of colors, textures, and forms, fueled by an insatiable curiosity

to explore further. Despite not having formal art education, she developed her skills through dedicated self-teaching, relentless practice and constant exploration.

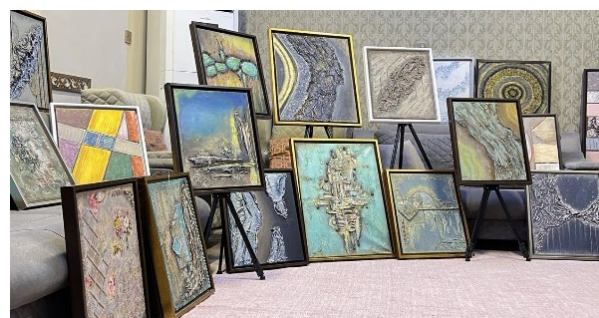
Determined to refine her craft and reach a wider audience, she participated in a series of seminars at UNIDO EDC in Basra. The training expanded her career, unlocking doors and opportunities. Not only did it offer technical guidance, but it also provided a supportive community that inspired Taqwa to elevate her art from a hobby to a professional career.

"I began transitioning into a professional artist and created a platform on social media called Contemporary Art," she recalls. "Suddenly, my work started to thrive."

Her talent soon caught attention, and in 2023, her paintings were chosen to be displayed on the Logos Hope, an international floating library ship that docked in Basra. Among many artists, her abstract pieces stood out, captivating viewers and cultural figures alike.

"I feel truly happy when I see people contemplating my art. They stand for a long time in front of my paintings. I wonder how they interpret it; sometimes we exchange thoughts, and that is immensely fulfilling."

Opportunities continued to unfold as her art made its way into exhibitions across Basra and Baghdad, including a personal showcase at the Palace of Culture and Arts and the Artists Syndicate. One of her proudest moments was being recognized by the Ambassador of Italy to Iraq and the Embassy Commercial Attaché.



Taqwa's inspiration comes in unexpected moments – in nature, by the sea or even while walking. She experiments with all kinds of materials: sand, plant leaves, stem bark, dye stuff, iron fillings, special tissue paper to create anthropomorphic pictures.

"One of my dreams is to showcase my art internationally. Participating in an Italian fair for modern art and presenting my paintings would be a profound honor. Art, in its essence, connects people and builds bridges, and we need that in this global context."

Being an artist takes courage and risk, which is why Taqwa is already planning her next steps. "Now I'm looking forward to establishing a commercial salon where I can sell my paintings, as well as provide tools and materials for other abstract artists. I'm positive and open to the opportunities that will arise. I know it's a long journey and I'm ready to walk it," she concludes.

A Water Tech Innovator

ALAA ABDULKAREEM TAHER



“After participating in the training courses and meeting global corporations, the work plans have been adjusted to align with the global development observed at the international fairs that I attended.”

Alaa Abdulkareem Taher has dedicated his career to improving water technology in Iraq, transforming challenges into opportunities for growth and innovation. He began his journey in 1997 as an employee at a Russian company specialized in electrical energy in Nasiriyah. His true calling, however, emerged in 2004 when he founded **Al-Kawthar Water Technologies Company** – a small venture that focused on selling water technical materials imported from neighboring countries.

Despite the initial success, Alaa’s ambitions extended far beyond what his company was achieving. Recognizing the limitations of traditional methods, he sought ways to expand and modernize his operations. This search led him to the services and programs offered by UNIDO. ***“My participation in the UNIDO project played a fundamental role in transforming my work,”*** he explained. ***“Before, our methods were outdated, and our reach was limited. But the training courses and international exhibitions opened my eyes to the possibilities of integrating global innovations into our business.”***

Through UNIDO’s support, Alaa gained invaluable insights into project management and development. His exposure to international fairs like Ecomondo and Key Energy enabled him to secure an agency with the Swedish company Momento, acquire advanced

machinery, and incorporate cutting-edge technologies into his operations. This evolution led to the creation of **Al Aswar General Contracting Company**, a comprehensive water technology and recycling enterprise.

Alaa’s Company is not only a leader in the installation, supply, and recycling of water purification systems and pumps, but is also a symbol of progress in Iraq’s water industry. He now employs 10 skilled workers and focuses on developing specialized treatment stations for water and sewage. He aims to present these innovations to both public and private sectors.

Driven by a clear vision of aligning Iraq’s industry with global standards, Alaa is committed to continuing his work in advancing water technology. He plans to diversify his offerings by incorporating renewable energy sources into water treatment solutions, ensuring a more sustainable and eco-friendly approach. ***“We are now working with new technologies, and sales have increased significantly. Our future plans include further improving specialized treatment stations and expanding our reach in the industry,”*** he concluded. Alaa’s vision extends beyond his Thi Qar’s growth; he is determined to be a key player in shaping a sustainable future for Iraq’s water resources.

The Road to Lasting Impact

ANWER HUSSEIN LAFTA - JAWDAT AL-TAWASOL CO.



"It's about embracing every challenge with a clear purpose; I knew that to grow."

Anwer Hussein Lafta is the founder of **Jawdat Al-Tawasol Co.**, a company that began as a modest workshop for repairing small electric generators. In 1992, freshly graduated from the Vocational Industrial School, Anwer launched his business with just one employee. The workshop was small, but his vision was expansive.

The path forward was challenging, but Anwer embraced each hurdle as an opportunity. In 2008, he discovered the UNIDO program, a crucial moment in his journey. **"Through participation in UNIDO projects, we have acquired various professional skills such as effective planning, continuous innovation, efficient resource management, implementation of flexible strategies, and prompt response to market changes,"** Anwer reflected.

Determined to elevate his business, he enrolled in the TOE courses, immersing himself in lessons on bookkeeping, communication, feasibility studies, and marketing. These courses were not just educational; they were transformative, equipping him with the tools to expand his horizons.

With the knowledge gained, Anwer's business began to evolve rapidly. What started as a single workshop blossomed into four major projects: a fuel-filling station, a general contracting company, a car washing

and lubrication station, and a complex for selling construction and electrical materials. These ventures now employ over 35 workers, turning Anwer's small operation into a thriving enterprise.

For this entrepreneur, growth was about much more than just financial success. **"This journey wasn't just about building a business; it was about making a real impact,"** he said. The skills he acquired didn't just improve his business operations; they shaped his entire approach to life. **"On a personal level, my abilities and knowledge have improved, leading to valuable experience and the adoption of a new lifestyle focused on seizing opportunities with perseverance and passion for success"** he said, highlighting the impact of his journey.

Anwer remains focused on continued growth and contribution. He envisions expanding his fuel-filling station into a full-service logistics hub, and his contracting company into one of the leading firms in Iraq. His plans are clear: to further develop his existing projects, explore new opportunities, and continue making a meaningful difference in his community. **"It's about embracing every challenge with a clear purpose,"** he remarks. For him, the journey is ongoing, driven by a relentless pursuit of progress and a commitment to building a future that matters.

Empowering Women, Preserving Heritage

ANAM SHAALAN MOHAISEN – SHATHRAT



“Empowering these women to stand on their own is my proudest achievement.”

The story of Anam Shaalan Mohaisen is one of resilience, love, and empowerment.

A mother of four and the driving force behind **Shathrat**, a workshop that has redefined the art of sewing Iraqi folkloric costumes. Her journey began at the age of 19, with a single sewing machine in her home. When her husband lost his job and remained unemployed for nine years, Anam began using her mom’s sewing machine to make men’s clothing. This provided a crucial source of income to support her growing household, which soon included three children. Just as her husband found a new job and the situation seemed to be improving, he suffered an accident that left him confined to a wheelchair.



“I became his main supporter and caregiver, and my sewing work helped cover the expenses of his medical care and our life.”

With no time to lose and despite the challenges, she dedicated herself to learning and took sewing courses to master her craft. With each garment she created, her dream of expanding her work grew stronger. But it

wasn’t until she discovered UNIDO’s training courses that her vision began to take shape. ***“Those courses opened my eyes to the possibilities beyond my home,”*** she reflects.

With newfound confidence and the support of UNIDO consultants, Anam established Shathrat, a workshop specialized in modernizing Iraqi folkloric clothing. This was only the beginning of her journey: through her collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), she secured a grant that helped her workshop flourish.

But Anam’s mission extends far beyond fashion. Shathrat has become a haven for widows and divorced women in her community. She took them under her wing, offering trainings in sewing, machine maintenance, embroidery, all while empowering them to gain independence.

“Over the past five years, I have trained over 450 women, helping them build their skills and providing a pathway to financial freedom.” Her trainees don’t just develop skills; they gain the confidence to start their own businesses, and some even secured loans to launch their projects.

One of her proudest achievements was her collaboration with the Thi Qar Textile Factory, where she arranged employment for 75 women that she personally trained. These women underwent nine months of free training before being employed at the factory; their skills helped boosting sales by 25% and revenue by 20%, while cutting costs by 50%.

Shathrat is a symbol of strength, resilience, and sorority. ***“Empowering these women to stand on their own is my proudest achievement, because each of them represents my own story”***, she concludes.

Seeds of Determination

TAVGA AMIN ISMAEL



"In every seed, I saw potential — not just for growth, but for creating something lasting and meaningful."



In the vibrant city of Erbil, Tavga Amin Ismael, a 37-year-old graduate from the College of Management and Economics at Salahaddin University, faced a common challenge: the scarcity of opportunities in her chosen field. However, what could have been a moment of defeat turned into the beginning of something significant. Tavga's love for nature, a passion she had nurtured since childhood, began to grow roots in her mind as the answer to her uncertain future.

In 2010, driven by a dream and a profound connection to the earth, Tavga founded **Akasia Nursery and Plants**, a small nursery in Erbil. It was a modest beginning, but one filled with hope and determination. **"In every seed, I saw potential — not just for growth, but for creating something lasting and meaningful,"** she says.

Tavga often said this as she cared for the delicate plants that would eventually become the heart of her business.

The early days of Akasia were filled with hard work and learning. Tavga poured her heart into every plant, nurturing not just their growth but also the dreams of a greener, more beautiful world.

Her efforts did not go unnoticed. As the nursery began to thrive, her vision continued to grow and take shape. By 2013, Akasia had sprouted new branches across Erbil and even reached into Baghdad, bringing life and color to countless homes and public spaces.

But Tavga's dreams did not stop at Iraq's borders. With the support of UNIDO, she began to cultivate international connections, forging partnerships with foreign horticultural companies.

These collaborations opened new doors, allowing her to expand her knowledge and access new resources. One particularly impactful experience was her participation in UNIDO's webinar with CERMAC in June 2022. It was followed by the prestigious EIMA International Exhibition in Bologna in November 2022. **"Every connection, every new piece of knowledge, is like adding another layer to the garden of my dreams,"** Tavga reflects.

A Vision Forged in Metal

ARAM AZIZ AMAR



"Staying and building here is my way of giving back to the land that raised me."

Aram Aziz Omar, born in 1986 in Erbil, Iraq, grew up surrounded by the sounds and sparks of his family's blacksmith shop. At just 18 years old, he began working in the family business, but the dream that ignited in him was far bigger than what his family had ever envisioned. With a keen eye for potential, Aram started collecting scraps of steel fences, refurbishing them, and selling them as newly restored pieces. This simple yet ingenious idea marked the beginning of a transformative path.

The road was fraught with challenges. The business landscape was tough and Aram, young and inexperienced, faced doubts about whether he could succeed. Overwhelmed by the difficulties, he even contemplated the idea of leaving his country to seek opportunities abroad. However, a heartfelt conversation with his father changed everything.

"Your country needs a strong young man like you to work hard in order to develop," his father told him. These words ignited a renewed sense of determination in Aram, and he decided to stay and fight for his dream.

In 2010, he took part in several UNIDO activities, including SPX Benchmarking and Training of Entrepreneurs. These opportunities equipped him with the tools and knowledge to advance his business. Aram began by expanding his father's blacksmith shop into a larger operation that specialized in producing steel fences. His efforts soon paid off, as his business grew steadily over the years.

"There were days when I thought I had reached my limit, but I would look around at the team, at the work we had already done, and I knew we couldn't stop," Aram reflects. ***"Every challenge taught me how to push beyond my doubts."***

Aram's dedication extended beyond fences. Over time, his operations expanded to include four factories covering 10,000 m², catering to high-demand sectors like military installations and stadiums. He also established a facility specializing in laser-cut steel plates and ventured into the iron trade, importing high-quality materials to support the construction of a stronger Kurdistan.



Today, Aram's factories are a pillar of industrial growth in his region. His work not only sustains his business, but also contributes significantly to the local economy and infrastructure. The story of Aram reflects the strength of persistence, where every challenge became a stepping stone towards building a better future for his homeland.

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