



## SUCCESS STORY

# Radio Gives Women a Voice

### An independent radio station gives women a voice and jobs



Photo: USAID/Jessica Morse

A woman from Halabja broadcasts a song that blends Spanish flamenco rhythms with Kurdish words. Her first job outside the home gives her independence and a public voice.

***The women who work at Iraq's first independent radio station are redefining their community's understanding of freedom as they broadcast music and talk shows championing the rights of women.***

After suffering decades of oppression, the Kurdish city of Halabja can now hear the sounds of freedom through a new radio station supported by USAID and operated by local women. The independent radio station, which is devoted to women's programming, has quickly become the most popular in the city. Its founder joked that the station is not popular only because it has the clearest signal in the city. Rather, people like it "because we are independent," she explained. "There are no political parties associated with it and no foreign powers guiding or dictating it." The station has no director: the all-female staff elects a three-person directing committee from among themselves to design the programs.

For Halabja, this newfound freedom of expression stands in stark contrast to the past. When Saddam Hussein attacked Kurdish populations with chemical and biological weapons, Halabja was hit especially hard. Those who survived the attacks remember March 16, 1998 as the worst day in the city's history.

Started in June 2005, the station began by playing music but is increasingly moving towards radio formats that give women a voice in public life. It has obtained a talk show license and the staff is currently writing programs to educate women on political issues such as constitutional rights, as well as subjects that are not usually discussed openly, such as family planning. The station also plans to introduce an off-the-air hotline where women can call in to discuss solutions to their problems.

The 15 or so women who accepted a job outside their homes to work at the radio said their goal is to serve women and address the problems they face. "Before the radio station, I didn't have anything, not even my self-confidence," said a woman in her twenties who serves on the station's directing committee. "I now give my knowledge and experience to other women and help them emerge from their houses and discover themselves."

The radio station is one of nearly 4,000 community development programs that USAID has implemented throughout Iraq.