

TV and online training seminar aims to equip women with the skills to make a bigger contribution to Iraqi journalism output.

2008, Institute for Women and War reporting

Around 50 women journalists from the south of Iraq gathered in the northern city of Sulaimaniyah in June for training in television reporting and online journalism.

The majority of the trainees attending the course, which was part of the ongoing Women's Media Initiative project, came from the southern city of Basra.

The training session, which had a strong practical emphasis, was conducted by experienced and award-winning journalists.

"Our aim is to empower Iraqi women journalists and to hone their journalistic skills to meet the needs of a multimedia environment," said Hiwa Osman, the IWPR country director in Iraq.

The main aim of the training was to create media teams that would be able to return to their areas and publish and broadcast compelling local stories that will add to and enrich the complex narrative of Iraq.

The TV training course looked at the various stages involved in developing a broadcast-quality film.

Participants were taught how to develop an idea; research a story; the basics of using a camera; writing to pictures; picture editing; and the ethics of broadcast journalism.

The trainees were split into small teams and worked on different stories in Sulaimaniyah. About seven short features were films were produced during the training session.

Rasha Adnan, a reporter from Basra, who works for al-Sumaria TV and Radio Sawa, said this was the first time she's attended a course in which theory and practice were combined and delivered by Iraqi trainers. "This is much better for us," she said.

Reporter Samah Samad from Kirkuk agreed. "The content of the training was new to me. [And] formerly we were being trained by foreign trainers who had a western perspective. But this time the trainers had an Iraqi perspective," she said.

Parallel to the TV training, IWPR ran an online journalism course, which provided instruction in subjects such as writing for the web, blogging, using the web as a medium for networking, photography, and producing and presenting audio and visual material.

Saba al-Asadi from Karbala said she'd never previously used the internet to help her research stories nor considered illustrating online reports with audio and video material.

Al-Asadi runs a women's website in the Karbala. She added that she will take the training material and her new skills back to Karbalaa and share them with her colleagues.

Iraq is the world's most dangerous place for journalists. In the last two years, several brave women journalists have lost their lives in the course of their work.

But an IWPR trainee told the training session that she remained committed to her work despite the risks. She said the TV training would help her report on her own more, which she prefers as she feels safer when she keeps a low profile.

Osman said the training session served an important role in helping women journalists improve and consolidate their skills, so that they can significantly increase their contribution to Iraqi journalism output.

"Unfortunately, telling the story of Iraq in the media has been left almost exclusively to men. We want to help address that imbalance," he said.