**Schriftelijke Vraag dd. 20/11/23 van S. Joosen:** Bijlage

**Iraaks Koerdistan - Economische samenwerking**

**Project proposal**

**Opportunities for developing economic cooperation**

**between Flanders and Iraqi Kurdistan**

1. **History**

Thanks to the financial support of the Flemish Government, Voka – Chamber of Commerce

and Industry Antwerp-Waasland could realize a successful project in Erbil, Iraqi-Kurdistan

from May 2017 till November 2019.

Where the main aim was to transfer the plato methodology to two key business support organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan, namely the local Chamber of Commerce and the Rwanga Foundation, the results can be considered more than excellent. Our local partners developed 2 plato working groups with +/- 15 to 25 participants which met 10 times; with 2 Iraqi-Kurdish plato coaches/mentors and several invited experts. The topics of interest where chosen by the local entrepreneurs-participants with animated exchanges of experiences.

We had the pleasure to welcome two delegations from Iraqi-Kurdistan to the Flemish region, introducing them to our companies and our expertise and went on a b2b-mission with Flemish entrepreneurs to Erbil.

Our networks hence include both political and business people at the highest level.

1. **New joined project proposal to be implemented with partners in Iraqi-Kurdistan**

After consultation of various local partners in Iraqi Kurdistan, we see that they are definitely open for new joined projects. Hence we would like to make the following new proposal.

* 1. **Implementation period**: 2 years (24 months)
  2. **Proposed starting date:** September 2021
  3. **Aim:**

This project aims to build further on excellent contacts and project results achieved with the implementation of the plato project with business support organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan in the period of May 2017 – November 2019. This project, financed by the Flemish Government, focused on transferring to Iraqi Kurdistan plato as a successful method for setting up learning networks between SMEs.

We identified some interesting new themes for a continued cooperation between Flemish and Iraqi Kurdish public and private institutions.

1) to transfer best practices from Flanders in following three specific sectors:

* Organic agri-food production and distribution / exports
* Waste management and eco-friendly production
* Supporting female entrepreneurship

2) to hold a regular dialogue on economic cooperation between Flanders and Iraqi Kurdistan via economic committee meetings including representatives of KRG & Flemish administration

**2.4 Partners** :

Aim of this new project is to engage again as partners in Iraqi Kurdistan some strong business support organizations, such as the Erbil Chamber of Commerce and industry and Rwanga Foundation and, as a new partner, the WEO – Women Empowerment Organization.

The Erbil Chamber of Commerce and Industry ([www.erbilchamber.org.en](http://www.erbilchamber.org.en)) would be more interested in the topic of waste management and the dialogue meetings.

The Rwanga Foundation, with its expertise in trainings, seems like the ideal partner for the topic of organic agri-food trainings. See also [www.rwanga.org](http://www.rwanga.org)

The Women Empowerment Organisation is a non-governmental, independent, non-profit organization with an ample expertise and focus on women entrepreneurial development and covering areas such as Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah amongs others. See [www.weoiraq.org/about.html](http://www.weoiraq.org/about.html) The former project manager of the Rwanga Foundation is the new director of the WEO and has delivered excellent work in the past.

More information can be found on their respective websites or via their annual reports.

Furthermore, also representatives from the KRG government should be included in the economic meetings or open dialogues.

1. **Activities to be implemented and results to be achieved**
   1. **Start-up meeting in Erbil**

In order to work out a fixed planning for the timing of the implementation of activities mentioned below and the role of Iraqi Kurdish partners, project coordinators of Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland will visit Erbil in the first months of the project, e.g. in September or October 2021.

Expected output: table with periods (months) for realizing main events in this project

(e.g. study visits to Flanders, thematic conferences in Erbil, etc.)

* 1. **Joined Flemish Iraqi Kurdish Economic Committee meetings**

This project aims to bring together +/- 4 times in the project period (= once per 6 months) representatives of KRG, the Flemish administration and Flemish and Iraqi Kurdish project partners. These meetings could take place during the above scheduled study visits in Flanders and in Iraqi Kurdistan. But, if this would be more opportune in a certain period, they could be organized also online via ZOOM or Teams, two platforms often used by Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland.

During these meetings Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland could present results of ongoing work in the project and also allow Flemish and Iraqi Kurdish public administrations to exchange views on certain economic topics of interest. Each of these meetings will have an agenda agreed on beforehand in order to maximize efficiency and results.

The KRG Representation in Belgium informed Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland about their interest to include in these joined economic committee meetings some representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Planning as well as of Kurdistan investment board.

* 1. **Activities around the three themes**

**Theme 1: Organic agri-food production and distribution / exports**

Flanders has a long tradition in implementing research in the field of organic production and the Flemish Administration has worked out a strategic plan for this sector. Flanders knows also several experienced sectoral organizations stimulating organic agri-food production and distribution in Flanders. A mapping of these important organizations shows following list:

NOBL (<https://www.nobl.be/>) **- Network for Organic Food and Farming Research**

BioForum Flanders (<https://www.bioforum.be/>

CCBT (Coordination Centre for applied research and extension on organic agriculture) (<https://www.ccbt.be/?q=node/179>)

Flemish Centre for Agriculture and Fishery Marketing (<https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlam/>)

Farmers Union (<https://www.boerenbond.be/over-ons>)

Fevia (Federation of the Belgian Food Industry) (<https://www.fevia.be/nl/over-fevia>)

Flanders: Department Agriculture & Fisheries (<https://lv.vlaanderen.be/nl/bio/>)

BelOrta (<https://belorta.be/>) – Cooperative & auction selling of agricultural products

Flanders Food (<https://www.flandersfood.com/>) – platform for stimulating innovative and sustainable agri-food industries.

Spread over the project period, following activities could be organized in order to transfer best practices from these organizations to key public and private organizations and policy makers in Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Activity 1.1. Study visit - meetings in Flanders with agri-food organizations**

Proposed timing: study visit of 3 days

Invited persons: 3 persons from Iraqi Kurdish organizations offering trainings or other activities & services for stimulating organic agri-food production

Programme: visits to & presentations by the Flemish organizations listed above, whereby also other specific organizations could be visited in line with priorities of Iraqi Kurdish partners (E.g. expertise for equipping agri- food control laboratories and running their operations).

Results to be achieved:

Visiting Iraqi Kurdish partners & representatives engage themselves to present via different channels (websites, meetings, written publications) some main findings resulting from the study visit and inform Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland of these initiatives with copies, links of online publications etc. Hereby, they mention the financial support of the Flemish Government for this study visit. The outcome of this study visit needs to offer also useful inputs for the organization of a conference in Erbil (see Act. 1.2.)

**Activity 1.2. Conference in Erbil on organic production with involvement of some key Flemish organizations, followed by a study visit**

Proposed timing: Conference (1 day)

Study visit (2 days)

Invited persons: 2 project staff of Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland

3 staff members of Flemish public / private organic agri-food organizations & Flemish administration

Programme:

1. Conference (1 day)

Iraqi Kurdish partners organize this conference in their conference rooms or, if needed due to large number of participants, in an external venue. Aim is to have minimum 30 participants from the side of Iraqi Kurdish public and private organizations with a good presence of key players in the sector of organic production, agriculture and rural development.

Iraqi Kurdish partners will invite local public and private stakeholders to deliver presentations focusing on current challenges, future opportunities, policy initiatives, etc. From the Flemish side, 3 organizations will present their role, activities and services in the field of organic agri-food production and marketing. This will include a presentation of the Flemish Strategic Plan for the organic agri-food sector.

1. Study visit (2 days)

Iraqi Kurdish partners plan meetings with and visits to key organizations in their region in the sector of (organic) agri-food production. Flemish experts will learn to know the status of activities and services of Iraqi Kurdish organizations and can exchange views and recommendations. Voka – CCI AW will bring these recommendations together in a summary report which can be a guide for future cooperation between Flanders and Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Activity 1.3. Transfer of a practical toolkit “EU market access rules for agri-food products”**

This activity aims at transferring a best practice from Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland in training export advisors to identify all relevant EU market access rules for any given agri-food product. This course received in 2018 a Best Practice Award for trainings in the field of internationalization from the International Training Foundation (ITF-) in Turin.

The toolkit /checklist allows to identify easily hygiene rules, labelling and packaging rules, rules on contaminants etc.

This project foresees a three days training followed by a training /monitoring from a distance with 20 selected agri-food companies. For these 20 selected case, Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland will demonstrate how to use the checklist and produce a brief summary report for each company in this pilot phase. Trained export advisors could then, after the ending of this project, continue offering this guidance in the field of EU import requirements to local companies. This training will include also an introduction to useful websites with info on marketing agri-food products in the EU, e.g. the website of CBI from The Netherlands. And practical tips for organizing exports (e.g. making price offers, choosing optimal packaging and transport solutions, clauses in sales contracts, etc.)

Proposed timing:

1. Training of 5 to 10 Iraqi Kurdish export advisors (3 days)

* Day 1: training of Iraqi Kurdish export advisors

(international marketing of agri-food products +

Toolkit EU market access rules agri-food products)

* Days 2 + 3: individual case discussions with interested agri-food companies (use of the toolkit in interview)

1. Training from a distance

Spread over the project period Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland will develop and demonstrate a model service for 20 Iraqi Kurdish agri-food companies, resulting in 20 model case reports with relevant info, business contacts & recommendations.

**Theme 2: Waste management and eco-friendly production**

Public and private organizations in Flanders take many initiatives in the field of prevention, reduction or processing of waste. And many of them approved a strategy in the field of CSR. Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland supports enterprises - via coaching in learning networks - in implementing sustainability initiatives.

Following activities could be organized in order to transfer best practices from these organizations to key public and private organizations and policy makers in Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Activity 2.1. Study visit – meetings in Flanders with organizations involved in waste management, energy efficiency and implementation of a CSR policy**

Proposed timing: study visit of 3 days

Invited persons: 3 persons from Iraqi Kurdish organizations offering trainings or other activities & services for improving waste management & implementation of sustainability strategies.

Programme: visits to & presentations by Flemish organizations

Organizations and enterprises to be visited or invited at Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland for sharing their experiences, could include:

OVAM (<https://ovam.be/>)

Port of Antwerp (<https://www.portofantwerp.com/nl/sustainability-award>)

Umicore (<https://www.umicore.be/en/our-sites/hoboken/>)

Ecover (<https://www.ecover.com/be-nl/>)

Biolectric (<https://biolectric.be/>)

Results to be achieved: Visiting Iraqi Kurdish representatives engage themselves to present via different channels (websites, meetings, written publications) some main findings resulting from the study visit and inform Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland of these initiatives with copies, links of online publications etc. Hereby, they mention the financial support of the Flemish Government for this study visit. The outcome of this study visit needs to offer also useful inputs for the organization of a conference in Erbil (see Act. 2.2.).

**Activity 2.2. Conference in Erbil on waste management, eco-friendly production and CSR, with involvement of some key Flemish organizations, followed by a study visit**

Proposed timing: Conference (1 day)

Study visit (2 days)

Invited persons: 2 project staff of Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland

3 staff members of public / private organizations with experience in waste management, energy efficiency or other sustainability aspects

Programme:

1. Conference (1 day)

Iraqi Kurdish partners organize this conference in their conference rooms or, if needed due to a large number of participants, in an external venue. Aim is to have minimum 30 participants from the side of Iraqi Kurdish public and private organizations with a good presence of key players working on improving sustainability of operations in public or private sectors.

Iraqi Kurdish partners will invite local public and private stakeholders to deliver presentations focusing on current challenges, future opportunities, policy initiatives, etc. From the Flemish side, 3 organizations will present their role, activities and services in the field of waste management or other sustainability subjects.

1. Study visit (2 days)

Iraqi Kurdish partners plan meetings with and visits to key organizations in their region in the sector of waste management or other environmental subjects, e.g. energy efficiency. Flemish experts will learn to know the status of activities and services of Iraqi Kurdish organizations and can exchange views and recommendations. Voka – CCI AW will bring these recommendations together in a summary report which can be a guide for future cooperation between Flanders and Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Theme 3: Supporting female entrepreneurship**

More and more women entrepreneurs take a leading role in the Flemish economy. In this project with partners in Iraqi Kurdistan, following activities could be set up for sharing experiences of Flemish women entrepreneurs with their counterparts in Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Activity 3.1. Study visit – meetings in Flanders with organizations specialized in female entrepreneurship**

Proposed timing: study visit of 3 days

Invited persons: 2 persons from Iraqi Kurdish organizations offering trainings or other activities & services for female entrepreneurships

Programme: roundtables with Flemish female entrepreneurs, visits to &

presentations by Flemish organizations with exchanges around theme

Organizations and enterprises to be visited or invited at Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland for sharing their experiences, could include ‘Straffe Madammen’ and our networks.

Results to be achieved: Visiting Iraqi Kurdish representatives engage themselves to present via different channels (websites, meetings, written publications) some main findings resulting from the study visit and inform Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland of these initiatives with copies, links of online publications etc. Hereby, they mention the financial support of the Flemish Government for this study visit. The outcome of this study visit needs to offer also useful inputs for the organization of a conference in Erbil (see Act. 2.2.).

**Activity 3.2. Conference in Erbil on women entrepreneurship, followed by a study visit**

Proposed timing: Conference (1 day)

Study visit (2 days)

Invited persons: 2 project staff of Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland

3 staff members of public / private organizations with leading women business owners, Board Members, CEOs, CFOs, etc. and Flemish administration

Programme:

1. Conference (1 day)

Iraqi Kurdish partners organize this conference in their conference rooms or, if needed due to a large number of participants, in an external venue. Aim is to have minimum 20 female participants from the side of Iraqi Kurdish public and private organizations.

Iraqi Kurdish partners will invite local public and private women in leading positions to deliver presentations focusing on experiences, challenges, opportunities, policy initiatives to support female entrepreneurship, etc. From the Flemish side, 3 women in leading positions will present their experiences, lessons learned, recommendations, etc.

1. Study visit (2 days)

Iraqi Kurdish partners plan meetings with and visits to organizations in their region with women in key positions. Aim is to exchange views and recommendations. Voka – CCI AW will bring these recommendations together in a summary report which can be a guide for future cooperation between Flanders and Iraqi Kurdistan.

1. **Reporting and follow-up during and after the implementation phase**
   1. **Reporting.**

Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland could work out at two moments a detailed technical and financial report with activities performed and costs dedicated to the project. This could be an interim report in month 13, covering the first 12 months of the project, and a final report to be submitted in the month after the ending of the project.

During the implementation, ample visibility will of course be given to the financial support from the Flemish Government in each publication and during each event. Proofs of visibility will be shown in the technical reporting (e.g. copies of published articles, Powerpoint presentations, etc.).

Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland plans to report about this project in our magazine Ondernemers!, our newsletter and social media in order to create awareness for Iraqi Kurdistan, the region and opportunities on both sides.

* 1. **Long-term benefits of projects**

Voka – CCI Antwerp-Waasland remains committed to a transfer of knowledge towards KRG; whilst at the same time promoting the benefits of and unique expertise in our Flemish region.

We strongly believe that such a project with an involvement of some or all of the above mentioned three themes with study visits and transfers of best practices could lead to a strong and sustainable relation between participating organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan and Flanders and strengthen the ties even more to the benefit of both regions and their inhabitants.

Furthermore, the economic committees or open dialogues also may lead the way to new areas of cooperation and synergies.

We thank the Flemish Government for looking into the possibility of this new project and remain available for any questions or extra remarks.

Antwerp, June 2021