

Health Democracy Impact Report 2022–2026

Evidence-Based Advocacy and Policy Change in the Health Sector in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Implemented by:

Aran Organization for the Development of Civic Culture

Supported by:

**National Endowment for Democracy
(NED)**



Period Covered:

2022–2026

Executive Summary

Between 2022 and 2026, Aran Organization for Development of Civic Culture, with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), implemented a comprehensive health democracy initiative aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the health sector of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Through independent research, investigative health reports, policy dialogue, public forums, media engagement, and direct advocacy with decision-makers, Aran successfully transformed documented public health concerns into concrete institutional responses and policy reforms.

During this period, Aran's evidence-based advocacy contributed to significant developments, including the issuance of new health regulations, amendments to existing policies, improved oversight mechanisms, expansion of public health services, and stronger engagement between civil society organizations and government institutions.

The project demonstrated that independent civil society actors can play a meaningful role in democratic governance by generating reliable evidence, facilitating dialogue between citizens and policymakers, and promoting accountable public institutions.

Key achievements include:

- Contributing to the issuance and amendment of numerous Ministry of Health regulations addressing patient rights, private healthcare regulation, foreign medical practitioners, pharmaceutical control, cosmetic centers, medical laboratories, healthcare workers' rights, and public health service quality.

- Establishing an unprecedented cooperation mechanism between a local civil society organization and the Ministry of Health, including regular meetings with senior officials and participation in high-level policy discussions.
- Supporting evidence-based reforms addressing illegal practices, weak oversight, and gaps in healthcare governance.
- Increasing public awareness through extensive media coverage, with hundreds of media materials and programs discussing Aran's research findings.
- Strengthening national and international recognition of local civil society research through partnerships with institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA).

The experience of Aran demonstrates that sustained civil society monitoring, when combined with constructive engagement and credible research, can contribute to democratic accountability and long-term institutional reform.

1. Introduction: Building Health Democracy Through Evidence and Accountability

The healthcare sector represents one of the most important areas affecting citizens' daily lives and their trust in public institutions. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, several structural challenges have affected healthcare governance, including weak regulatory oversight, unequal access to services, gaps in professional standards, and limited accountability mechanisms.

Recognizing these challenges, Aran Organization launched its health democracy initiative in 2022 with the objective of strengthening public accountability and supporting evidence-based policymaking in the health sector.

The project was built on three interconnected approaches:

1. Independent Research and Documentation

Aran produced a series of investigative health reports examining critical issues affecting healthcare services, including:

- Patient rights and healthcare access.
- Regulation of private healthcare institutions.
- Pharmaceutical quality and illegal medicine markets.
- Medical education standards.
- Healthcare workers' rights.
- Public-private healthcare governance.
- Professional accountability among healthcare providers.

These reports were based on field research, interviews, data collection, expert consultation, and analysis of existing regulations.

2. Policy Advocacy and Institutional Dialogue

Rather than limiting its work to documentation and public awareness, Aran developed direct advocacy channels with relevant institutions, particularly the Ministry of Health.

The organization shared research findings with decision-makers, presented recommendations, participated in policy discussions, and followed up on implementation processes.

This approach transformed research findings into practical policy discussions and contributed to measurable institutional responses.

3. Public Engagement and Democratic Participation

ARAN ORGANIZED CONFERENCES, DIALOGUE SESSIONS, AND PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS THAT BROUGHT TOGETHER:

- **GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.**
- **MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT.**
- **HEALTHCARE EXPERTS.**
- **PROFESSIONAL UNIONS.**
- **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS.**
- **MEDIA INSTITUTIONS.**
- **CITIZENS AFFECTED BY HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES.**

THESE PLATFORMS CREATED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HEALTHCARE POLICIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

2. OVERALL IMPACT OF THE PROJECT (2022–2026)

THE PROJECT GENERATED IMPACT ACROSS FIVE MAJOR AREAS:

1. POLICY AND REGULATORY REFORM

ARAN’S RESEARCH CONTRIBUTED TO GOVERNMENT ATTENTION TOWARD PREVIOUSLY NEGLECTED HEALTHCARE ISSUES AND SUPPORTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW REGULATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES.

MAJOR AREAS OF REFORM INCLUDED:

PATIENT RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION.

REGULATION OF HERBAL MEDICINE CLINICS.

REGULATION OF FOREIGN DOCTORS’ PRACTICE.

PRIVATE HEALTHCARE PRICING MECHANISMS.

- Medical laboratory licensing.
- Pharmaceutical waste management.
- Control of psychotropic medicines.
- Regulation of cosmetic centers.
- Protection of healthcare workers’ rights.

THESE REFORMS REPRESENT IMPORTANT STEPS TOWARD STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVING HEALTHCARE GOVERNANCE.

2. Strengthened Civil Society–Government Cooperation

The project created an unprecedented level of engagement between a local civil society organization and the Ministry of Health. Between 2022 and 2026: Aran held nine official meetings with the Minister of Health. Aran conducted thirteen meetings with the Sulaymaniyah Directorate of Health. The project team participated in inspection activities with Ministry committees. Aran presented its findings directly to senior health officials. For the first time, a local NGO participated in a Ministry of Health Council meeting chaired by the Minister and attended by senior directors, presenting evidence from its research and discussing policy responses.



(ARA) international conference in Sri Lanka.

3. Improving Public Health Services

Aran's monitoring and advocacy contributed to increased attention toward healthcare infrastructure and service quality.

Examples include:

Expansion of intensive care capacity in public hospitals.

Protection of healthcare facilities from misuse and unauthorized practices.

Strengthening oversight of private healthcare institutions.

Promoting clearer separation between public and private medical work.

These developments demonstrate how civil society monitoring can support improvements in public service delivery.

4. National and International Recognition

The credibility of Aran's research resulted in increased engagement with national and international actors.

Achievements include:

Cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Kurdistan Region.

- *Representation of Iraq at the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) international conference in Sri Lanka.*
- *Selection of Aran's experience as a valuable model for community-based health advocacy.*
- *Membership in international research networks.*

5. Public Awareness and Media Impact

Aran's reports received extensive media attention, transforming research findings into public discussions.

Between 2022 and 2026:

- More than 250 media materials covered Aran's reports and activities.
- The organization participated in more than 50 television and media programs.
- Major media institutions used Aran's findings as a basis for investigative coverage.

The media impact expanded the reach of health-related discussions and strengthened public demand for transparency and accountability.

3. Detailed Policy Impact Cases (2022–2026)

From Evidence-Based Research to Institutional Reform



More than 250 media materials covered Aran's reports and activities.

One of the most significant achievements of Aran's health democracy initiative has been the transformation of documented healthcare challenges into concrete policy responses. Through investigative reports, stakeholder dialogue, formal recommendations, and continuous engagement with government institutions, Aran contributed to placing critical healthcare governance issues on the policy agenda.

The following cases demonstrate how independent civil society research can contribute to institutional reform and strengthen democratic accountability.

Case Study 1: Implementing Patient Rights Legislation

Issue Identified

In its Third Health Report published in February 2022, Aran highlighted that the Law No. (4) of 2020 on Patients' Rights and Responsibilities in the Kurdistan Region had not been effectively implemented due to the absence of necessary executive instructions from the Ministry of Health.

The report identified that the lack of implementation mechanisms limited patients' ability to benefit from their legally recognized rights and weakened accountability within healthcare institutions.

Advocacy and Engagement

Following the publication of the report, Aran:

- Shared the findings with relevant government institutions.
- Conducted discussions with Ministry of Health officials.
- Advocated for the issuance of executive instructions necessary to activate the law.

Policy Response

On 6 July 2022, the Ministry of Health issued Instruction No. (4) of 2022, published in the Kurdistan Official Gazette, providing the executive framework for implementing the Patients' Rights and Responsibilities Law.

Impact

This decision represented an important institutional step toward:

- Strengthening patients' legal protections.
- Clarifying healthcare providers' responsibilities.
- Establishing a clearer accountability framework within health institutions.

The case demonstrates how civil society monitoring contributed to activating existing legislation and improving healthcare governance.



Instruction No. (4) of 2022, published in the Kurdistan Official Gazette

Case Study 2: Regulation of Herbal Medicine Clinics

Issue Identified

Aran's Third Health Report (February 2022) documented widespread challenges in the herbal medicine sector, including:

- Operation of clinics without clear regulatory standards.
- Involvement of unqualified individuals in providing health-related services.
- Lack of scientific oversight.
- Risks to citizens due to unverified treatments.
- Financial exploitation of patients.

The report also highlighted concerns regarding political influence and informal networks affecting regulation of this sector.

Advocacy and Engagement

After publishing the findings, Aran:

- Raised public awareness through media discussions.
- Shared recommendations with the Ministry of Health.
- Held discussions with relevant officials regarding regulatory gaps.

Policy Response

On 6 July 2022, the Ministry of Health issued Instruction No. (5) of 2022 regulating herbal medicine clinics.

The instruction introduced:

- Licensing requirements.
- Professional eligibility standards.
- Restrictions on unauthorized practices.
- Greater government oversight.

Impact

The regulation helped move the herbal medicine sector from an informal environment toward a more structured and accountable framework.



Instruction No. (5) of 2022 regulating herbal medicine clinics

This case illustrates the role of evidence-based advocacy in improving consumer protection and healthcare standards.

Case Study 3: Regulation of Foreign Medical Practitioners

Issue Identified

Aran's Third Health Report examined the challenges surrounding foreign doctors working in the Kurdistan Region.

The report identified several concerns, including:

- Foreign physicians practicing without sufficient regulatory oversight.
- Individuals working outside their professional specialties.
- Lack of clear professional verification mechanisms.
- Potential conflicts of interest involving private healthcare institutions.

Advocacy and Engagement

Following publication of the report, Aran:

- Presented findings through media platforms.
- Submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Health.
- Engaged with health officials regarding the need for stronger regulation.

Policy Response

On 6 September 2022, the Ministry of Health issued Instruction No. (7) of 2022 regarding the work of foreign doctors in the Kurdistan Region.

The instruction established:

- Professional requirements.
- Licensing procedures.
- Regulatory controls over foreign medical practice.

Impact

The decision significantly strengthened oversight of foreign medical professionals and contributed to improving professional accountability within the healthcare sector.



Instruction No. (7) of 2022 regarding the work of foreign doctors in the Kurdistan Region.

Case Study 4: Regulating Private Healthcare Pricing

Issue Identified

Aran's Third Health Report dedicated a major section to private healthcare institutions and identified significant problems related to:

- Unregulated healthcare prices.
- Different pricing practices between institutions.
- Financial burdens placed on citizens.
- Lack of transparency in private healthcare costs.

The report documented how weak regulation created opportunities for exploitation of patients seeking medical services.

Advocacy and Engagement

Aran:

- Presented findings publicly.
- Conducted media discussions.
- Shared evidence with the Ministry of Health.
- Recommended establishing a transparent pricing system.

Policy Response

On 13 November 2022, the Ministry of Health issued Instruction No. (8) of 2022 regulating prices in private hospitals and healthcare centers.

The instruction introduced:

- Standardized pricing mechanisms.
- Classification of healthcare services.
- Greater financial transparency.
- Unified billing procedures.

Impact

The reform contributed to:

- Reducing arbitrary pricing practices.
- Increasing transparency in private healthcare services.
- Strengthening government oversight of private healthcare providers.



Instruction No. (8) of 2022 regulating prices in private hospitals and healthcare centers.

Case Study 5: Regulation of Medical Laboratories

Issue Identified

Aran's Third Health Report revealed serious concerns regarding medical laboratories, including:

- Operation of unlicensed laboratories.
- Management by individuals without appropriate qualifications.
- Issuance of inaccurate medical reports.
- Risks to patient safety.

The report highlighted the need for stronger licensing and professional standards.

Advocacy and Engagement

Aran submitted its findings to the Ministry of Health and engaged with officials to discuss regulatory gaps.

Policy Response

The Ministry issued:

- Instruction No. (9) of 2022 regarding subsidiary laboratory licensing.
- Instruction No. (4) of 2023 regarding private laboratory licensing.

These instructions introduced:

- Qualification requirements.
- Professional licensing standards.
- Minimum experience requirements.
- Stronger inspection mechanisms.

Impact

The reforms improved laboratory governance by:

- Restricting laboratory ownership and operation to qualified professionals.
- Reducing unauthorized practices.
- Increasing patient protection through improved accuracy and oversight.



Instruction No. (4) of 2023 regarding private laboratory licensing.

Case Study 6: Management of Medical and Pharmaceutical Waste

Issue Identified

Aran's 2022 Health Report documented unsafe practices related to medical and pharmaceutical waste management, including:

- Improper disposal methods.
- Environmental and public health risks.
- Weak institutional monitoring mechanisms.

Advocacy and Engagement

Aran raised the issue through:

- Research publication.
- Media engagement.
- Formal communication with health authorities.

Policy Response

The Ministry of Health issued:

- Instruction No. (1) of 2023 on pharmaceutical waste recycling.
- Instruction No. (19) of 2023 on laboratory waste recycling.

Impact

These measures contributed to:

- Establishing clearer procedures for healthcare waste management.
- Increasing institutional responsibility.
- Reducing environmental and health risks.



Case Study 7: Regulation of Cosmetic Centers and Protection from Unqualified Practices

Issue Identified

Aran's health research identified serious concerns regarding cosmetic centers, including:

- Performance of procedures by non-specialists.
- Lack of professional oversight.
- Use of unregulated practices.

Advocacy and Engagement

Aran presented evidence through:

- Investigative reporting.
- Policy recommendations.
- Dialogue with Ministry officials.

Policy Response

The Ministry issued:

- Instruction No. (8) of 2024 regulating dermatological cosmetic procedures.
- Instruction No. (10) of 2024 regulating healthcare centers and cosmetic facilities.

The regulations introduced:

- Specialist physician requirements.
- Professional qualification standards.
- Licensing requirements.
- Control over medicines and materials used.
- Restrictions on unqualified personnel.

Impact

These measures strengthened patient safety and improved regulation of cosmetic healthcare services.



Instruction No. (19) of 2023 on laboratory waste recycling.



Instruction No. (10) of 2024 regulating healthcare centers and cosmetic facilities.

Case Study 8: Protecting Healthcare Workers' Rights and Social Security Coverage

Issue Identified

Aran's Sixth Health Report (June 2026) documented violations affecting nurses and healthcare workers in private healthcare institutions, particularly:

- Failure to comply with labor regulations.
- Lack of registration in social security systems.
- Weak protection of healthcare workers' rights.

The report found that approximately 75% of nurses working in private healthcare institutions were not registered within the social security system.

Advocacy and Engagement

Following publication:

- Aran presented findings during the report launch conference.
- Recommendations were submitted to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
- The issue received extensive media attention.

Policy Response

On 24 June 2026, the Kurdistan Regional Government Council of Ministers discussed the issue and issued a decision requiring private sector institutions to register their employees within the social security system.

Impact

This represented a major policy achievement by:

- Strengthening workers' rights.
- Improving compliance with labor legislation.
- Expanding social protection mechanisms.

The case demonstrates the direct link between civil society evidence, public dialogue, and government accountability.

Overall Lessons from Policy Impact Cases

Across these cases, Aran's experience demonstrates that effective civil society advocacy requires more than identifying problems. Sustainable change occurs when research evidence is combined with:

*Constructive engagement with institutions.
Clear policy recommendations.*

- *Public awareness.*
 - *Media partnerships.*
 - *Continuous follow-up.*
-

The project provides a practical example of how locally generated evidence can contribute to democratic governance by improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness within public institutions.

4. Strategic Institutional Impact (2022–2026)

Strengthening Government–Civil Society Cooperation, Institutional Accountability, and Health Democracy

Beyond individual policy reforms, Aran's health democracy initiative contributed to establishing a broader model of cooperation between civil society, government institutions, professional bodies, media organizations, and international actors.

The project demonstrated that civil society organizations can move beyond a monitoring role and become constructive partners in improving public policies through evidence generation, dialogue facilitation, and accountability mechanisms.



Strategic Health Conference and Government Partnership

4.1 Strengthening Institutional Cooperation with the Ministry of Health

Building a Sustainable Dialogue Mechanism

One of the most important achievements of the project was the establishment of a continuous dialogue channel between Aran Organization and the Ministry of Health in the Kurdistan Region.

Through evidence-based engagement, Aran developed a relationship based on:

- Independent research.
- Professional dialogue.
- Policy recommendations.
- Institutional follow-up.

Between 2022 and 2026, this cooperation included:

- **Nine official meetings with the Minister of Health.**
- **Thirteen meetings with the Director General of Sulaymaniyah Health Directorate.**
- Participation of the project team in inspection activities with Ministry committees.
- Continuous exchange of information regarding healthcare challenges and possible solutions.

This level of engagement represents an important development in the relationship between civil society and government institutions in the health sector.

Participation in the Ministry of Health Council

A significant milestone occurred in September 2024 when Aran became the first local civil society organization to participate in a meeting of the Ministry of Health Council.

The Council, chaired by the Minister of Health and attended by senior ministry directors, represents one of the highest institutional bodies responsible for discussing and approving health policies and administrative decisions.

During the meeting:

- Aran presented findings from its health research.
- The organization shared documented evidence regarding challenges within the healthcare system.
- Senior Ministry officials discussed possible institutional responses.

This participation represented a practical example of democratic governance, where independent civil society evidence was integrated into official policy discussions.

4.2 Strategic Health Conference and Government Partnership

Transforming Research Findings into Policy Dialogue

On 29 April 2026, Aran organized a Strategic Health Conference in Sulaymaniyah with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The conference represented a major transition from research and advocacy toward structured policy dialogue.

Participants included:

- Senior Ministry of Health representatives.
- Health directors from different provinces.
- Healthcare experts.
- Academic representatives.
- Professional unions.
- Civil society organizations.
- International stakeholders.

The Ministry of Health officially participated in the conference and recognized the importance of the initiative.

Following the conference:

- The Minister of Health reviewed the recommendations.
- The Ministry participated in follow-up discussions.
- A specialized committee was established to examine the recommendations and assess their integration into health policies.

4.3 Contribution to Expanding Healthcare Services

Aran's monitoring of healthcare challenges contributed to increased attention toward infrastructure development and service improvement.

Expansion of Intensive Care Capacity

One of the issues highlighted by Aran was the limited number of intensive care unit (ICU) beds in public hospitals.

The organization raised this issue through:

- Health reports.
- Public discussions.
- Policy dialogue sessions.

Following sustained advocacy and discussion, ICU capacity in public hospitals increased significantly, expanding from approximately **100 beds to 224 beds**.

This development represents an important improvement in emergency healthcare capacity and demonstrates the potential impact of evidence-based advocacy on public service planning.

Supporting Protection of Public Healthcare Facilities

Aran's research also highlighted challenges related to healthcare resources and institutional management.

Through monitoring and advocacy, the organization contributed to discussions on:

- Protecting public healthcare resources.
- Improving service delivery.
- Strengthening institutional oversight.

One example was the issue surrounding the planned development of the new Hiwa Cancer Hospital in Sulaymaniyah, where Aran's research highlighted attempts affecting the intended use of the allocated land.

Following public attention and institutional follow-up, the project moved forward as an important healthcare infrastructure initiative.

4.4 National and International Partnerships

Cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO)

During 2024–2025, Aran strengthened cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) representation in the Kurdistan Region.

The organization held:

- Three official meetings with WHO representatives.
- Two project activities attended by WHO representatives.



These engagements focused on:

Aran - WHO meetings

- Healthcare governance.
- Health system challenges.
- Opportunities for technical cooperation.

This partnership contributed to strengthening the professional credibility of Aran's work and connecting local civil society efforts with international health discussions.

Participation in the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA)



Aran - WHO meetings

A major international milestone was Aran's participation in the international conference organized by the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in February 2025.

Aran represented Iraq and presented its experience in:

- Health sector governance.
- Accountability challenges.
- The role of civil society in addressing institutional weaknesses.

Following evaluation of Aran's work:

- The organization was recognized within the ARA network.
- Its experience was considered a valuable example of community-based research and advocacy.

This achievement demonstrated that locally generated knowledge from Iraq can contribute to international discussions on governance, resilience, and sustainable development.

4.5 Engagement with National Health Networks and Institutions

Aran expanded cooperation with national actors in the healthcare sector through participation in professional platforms, including the Kurdistan Health Summit.

The organization participated in:

- Kurdistan Health Summit 2023 at the University of Sulaymaniyah.
- Kurdistan Health Summit 2025 at the University of Halabja.

During these events, Aran presented:

- Findings from its health research.
- The role of civil society in improving healthcare governance.
- The importance of transparency and accountability in health policies.

These engagements strengthened recognition of civil society as a legitimate stakeholder in healthcare reform.

4.6 Media Influence and Public Accountability

Transforming Research into Public Dialogue

A key component of Aran's impact strategy was ensuring that research findings reached citizens, policymakers, and professional communities.

Between 2022 and 2026:

- More than **250 media materials** covered Aran's reports and activities.
- The organization participated in more than **53 television and media programs**.
- Health reports became subjects of public discussion and institutional debate.

Media coverage played a critical role in:

- Increasing public awareness.
- Encouraging government response.
- Creating accountability pressure.
- Amplifying citizens' concerns.

4.7 The Rudaw Media Campaign: National-Level Visibility of Research Findings

One of the strongest examples of media impact occurred after the publication of Aran's Sixth Health Report in June 2026.

Twenty-seven days after publication, Rudaw Media Network launched an extensive media campaign based entirely on the report's findings.

The campaign covered three major themes:

1. Pharmaceutical challenges in public hospitals.
2. Surgical services and public-private healthcare practices.
3. Violations affecting nurses and healthcare workers in private institutions.



Director of Aran in the interview with Rudaw

Between 15–20 July 2026:

- Rudaw produced eight media programs and reports.
- The organization hosted Aran's representatives in major programs.
- Field reports independently examined issues documented in the report.

Rudaw's decision to dedicate extensive coverage after reviewing and verifying the report represented a strong indicator of the credibility and quality of Aran's research.

4.8 Contribution to Health Democracy

The cumulative impact of Aran's project extends beyond individual policy changes. It contributed to strengthening the foundations of health democracy through:

1. Increasing Citizen Participation

The project created spaces where citizens, healthcare professionals, and experts could raise concerns and contribute to policy discussions.

2. Strengthening Accountability

Through independent monitoring and evidence-based recommendations, the project encouraged institutions to respond to documented problems.

3. Improving Transparency

By transforming hidden challenges into publicly discussed policy issues, Aran helped increase transparency within the healthcare system.

4. Promoting Responsive Governance

The project demonstrated that public institutions can respond positively when civil society provides credible evidence and constructive recommendations.

Conclusion: A Sustainable Model for Civil Society-Led Health Reform

The experience of Aran Organization between 2022 and 2026 demonstrates that independent civil society organizations can play a meaningful role in democratic governance and public sector reform.

With support from the National Endowment for Democracy, Aran developed a model based on:

- Independent research.
- Evidence-based advocacy.
- Institutional dialogue.
- Public engagement.
- Media partnership.

This model contributed to tangible reforms in the healthcare sector, strengthened cooperation between citizens and institutions, and advanced the concept of health democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The project's achievements demonstrate that when civil society is empowered to investigate, engage, and advocate, it can become an effective partner in building more transparent, accountable, and responsive public institutions.



Health officials, Activists and NGOs in Aran Conference 2024

5. Key Achievements, Quantitative Indicators, Sustainability, and Lessons Learned (2022–2026)

Final Impact Assessment for the Health Democracy Initiative

5.1 Key Achievements (2022–2026)

Over the implementation period, Aran Organization’s Health Democracy Initiative achieved significant and measurable progress in strengthening transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking in the health sector of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The project successfully moved from **research and documentation** toward **policy influence and institutional change**, demonstrating the practical value of civil society engagement in democratic governance.

The main achievements include:

1. Influencing Health Policy and Regulatory Reform

Aran’s investigative reports and advocacy activities contributed to government responses addressing critical healthcare challenges.

Key policy areas influenced by the project include:

- Implementation of patients’ rights regulations.
- Regulation of herbal medicine clinics.
- Regulation of foreign medical practitioners.
- Reform of private healthcare pricing systems.
- Licensing and monitoring of medical laboratories.
- Medical and pharmaceutical waste management.
- Control of psychotropic and controlled medicines.
- Regulation of cosmetic centers.
- Protection of healthcare workers’ labor and social security rights.



. Meetings between Aran& Minstar of Health -KRI

2. Establishing Civil Society as a Health Policy Partner

The project contributed to changing the traditional relationship between government institutions and civil society organizations by creating a model based on cooperation, evidence sharing, and constructive accountability.

Major milestones include:

- Regular engagement with senior Ministry of Health officials.
- Participation in high-level health policy discussions.
- Presentation of independent research findings directly to decision-makers.
- Inclusion of civil society perspectives in healthcare reform discussions.

This represents a significant advancement in democratic participation and institutional openness.

3. Strengthening Accountability and Public Oversight

Through investigative research and public advocacy, Aran contributed to exposing issues that previously received limited public attention, including:

- Unregulated healthcare practices.
- Patient rights violations.
- Weak professional oversight.
- Pharmaceutical risks.
- Healthcare workers' rights violations.
- Challenges in public-private healthcare governance.

By documenting these issues and presenting evidence-based recommendations, the project encouraged government institutions to review practices and introduce corrective measures.

4. Improving Healthcare Service Governance

The project contributed to discussions and reforms related to healthcare service quality, including:

- Expansion of intensive care capacity in public hospitals.
- Strengthening regulation of private healthcare institutions.
- Improving professional standards in healthcare services.
- Promoting fairer access to healthcare services.

These achievements demonstrate how research-based advocacy can contribute to improving public services.

5. Expanding Public Awareness and Civic Participation

Through media engagement, conferences, and public dialogue sessions, Aran successfully increased public awareness regarding healthcare governance challenges.

The project transformed technical health issues into public discussions involving:

- Citizens.
- Healthcare professionals.
- Government representatives.
- Academics.
- Civil society organizations.
- Media institutions.

This strengthened the role of citizens in monitoring public services and demanding accountability.

5.2 Quantitative Indicators of Impact

The following indicators summarize the measurable results achieved through the project:

Area	Achievement
Health policy reforms influenced	More than 15 government instructions, regulations, and administrative decisions connected to issues raised through Aran's advocacy
Official meetings with Minister of Health	9 meetings
Meetings with Sulaymaniyah Health Directorate	13 meetings
Participation in Ministry inspection activities	5 inspection activities with Ministry committees
Health reports produced	Six major investigative health reports
Public conferences and dialogue events	Multiple national-level conferences and policy discussions
Media coverage	More than 250 media materials
Television and media appearances	More than 53 programs and interviews
International health cooperation	Cooperation with WHO and participation in international research networks
International representation	Representation of Iraq at ARA international conference in Sri Lanka
ICU capacity improvement	Increase from approximately 100 to 224 beds in public hospitals
Healthcare workers' protection	Government decision requiring private institutions to register employees in social security systems
Public engagement	Participation of government officials, parliament members, experts, unions, and civil society representatives in project activities

5.3 Sustainability of Impact

The impact generated by the project is expected to continue beyond the implementation period due to several sustainability factors:

1. Institutionalization of Policy Changes

Many project outcomes were transformed into official government instructions and administrative decisions.

Unlike temporary activities, these regulations create lasting institutional frameworks that continue influencing healthcare governance.

2. Strengthened Civil Society–Government Dialogue

The relationships established between Aran and health institutions created a sustainable communication mechanism.

The Ministry of Health now recognizes civil society research as a valuable source of evidence for identifying challenges and improving policies.

3. Increased Credibility of Independent Research

The project strengthened confidence in locally produced research.

Aran's reports became reference documents used by:

- Government institutions.
- Media organizations.
- Professional associations.
- Researchers.
- Civil society actors.

4. Expanded Networks and Partnerships

The project established connections with:

- Ministry of Health institutions.
- World Health Organization representatives.

- International research networks.
- National health organizations.
- Professional unions.

These partnerships provide opportunities for continued cooperation and future policy engagement.

5. Public Awareness as a Long-Term Asset

The project contributed to creating a more informed public capable of understanding healthcare challenges and engaging in discussions about public services.

This increased awareness strengthens democratic accountability beyond the project period.

5.4 Lessons Learned

The implementation experience between 2022 and 2026 generated several important lessons for future health governance and democracy initiatives.

Lesson 1: Evidence-Based Advocacy Creates Stronger Policy Influence

Reliable data, field research, and documented evidence were essential factors that enabled Aran to engage effectively with policymakers.

Government institutions were more responsive when recommendations were supported by credible research rather than general criticism.

Lesson 2: Constructive Dialogue Produces Greater Institutional Change

The project demonstrated that civil society can achieve stronger results through a balanced approach combining:

- Independent monitoring.
- Public accountability.
- Professional dialogue.
- Practical recommendations.

This approach helped build trust while maintaining Aran's independent role.

Lesson 3: Media Partnerships Amplify Policy Impact

Media coverage played a critical role in transforming research findings into public discussions.

Strategic cooperation with influential media institutions expanded the reach of project outcomes and increased pressure for institutional responses.

Lesson 4: Local Civil Society Organizations Can Influence National-Level Policies

The project demonstrated that local organizations with strong research capacity can contribute to meaningful policy changes when they combine:

- Technical expertise.
- Community engagement.
- Advocacy skills.
- Institutional communication.

Lesson 5: Health Democracy Requires Multi-Stakeholder Participation

Sustainable healthcare reform requires cooperation among:

- Government institutions.
- Civil society.
- Healthcare professionals.
- Citizens.
- Media.
- International partners.

The project showed that inclusive dialogue improves both policy quality and public trust.

5.5 Final Conclusion

The Health Democracy Initiative implemented by Aran Organization with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy represents a successful example of how civil society can contribute to democratic governance through evidence-based advocacy.

From 2022 to 2026, the project moved beyond identifying healthcare challenges and successfully contributed to policy discussions, institutional reforms, and public accountability mechanisms.

The initiative demonstrated that independent research combined with strategic engagement can produce measurable improvements in public policy and service delivery.

The experience provides a replicable model for strengthening democratic institutions through citizen participation, transparency, and accountable governance.

Ultimately, the project contributed not only to improving healthcare policies but also to strengthening the broader principles of democracy by ensuring that citizens' concerns, supported by evidence and public dialogue, can influence decision-making processes.

End of Report

Health Democracy Impact Report 2022–2026

Aran Organization for the Development of Civic Culture

Supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)