IRAQ HUMANITARIAN CRISIS SITUATION

AND NGOs RESPONSES

MAY 2007

This Document has the aim, through the last technical documents published by NGOs working in Iraq to update readers on the context and to highlight that, despite of the very unsecured environment and the numerous constraints faced by aid workers on the field, an humanitarian intervention in Iraq is on-going, possible and needed.
Affected and vulnerable Iraqis need this support that can be improved with the support of all stakeholders, including the whole international community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eight million people are estimated to be in need of immediate assistance as a consequence of the Iraq humanitarian crisis. Amongst them, 4 million are reported to be displaced and over 4 million people were considered as food insecure inside Iraq in 2005, when the overall situation was not as bad as it is today.

The humanitarian situation has arisen as a combination of degraded basic services, loss of livelihoods and rampant inflation which have increased the vulnerability of the people. While the situation is not consistent across the country, the affected population also faces escalating violence, human rights violations and a crisis of protection all of which contribute to a downward spiraling emergency. At the same time the increase in violence has severely constrained humanitarian space, and relief provisions have all but ceased.

The clear implication is that humanitarian assistance is needed in Iraq immediately. Political resolution to the causes of the crisis must occur in parallel with assisting the lives and livelihoods of all Iraqis. Even if current conditions do not deteriorate further, humanitarian assistance is nonetheless urgently needed. Recognition of and actions to assist vulnerable communities are in place, but as conditions have worsened, the consistency, frequency, content and quality of assistance has not been able to keep pace.

The implications are that the Government and International Organisations that are embedded within the International Zone, have a limited perception of the situation faced on the ground and have lost the opportunity to access the population and hot spots.

A key element in addressing the humanitarian crises on the ground is for relief and aid agencies to have access to the areas where they are assisting the vulnerable. With growing acknowledgement by the international community that there is indeed a humanitarian crisis in Iraq, this issue take a more important place in the discussions about humanitarian aid in Iraq.

NGOs play a vital role providing support to affected people. NGOs that adhere to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, and deliver humanitarian aid, need to distinguish themselves from other types of agencies emphasizing their neutrality and impartiality. Currently, NGOs have adapted to the current climate of distrust and uncertainty in Iraq by being very conservative in the information they share and in being careful with whom they are publicly associated with in Iraq.

NGOs engaged in the changing landscape of Iraq, use their mandates, charters and the above-mentioned Code of conduct as reference points to guide and adapt their actions. The ability to respond however is often constrained by a lack of neutral and flexible funding that supports their core functions as opposed to definite actions anchored to a specific budget line. Furthermore, the withdrawal of some donors and limited funds from other sources, for the humanitarian assistance provided by many NGOs may significantly decrease the number of active NGOs, in spite of the evident acute humanitarian needs.

Coordination mechanisms serve a vital role in the humanitarian context, providing opportunities for NGOs to maintain their independence, and when needed, to use a coordination platform and the perception of non-affiliation with organisations that can compromise their efforts within communities and the safety of their staff and aid workers. At the same time, it allows for a pooling of information and a stage from which it can be conveyed in a coherent manner to the appropriate audience. Furthermore, it can facilitate the identification of gaps in aid assistance and better responses.

In order to better answer to these needs, NGOs have activated a field-based emergency network that will improve the quality of aid response by centralising and securing information on existing networks, improving field linkages, and easing aid workers access.

In the short term, there appears to be no way to address the protection vacuum in much of Iraq. MNF-I and Iraqi Security Forces are incapable of protecting civilians, while the Iraqi authorities cannot access many of those in needs. At the same time, the rule of law, governance, and macro-economic improvement cannot be tackled by humanitarian actors seeking to respond to emergency needs.

However, there are urgent needs to which humanitarian actors can address and ways in which they can do so, at a local level, through micro-approaches within global and flexible strategies. Humanitarian actors have obligations to uphold the rights of the people of Iraq to receive adequate humanitarian assistance through the provision of adequate shelter and resources including food rations and nutritional supplements, clean water, and the provision of medical attention to those who are injured or sick. Humanitarian actors can also play a vital role as advocates about the needs and situation of the people of Iraq.

Therefore, NGOs in Iraq make a range of recommendations which include the need to acknowledge the gravity of the humanitarian crisis inside Iraq and its challenges, as well as its impact on the civilian population and give increased support to NGOs, as neutral and impartial key actors on the ground; the need to address the humanitarian needs inside Iraq; to ensure that International Humanitarian Law is always and fully respected; to achieve a more coordinated, flexible and locally-based humanitarian response; to find an acceptable route to provide a legal status to Iraqi refugees and acknowledge the equal responsibility to engage and assist with the host countries and to illustrate that it is still possible to address humanitarian needs inside Iraq through community and locally-based, flexible and adapted approaches.

Acronyms

CoC: Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief

COSIT: Central Office for Statistics and Information Technology

GoI: Government of Iraq

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IDPs: Internally Displaced Persons

IRCS: Iraqi Red Crescent Society

IRIN: Integrated Regional Information Networks

MNF-I: Multi-National Forces in Iraq

NCCI: NGOs Coordination Committee in Iraq

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

     INGO - International NGO

     NNGO - National NGO

OCHA: Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PDS: Public Distribution System

PSC: Private Security Company

     PSD - Private Security Detail

UN: United Nations

UNAMI: UN Assistance Mission in Iraq

UNICEF: UN Children's Fund

WFP: World Food Program

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 - Find an acceptable route to provide a legal status to Iraqi refugees and acknowledge the equal responsibility to engage and assist with the host countries.

CONTEXT

Iraq Humanitarian Crisis Situation

"Iraq is in a humanitarian crisis with up to 8 million people (one third of the population) in need of immediate assistance"

According to an OCHA/UNAMI problem statement prepared in close cooperation and collaboration with NCCI, and reinforced by OCHA strategic Framework recently published, Iraq is in a humanitarian crisis with up to 8 million people in need of immediate assistance. Those in need fall into three broad categories:

- Up to 2 million are estimated to be refugees in neighbouring countries;
- 1.9 million are estimated to be IDPs;
- An estimated over 4 million people were described by COSIT/WFP[1] as food insecure inside Iraq when survey work was completed in mid 2005.

The humanitarian situation has arisen as a combination of degraded basic services, loss of livelihoods and rampant inflation which have increased the vulnerability of the people. The affected population also face escalating violence, human rights violations and a crisis of protection all of which contribute to a spiralling crisis. At the same time the increase in violence has severely constrained humanitarian space, and relief provisions have all but ceased. The situation is not consistent across the country.

Access and Information

The analysis of the humanitarian situation inside Iraq is severely constrained by the extreme difficulties of anyone (Government Ministries, NGOs, the UN or research bodies) to collect accurate data that is agreed upon by all parties. The best that can be done until access improves and detailed assessments can be undertaken is to examine as many welfare indicators as are available in an attempt to build an impression of the situation facing the people of Iraq with a view to recommending action. The main challenges are to determine the numbers and locations of the most affected people are located, to determine the standards and methods for assistance provision, to advocate for resources to provide the assistance, and to plan for the possible further deterioration of the situation.

What is certain is that conditions are not uniform countrywide, and the spread and intensity of humanitarian needs must be carefully estimated at the local level for relief activities to be planned. The available data and indicators combine to suggest that humanitarian conditions have continued to deteriorate in the past 12 months, apparently at an accelerating rate as violence has escalated. The increased numbers of IDPs and those seeking refuge outside Iraq are indications of worsening security and socio-economic conditions inside the country. Even if conditions remain unchanged in the

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[1] WFP/Central Office for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT) *Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis in Iraq*, May 2006: http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf_Food_Security_and_Vulnerabi.pdf

coming six to twelve months it is necessary and urgent for humanitarian assistance to be increased for the people of Iraq immediately.

Basic Services

Years of sanctions, wars, occupation and internal conflicts have combined to create precarious conditions which further impoverish the Iraqi people, increasing their vulnerability to shocks. Basic services infrastructure which was formerly considered among the best in the region, has deteriorated and in some cases collapsed as a consequence. The situation has become much worse in recent months as the violence has increased. This takes the form of a protection and human rights crisis, but also a basic survival crisis for the displaced and for people unable to move from their homes who are receiving poor to non-existent basic services. Assistance activities have been directed to the basic services sectors to provide relief to the affected population. These services have been provided through various actors including:

- The Government of Iraq
- UN agencies
- NGOs
- Religious bodies
- Communities
- Private contractors working with the Multi-national Force in Iraq
- Non state armed actors

> *"It is the contention of the humanitarian community working on Iraq that a humanitarian crisis is now the reality for many Iraqis"*

While they have succeeded in keeping services on line, the rate of decline has increased in most sectors in recent months. Coupled with the implications of the perilous economic situation in combination with rising violence, it is the contention of the humanitarian community working on Iraq that a humanitarian crisis is now the reality for many Iraqis.

Refugees and IDPs

The push factors which give rise to displacement inside Iraq and to refugee movements out of Iraq may be summarised as declining security conditions and declining economic conditions, combined with loss of faith in the Government and most of authorities to ensure safety and prosperity.

While there may be a high-profile and wealthy elite in exile, the majority of recent Iraqi refugees are poor and reside in low-income areas. Given the urban rather than camp nature of the Iraqi displacement in neighbouring states, assistance will need to be community and institution-based.

The overwhelming volume of internal displacement concentrated in a short time period, ongoing violence and already-deteriorated security conditions and living standards facing Iraq's population have created dramatic humanitarian needs for both IDPs and their host communities, and need to be addressed as a matter of urgency through a collaborative and coordinated response.

While the course of displacement in 2004/2005 was assessed as a short-term phenomenon, the new displacement reality is shaping up to be a long-term trend.

The migration situation may be further evolving with the authorities in some districts or countries reportedly denying permission to people to settle within their boundaries. It may also mean that the displaced will continue to search of alternative locations in which to settle on long term basis. Assistance planned for the displaced will need to take this evolving reality into account.

Certainly the refugee and IDP caseloads are in immediate need of humanitarian relief, and also a proportion of the 'hidden' affected people inside Iraq are in need of assistance to make up for the impact of violence on their daily lives, the impact of shortfalls in basic services, the inefficient functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS), loss of livelihoods and uncontrolled inflation.

> *"A proportion of the 'hidden' affected people inside Iraq are in need of assistance to make up for the impact of violence on their daily lives, the impact of shortfalls in basic services, the inefficient functioning of the PDS, loss of livelihoods and uncontrolled inflation"*

Food Security

The general perception currently is that the PDS has ceased to function in some districts and is only partially functioning in others with incomplete rations being provided due to a lack of access. Consistent data are difficult to obtain, but the indications, reinforced by the latest assessment reports published by WFP in April 2007[2], are negative in terms of the performance of the PDS. This is especially worrying when the WFP's *Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis in Iraq* stated that, in 2005, "the extremely poor are highly dependent on the PDS ration."

NGO reports indicated that people in receipt of PDS rations sold a proportion of their ration for fresh food in 2003, for medicines in 2004, and to help pay the rent in 2005. It has been reported that some people now sell it to pay their trip to abroad[3]. The shift in the use of the PDS in this manner may be an indication of increasing poverty, de-capitalisation and erosion of cooping mechanisms.

According to a UNICEF statement issued in February 2007, about 1 child in 10 is under weight and 1 in 5 is short for their age[4]. The implication is that 4.5 million children are undernourished. The WFP/COSIT food analysis stated that acute malnutrition for children below age five was 9% overall, with rates for children up to twelve months of 13% and between twelve months and two years of 12%.

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[2] See WFP, *An assessment of PDS in Iraq*, April 2007: http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?article1705 and WFP, *an assessment of IDPs access to PDS*, April 2007: http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?article1704
[3] See IRIN, March 21, 2007: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70841
[4] See IRIN, March 5, 2007: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70645

The reasons that Iraq is in this predicament were cited, by WFP[5] as weak basic services infrastructure, rising unemployment and falling levels of education. Since the survey work was completed, sources of food insecurity have continued to deteriorate.

Health

Increasing problems with the emergency and response activities of the health system have made the provision of health services dire. Health care facilities are being occupied by non-state armed groups or military forces, who deny access for persons seeking treatment[6]. The distribution system and supply chains for the provision of medical supplies and medicines are sporadic and dysfunctional.

Due to insecurity, pregnant women have become reluctant to go to health facilities for delivery.

The exposure to violence, constant stress and lack of stability are compromising the mental health of large segments of the population, especially children. Psycho-social interventions are urgently needed to address the impacts in the long term.

Finally, attacks on health workers are impacting the delivery of services in some areas and on the morale and commitment of health workers to provide services. As a result lots of surviving health workers in the most violent areas are either leaving their jobs or migrating, further depleting the country of precious human capital.

Water and Sanitation

Basic services in some areas have ceased to function altogether and only 32% of Iraqis have access to drinking water; 19% have access to a good sewerage system. Water supplies have worsened, indicated by the reported increased incidence of diarrhoeal[7] disease[8] throughout the population and increased water deliveries by UNICEF and ICRC through water trucking operations.

> *"Only 16% of Baghdad's residents - supposedly one of the country's most prosperous cities - say that their income is sufficient to meet their basic needs"*

Livelihoods

Unemployment has continued to increase. Although data on unemployment remain contentious, all indications are that rising conflict, low investment and worsening economic conditions have made employment less secure. Some claim that unemployment stands at 30% whereas others maintain that it is closer to 70%[9]. Only 16% of Baghdad's residents - supposedly one of the country's most prosperous cities - say that their

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[5] WFP/COSIT *FSVA*, p2
[6] See IRIN February 13, 2007: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70139
[7] Government of Iraq/UNICEF *2007-2010 Country Programme Action Plan* p.5
[8] See Alertnet-Reuters, March 22, 207: http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L22331756.htm
[9] http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/070315/15iraq.htm

income is sufficient to meet their basic needs according to a January 2007 survey by the U.S. military's Multi-National Division-Baghdad[10].

Beginning of May 2007, the Central Office for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT) released a survey highlighting that 43 percent of Iraqis suffer from 'absolute poverty' and another 11 percent live in 'abject poverty'.[11]

Additionally, racing inflation of almost 77 % in August 2006, fell back to 52% from September to November, and increased again to almost 65% in December 2006[12].

Education

Education has become less available as teachers are being targeted, fleeing in fear of their lives as internal conflict have spiralled. Data on school attendance vary according to location. According to UNICEF, 75% of students in central Iraq and 90% in Baghdad are not attending school. Overall attendance seems to have declined since 2003 with reports of temporary school closures in response to incidents in their areas. Teachers being targeted means that some schools are not fully functioning. Schools are also becoming shelters for IDPs in some communities, forcing the students either to remain at home or study in less than ideal conditions.

Security

Violence is a critical, all-pervasive characteristic in the lives of people in many parts of Iraq, with devastating humanitarian consequences. It is vital to focus all efforts on ensuring that the current situation does not worsen still further, and that all is done to prepare to meet current and anticipated emergency humanitarian needs. While attacks by insurgents and counter-insurgency operations continue and religious, political and criminal violence deepens and spreads, it is civilians that are paying the price.

> *"It is vital to focus all efforts on ensuring that the current situation does not worsen still further, and that all is done to prepare to meet current and anticipated emergency humanitarian needs"*

While overall conditions did not seem to constitute a humanitarian crisis early in 2006, the escalation of violence after the Samarra incident in late February 2006 was probably a turning point in the evolution of the situation. The impact of violence over a prolonged period seems to have had the effect of tipping the most vulnerable population into crisis. Concurrently, humanitarian space has reduced as the violence has escalated catching the population in a double jeopardy – just as needs have increased, assistance has all but been reduced from most sources.

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[10] http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/070315/15iraq.htm
[11] http://www.azzaman.com/english/index.asp?fname=news%5C2007-05-02%5Ckurd1.htm
[12] http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/arc_Articles.asp?Article=174199&Sn=BUSI&IssueID=30005

It should be noted however, that some areas are more affected than others with the northern governorates relatively less affected by the violence while a recent estimate places 85% of the violence occurring in and around Baghdad (according to UNAMI Safety and Security Unit Daily Security Updates). A study published in *The Lancet* states that 91% of violent deaths were men and nearly two thirds of these deaths were concentrated in the 15 - 44 year age group. This report however did not go into the humanitarian consequences of the death toll, such as the widespread displacements following killings, the widows and orphans who are left without a source of income following the death of principal income earners, the increase of street children and child labour, etc.

Implications of the Existing Context

Iraq is in a crisis of protection, human rights must be observed and protected and basic services must be restored immediately. Political resolution to the causes of the crisis must occur in parallel with assisting the lives and livelihoods of all Iraqis. The clear implication is that humanitarian assistance is needed in Iraq immediately. Even if current conditions did not deteriorate further, humanitarian assistance is nonetheless urgently needed. Recognition of and actions to assist vulnerable communities are in place, but as conditions have worsened assistance has not kept pace in terms of quantity and quality of aid and in terms of consistency.

> *"The clear implication is that humanitarian assistance is needed in Iraq immediately"*

The cause of increased destitution is simultaneously the reason that sufficient assistance is not being provided to many vulnerable affected people. It is essential that humanitarian space is maintained and expanded for relief to be provided. The main constraints to increasing assistance exist in determining how to get the job done in such an adverse security environment, and to have sufficient, flexible financial and human resources to be able to address the most serious unmet needs.

The challenge remains to determine how many and where the most affected people are located. Refugees in neighbouring countries are in need of status determination, access to social services and humanitarian assistance; IDPs are receiving some assistance but it is not sufficient and the pipeline is all but empty; and the most vulnerable inside Iraq need assistance because basic services have broken down, breadwinners are either unemployed or missing and aid agencies and Government are unable to provide adequate relief.

In addition to locating vulnerable communities, accessing them remains difficult. Methods of delivery must be very innovative to address the needs of the affected because capacities inside Iraq to respond are mainly absent or not in a strong enough position to be as effective as the demand for assistance would seem to require. Re-establishing trust with affected communities is a priority. Organisations may need to investigate cross-border or cross boundaries corridors into hot spot areas, including potentially non-military air drops of assistance, as one of the only potential means of replacing a collapsed PDS. Paradoxically, in areas where population homogeneity is

occurring, it may become increasingly possible to establish corridors of assistance to reach the vulnerable.

Since 2003, organisations have needed to constantly adapt to exploit opportunities as they arise, at a local level, through targeted (micro-localised-adapted) approaches and strategies. It is because and thanks to this flexibility, adaptability, as well as community-based and micro-interventions that NGOs are amongst the only humanitarian actors still able to intervene on the field, sometimes far from international and global standards, but always concerned by the quality of aid.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

NGOs as key actors on the field

Existing Response Capacity

The Iraqi Government's capacity to administrate and guide the country and to enforce the rule of law is extremely limited because of:

- Loss of technical capacity (through various processes including de-baathification within Government ranks, brain drain of experts, academics etc.) which had direct impacts on the management and running of most institutions;

- The emergence of new leaders and increasing resentment of some parts of the population that challenge the basis and legitimacy of the central Government;

- The inability of the Government to access some parts of the country (including districts within Baghdad)

"The key comparative advantages NGOs have are their streamlined approaches, and ability to react quickly to develop strategies and responses"

Likewise, at the notable exception of ICRC, most of International Organisations' capacity has failed to respond to the needs in Iraq because:

- They have not adapted and adjusted their responses to the evolving and complex context;

- The emphasis of their efforts have focused on Government capacity and reconstruction - which has been a slow process producing few milestones;

- Their acceptance amongst the Iraqi population has been affected by 12 years of sanctions against Iraq and the need to use MNF-I escorts for their logistics/security;

The implications are that most of the International Organisations that are based within the International Zone, have skewed their perception of the situation faced on the ground, and have lost the opportunity to access the population and hot spots.

The constant pressure of the factors faced by Iraqi citizens (poor living conditions; lack of basic services; difficult security conditions and increased distrust leading to fragmentation and isolation) has steadily eroded their coping mechanisms and traditional forms of solidarity that are extended in times of crises. As a result, their capacity and resources have been stretched thin and they require external sources of relief assistance.

NGOs working in Iraq faced multiple obstacles in responding to the numerous needs. NGOs have met with some success and many failures compounded by the problems faced by all key stakeholders involved in delivering aid and assistance. However the key comparative advantages NGOs have are their streamlined approaches, and ability to react quickly to develop strategies and micro-responses locally adapted by:

- Adapting their structures and activities to the volatile context and newly emerging needs;

- Building relative trust and acceptance in the communities they operate in;

- Adhering to an impartial and neutral approach in their service delivery within the limitations of keeping a low profile, to help correct some of the misperceptions the population may have about NGOs, their affiliations and objectives.

These efforts have allowed INGOs to maintain their own capacities and to extend their services and assistance at a national level by building the capacity of Iraqi NGOs. Of critical importance, they are still able to access communities and represent a large part of the last humanitarian actors and witnesses on the ground.

Perceptions of NGOs

The overall objective of humanitarian aid is to provide lifesaving assistance and alleviate suffering. In achieving this objective, access to vulnerable and needy people in conflict zones is essential. However the conflicts in Iraq are saturated with multiple stakeholders' strategic interests and agendas, politicising the context and compromising humanitarian access conditions.

> *"NGOs that adhere to the Code of Conduct and deliver humanitarian aid need to distinguish themselves from other types of agencies emphasizing their neutrality and impartiality"*

Prior to 2003 the few INGOs operating in Iraq were labelled as spies by the regime. At the time, the concept of NGOs and the culture of a free civil society were not fully articulated. In 2003, the en masse arrival of NGOs in Iraq reinforced the perception that NGOS were linked with the Coalition Forces. Today, this misperception still exists in the current atmosphere of distrust.

Several non-humanitarian actors (military, private companies, non state armed groups) have presented some of their activities as 'humanitarian' thereby blurs the line and reinforces misperceptions, which has a serious impact on legitimate aid worker security.

As a result, thousand of NNGOs have been created since the fall of the former regime, with only few of them being in accordance with the international criteria defining an NGO.

This variance in perception makes it difficult for NGOs to be able to deliver aid while strictly adhering to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red

Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (CoC)[13], which remains non-negotiable.

Humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs have to strike a balance between these principles, and managing everyday realities to achieve their stated goals without compromising their integrity. In this context it is important for NGOs to remember that there is a hierarchy within the principles of the CoC. At the top of this hierarchy is the absolutely non-flexible statement that "the humanitarian imperative comes first".

NGOs that adhere to the CoC and deliver humanitarian aid need to distinguish themselves from other types of agencies emphasizing their neutrality and impartiality. At the same time, it is impossible for an NGO to operate in isolation and there is a need for cooperation with others. In doing so, NGOs run the risk of being associated with negative elements in the minds of various constituencies. As an example, NGOs frequently entering the Baghdad International Zone can be perceived as spies affiliated with occupation forces. Yet, this type of affiliation might be a barrier in improving access.

As a coping mechanism, NGOs currently operating in Iraq decided to maintain low-profiles to prevent themselves from being targeted from attacks. Aid workers on the ground that work with international NGOs do not advertise where the aid is being brought from or who they partner with, nor do they communicate on their programs or interventions.

> *"On one hand the NGOs need to distinguish themselves from other groups so that they are not wrongly affiliated or perceived. At the same time, in order to build trust they need to be more visible in the community"*

In terms of perception this is a double-edged sword. On one hand the NGOs need to distinguish themselves from other groups so that they are not wrongly affiliated or perceived. At the same time, in order to build trust they need to be more visible in the community. The question invariably arises, does community acceptance improve security especially since the communities themselves are often not safe. In gaining acceptance, and providing aid, perceptions are nonetheless built.

However, difficulties arise quite often when NGOs go into communities to make assessments and because of delays and unforeseen obstacles are then not able to make deliveries after the "promise" of aid (even if not given) is expected by the communities. This creates gaps in the access. Currently, NGOs have adapted to the current climate of distrust and uncertainty in Iraq by being very conservative in the information they share and in being careful with whom they are publicly associated with in Iraq.

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[13] http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57jmnb?opendocument

Distance Programming Challenges[14]

Insecurity in Iraq has forced most foreign NGOs that work on the central and southern areas to adopt remote programming strategies and complicated the efforts of Iraqi NGOs who wish/ed to develop relationships with international actors. This imposed distance has raised a number of concerns with respect to the quality of the aid delivered, NGO's accountability for those deliverables, and donor's ability to appreciate and respond to the needs on the ground.

The worsening security situation in Iraq has forced most of the above-mentioned INGOs to continue operating in a remote mode since end of 2004. Some of the challenges in distance programming are still very difficult to overcome and it was deemed necessary to share experiences and lessons learnt by foreign and local NGOs in order to identify concrete measures that could be taken to overcome challenges related to distance programming. It was the objective of the workshop that has gathered NGOs at the NCCI invitation in June 2006.

> *"NGOs identified possible solutions to reinforce their capacity to overcome those challenges, which gives an indication that there is room for improvement"*

In the implementation of remote programming approaches, NGOs still encounter the same distance-related challenges since they started operating remotely more than 2 years ago. These include challenges in communication, assessment, monitoring & evaluation and personnel management. The effects of these challenges result in the donors' perception that remote programming is fraught with difficulties and render assistance difficult and expensive.

However, the main differences with the situation in 2004 are related to the organisational and programming options adopted by NGOs. This illustrates an adaptation of INGOs to the Iraqi operational environment consisting mainly in providing greater responsibility to Iraqis working for INGOs.

INGOs have developed a range of remote programming approaches that offer mixed results. As a result of the situation, a new distance programming option was developed - remote partnership - whereby INGOs enter into partnerships with LNGOs. This option can be implemented in parallel of other remote approaches.

There are several factors NGOs should consider before adopting one or a combination of the remote programming options. Participants of the above-mentioned workshop concluded that it was not possible to compare the limits of each remote programming option since too many factors have to be taken into consideration and, most likely, a combination of factors would result in the failure of a remote programming option as opposed to a single factor. However, on the principle, approaches that gave the most latitude to national personnel and NNGOs are favoured.

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[14] Full Report published by NCCI is available here: http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf_NCCI_-_Distance_Challenges_Faced_by_NGOs_in_Iraq_-_Report_-_Aug06.pdf

NGOs identified possible solutions (see table summarizing them below) to reinforce their capacity to overcome those challenges, which gives an indication that there is room for improvement.

- Those solutions imply that increased attention should be paid to:

- Empowerment of National staff, and therefore on capacity building;

- Coordination and capacity building resources at local level;

- Collectively address common issues of concern;

- Justifying and explaining the need for adequate funding, as NGOs find increasingly difficult to get sufficient funding for human resources, support costs and even activities.

> *"Delivering is not remote – it is the managing"*

As some propositions need to be developed and made clearer before to be implemented an action plan need to be discussed with all stakeholders.
The implementation will need the investment of all actors. Since 2006, NGOs proposed some possible solutions and invited the donor community to build an action plan that includes agreed indicators, criteria for Monitoring and Evaluation, etc.

At the time of writing, the proposition remains valid, but only few initiatives have followed-up. Nevertheless NGOs continue to adapt their mechanisms to the evolving and complex reality and to show on daily bases that delivering is not remote – it is the managing.

Summary of proposed solutions

Challenge / solutions	NGO Collective action	Donors action
Communication		
- Video-conferencing	X	X
- Cultural and contextual understanding/awareness	X	
- Language skills		
- Increase handover periods between incoming and outgoing expatriate staff	X	X
- Changing office location from Amman to Erbil for NGOs operating in central Iraq		
- Create in Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and in Basrah airport an NGO space where expatriates can meet with their Iraqi colleagues	X	X
- Liaison/reporting officer		X
- System of deputies for key personnel		X
- Board system		
- Iraq based staff: horizontal versus pyramidal structure		
Personnel Management		
- NCCI Human Resources (HR) database	X	
- Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities	X	
- Bonus system		X
- Salary scale	X	X
- Increased interaction between NGO HQ and Iraqi personnel	X	
- Increased interaction between Iraq based personnel and donors	X	
- Improved expatriates' interpersonal skills		
- Training and development policy	X	X
- Small scale programmes "think small"		
- Internship abroad	X	X
- Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities	X	
- Share training resources to reduce costs	X	X
- Expatriates and experienced Iraqis from various NGOs to provide collective trainings to NGOs' staff.	X	
- Localise training resources	X	X
Assessment		
- NGO Joint Needs Assessment	X	X
Monitoring and Evaluation		
- Promote organisational learning within NGOs and among NGOs	X	X
- Participatory M&E		X
- Separate M&E Unit		X
- Peer M&E	X	X
- External M&E	X	X

Emergency Response and Access[15]

A key element in addressing the humanitarian crises on the ground is for relief and aid agencies to have access to the areas where they are assisting the vulnerable. With growing acknowledgement by the international community that there is indeed a humanitarian crisis in Iraq, this issue take a more important place in the discussions about humanitarian aid in Iraq.

NGOs play a vital role providing support to affected people. Nevertheless, they often face obstacles in accessing the most vulnerable. It was needed to review access options and obstacles that reflect the situation on the ground and make use of the comparative advantages and experiences that NGOs have, to list what can be done, what solutions are viable and what support is needed to implement those solutions to improve the quality of aid given to the affected Iraqis in the field.

> *"A coordinated, global and inclusive strategy is needed with all the stakeholders involved in order to provide appropriate responses to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq."*

With due acknowledgment to existing official Iraqi channels, the humanitarian intervention is not meant to replace what exists, but to try to reduce the vacuums in the access of beneficiaries to basic services.

Despite their presence on the ground and their capacity to deliver, it has to be stated that NGOs cannot independently provide all the solutions nor respond to all the needs. A coordinated, global and inclusive strategy with locally-based approaches is needed with all the stakeholders involved in order to provide appropriate responses to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

Obviously, it has to be underlined that Humanitarian Operational Space is not given as an established space and that access is never taken for granted. Both have to be developed and sustained on a daily basis.

Four main issues are indispensable for access:

- Presence on the ground
It is a very basic premise, but you have to actually be on the ground trying to bypass obstacles in order to succeed. Accompanying attempts to counter barriers such as checkpoints requires creativity. This might appear obvious and trite, but it is often forgotten in distance programming interventions.

- The need for coordination and networking
With the increasing lack of trust and the quasi impossibility to move freely in central Iraq, coordination and networking are needed more than ever, to provide updated and accurate information, as well as in terms of keys contacts on the ground (that can facilitate access) or lobbying relays with authorities and main stakeholders.

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[15] Full Report published by NCCI is available here: http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?article1580

- The need to diversify resources

Human resources, but also physical or financial resources need to be diversified to increase opportunities for access on the ground, as access is very often possible at a local level only. This means that staff should be diversified, and vehicles and drivers are available to transport goods from a point to another; warehouses strategically located for pre-positioning goods in various access points, etc.

- Trust and Timing

The quicker aid is delivered the better the response is. Timing in terms of obtaining authorisations, responding to a crises and delivering goods is an important issue and can be shortened by creating links and relationships at local – community levels. Organisations that have better access to a spot are often those who have been working in the area for a while, are known to the communities, or are originally from the area. Indeed, creating trust is a critical issue and, time is a great concern for humanitarian organisations in order to save lives. Being present soon after a disaster or a big crisis can increase access as the acceptance and credibility of the organisation is reinforced by its actions as perceived by the community.

There are 2 main sets of obstacles for access to beneficiaries. There are obstacles that can be solved directly by NGOs during their intervention and those that can be solved by other partners through an efficient networking process.
There is a third set which is more relevant to the context or the current insecurity and on which NGOs cannot have an effect to improve it, even if it affects them. Indeed, these obstacles can only be solved in the long-term with the support of all actors in Iraq.

> *"3 ranges of solutions have been raised that can ease NGO access: Networking, Diversity of Resources and, above all, focusing on solutions at a local level."*

3 ranges of solutions have been raised that can ease NGO access: Networking, diversity of resources and, above all, focusing on solutions at a local level.

Most access points have already been identified. Some are already in use, and others are considered as possibilities. Facilitators, often at a local level or specific resources have to be used to help with improving or creating access. In most of the identified or possible access, an updated database of local contacts, managed by talented, creative and adaptable managers able to deal with unpredictable obstacles is absolutely needed. The need to have diversified teams requires adequate funding, as multiple staff means more expenses.

Coordination for an Emergency Response Capacity

Amongst the various strategies that have been regularly discussed and outlined regarding the access to meet the needs of the affected populations (massive cross-boarding, convergence points that can be used as safe haven for the population, etc); aid workers repeatedly returned to the need to bolster existing networks in order to improve coordination in terms of the emergency, which is necessary in order to make progress in improving access.

Coordination mechanisms serve a vital role in the humanitarian context, providing opportunities for NGOs to maintain their independence, and when needed, to use a coordination platform and the perception of non-affiliation with organisations that can compromise their efforts within communities and the safety of their staff and aid workers. At the same time, it allows for a pooling of information and a platform from which it can be conveyed in a coherent manner to the appropriate audience. Furthermore, it can facilitate the identification of gaps in aid assistance and appropriate responses.

While NGOs have a vital role to play in monitoring, managing aid and gaining access, the difficulties faced by humanitarian agencies mean that negotiating around the various obstacles for access to vulnerable populations has become an inevitable and complex part of the humanitarian experience. The implications are that:

- Quick responses to emergencies are hampered

- The flow of accurate information and data on vulnerable community conditions are difficult to manage and analyse

- Monitoring and evaluation of conditions and needs and the impacts of aid are complicated to obtain, time consuming for cross-checking and verification, etc. [16]

> *"In order to better answer to these needs, NGOs have decided to activate a nationwide field-based emergency network that will improve the quality of aid responses"*

In order to better answer to these needs, NGOs have decided to re-activate a field-based emergency network that will improve the quality of aid responses by centralising and securing information on existing networks, improve field linkages, and ease aid workers access.

Indeed, the reality on the ground is that an improved coordinated mechanism is needed to facilitate access to vulnerable communities. An emergency network serves as an opportunity to overcome some of these obstacles to efficiency while allowing NGOs to maintain their independence while taking advantage of synergies built between them. The development of the emergency network will serve a vital link in the on-going efforts to assist the Iraqi population.

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[16] NGOs are currently working to improve their Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms, to agree on accurate criteria, define mechanism of peer-monitoring etc. A technical document is planned to be publish at the end of the current process.

NGOs have maintained an adaptable and responsive coordination and posture to events and issues as they arise, and a proactive stance calling attention to potential problems or issues of concern to civil society and Iraq as a whole. This coordination is already applied at multiple levels and serves first and foremost the people of Iraq, the NGOs and civil society, and secondarily UN agencies, International Government missions and other interested third parties, including the GoI.

Yet, as stated in the new UN Strategic Framework for humanitarian action in Iraq[17]: "*The existing UN coordination structure for humanitarian activities is currently limited to the Humanitarian Working Group. […] This mechanism has facilitated coordination of humanitarian response in localized intense conflict areas but generally is more focused on information sharing.*
Currently, the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) provides a forum for coordination among most international and Iraqi national NGOs complementing UN efforts. This forum, and the NGO community at large, has been critical in responding to humanitarian needs in Iraq since 2003. In addition, NCCI and its members have established an emergency field coordination structure through area focal points to enable rapid response to identified needs, particularly during periods of intensified localized conflicts."

The coordinated humanitarian response is carried out at multiple levels as the situation demands ranging from advocating for an adequate response for the newly recognised humanitarian crisis in Iraq, to targeting and linking on-the-ground humanitarian aid providers to each other and vulnerable groups.

Nevertheless, in addition to the on-the-ground humanitarian coordination, the improvement of the coordination mechanisms should grow through 4 main issues:

> *"The coordinated humanitarian response is carried out at multiple levels as the situation demands ranging from advocating for an adequate response for the newly recognised humanitarian crisis in Iraq, to targeting and linking on-the-ground humanitarian aid providers to each other and vulnerable groups"*

- Community and Institutional Capacity Building

There are urgent needs to build, support and improve on the organisational and humanitarian aid capacity of the relevant stakeholders present in Iraq.

- Prevention

The continuous escalation of violence and internal sectarian tensions in Iraq requires efforts that slow or halt the further deterioration of the current situation. Engaging Iraqis in constructive dialogues around themes of mutual interest facilitates integrated and participatory approaches amongst stakeholders and enables them to advocate effectively on behalf of their constituents and ease access to hot spots.

- Information and Communication management

As stated at the beginning of this document, communication like coordination is fragmented. Conflicting reports from various sides are confusing the donors and the Iraqi

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[17] See: http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf_Strategic_Framework_for_Humanitarian_Action_in_Iraq.pdf

population which has direct impacts on the general perception of humanitarian needs in Iraq. Dedicated communication mechanisms that are able to compile and analyse information from a variety of sources and that are made accessible to relevant organisations and individuals can go a long way to raise awareness of current events, develop concerted plans and facilitate appropriate responses.

- Advocacy & Lobbying

Advocacy and lobbying are cross cutting activities needed for all the stakeholders in Iraq that wish to engage in humanitarian interventions. There has been an urgent need for advocacy and lobbying.

That is to say that coordination should be developed to link the response to every need. Indeed, given the complex Iraqi context, responses should be developed through an inclusive and general strategy.

Therefore we welcome the above-mentioned UN Strategic Framework which proposes "*to promote concerted humanitarian action by strengthening coordination or partnerships at various levels with the Government of Iraq, and among humanitarian Organizations; to develop a multi-faceted strategy for maximised operability in an insecure environment, including through promoting an area-based approach to security regulations and programme planning, thereby maximising access opportunities; to establish a centralized information collection, management and analysis system aimed at improving availability and consistency of data in order to establish common analysis and messaging on the humanitarian situation, needs and response; to develop and implement an advocacy strategy aimed at influencing policies and practices of key actors; promoting the rights of the civilian population, promoting adherence to humanitarian norms ensuring better preparedness; and ensuring a coordinated, effective and adequately resourced response and; to promote resource availability for agencies operating in Iraq, especially NGOs.*"

> *"Donors with humanitarian responsibilities must recognize that coordination of NGO humanitarian operations is neither an add-on nor a luxury"*

In the independent evaluation of NCCI[18] recently published, the author emphasized that "*Donors with humanitarian responsibilities must recognize that coordination of NGO humanitarian operations is neither an add-on nor a luxury, and that coordinated activity is especially important in difficult contexts. Funding at a level sufficient for growing core needs and specific projects should be provided into the medium term and should be maintained for as long as needs among the population -- and potential needs resulting from renewed violence -- overwhelm local and national capacities, and thus merit a continued humanitarian presence.*"

That is to say that implementing the strategic framework's proposal to strengthen the coordination mechanisms is urgently needed to help supporting, at the local level, Iraqis that are suffering on a daily basis in Iraq.

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[18] http://www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf_NCCI_Evaluation_Report_-_March_2007-2.pdf

CONSTRAINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for Flexible, Inclusive and Locally Based Strategies and Diversified Resources

NGOs have adapted and responds to the changing landscape in Iraq, using their mandate, charter and the above-mentioned Code of conduct as reference points to guide their actions. The ability to respond however is often constrained by a lack of neutral and flexible funding that supports their core functions as opposed to definite actions anchored to a specific budget line. Furthermore, the withdrawal of some donors and limited funds from other sources for the humanitarian assistance provided by many NGOs may significantly decrease the number of active NGOs, in spite of the evident acute humanitarian needs.

In addition, the escalation of violence in different parts of Iraq has exposed civilians to high risks and they are subject to various threats including intimidation, kidnapping, arbitrary arrests, assassination etc. Aid workers, as civilians, are facing the same dangers. This involves not only the safe working conditions but also the protection of aid workers identities. This is significant as people can be targeted and ostracized just for being misperceived or wrongly affiliated.

Continued instability and security concerns have led to the relocation and/or withdrawal of many NGOs from Iraq. The consequence is an increase in challenges faced and further urgent/pressing needs on-the-ground. This loss of humanitarian space has reduced the ability of NGOs to operate in an effective manner. Additionally, most of stakeholders' strategies are elaborated at the head quarter's level, without an adequate knowledge for the reality on the ground. It results lots of guidelines, administrative requirements, rigid frameworks that are not adapted to the Iraq context and which hamper, often, the needed creativity, flexibility and non-formal intervention on the ground.

In the short term, there appears to be no way to address the protection vacuum in much of Iraq. MNF-I and Iraqi Security Forces are incapable of protecting civilians, while the Iraqi authorities cannot access many of those in need. The rule of law, governance, and macro-economic improvement cannot be tackled by humanitarian actors seeking to respond to emergency needs.

However, there are urgent needs to which humanitarian actors can be expected to respond, and ways in which they can do so. Humanitarian actors have obligations to uphold the rights of the people of Iraq to receive adequate humanitarian assistance through the provision of adequate shelter and resources including food rations and nutritional supplements, clean water, provision of medical attention to those who are injured or sick, and fuel. Humanitarian actors can also play a vital role as advocates about the needs and situation of the people of Iraq.

Therefore,

➢ **The UN and Members States, Donors, the International Leadership and all stakeholders including UN agencies, need to acknowledge the challenges of the humanitarian crisis inside Iraq, as well as its impact on the civilian population and must address the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and give increased support to NGOs, as neutral and impartial key actors on the ground by**: Mobilizing qualified technical senior staffs with strong experience in war-torn areas to deal with the complex emergency; developing an internationally coherent and sustainable humanitarian, political, economical and social strategy at the regional level; advocating for the International Community to provide greater and readily accessible, flexible, neutral and needs-based emergency humanitarian funds; balancing the funds between the support provided for inside Iraq and abroad in order to address the roots of the problems and to avoid the risk of creating a "pull factor" (incentives to leave) and an increase in outflow; putting the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure that NGOs, including Iraqi NGOs, can receive funds in a timely manner; building on discussions underway with NGOs to better understand remote management and mechanisms for monitoring and verification.

➢ **The Government of Iraq needs to provide significantly greater support to address humanitarian needs by:** acknowledging the humanitarian crisis inside the country; allocating their available funds, human and technical resources, and basic goods to meet the needs; accepting and facilitating alternative response mechanisms to compensate for the various difficulties that hamper the current centralised distribution systems in place such as the food and medicines, which would ease and accelerate the delivery of stocks by reducing transportation cost and time; facilitating the movement of aid workers; coordinating and using the most efficient mechanisms at the ministerial level for the movement and delivery of non-militarised humanitarian aid; supporting NGOs through unified legislation and registration processes that recognise their rights and independence; and lending credence and respect for the Rule of Law.

➢ **All stakeholders need to ensure that International Humanitarian Law is always and fully respected by**: reinforce protection mechanisms for Iraqi civilians; acknowledging that the on-going human rights violations are a crime against humanity; advocating for respect of human rights in Iraq; holding transparent inquiries into all allegations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations by all parties; ending the state of impunity through adequate judicial mechanisms; easing access by creating humanitarian corridors; ensuring a stronger civil military coordination with all combatants through the allocation of a high level UN Civil Military Coordinator with a civilian and humanitarian background.

➢ **All stakeholders and especially the UN need to achieve a more coordinated, flexible and locally-based humanitarian response by:** addressing the roots of the problems through an appropriate political, economical and social strategy; reinforcing the humanitarian coordination by assigning a strong experienced Humanitarian Coordinator with humanitarian background to implement the UN Strategic Framework; ensuring that the concerns of NGOs are taken into account at all stages; increasing their presence on the ground and their support to

humanitarian actors in term of logistics; and coordinating the response at a regional level and assisting in the coordination at the local level.

> **UN, NGOs and other humanitarian actors on the ground need to illustrate that it is still possible to address humanitarian needs inside Iraq, with the necessary resources, by**: increasing their communication and exchanges of information with other stakeholders; working together to develop indicators and a verification mechanism to identify priority needs and an early warning mechanism; ensuring that comprehensive mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation adapted both to the on-the-ground reality and the donor's expectations are in place; and continuing to develop capacity building programmes with Iraqi aid workers and local communities, especially in the areas of quality of assistance, fundraising, conflict resolution and peaceful reconciliation models, networking and information sharing.

> **The UN, host countries[19], and the International Community, including countries involved in the coalition, need to acknowledge their equal responsibility to engage and assist with the host countries and to find an acceptable route to provide a legal status to Iraqi refugees by**: sharing the responsibilities for the protection and rehabilitation of large numbers of people from Iraq through urgent increases in resettlement programmes; making generous provisions to open their doors and accept genuine asylum-seekers now seeking to flee the violence inside Iraq; assuring access to an asylum processes for displaced Iraqis in third countries and expanded opportunities of refugee resettlement for those with special protection needs; respecting their moral obligation towards Iraqi refugees in ensuring that their rights are respected particularly the right of non-refoulement; registering those seeking refuge and those in need of assistance in order to facilitate their safe rehabilitation, temporary residence and protection pending a durable solution; revising refugees' permit requirements.

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[19] notwithstanding the non-signature of the 1951 Convention by some of these countries,