

# Special feature

# The crisis in Iraq

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# Humanitarian Exchange



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**Editorial photos:**

Left: IDPs in Baharka camp, 5km north of Erbil  
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Top: PKK & PUK Peshmerga on the way to the frontline in Kirkuk  
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Middle: Displaced Iraqi children in an IDP site in Koyseinjaq  
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Bottom right: A displaced boy in a camp, Erbil  
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# Editorial



This issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*, co-edited with Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Research Fellow Eva Svoboda, focuses on the crisis in Iraq. Since the seizure of Iraqi territory by Islamic State in January 2014, over 3.2 million people have been displaced. More than 8m people are in need of humanitarian assistance, but a lack of funding and insecurity mean that few international humanitarian organisations are working outside of Kurdistan.

In her lead article, Louise Redvers provides an insightful overview of the humanitarian crisis and political context in Iraq. Laura Lungarotti, Sarah Craggs and Agnes Tillinac highlight human trafficking as a neglected protection concern and urge humanitarian and protection practitioners to better identify trafficking and respond to it. Julia St. Thomas King and Dennis Ardis explore the use of mobile approaches to monitor and identify protection needs and ensure that displaced Iraqis have the documentation they need to access humanitarian assistance. Barah Mikail, Lisa Reilly and Raquel Vazquez Llorente critically discuss acceptance as a security strategy in Iraq, and Rachel Sider shares learning from using CLARA – Cohort Livelihoods and Risk Analysis – to design safer livelihoods programmes. Keith Chibafa looks at the collaborative use of Last Mile Mobile Solution (LMMS) technology for beneficiary data and tracking, Gemma Woods and Sarah Mace report on efforts to encourage beneficiary feedback on the response via a call centre in Erbil and Su'ad Jarbawi makes the case for scaling up cash assistance.

Articles in the Practice and Policy Notes section reflect on the impact of technology and e-money in Nepal after the recent earthquake, research in Samoa on the use of participatory tools to assess remittances in disaster, the current crisis in South Sudan and the growing role of robust multilateral military interventions in African peacekeeping.

As always, we welcome any comments or feedback, which can be sent to [hpn@odi.org.uk](mailto:hpn@odi.org.uk) or to **The Coordinator, 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ.**



Iraqi woman and child, who fled their village near Sinjar after it was captured by IS © Caroline Gluck/EU/ECHO

# The crisis in Iraq

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## The crisis in Iraq: an overview

**Louise Redvers**

The eruption of armed conflict in Iraq in January 2014, and subsequent large-scale territorial seizures by the Islamist militant group calling itself Islamic State (IS), has displaced more than three million Iraqis in the space of 18 months. The UN and international NGOs, already in Iraq in significant numbers supporting some 220,000 Syrian refugees, have struggled to cope with the speed and scale of the displacement. Key challenges have included limited funding, restricted access to large parts of the country due to security concerns and a lack of coordination between the different aid actors involved. Iraq's weak infrastructure and limited capacity – the result of decades of conflict – as well as its ever-deepening sectarian divides and complicated political landscape, have exacerbated these difficulties. Nearly two years into the crisis there is little sign of the displacement caseload reducing, and with more military offensives on IS territory planned the number of people needing humanitarian assistance – currently estimated to be as many as eight million – is only likely to increase.

### Geography

Since the start of the crisis in January 2014, when militants from IS first entered Iraq, exploiting a security vacuum created by a rift between Sunni tribal leaders and the Shia-led government, aid agencies have been strongly criticised for prioritising easier-to-reach areas in places like Kurdistan, as opposed to targeting the most vulnerable. Some 500,000 people were displaced from Anbar in the first few months of 2014, about as many as fled Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, when IS invaded in June, yet the situation made few global headlines and repeated UN appeals for funding fell largely on deaf ears.

This apparent international indifference to IS' rise in Iraq was blamed on a combination of donor fatigue following decades of aid funding for a country that never seemed to get better, and the proliferation of other crises such as Syria, Typhoon Haiyan and the Central African Republic. The inaccessibility of Anbar, which few foreign journalists or aid workers had visited in recent years due to security concerns, was another factor. Mosul and the province of Nineveh, on the other hand, were just a few hours' drive, if that, from the Kurdish capital of Erbil, and a much easier story to cover. Some organisations have made efforts to partner with local and national NGOs to get aid to the millions trapped inside IS-held territories, but more

needs to be done to build local partnerships. Domestic NGOs have good community contacts and better access to hard-to-reach areas, but cannot always satisfy increasingly stringent donor requirements.

### Funding

The UN designated Iraq a Level 3 emergency in August 2014, placing it alongside Syria, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Yemen in terms of severity and scale, but like many other crises it has struggled to attract funding. Apart from a one-off allocation of \$500m from Saudi Arabia last year, repeated UN appeals have failed to meet their target; as of 13 August, the 2015 Strategic Response Plan (SRP) was only 40% funded.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the World Food Programme (WFP) began cutting back its distributions in March, and in July the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that 84% of the country's humanitarian health programmes had been suspended, leaving up to three million people without access to key services.

Over the years Iraq has received billions of dollars of international aid and military spending, and many donors believe that, as an oil-exporting middle-income country, it should be doing more to help itself. However, a long history of conflict, including the war with Iran in the 1980s, the first Gulf War in 1991, years of crippling sanctions and then the 2003 US-led invasion and subsequent sectarian conflict have greatly weakened Iraq's capacity, leaving its institutions riddled with corruption and mismanagement. Allegations of misallocation of government cash grants for IDPs are widespread.

Another complication is that, in addition to the sovereign Iraqi government in Baghdad, the semi-autonomous Kurdistan has its own regional government based in Erbil. Although relations are slowly improving, there is little love lost between the two due to long-running budget and territorial disputes, and each is responding separately to the IS crisis, both in humanitarian terms and militarily. As a result, most aid organisations are running two parallel operations, one in the north with the Kurdish government, and one in the south and centre of the country, with the Iraqi government, pushing up costs and adding to the bureaucracy of the response.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=1097>.

Beneath these central structures there is a complex web of provincial authorities. In the south and centre of the country, the provinces have the final say on border control, and there have been numerous instances where fleeing IDPs have been blocked from entering certain governorates due to their ethnicity and religion. In April thousands of Sunni Muslims fleeing an anti-IS operation in Anbar were prevented from entering predominantly Shia Baghdad, leaving them stuck for days in a no man's land, without food or shelter. Kurdistan also runs a tight border policy and has likewise come under fire for its selective entry policies, which generally allow passage to Christians, Yezidis and other minorities, whom it sees as key to helping it build an independent Kurdish state, but often turning back Sunni Arabs.

In a strongly worded statement in May 2015, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, Chaloka Beyani, criticised both governments for failing IDPs, flagging instances of restricted movement, detention without due process and an 'ad hoc' approach to aid delivery. While fully cognisant of cases of restricted movement and blocked passage, aid agencies are required to work closely on aid delivery with the authorities, and few have openly challenged their policies on IDP movement and returns. Western and regional governments, which are in coalition with both Baghdad and Erbil to hold back the advance of IS, have also remained quiet, and when pressed say the border forces have to prioritise security.

## Coordination

Few aid actors will deny that the response to last summer's Mosul and Sinjar displacements was chaotic. The situation was certainly not easy: in the space of a few weeks, at the height of a scorching Iraqi summer, close to a million people streamed into Kurdistan in need of food, water and shelter; thousands more spent weeks under siege on and around Sinjar mountain, where many lost their lives. Half-built shopping malls, hotels and office blocks – once promising symbols of the region's nascent oil boom – became makeshift shelters strewn with washing lines and cooking pots, and public parks were overwhelmed by rough sleepers sheltering in tents made from plastic sheeting. Aid teams set about erecting tented camps, with some sites chosen so hastily they had to be relocated days later due to moving frontlines or poor water supplies. Rushed aid distributions were often scattergun, duplicating deliveries for some families, and missing others entirely.

Tracking IDPs was next to impossible, both because of their numbers and because of their continued movement onwards to new sites, and it took months for the authorities to agree with aid agencies on a formal system of registration. For most of 2014 IDPs coming into Kurdistan were given temporary tourist passes, and there was widespread confusion about the legality of their status. Many Sunni Arab IDPs from places like Mosul and Tikrit were reluctant to register for fear that their details would be passed to the Kurdish authorities and their notorious plain-clothed Assayish security force, or even passed back to the militants they had fled. Many Anbari IDPs in Baghdad also chose to stay below

the radar, worried about being targeted by Shia militia groups and accused of being IS supporters, or being forced to move out of Shia neighbourhoods where they had found shelter.

The lack of accurate registration data meant that initially many aid distributions were based on guesstimates, and even these rough numbers were not always shared between the dozens of organisations running relief drops, leading to confusion and duplication. The sheer number of UN agencies and NGOs involved in the response complicated coordination. It took the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) some time to set up its operation in Erbil, leaving the larger operational UN agencies like UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP to assume de facto charge. In addition to personality clashes at senior level, organisations that had previously had clear mandates working in 'sectors' to support Syrian refugees had to reassemble into additional 'clusters' to help Iraqi IDPs, often creating whole new working groups. There was duplication and all the usual UN bureaucracy, and while many agencies 'surged' staff to assist in the response, the deployments were short term. International NGOs complained that personnel changes meant that it took months to get basic proposals signed off.

It took such a long time for funds to be released that at one stage many NGOs were forced to shut projects for weeks at a time due a lack of cash flow. There were complaints too about national and local NGOs – especially in the south of the country – being excluded from planning and coordination meetings. Limited internet connectivity and language barriers complicated teleconferencing.

Senior officials admit that it took too long for the crisis to become a Level 3 emergency in more than name, but under the leadership of Lise Grande, who was appointed the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq in December 2014, coordination appears to have greatly improved. International NGOs, which had complained about being kept at arm's length from planning by the UN, have been invited to co-lead response clusters, and now have more say about projects and implementation. Intense lobbying by the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) has improved dialogue and partnerships with local and national actors.

With many international UN and NGO staff now based back in Baghdad, after relocating en masse to Erbil in June 2014, the response is less concentrated on Kurdistan, although IS-held areas are still very poorly served. The roll-out of pooled funding has also helped speed up project implementation, ensuring that money – when it is there – gets to operating partners more quickly. Likewise, the launch of a new humanitarian hotline, giving IDPs access to information about services and support, is intended to help bridge the gap between aid agencies and recipients and improve the accountability of aid delivery.

Going forward, the key challenge for aid actors operating in Iraq will be continuing to support the millions of people in

need of emergency food, shelter and medical services, while also helping to build resilience among communities facing protracted displacement. The provision of work opportunities and education are vital, both to ensure that IDPs are given a chance to rebuild their lives and to reduce potential tensions between the displaced and their host communities. The UN in particular faces a delicate task in supporting the provincial authorities as they assist people to return to territory reclaimed from IS, without endorsing efforts to reshape the ethnic make-up of certain communities. This will be a particular challenge in the ethnically mixed and long-disputed Nineveh Plains around Mosul, as well as in and around Kirkuk. Both of these areas are very much in the sights of the Kurdish regional government's state-building ambitions. Development actors such as the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) are already stepping in to help the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities rebuild areas reclaimed from IS, and there are concerns about how money will be allocated, and for whose benefit.

For now, the governments of Iraq and Kurdistan, and their international allies, are pursuing a military solution to IS. This is as much to reclaim seized territory within Iraq as it is an attempt to reduce the extremists' growing international influence. However, IS is just one symptom of Iraq's deeper sectarian and political divisions. As IDPs begin to trickle home, either because their towns have been liberated or because they can no longer cope with the conditions of their displacement, this needs to be kept in mind. Decades of authoritarian Sunni rule under Saddam Hussein, followed by the post-2003 invasion and Shia-led government, in parallel with Kurdistan's

ambitions for nationhood, have turned Iraq into a complex mosaic of grievances and vested interests.

Failure to acknowledge these challenges by ignoring ethnicised IDP returns policies and not putting in place comprehensive dialogue and peace-building programmes alongside physical reconstruction projects will only store up future conflicts. Helping communities help themselves through livelihood and employment opportunities, and promoting the reintegration of different ethnic groups as they return home, must be an integral part of all programming. This will not be an easy sell to donors, who are under increasing domestic pressure to justify overseas aid spending and prefer quick-impact projects with photogenic deliverables, but aid organisations need to be bold.

With the World Humanitarian Summit looming, the debate is more urgent than ever about how the humanitarian and development sectors can better play to each other's strengths, rather than working in silos. Iraq provides an opportunity to prove the gap can be bridged. There is also an opportunity for international aid actors to practice what they preach on engaging with national and local actors to build their involvement and capacity. This is key to ensuring that the most vulnerable communities receive aid; given funding constraints, it will also allow for a more sustainable in-country response in the medium to long term.

**Louise Redvers** is a journalist with IRIN. She has been reporting on the humanitarian impact of Islamic State in Iraq since January 2014.

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## Human trafficking in crises: a neglected protection concern

**Laura Lungarotti, Sarah Craggs and Agnes Tillinac**

A migrant woman stranded in the midst of conflict in Iraq with no means of finding a safe haven elsewhere engages in survival sex with a bus driver. A displaced child in Kurdistan works hazardous unpaid jobs in exchange for food and shelter. Are these victims of trafficking? In conflicts and natural disasters, it is not always easy to draw a line between abuse of power, abuse of a position of vulnerability, forced labour, exploitation and human trafficking. Migrants, displaced people, other mobile groups, host communities and specific groups or individuals, including women, children, adolescents and ethnic minorities, are often victims of trafficking; crises tend to exacerbate pre-existing exposure to risks, threats, abuse and exploitation, and introduce new risks and threats.

In Iraq, recent research and reports<sup>1</sup> show that specific groups, such as Yazidi women and children, have been abducted by ISIL for the purpose of sexual exploitation and slavery-like practices, including forced marriage, either in Iraq or in neighbouring Syria. In Iraq and Libya, there are reports of migrant workers being held by militia groups such as ISIL in debt bondage, tortured for financial extortion or ransom<sup>2</sup> or used for forced labour or sexual exploitation. In Nigeria, abduction of specific religious groups has been one of Boko Haram's terror techniques, and in the Central African Republic people fleeing civil and political crisis have faced sexual exploitation at bus stations and transit sites. In all of these instances, discrimination, neglect, exclusion and weak national structures provide fertile ground in which exploitation and human trafficking can flourish.

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1 Since November 2014, the IOM has conducted research on human trafficking in regional crises in Iraq (including the impact of the Syria crisis), Libya and Tunisia. See <http://ow.ly/PfG6F>. See also reports from the United Nations Mission in Iraq at [http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=3316:iraq-un-report-documents-human-rights-violation-of-increasingly-sectarian-nature&Itemid=605&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=3316:iraq-un-report-documents-human-rights-violation-of-increasingly-sectarian-nature&Itemid=605&lang=en).

2 A similar form of human trafficking has been noted in the Sinai peninsula in Egypt. See, for example, M. van Reisen and C. Rijken, 'Sinai Trafficking: Origin and Definition of a New Form of Human Trafficking', *Social Inclusion*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2015.



© EU/ECHO/Caroline Gluck

Families fleeing fighting in Kobane board IOM buses to Kurdistan

## What is human trafficking?

Human trafficking has three key elements: *an act* (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons), using *means of coercion or threat* in order to control an individual for the purpose of *exploitation*. Exploitation may take various forms: sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, organ removal, slavery and slavery-like practices. In the case of children, only two of these three elements (act and exploitation) need to be present to define trafficking.

## Why is human trafficking so poorly addressed in crises?

First and foremost, determining what amounts to a crime of trafficking is the prerogative of the state.<sup>3</sup> In Iraq, legislation against human trafficking was passed in 2012, resulting in the establishment of a specific department within the Ministry of Interior and a Central Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons (CCCT). Since the upsurge in violence in 2013, many activities have had to be reformulated or put on hold. The anti-trafficking response in crisis contexts such as Iraq is further constrained by the limited number of non-governmental organisations specifically equipped to respond to this crime and protect its victims.

<sup>3</sup> In relation to the MENA regional crises, Syria and Iraq have anti-trafficking legislation in force; Libya and Tunisia are yet to pass national anti-trafficking laws (in the latter a draft anti-trafficking law is under legislative review).

Despite increasing accounts of human trafficking in crisis, humanitarian actors often lack tailored, specific and systematic anti-trafficking tools or knowledge. Human trafficking risks are often not fully understood or recognised by first responders at the onset of crises. There are grey areas between forced labour, exploitation, abduction and trafficking, and so determining whether someone is a victim of trafficking or labour exploitation or a smuggled migrant can at times be tricky. In Iraq, reports indicate that some migrant workers fleeing areas under Islamic State (IS) control, whether held captive at some point or not, did not want to (or could not) leave Iraq before they had settled debts related to their initial entry into the country (i.e. smuggling) or conditions of work. Without more details of their specific situation, these workers – perhaps wrongly – could have been identified as smuggled migrants or as exploited/detained and trafficked migrant workers at one stage or another. Beyond the legal consequences, misidentification could also significantly affect a migrant worker's access to tailored anti-trafficking assistance.

The general lack of knowledge among humanitarian actors on the definitional complexities of human trafficking and responses to it in times of crisis does not help in raising awareness on the issue. Some forms of human trafficking, such as the slavery-like practices suffered by Yazidi women and girls in Iraq, might be responded to within measures to restore the dignity and safety of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence implemented by humanitarian agencies, but other cases fall between the cracks. In Iraq, cases of migrants smuggled and later trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labour, or cases of abduction for the purpose of trafficking for forced organ removal, may not find an appropriate set of responses within the humanitarian architecture.

Likewise, unknown adults are picking up unaccompanied and separated Syrian children at the border or from refugee camps. This is another issue that requires thorough analysis and understanding of the legal framework and practices predating the crisis, how they have unfolded during the crisis and any new risks associated with human trafficking or other abuse. Child labour currently figures among the Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Minimum Standards (CPMS).<sup>4</sup> This is testimony, not only to the fact that child labour exists in times of crisis, but also that efforts are under way to integrate measures within the humanitarian response to counter it. However, specific evidence on child trafficking, including trafficking unrelated to child labour, has not been brought to the attention of humanitarian actors. This may be because the humanitarian community has so far considered tackling the issue of human trafficking in Iraq and elsewhere as the business of development actors. Protection actors have expressed interest in learning more about human trafficking during the crisis in Iraq, including how it can be best addressed, and this should be built upon.

## Moving forward

Human trafficking in humanitarian crises has come increasingly to the fore, and efforts must continue to ensure that evidence-based, innovative responses to it become an integral part of the humanitarian response. Without falling prey to a status-based approach, humanitarian and protection practitioners need to acknowledge the risk of human trafficking in times of crisis, so that, where protection and assistance needs arise, they can be identified and responded to. Understanding whether a survivor of gender-based violence is also a victim of human trafficking, as well as looking at child victims of trafficking during child protection responses, allows for a more inclusive approach and helps bridge the gap between pre- and post-crisis exploitation.

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<sup>4</sup> Reference guide for child protection humanitarian actors and companion to Sphere Standards: <http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards>.

Dedicated experts could be deployed at the onset of a crisis response, and when relevant could steer working groups looking at context-specific responses. They should be deployed with other first responders (e.g. shelter, medical assistance, water and sanitation, food and non-food items) to ensure that the prevention aspects of human trafficking are not overlooked at the outset of a crisis. In Nepal, humanitarian actors were confronted by the risks of human trafficking just days after the earthquake. Even where evidence of trafficking is scant, early interventions could have a significant preventive impact. In Iraq, there is increasing interest among protection actors in constituting a sub-working group (embedded within the Protection Working Group or broader Cluster response) looking at unsafe migration and human trafficking, and this may be a model that could be supported and replicated system-wide.

Lastly, humanitarian and protection practitioners need to develop innovative ways to prevent and ultimately end human trafficking during crises. Mobile anti-trafficking teams comprising civil society actors and government officials have proved effective in natural disaster contexts.<sup>5</sup> In conflict, redirecting the work of development-focused civil societies and NGOs to dedicated humanitarian protection work for victims of human trafficking could be explored. Context-specific solutions involving the community and traditional leaders, together with capacity-building activities by humanitarian and early recovery actors, could be effective response strategies.

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<sup>5</sup> IOM's experiences in Haiti and the Philippines have proved that this model could be effective.

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## Identity crisis? Documentation for the displaced in Iraq

### Julia St. Thomas King and Dennis Ardis

In any crisis where people are forced to flee, whether across international borders or within their own territory, holding basic documentation to prove one's identity is fundamental to survival and recovery. In Iraq, where internally displaced people (IDPs) are scattered across different governorates with varying degrees of security and access constraints, ensuring that the most vulnerable are identified and can obtain the legal protection they need is a tremendous challenge. In the midst of ongoing conflict and an ever-evolving displacement crisis, mobile identification, legal assistance and building the capacity of local communities to share information has proven critical to ensuring that people can meet their basic

needs and protect themselves and each other from further harm.

### Context

Iraq is no stranger to displacement. Prior to the most recent wave of violence, the country had already undergone significant upheaval in the wake of the 2003 US-led invasion and the bombing of the Al Askari mosque in Samarra in 2006, including the dissolution of the old regime, reconstitution of the political system, destruction of infrastructure, loss of life, eruption of sectarian violence and mass displacement.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between 2006 and 2008 an estimated 2.8 million Iraqis were displaced, 5% of the total population at the time. In 2013 approximately 2.1m people were still in displacement.<sup>1</sup>

With the capture by Islamic State (IS) of large areas of al-Anbar governorate, as well as sites in Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Diyala, Iraq's displacement crisis has deepened. Between January 2014 and August 2015 the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) recorded 3.1m IDPs across the country,<sup>2</sup> sheltering in roughly 3,550 locations.<sup>3</sup> IS's advances and the Iraqi government's counter-measures have greatly diminished humanitarian access and protection space. Many are suffering from the impact of both protracted and multiple displacement – financial resources dwindling, jobs and assets lost, documentation missing – and are struggling to meet their basic needs, all while trying to protect themselves from ongoing violence.

### Loss of documentation in displacement

The rapid onset and dynamic nature of the most recent crisis in Iraq caused many to flee without their most valuable belongings – including their proof of identity. In the current protection

environment, documentation is essential in order to obtain even the most basic humanitarian assistance and to reach areas of safety. In Iraq, a nationality certificate, Civil ID card, housing card and food ration card (PDS) are required to access essential services and public goods – including medical care, education, food rations, employment and government social welfare schemes – as well as to register for compensation entitlements.

IDPs must register with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) to receive a one-off government assistance package of 1m Iraqi Dinar, as well as any other help that may be provided over the course of the crisis. Officially, this registration requires a nationality certificate, Civil ID, PDS and housing card. In many areas, NGOs are required to use MoMD beneficiary lists, which means that IDPs unable to produce these documents to register with the MoMD are often excluded from other humanitarian aid provided locally.

At the same time, IDPs are largely unable to claim the PDS food rations in their area of displacement, either because they have lost their card or because they are unable to transfer it to their new location and the governorate refuses to honour their old PDS card (e.g. in Kirkuk). For a woman without a male



© Rachel Unkovic/International Rescue Committee

Iraqi Yazidi refugees in Newroz camp

1 Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC), *Iraq: Internal Displacement in Brief – As of December 2013*, 31 December 2013.

2 See <http://iomiraq.net/article/0/displacement-escalates-iraq>.

3 IOM Iraq, 'Situation Report 20: Update for 10–24 June'.

companion, obtaining food assistance is particularly difficult, as the PDS card bears the name of the male head of household; she can essentially be blocked from transferring the card as well as from obtaining any other documentation (and, by extension, services and assistance).

Lack of documentation also limits freedom of movement and heightens the risk of detention. Male IDPs are more likely to be detained by the police or prevented from moving from one location to another (and thus from reaching places of safety). The heightened risk of detention at checkpoints over lack of documentation is exacerbated by sectarian tensions, as the situation can be exploited to deny access to safe territory for specific groups or to make arrests under Article 4 of Iraq's Anti-Terrorism Law. To date, a quarter of the International Rescue Committee (IRC)'s detention caseload comprises Article 4 cases targeting men, the majority of them Sunni. The detention caseload from January to August 2015 has risen by 187% from the same period in 2014. This does not just pose a risk to men: it also contributes to family separation and increases the vulnerability of women and children since Iraq's patriarchal documentation system means that men hold documentation on behalf of their family.

## Barriers to accessing documentation

Obtaining personal status documentation in Iraq is difficult at the best of times. The system remains largely paper-based and location-specific. This means that, in order to obtain a new nationality certificate or Civil ID, people are expected to present themselves at the office in their governorate of origin. They are also subjected to complicated procedures, fees, administrative backlogs and a high burden of proof.

In the current climate, these barriers are further complicated by constantly changing rules, which are often created to discourage movement and force return. Inadequate staff capacity to deal with the volume of applications causes significant delays; instructions change frequently, as do the locations for issuance of documentation. In some cases power of attorney is not accepted, forcing IDPs to appear in person, despite significant risks to their safety and security. Single women face additional serious protection risks associated with movement – e.g. sexual violence, abduction – and often bear the sole burden of care for children.

Women are often required to produce their father's or brother's Civil ID or a nationality certificate to support their own cases. If a woman's husband has been detained under Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law, she will not be provided with a housing card in her name, and so cannot register with the MoMD and cannot apply for any documentation, let alone obtain housing with a legal rental agreement.

Security concerns, checkpoints and other practical constraints place near-insurmountable restrictions on IDPs' ability to access the documentation they require to meet their basic needs and stay safe. These constraints, coupled with fear of discrimination and arbitrary arrest, also make it extremely

difficult for aid agencies to provide the most vulnerable with legal assistance and information.

## Mobile protection monitoring, information and legal assistance

Since 2009, the IRC has partnered with UNHCR to operate Protection, Assistance and Reintegration Centres (PARCs) across central and southern Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Rapid and constant mobile deployment to monitor the protection environment, identify needs and deliver legal and other services has proved critical to assisting the most vulnerable. Monitors conduct weekly community- and household-level assessments across urban areas – informal settlements, unfinished buildings/collective shelters and makeshift camps – as well as in formal camps to identify urgent needs.

It was through mobile protection monitoring teams that the case of Layla was identified and addressed. Layla, a 35-year-old woman, fled Mosul with her three children in July 2014, after IS kidnapped her husband. She managed to find safe passage to a camp in Kerbala despite having left all of their documents behind, including the family's PDS card. Layla was identified by mobile protection monitoring teams soon after she arrived at the camp. She explained: 'I was rejected at the food ration centre and not provided with a new [PDS] card because my card was in the name of my husband and I didn't have any documents to prove that my husband was kidnapped. Now I can't get registration at MoMD or receive any food or money [cash assistance]'. Because the old card was in her husband's name, Layla needed to provide not only her basic identity documents, which she didn't have, but also additional documents showing that her husband had been kidnapped or was deceased and could therefore not update the card himself.

The monitoring team referred Layla's case to a lawyer in Kerbala, who pressed her case directly at the food ration centre. According to Layla, the lawyer 'explained the story of the kidnapping of my husband and my flight with my three children to Karbala. The employee approved me for a new PDS card, whereas before he had refused to listen to me'. Layla still does not know what happened to her husband, but her life is marginally better due to the PDS card. 'I am now able to receive aid ... the card is not just a document but a means of income and survival.' Layla's card was granted after she signed a written pledge to testify that she had no access to any other PDS card. While she should have been provided with this opportunity without legal assistance, the complexity of the system and her lack of knowledge of the 'rules' made it impossible for her to get her card without help.

There are thousands of cases similar to Layla's. This year, the IRC has conducted over 1,200 community-level assessments,

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<sup>4</sup> As of December 2014, the IRC directly operated and supported local partners in operating PARCs in ten governorates: Anbar, Babylon, Baghdad, Diyala, Karbala, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Wassit.

reaching over 84,000 households, and provided legal assistance in over 7,950 cases. Half have been to obtain documentation. And this barely scratches the surface. To reach people like Layla even faster, and because experience tells us that the majority of those uprooted will be missing basic documents, lawyers now form part of mobile teams tracking new waves of displacement. By accompanying protection monitors, lawyers engage individuals like Layla within a broader, overall discussion of their humanitarian needs, so that they can provide key information necessary to ensure their protection. Teams comprise both female and male monitors and lawyers to ensure that women have a full opportunity to raise their concerns and receive tailored assistance.

## Community-led information dissemination

As humanitarian space decreases and the ability of international and local actors to provide assistance directly to those in need is challenged, providing people with accurate information on how to protect themselves and their families is becoming increasingly important. In order to build this self-reliance, the IRC is training community focal points (both male and female) and working with community coordination structures to create a critical mass of people who understand the rules and can track their local evolution and application, and share this information with their communities.

In areas affiliated to Abu Ghraib district,<sup>5</sup> for example, where mobile teams were not able to access IDP populations, teams worked with community focal points, Sheikhs and IDP focal points to organise a meeting with Abu Ghraib District Council. There, IRC lawyers and protection monitors provided interactive training on registration procedures. Following this, community representatives established information dissemination points and provided information verbally in

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<sup>5</sup> Specifically Hawsa, where there are an estimated 4,000 IDPs, and in Zaidan, where there are an estimated 2,000 IDPs.

their localities. A system for reporting procedural changes and referring complex cases to lawyers was also established to ensure that community focal points could provide consistent information, and that – as rules evolved – urgent cases could receive immediate assistance.

## Conclusion

In every displacement emergency, the possession of basic documentation to prove one's identity is key to accessing protection and the tools necessary to rebuild one's life. For those who have fled without such documentation, the ability to secure assistance can be very limited. Moreover, the complex nature of displacement in Iraq, with its urban and camp dimensions, and the conflict and insecurity that prevail in the country, make it very difficult for aid agencies to reach those in need, and for those in need to reach places where they can receive assistance.

In a protracted crisis such as Iraq, direct assistance by itself is not sufficient; it is vital that self-reliance among individuals and communities is also built up. Given the severe access constraints, mobile approaches to monitoring, identifying needs and providing individuals with assistance to overcome the difficulties associated with lack of documentation offer a solid platform for bolstering resilience, as does the establishment of strong systems of information-sharing. The IRC has drawn on its experience of operating and supporting PARCs across southern and central Iraq in designing programmes elsewhere in the Middle East, and has adapted this approach to respond to the many needs generated by urban displacement in the region. Continuing to learn from and refine such approaches will be key as we work to support vulnerable populations displaced by conflict.

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## Sectarianism and humanitarian security: is acceptance working in Iraq?

**Barah Mikail, Lisa Reilly and Raquel Vazquez Llorente**

Security risk management strategies aim to ensure safer access to communities in need of humanitarian aid. In Iraq, the link between humanitarian access and security risk management is even stronger. This article explores developments in Iraq and their impact on the security of humanitarian workers operating in the country.<sup>1</sup> It also takes a critical look at the role acceptance plays as a security measure, and what impact changes in context have had on the ability of aid agencies to gain humanitarian access and implement programmes.

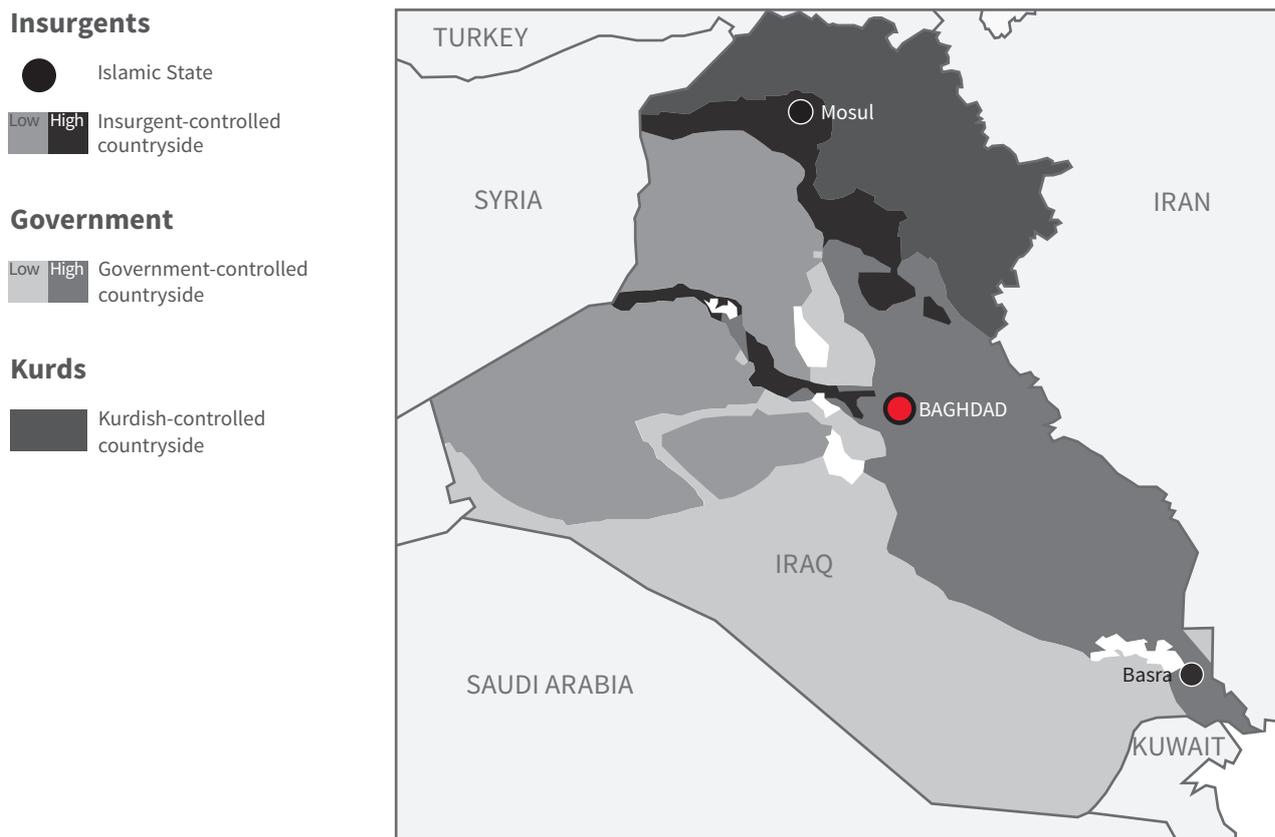
## Humanitarianism and sectarianism in Iraq

The Iraqi population has faced a dire humanitarian situation for decades. While oil-rich Iraq enjoyed wealth and high levels of growth at the end of the 1970s, a series of catastrophic

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on 15 interviews held with 20 humanitarian workers of 14 organisations (international and national NGOs, United Nations agencies and donor governments) in August 2015 in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Figure 1 The situation in Iraq**



Source: Institute for United Conflict Analysts (IUCA).

decisions by President Saddam Hussein accelerated the disintegration of the country. The Iran–Iraq War (1980–88), the Gulf War (1991) and the international embargo that followed Saddam’s decision to invade Kuwait all contributed to the degradation of living conditions in Iraq. Although Iraqis were still able to meet some of their basic needs through government programmes, the economy was in ruins.

The US-led invasion in 2003 and the toppling of Saddam’s regime added to this bleak situation. A number of factors accelerated the political, economic and social disintegration of Iraq, notably the coalition’s war strategy and its apparent lack of preparation to deal with the aftermath. The attempt by the Coalition Provisional Authority to remove from government all public servants affiliated to the former ruling Ba’ath Party resulted in the political exclusion of hundreds of thousands of people – including people who could have helped with the accompanying democratisation process.

With the sudden crumbling of previously strong central institutions, Iraqi leaders tried to find alternatives. Appointed leaders failed to gain political legitimacy or guarantee the country’s security, and Iraq soon began to fragment along sectarian lines. In the centre of the country, Arab Sunnis feared that the toppling of Saddam would lead to political domination by the Arab Shiites, who comprise the majority of the population (around 60%). Northern-based Kurds, who

had started establishing autonomous institutions following the Gulf War in 1991, took the opportunity after 2003 to push their own local political agenda. Localism and sectarianism flourished, and attacks on religious symbols, such as the Shiite al-Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006, contributed to the radicalisation of post-war sectarian politics – aggravated by the inability of Iraq’s leaders to agree on a national agenda to support the reconstruction of the country. The US and its allies proved incapable of compensating for the inexperience of Iraq’s new, often opportunistic, political representatives and leaders.

Despite growing violence – mostly in the form of regular attacks on religious shrines and against the government, and more recently executions carried out by Islamic State (IS) – humanitarian organisations have been able to operate since the downfall of Saddam’s regime in 2003. However, the withdrawal of the US in 2011, the emergence of IS, and Prime Minister Nouri Maliki’s failure to tackle corruption, coupled with his decision to send troops into Sunni areas in 2013, have increased social tensions and hostility towards the government – all of which have made Iraq a more insecure place for aid agencies. Agencies operating in Iraq face a range of threats and risks according to their regions of operation, and many see the country as at least two, if not three, distinct contexts: Baghdad and the south, areas under Islamic State control and (the easiest and safest) Iraqi Kurdistan.

## Baghdad and Southern Iraq

Frequent bomb attacks, shootings, firefights and demonstrations pose a considerable risk to humanitarian agencies in Baghdad and Southern Iraq. Between January and August 2015, 1,229 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were detonated in Baghdad. Roadside IEDs are found mostly on the periphery of the city, while suicide bombings and vehicle-borne IEDs are more frequent inside Baghdad. The majority target civilians in busy locations such as markets. Magnetic or adhesive IEDs usually target government officials or the security forces. Although humanitarian workers are not being directly targeted, traditional security risk management approaches are ill-suited to such a volatile context. Relying on acceptance by the community outside of the immediate areas where large humanitarian operations are conducted is becoming increasingly challenging for aid agencies.

**Table 1 Incident statistics for Baghdad (January–August 2015)**

Incident type	Registered number of incidents
Roadside IEDs	993
Suicide IEDs	23
Vehicle-borne IEDs	61
Magnetic/adhesive IEDs	152
Total IEDs	1,229
Indirect fire attacks	47
Shootings	323
Firefights/engagements	99
Murders	434
Kidnappings	119
Demonstrations/civil unrest	48

Incident statistics by IMMAPP: <http://immap.org>.

### IS territory

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been able to implement protection programmes in accordance with its very specific mandate in IS-held areas. However, both NGO and UN representatives question whether any form of humanitarian acceptance will be achievable in territory under IS control. Some local organisations seem to have been able to gain intermittent access through their knowledge and contacts, but international aid agencies face specific challenges, including the direct targeting of foreigners and the risk of torture and death in the event of capture. The nature of these threats has made agencies reluctant to share information and analysis on their operations, security strategies or movements for fear that such information could fall into the hands of Islamic State and be used to target them.



Controlled IED explosion in Iraq  
© Public domain

The risks to staff also mean that aid agencies are less likely to try to access IS-controlled areas, leaving a considerable gap in knowledge of security issues, as well as in information concerning humanitarian needs in areas under IS in control.

With a protection crisis across the country and nearly a quarter of the population in need of some form of humanitarian assistance,<sup>2</sup> many aid agencies are unwilling to jeopardise their existing operations by trying to gain access to IS territory, where it is much more difficult to work safely and effectively. Although security concerns are the main reason for not working in areas where IS operates, reputational damage and perception issues also deter humanitarian agencies from venturing into IS-controlled territory. Organisations operating in Iraqi Kurdistan risk having their authorisation to work revoked if they also work in IS-controlled territory, as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has made it clear that cross-line operations are not allowed. Media in the region is highly politicised and could make humanitarian assistance an instrument for fuelling sectarian tension.

### Iraqi Kurdistan

Paradoxically, instability in the rest of Iraq is benefiting the KRG. The Kurds have been able to rule an extended territory that looks like a safe haven compared to the rest of the country. As such, Iraqi Kurdistan is the easiest and safest environment for aid agencies.

2. UNOCHA, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan*, June 2015.

Humanitarian agencies are able to work in territory controlled by the KRG because the government is willing to allow them to do so, rather than through more proactive acceptance strategies by aid agencies themselves. There are, however, some notable exceptions. For instance, security and programme staff from the Danish Refugee Council work together to gain acceptance from communities through social cohesion projects that seek to reduce tensions between incomers and host communities. Within the more liberal Christian area of Erbil, where many agencies are based, humanitarian organisations rely on de facto acceptance to protect staff, rather than protection measures such as the armoured vehicles and reinforced compounds seen in southern areas of Iraq. There is a perception, however, that international staff have become too complacent regarding the security situation in Erbil.

While agencies have assumed that they have achieved acceptance in Iraqi Kurdistan, the evidence is not readily apparent. NGOs have very low visibility and use unmarked vehicles and no signage on their offices, security measures which are normally taken in areas where NGOs have not been accepted and are even being deliberately targeted. This lack of visibility may be linked to the negative perceptions of foreigners reportedly held by the local population. These perceptions stem primarily from previous experience with international oil workers, who were perceived as primarily interested in making money. Although aid agencies believe that local people will understand that they have come to help and will accept them, for their part locals believe that most foreigners are there to make money, convert them to Christianity or spy on them. Rather than continue to assume that acceptance is an effective security strategy, agencies should be constantly questioning whether they have actually achieved acceptance, and should regularly review their strategies against changes in the context.

## Humanitarian action in fragmented contexts

Last year an additional 2.2 million people were newly displaced by Islamic State offensives, bringing the total to 3.2m, or 11.49% of the Iraqi civilian population. More than 90% of IDPs and refugees do not live in camps, and are scattered across 3,000 locations.<sup>3</sup> Northern Iraq hosts the largest number of IDPs and refugees. In 2014, the population in Iraqi Kurdistan increased by 28% due to the conflict in Syria and the crisis caused by IS, placing additional strain on the region's economy.

3 OCHA, 'Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan', June 2015.

Humanitarian agencies need to understand and consider sectarian tensions when planning security risk management strategies in a context as fragmented as Iraq. The newly elected Prime Minister, Haidar Abadi, is pushing for reforms to end corruption and bad governance, and to reunify Iraq by winning its people's support. This is a huge task, and it is not clear whether he will succeed. The absence of a strong Iraqi national army, the mushrooming of militias such as the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilisation Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga and warnings from powerful local leaders that Iraq could end up being partitioned do not suggest that the Iraqi government is likely to regain control of the country in the near future.

To ease sectarian tensions and guarantee sustainable humanitarian access, 30 NGOs are working in partnership to implement social cohesion programmes. Under the coordination of the DRC, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is leading a cluster response plan to promote understanding between sectarian groups through a focus on emergency livelihoods, in order to mitigate tensions in local communities that have witnessed large influxes of IDPs. National NGOs that have safe access to affected populations have been encouraged to participate. While the hope is that these programmes can help ease tensions between sectarian groups, their restricted scope – with only 200,000 people targeted for assistance out of 3.3m in need of emergency livelihoods – may limit their impact.

To date host communities have borne influxes of large numbers of IDPs and refugees with remarkable equanimity. As the majority of older people in Iraqi Kurdistan have been displaced at some point in their lives, they empathise with refugees and internally displaced people. However, the long-standing tensions between Kurds and Arabs, and the lack of social cohesion, can jeopardise humanitarian access and the ability to deliver aid in a neutral and impartial manner. Undoubtedly, the stability of Iraqi Kurdistan and regional and internal politics will have an impact on the ability and willingness of NGOs to work in different areas of the country.

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# Designing safer livelihoods programmes in Iraq

**Rachel Sider**

Since January 2014, Iraq has spiralled from long-term conflict and chronic vulnerability into a complex humanitarian emergency. With over 3.2 million Iraqis displaced, widespread violence and insecurity has torn apart the social fabric of the country. Iraq's ethnic and sectarian groups are separated by mutual fear and suspicion, and the chances of restoring social cohesion are dwindling rapidly. A key question remains: how can we continue to respond to acute needs without losing sight of longer-term recovery?

Short-term assistance constitutes the bulk of the international community's humanitarian response in Iraq in 2015. Yet ensuring favourable outcomes for Iraqi civilians requires action that saves lives in the short run, and addresses the structural causes of violence and fragility without giving rise to new grievances. This article elaborates some of the key socio-economic challenges in Iraq, with a particular focus on livelihoods, security and social cohesion.

## Livelihoods as an entry point

To date, there has been limited evidence that livelihood responses in Iraq have effectively considered local dynamics and are conflict sensitive. Affected Iraqis are drawing on their assets to survive, while dealing with changing configurations of power, unequal access to resources and information and the threat of violence. Displacement increases the vulnerability of men, women, boys and girls and can lead to disruptive changes in gender norms and social and cultural practices. In conflict-affected areas, assets have been damaged or destroyed and transport routes are disrupted or dangerous, affecting markets and damaging the livelihoods both of internally displaced people (IDPs) and the communities hosting them.

Livelihood interventions can be a double-edged sword: they can help people overcome crises and build resilience, yet they can also become liabilities, increasing vulnerability to risks such as gender-based violence (GBV) and social tensions. While critical, the links between gender, livelihoods and protection have largely been overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

In early 2015, Oxfam and the Women's Refugee Commission piloted the Cohort Livelihoods and Risk Analysis (CLARA) tool in the disputed internal boundaries (DIBs)<sup>2</sup> of Diyala Govern-

orate. Developed by the Women's Refugee Commission, CLARA assesses needs, risks and opportunities, and highlights mitigation strategies for safer, more responsive humanitarian assistance. The tool evaluates the livelihood recovery needs of conflict-affected communities and associated risks through mainstreaming gender risk analysis. This analysis supports the design of appropriate livelihoods initiatives that incorporate gender risk mitigation throughout the programme cycle for safer, more responsive and effective livelihoods programming.

CLARA is a set of four steps to capture GBV risks associated with pre-crisis livelihoods, as well as the potential risks arising from programmes in response to crisis. The four steps are secondary and primary data review, data analysis and programme design, and implementation and monitoring. CLARA may be used alongside other livelihood assessments or as a stand-alone tool, depending on the context. WRC and Oxfam identified three target populations for the assessment – IDPs living in non-camp settings, returnees and host communities. The analysis spanned five villages in northern Diyala consisting primarily of returnees or higher proportions of IDPs to hosts.

A team of nine data collectors, five women and four men, received two days of training on gender, GBV, livelihoods, ethical data collection, interview facilitation and note taking. Together they conducted 28 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 31 household interviews with 208 IDPs, returnees and hosts. In accordance with the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, ten consultations took place separately with women, men, adolescent girls and boys. FGDs were also held with the main livelihood groups, including farmers, shepherds, traders and labourers. FGDs included people with disabilities and their caregivers and the elderly.

## Perceptions of insecurity

The overarching conclusion of CLARA is that perceptions of insecurity dominate daily life. They restrict livelihood opportunities, shape communal interactions, influence gender dynamics and perpetuate distrust and fear in communities. This is of particular concern in areas disputed by the Kurdish and federal Iraqi authorities. Dialogue with local elders, community leaders, women and adolescents identified security and community cohesion as the principal factors influencing decision-making in displacement. Addressing these factors is an essential step in facilitating recovery and durable solutions.

Communal tensions, distrust of strangers and revenge crimes – made worse by the easy availability of arms and a general climate of impunity – are major concerns for affected communities, particularly as they recover livelihoods in either areas of displacement or return. As CLARA reveals, individuals'

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1 *Gender Issues in Conflict and Humanitarian Action*, Oxfam Humanitarian Policy Note, November 2013.

2 The Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) are areas that fall under Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution as territory that lies outside of the agreed semi-autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq and remains in dispute between Baghdad and Erbil.



A data collector facilitates a focus group discussion with IDP men using the CLARA tool in Iraq

perceptions of security must be considered in developing durable solutions to their displacement. Host communities and IDPs reported a perceived uptick in petty crime, citing rumours of theft among shopkeepers. Fear of strangers focused on perceived affiliation with armed groups and risks to women and girls. As one woman noted, 'Most of the men do not go to work because they do not want the women to be alone in the village. We do not let our children go to work because there are strangers in the village'. Such fears have constrained freedom of movement, confining women and girls to the home and preventing traders from travelling far outside the village. People who have opted to remain displaced or who lack alternatives to return often have a bleaker view of security in their home village than those who have returned. These factors, as well as the absence of reliable statistics on crimes against civilians and communal conflict, make it difficult to analyse the security context in a way that, for example, effectively includes women's perspectives and participation and ensures 'do no harm' principles.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On the obstacles to incorporating women's participation and perspectives in developing a comprehensive gender analysis to underpin humanitarian and development interventions, see *Women, Peace and Security: Keeping the Promise*, Oxfam briefing paper, September 2015.

Trust in governance and in the security forces has been undermined by the proliferation of weapons, the loss of social cohesion following displacement, pervasive cronyism and collective crimes against groups along ethno-sectarian lines. Demographic change in the DIBs has deepened the social, economic and political grievances of communities experiencing displacement. There are no mechanisms to compensate for this and the failure of the authorities to address violations and restore inclusive governance and the rule of law is clear. In the absence of reliable and consistent governance, families in contested areas feel unprotected, intimidated and threatened.

Ultimately, any longer-term solution to displacement can only be durable if physical security (i.e. the absence of threats to people's physical integrity) and legal security (i.e. the presence of protective measures and respect for human rights) are assured. People must be protected against the threats which caused their displacement, and which may trigger renewed conflict. This hinges on a peaceful resolution of the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil.

## Challenges to recovery

Even if the causes of displacement are contained, security is restored and families regain their livelihoods, creating the right set of circumstances for sustainable recovery will be difficult. The Iraqi government has publicly recognised that it is responsible for setting up an appropriate framework for return through a joint coordination centre, ensuring security, rule of law, respect for human rights and access to basic services. Very little has been done, however, to make this a reality. In fact, there is hardly any state presence and still little evidence of significant rehabilitation, specifically in the DIBs, where administrative control is contested.

Militia activity – made worse by the circulation of arms and general sense of impunity – has had a negative impact on the work of NGOs and the United Nations, reducing access and threatening programmes intended to assist returns. The presence and unregulated movement of militias in newly accessible areas poses larger threats to civilian security, and is the primary obstacle to voluntary and safe return.

The humanitarian community has yet to collectively prioritise recovery and identify principal areas of concern, needs to be addressed and a common strategy to be adopted. Community tensions, IDP and returnee intentions and protection risks for the displaced have not driven planning processes. As a whole, the international community is struggling to develop programmes that both meet humanitarian needs and strengthen the resilience of Iraqi communities.<sup>4</sup>

## The way forward

Practically, we need to work together to develop clear operating procedures for early recovery to shape interventions in newly secure areas, disputed territories and communities of return. The needs of host communities must be taken into

consideration as early as possible. In addition to putting significant strain on local infrastructure, the ongoing IDP influx has increased competition for jobs, depressed wages and increased the cost of living. These factors have fuelled tensions between IDPs and their hosts, threatening the positive protection environment that has sheltered IDPs for over a year and complicating returns scenarios moving forward.

The humanitarian response must take into account conflict dynamics and IDPs' perceptions of insecurity and support the conditions for durable solutions, particularly return. This includes mainstreaming social cohesion in recovery and aligning humanitarian action with longer-term conflict reduction and peace-building initiatives. Practitioners, governments and donors must recognise that the underlying drivers of conflict, many of which are political and socio-economic, remain unaddressed.

Improving security in Iraq and areas where the conflict has receded will be key to enabling humanitarian and development workers to meet the pressing needs of the population and ensure the proper conditions for durable solutions. Only the state can sustainably restore authority and the rule of law by deploying security forces and strengthening the justice system. Such efforts must be conducted without fuelling further grievances and in a way that guarantees everyone's safety.

Recurring tensions and communal disputes must be resolved through inclusive consultation with men and women in communities and support to traditional dispute resolution mechanisms to help families regain trust with their neighbours. Donor governments should continue to support local reconciliation and inclusive peace-building programmes alongside a humanitarian response that actively seeks to reduce conflict.

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4 Oxfam, 'No Accident: Resilience and the Inequality of Risk' 2013.

## LMMS: going the extra mile in Duhok, KRI

### Keith Chibafa

At a cash distribution on 31 August 2015 at Bajid Kandala camp in Duhok Governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), senior representatives from UNICEF, the Duhok Governorate's Board of Relief and Humanitarian Affairs (BRHA), the Italian Embassy and the national media observed staff from World Vision and Medair using World Vision's Last Mile Mobile Solutions (LMMS) platform to process beneficiaries as they received assistance.<sup>1</sup> The event

was attended by such a high-powered delegation because it was the culmination of months of collaborative effort geared towards setting up the LMMS tool. LMMS is a stand-alone system developed by WVI that digitises beneficiary registration, verification, distribution planning and management, monitoring and reporting. The technology has also been used to enhance remote data collection, and manage and speed up aid distributions. Using LMMS delivers rapid reporting functionality to aid workers. It can be utilised by multiple agencies running multiple humanitarian aid programmes across different sectors, with participating

1 For more information on the distribution see [http://www.ncciraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=12876:world-vision-lmms-bringshumanitarian-agencies-in-iraq-together&Itemid=149&lang=en](http://www.ncciraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=12876:world-vision-lmms-bringshumanitarian-agencies-in-iraq-together&Itemid=149&lang=en).



Registration of displaced people in Duhok, Kurdistan using LMMS

agencies accessing beneficiary data stored on a centralised server.

### Early coordination

The BRHA, which oversees all activities related to refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in the governorate, tasked World Vision and Medair with registering close to 200,000 IDPs living in 16 camps. The two agencies trained the local BRHA and camp management staff, and each of the 16 camps was provided with the equipment necessary to use the LMMS system for registration.<sup>2</sup> Between March and August 2015, 32 staff were trained and 34,637 households with 186,159 family members registered on LMMS. Each registered beneficiary received a barcoded ration card with their photo and unique number. The card had the BRHA logo on the back. Of the 16 IDP camps, World Vision was given responsibility for registering households in six; Medair was responsible for five and the remaining five were under the jurisdiction of the BRHA. Data from each camp was consolidated into a single central database.

### The LMMS Working Group

An LMMS Working Group was established in May 2015. Meeting monthly, the Working Group comprised representatives of World Vision (as chair), Medair (co-chair), the BRHA and

humanitarian agencies planning to or actually using LMMS, including Tearfund, UNICEF, Caritas and Oxfam. The Working Group was established as a forum where LMMS users could discuss, update and share best practice and challenges in their deployment and implementation of LMMS. One of the key provisions of the terms of reference was that all Working Group members were to 'protect all the data collected by, or shared with members, to seek consent from and respect the rights of beneficiaries, and to use the data that is entrusted to the members only for humanitarian purposes in the current crisis, and not share the data with any parties outside of the WG'. Additional objectives of the Working Group were to:

- improve the coordination of humanitarian aid to beneficiaries by using a common technology platform, in this instance LMMS;
- implement a standardised approach to the registration of IDPs; and
- draft and set up protocols and guidelines to ensure safe access and data security.

### Data ownership and protection

The question of data ownership in a scenario where different agencies are undertaking the beneficiary registration process can be complicated. Agencies are usually reluctant to give up or share data that they have captured and that they perceive to be theirs. Concerns regarding data privacy and protection add to the complexity. Having the BRHA as a key stakeholder in the process overcame this hurdle as members of the

<sup>2</sup> Funding from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Development (DFATD) enabled World Vision to provide training and equipment to the BRHA and other agencies.

Working Group agreed that the BRHA, as the government representative, would be the data owner.

In addition to the data protection provisions in the terms of reference, steps were also taken to physically and logically secure the data. Measures included having the central server in a secure location with very strict access control. Industry best practice, such as firewalls, Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and Virtual Private Networks (VPN), were all implemented over and above the standard LMMS user authentication in order to ensure the security of the data.

## Distribution process

At the conclusion of the registration in all 16 IDP camps, the BRHA asked that all agencies doing distributions in the camps utilise LMMS. For upcoming distributions, the agencies would notify the BRHA of their plans, and BRHA staff would use LMMS to set up a distribution plan on the system. On the designated day, the agency would arrive at the camp with its commodities and do the distribution using LMMS. The actual operation of LMMS would be done by the camp management team. LMMS technical staff would be on hand to provide support as needed. After the first official distribution on 31 August, subsequent distributions were sometimes held concurrently in different locations by different agencies, all accessing the data stored on the central server.

## A single platform across agencies

The efficiency and effectiveness of technology tools such as LMMS for single agencies is well documented. Drawing on lessons and learning from earlier deployments, including in the Central African Republic (CAR),<sup>3</sup> the ‘multi agency, multi sector, centralized data’ model deployed in KRI was the next logical step in the evolution of the LMMS product. There are plans to have an independent evaluation and validation of the model in KRI, but the initial results are very promising. The model provides a platform for collaboration, standardisation and optimisation across different actors, and increases humanitarian agencies’ ability to measure their effectiveness as a sector. All agencies use the same platform to track their assistance to beneficiaries, which in turn allows the government and the aid system to monitor coverage, resulting in increased visibility for agencies’ activities and improved accountability. Sharing hardware, software and human resources is a cost-effective way to undertake registrations and distributions, while at the same time ensuring that access to the data is limited to authorised personnel only. Duplications in the data are minimised, as is double counting and overlapping deliveries. An analysis of the data can lead to greater insights and assist in the decision-making process for future assistance.

<sup>3</sup> See Keith Chibafa, ‘Why Not Digital? Technology as an Interagency Tool in the Central African Republic’, *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 62, September 2014.

## Challenges and lessons

A heatwave during the holy month of Ramadan and an outbreak of scabies in some of the camps hampered the registration process. High staff turnover among some partners led to multiple training sessions in order to build the capacity of the Working Group members. Finalising contracts and the terms of reference for the Working Group took longer than anticipated, and one lesson for the future would be to start the process earlier as this helps to establish the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders early in the process.

## Next steps

1. Continue with the registration of new entrants to camps. New displaced families continue to stream into Duhok Governorate and the escalating conflict in Iraq will see a continued influx of IDPs. Having the system in place will speed up the registration process, even if new camps are opened, as the infrastructure to support the registration process is already in place.
2. Have locally trained staff from the BRHA and camp management train and build the capacity of new staff as they come on board.
3. Undertake an independent evaluation of the model, and gather and document empirical evidence of its costs, benefits, strengths and weaknesses.
4. Scale up distributions in the camps. With winter looming, it is anticipated that there will be a substantial increase in distributions within the camps linked to winterisation programmes.
5. The BRHA has confirmed that the next phase will see the immediate commencement of registrations of all non-camp IDPs in Duhok. This will include IDPs renting houses in Duhok, as well as households staying with host families. The registration data will again be stored on the central server.
6. Replicate the model in other governorates within KRI, including Erbil and Souleymania, applying lessons from the Duhok experience.
7. Expand the membership of the Working Group and start discussions on the interoperability of different systems.

## Conclusion

In light of increasing calls for shared service infrastructure and centralised beneficiary registration systems, the implementation of LMMS in KRI holds much promise. The model demonstrates that humanitarian actors can use one platform for beneficiary relationship management and tracking inputs across multiple sectors (including cash) and multiple agencies. The data is stewarded by one agency on behalf of the responsible government and implementing agencies. The inaugural distribution on 31 August was the culmination of months of planning and coordination among various stake-

holders and players in Duhok Governorate. With the model still in its infancy, further study and analysis will be needed to get qualitative and quantitative evidence as well as recommendations on areas for improvement.

The application of technology as a shared service with centralised beneficiary registration and distribution systems, along

with all the associated benefits, is an exciting proposition for humanitarian agencies, donors, governments and other stakeholders, especially in the area of sector-level coordination, transparency and accountability.

**Keith Chibafa** is Business Development Manager – LMMS at World Vision International.

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## Connecting humanitarian actors and displaced communities: the IDP call centre in Iraq

**Gemma Woods and Sarah Mace**

In August 2014, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), World Vision, Internews, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Norwegian Refugee Council conducted an inter-agency assessment of information needs amongst displaced communities in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Although the assessment noted that access to communication channels was clearly regarded as a key priority, it also discovered that a lack of information was fuelling feelings of isolation, confusion and mistrust amongst displaced people and significantly reducing their ability to cope with the growing crisis. Displaced Iraqis had only limited access to conflicting and incomplete information regarding the provision of and access to basic services and humanitarian assistance. ‘We don’t know the organisations or their names,’ one man told the inter-agency team during their visit to Dohuk in Iraq’s Kurdistan region. ‘We have never spoken with them. We don’t know anything about their work.’ The report called on humanitarian agencies to increase their information-sharing and dialogue with affected communities, and strengthen their ability to listen and respond to the needs and feedback of displaced people.

### Developing the IDP call centre

To address some of these issues, a group of UN agencies and NGOs established a nationwide hotline for displaced people to access information on humanitarian assistance and provide feedback on the humanitarian response. The call centre is currently funded by UNHCR, WFP and OCHA, with partners including IOM, the Norwegian Refugee Council, World Vision and Save the Children providing technical support and capacity-building, including training for call centre staff on protection, the humanitarian response architecture in Iraq and accountability. The project is implemented by the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

The call centre, based in Erbil, currently has seven staff able to take calls in all of the languages and dialects used in Iraq. Callers are given the option of talking to a male or female staff member. Staff have been trained in active listening techniques to ensure that the information gathered from callers is correct, and callers are given the time and space to explain their concerns. While staff are not trained counsellors, they are able to identify issues which may need further support and refer callers for further assistance.

Information on humanitarian programmes (for instance locations, allocations and documentation requirements) is passed to callers or flagged for specific NGOs or UN agencies to respond to if the queries require further investigation. At the same time, regular reports are provided to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and clusters on any trends in the issues raised by callers and their feedback on aid programmes. At the request of humanitarian agencies, call centre staff also conduct post-distribution monitoring of the assistance provided to IDPs and collect feedback from them.

Providing a single point of contact was identified as a key way to reduce confusion around which organisations were providing which services in each location. Given the difficulty of accessing certain areas of the country, the call centre also permits ongoing information exchange, even with people in harder to reach areas. The call centre also helps agencies meet their responsibilities regarding accountability to affected populations, and having a better understanding of people’s needs and feelings enables agencies to be more responsive. With access a key issue in the response, the call centre aims to help identify gaps in hard to reach areas, enable affected people to communicate with humanitarian actors and ensure that assistance is appropriate.

The call centre builds on a similar initiative in Jordan run by UNHCR to provide information to refugees. The Jordan centre drew on the expertise of private sector customer service call centres, and this experience has been transferred to the design of the Iraq centre. A single, toll-free number, Cisco call handling

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Understanding the Information and Communication Needs of IDPs in Northern Iraq’, September 2014.



A WFP employee explains the IDP call centre  
© Chloe Cornish/IRIN

software, a ticketing system to allow callers to be identified if they called back or required follow-up and giving callers the choice of a male or female call handler were all built in.

The road to opening the call centre has been anything but smooth, from its inception to its launch in July 2015. It is a complex project. The equipment required was not available in Iraq, and international sanctions meant there were import delays. The need to get the right call-handling equipment into Iraq and the technical requirements involved in working with three separate telephone companies, all with very different methods of operating, caused further delays, and working with the cluster system and key strategic partners to gather the information to give to IDPs took time. It is very important to ensure that operators have accurate information about the dozens of different humanitarian services available to IDPs in Iraq. Leadership from the humanitarian country team and OCHA was key in facilitating the gathering of information. A website is being developed for this, and updates will be reported at the HCT level. UNOPS have succeeded in delivering the project thus far and will continue to support it.

What the project has made clear is that there is a huge need for clear and timely information amongst displaced people. It is hoped that the call centre will help in addressing that gap.

## First results

Following a limited launch in July 2015, the call centre is now operational countrywide. The majority of callers in its first nine weeks (31%) requested information on how and where to access food assistance, followed by requests for information about cash assistance projects operated by humanitarian actors (20% of calls). Other calls included requests for assistance with shelter and access to medical care, and requests for relief items such as blankets and mattresses. With the onset of winter, it is anticipated that these calls will increase.

The majority of callers so far have been male (71%), highlighting the need for further community outreach and for the humanitarian community to employ alternative community engagement methods to reach women. For example, the project is aiming to place phones in female-friendly spaces to allow for more engagement by women. As highlighted by the 2014 interagency assessment of the information needs of IDPs in Northern Iraq, female respondents said that they preferred a face-to-face approach to communication. A multi-channel, multi-platform suite of community engagement approaches was identified as the best way to address information needs in Iraq. Whilst the IDP call centre can go some way towards addressing information gaps, it cannot resolve the information needs of all sections of the community.

Whilst work is ongoing to publicise the call centre across the country, displaced people are starting to notice the leaflets and posters advertising the service distributed in areas hosting the highest proportion of displaced communities. Thirty-six-year-old Ali was forced to flee from his home in Fallujah in May 2014 with his wife and young daughter to seek refuge in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. On arrival he found shelter in a rented house shared with three other families, but could not find work. In August 2015, Ali saw a poster advertising the IDP call centre on the wall of a public hall in Erbil and decided to call and ask for help. ‘The person who spoke to me at the call centre was very kind and helpful’, Ali said. Call centre staff put Ali’s family on the waiting list for a space at a local IDP camp. ‘I was happy to learn that there was someone who cared about our problems and was searching for a solution for us’, said Ali.

Ensuring that call centre staff have up-to-date and accurate information on the country-wide humanitarian response is an ongoing challenge. Humanitarian agencies regularly set up, alter or shut down assistance programmes in response to the ebb and flow of funding and operational needs. As the humanitarian response moves on, call centre staff have received more training and guidance to allow them to respond to queries; for example, when the value of food vouchers provided by WFP changed, staff received specific briefings on this issue to ensure that the answers they provided to callers were clear and consistent. However, making sure that call centre staff have access to the most accurate and up-to-date information is a resource-intensive activity.

The challenges of providing information to displaced communities in Iraq are extremely complex. Some 8.6 million people

are currently affected by the crisis, including 3.2m people displaced from their homes.<sup>2</sup> Needs exceed the ability of the humanitarian community to respond, and call centre staff are not always able to identify humanitarian actors with the capacity to respond to callers’ requests. The aim is that feedback from calls, including identifying gaps in assistance, will influence how humanitarian assistance is organised and delivered. More time (and data) is required before this can be translated into results on the ground.

## Next steps

The next aim is to provide online access to anonymous data mapping and analysing the main information needs reported by callers across Iraq. IOM is taking the lead in making data easily available to the public through its Community Response Map, which was expected to go live by the end of September. Meanwhile, work continues to increase awareness of the call centre. Analysis and mapping are key to helping humanitarian partners understand needs on the ground and adjust their response accordingly. Donors must continue to support the humanitarian response, particularly by listening and responding to the needs of the displaced as expressed by people contacting the call centre.

**Gemma Woods** is a Protection Officer working for UNHCR in Erbil. **Sarah Mace** was the Call Center Coordinator for UNOPS in Erbil until August 2015. She is now working on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) for WFP in Rome.

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<sup>2</sup> Iraq: Humanitarian Crisis – Situation Report no. 60 (2 September – 8 September 2015).

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## Unleashing the multi-purpose power of cash

### Su’ad Jarbawi

Iraq is an upper middle-income country with high literacy rates, sound infrastructure, functioning markets and a comprehensive *hawala* cash transfer network covering all 18 governorates, making it an appropriate context for cash transfer programmes. Despite this, cash transfers have been on the periphery of the Iraq humanitarian response. As of the last Humanitarian Response Plan in June 2015, cash transfer programmes (both conditional and unconditional) constituted only 3% of the total funding appeal of \$497.9 million.<sup>1</sup>

Despite a large body of evidence to the contrary, including a recent report by the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash

Transfers,<sup>2</sup> a combination of institutional inertia and concerns around diversion, corruption and anti-social spending have prevented the large-scale adoption of unconditional cash transfers. ‘Unconditional’ cash in particular is perceived as ‘free money’, diverting the debate into what ‘conditions’ (or lack thereof) make a household eligible for assistance, adding to the resistance to adopting cash. For that reason, Mercy Corps and other cash actors use the term Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) to shift the focus to the diverse uses of cash and away from a ‘conditionality’ debate.

We argue that the wider adoption of MPCA over multiple rounds of assistance can support more effective humanitarian intervention in Iraq and prepare the ground for a viable exit from the humanitarian response. The Iraq displacement crisis activated a full cluster response based primarily on the provision of goods and services, with cash transfer programmes

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<sup>1</sup> Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan, June 2015. This figure does not include vouchers for food distribution.

<sup>2</sup> *Doing Cash Differently: How Cash Transfers Can Transform Humanitarian Aid*, September 2015.

interlaced to fill gaps. But consider the reverse: MPCA as a first-line response addressing basic needs across sectors. The provision of multiple rounds of assistance and the collection of household expenditure data through post-distribution monitoring (PDM) provides a more realistic understanding of households' priorities and unaddressed needs to inform a more coherent and data-driven cluster response. Expanding the evidence base around household expenditure can also help in understanding expenditure patterns and trends, and how these link to household vulnerability. This is particularly relevant now, as the World Bank works with the Iraqi government to transform its costly blanket food-based Public Distribution System (PDS) into a targeted, vulnerability-based social protection system.

## Background

From the outset, Mercy Corps based its humanitarian response strategy on providing MPCA. The agency also argued for moving beyond one-time emergency assistance to newly displaced households, to multi-month assistance for conflict-affected households. Market assessments in January 2014 demonstrated that markets were resilient: traders had found new and alternative supply routes and reported no difficulty in absorbing increases in demand. Using *hawalas* in marketplaces where programme participants normally procured their household needs, Mercy Corps has to date transferred over \$6.2m to 8,500 households in Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah ad-Din and Sulaymaniyah governorates.

While Mercy Corp's decision to provide multiple rounds of assistance to vulnerable households, not just newly displaced families, limited the number of households the agency was able to reach, it offered two key advantages. First, providing multiple rounds of cash assistance enabled a more comprehensive response. Mercy Corps' PDMs indicated an over 50% fall in the use of negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing the number of meals, taking children out of school or sending children to work. Second, this approach allowed Mercy Corps to collect PDM data over a prolonged period, gaining valuable insights into monthly household expenditure patterns and priorities to inform subsequent programming.

## How the cash was used

MPCA is a dignified and accountable response mechanism: 99% of Mercy Corps' PDM respondents preferred cash for its flexibility and because it allowed them to decide for themselves what to buy. Expenditure data demonstrated that households used MPCA to meet 16 different needs (see Figure 1). In winter 2014, Mercy Corps provided cash assistance to 5,400 households, expecting them to use the money to meet winter-specific needs, such as shelter improvements and heating. While the PDM data indicates that households did allocate additional funds towards winter expenses, food, rent and health remained the highest monthly expenditure priorities even in the middle of winter. This is a stark reminder that what we think households need

may not be what they actually choose to buy. It also highlights the freedom MPCA embodies.

Spending on education and transport was also consistently high. In an independent rapid assessment among displaced households in Kirkuk, Diyala and Baghdad in February and April 2015, Mercy Corps teams found that the lack of funds to cover transport was consistently cited as the biggest impediment to accessing education, and a higher priority than educational supplies and uniforms. This is an example of how PDM data from MPCA can provide deeper insights to refine interventions, in this case around education.

The data presented in this section, even given limitations of scale, highlights that PDM data collected over multiple rounds of cash assistance may well provide a more reliable picture of needs to inform targeted interventions. Currently, PDM data gathered by cash actors in Iraq is collected from a single round of cash assistance. While this is a useful starting point, it prevents us from seeing recurring monthly expenditure patterns for vulnerable households.

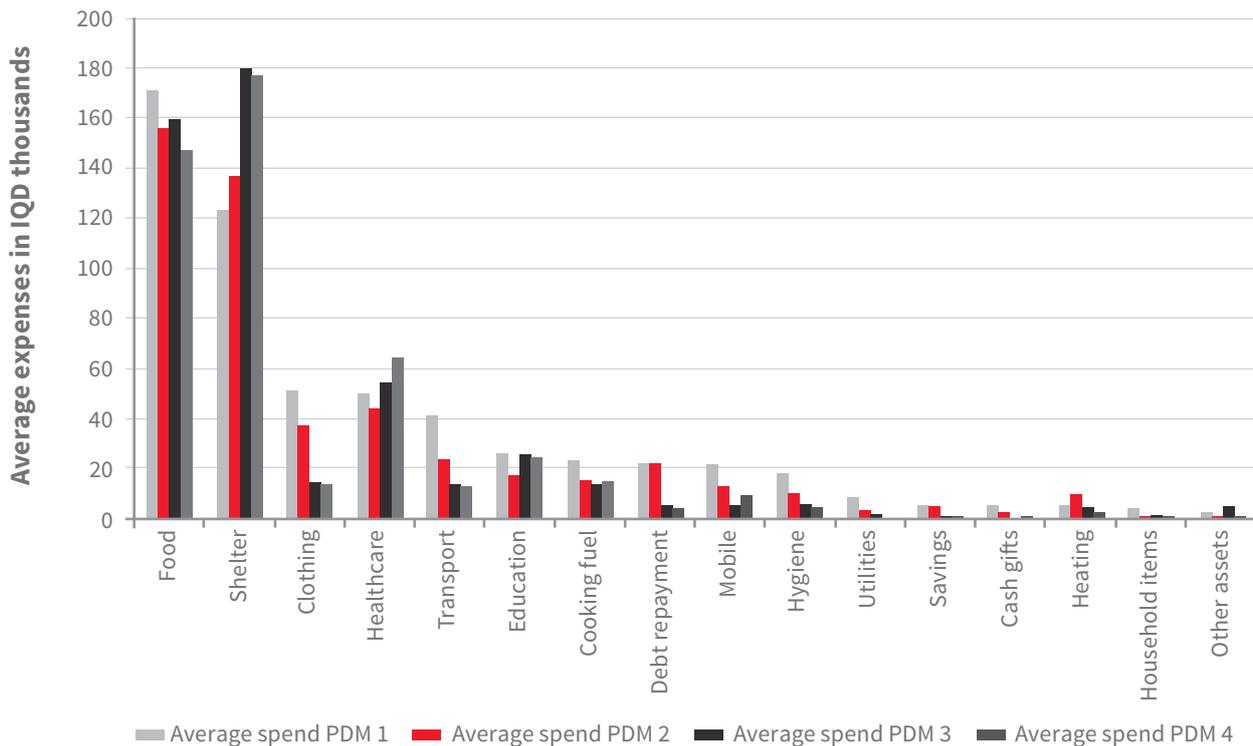
## PDM and PDS

The Iraqi government is currently overhauling its Public Distribution System (PDS). Housed within the Ministry of Trade, the PDS is one of the world's largest and costliest government social welfare distributions, with over 95% of the Iraqi population, irrespective of income, eligible for monthly food rations. The PDS accounts for a large proportion of government spending and one that it can hardly afford in the current fiscal climate, with large-scale displacement, the mounting cost of the 'Islamic State crisis' and falling oil prices. Concurrently, the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) also provided a one-time cash package of IQD 1 million (\$843) for households displaced in 2014.

With technical inputs from the World Bank, the government is exploring various options for moving from a blanket food-based PDS towards a more targeted social protection scheme predicated on household expenditure and vulnerability indicators. Furthermore, there is a push towards streamlining the various forms of government assistance from the various line ministries involved. It is important to acknowledge here that any transition out of the PDS is likely to be met with resistance, and have a negative impact on the economy, even if only temporarily.

Mercy Corps and other key cash actors argue that the systematic and wider collection of household expenditure data through PDMs can help refine household vulnerability criteria for this initiative. For example, in reviewing expenditure data, particularly the ratio of food to non-food spending, cash actors are starting to debate what vulnerability means in the Iraq context. If a displaced household consistently spends on both food and non-food expenses such as education, does this mean it is not vulnerable? Or does vulnerability in the Iraq context look different, and if so, what are those characteristics?

**Figure 1 Household expenditure categories, Mercy Corps PDM data**



The Humanitarian Response Plan in Iraq has identified the government’s social protection scheme as a viable exit strategy from humanitarian response. MPCA has the potential to do more than simply hand over Iraq’s 3m displaced people to the government’s social protection plan. Cash actors’ learning and understanding of vulnerability criteria in Iraq, based on monthly expense patterns, can help to identify unique vulnerability markers in the Iraq context, to support the government’s efforts in this transition to a targeted social protection scheme.

### All roads lead to cash

To encourage the use of MPCA, cash actors in Iraq undertook two key initiatives. First, a Cash Working Group (CWG) was formed in August 2014. With UNHCR and Mercy Corps as the current co-leads, the CWG functions as an advisory and coordination body to promote wider understanding and adoption of all types of cash and voucher interventions among humanitarian actors. Second, in March 2015 Mercy Corps, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) formed the Cash Consortium of Iraq (CCI), with the express purpose of increasing the impact of MPCA. The consortium approach is helping cash actors provide a coordinated cash response across Iraq’s fractured displacement context, move to multiple rounds of cash assistance and build a more nuanced understanding of the crisis by harmonising targeting and data collection. The CCI is an active member of the CWG and shares lessons and tools with cash actors more widely.

Together, the CCI and the CWG took the opportunity of a revision of the Humanitarian Response Plan in April 2015 to

push for and gain a standalone chapter within the Plan for MPCA. This effectively means that cash actors will, for the first time, be able to account for and measure the geographical spread, implementation and impact of MPCA, separately from other forms of conditional cash and vouchers, and in kind aid.<sup>3</sup> While not recognised as a full cluster, the CWG is gaining momentum, most recently by obtaining a seat at the Inter-Agency Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG). As of August 2015, cash actors including CCI partners had supported over 117,000 households with MPCA – the majority in the form of one-time emergency cash to newly displaced households. As cash actors assimilate their learning from this single round of MPCA, Mercy Corps is continuing to advocate for multiple rounds of monthly cash assistance for all vulnerable households, and for all cash actors (outside of the CCI) to harmonise data collection and analysis in order to gain a much broader picture of households’ monthly expenditure patterns in Iraq.

While not a blueprint in itself, the use of MPCA in Iraq can serve to spark a debate on how cash assistance can be better utilised within humanitarian response. Unless we push for the wider adoption of MPCA and multiple rounds of assistance in Iraq, we will not be able to capitalise on this opportunity. The opportunity is there; it simply needs to be seized.

**Su’ad Jarbawi** has been working with Mercy Corps in humanitarian crises since 2003, including in Sudan, Haiti, Yemen, Mali, the Central African Republic, Syria and Iraq. Her involvement in cash programming began with the Haiti earthquake response.

<sup>3</sup> This is also a key recommendation of the High Level Panel report on cash cited above.



A woman receives a cash transfer via the Hello Paisa mobile money system.

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# Practice and policy notes

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## Hello, money: the impact of technology and e-money in the Nepal earthquake response

**Erik Johnson, Glenn Hughson and Alesh Brown**

On 30 April 2015, five days after the massive earthquake in Nepal, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) hosted humanitarian agencies in the UN compound to start what came to be known as the Cash Coordination Group (CCG). Four working groups were established, focusing on geographical mapping of which agencies were doing cash and where; market analysis; analysis and comparison of financial service providers; and standardising transfer amounts. This article, written by three members of the CCG, highlights learning on market analysis through the use of a mobile application, the identification and use of financial service providers and e-cash.

### Mobile market analysis

ACT Alliance agencies DanChurchAid (DCA) and ICCO led the initiative within the CCG to conduct market analysis via a mobile app on a system powered by software from the non-profit organisation AKVO. The initial template for the survey was based on one previously developed by the IFRC (Rapid Assessment of Markets, or RAM), which had been translated into Nepali prior to the earthquake. Indeed, a key ingredient in the success of cash transfer coordination in the early days was the degree of knowledge and prior relationships amongst those present, despite the lack of a formal cluster.

The app-based survey provided a quick first analysis of whether cash was a feasible intervention. DCA's partners completed 83 market surveys with traders and consumers in three districts over a week, rapidly providing a map of market conditions for these areas. This would not have been possible with pen and paper. However, despite making the app free and offering training via the CCG, few agencies took advantage of it in the first couple of days, and it took two and a half weeks before enough data was generated to enable comparisons between different geographical areas. Interviews with other agencies indicate that the lack of access to the online platform to view the information collected was a crucial missing ingredient in motivating organisations to use the market assessment app. This is a key lesson for the use of mobile apps for market assessment, as well as other needs and capacity mapping functions: the same solution should be used by all agencies, and everyone should have access to the dataset, mapping and dashboard functions to enable quick, data-driven decision-making.

Although most agencies used the RAM tool, there were different views regarding how much market analysis was needed. For example, one agency moved extremely fast after the earthquake to distribute unconditional cash to elderly people in Gorkha district without any formal market assessment data. The distributions were based on beneficiaries' own reports that what they needed could be obtained on the market, which post-distribution monitoring later substantiated. Other agencies used their own assessment formats, but none implemented the more thorough – but also more time- and labour-intensive – Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis (EMMA) surveys in the first month after the earthquake.

### Financial service providers

As of April 2013, there were 291 providers of various types (see Tables 1 and 2). Many were affected first by the earthquake itself, and then by mass cash withdrawals as households tried to meet their emergency needs. As a result, delivering cash through existing financial services after the emergency was likely to be complex, constrained by coverage and liquidity problems (i.e. having cash available in each branch/location), and because of issues associated with payment verification, regulation and 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) requirements. However, a large number of financial service providers were interested in working with humanitarian agencies following the earthquake, both to gain access to humanitarian customers and to get market penetration into rural areas. Going forward, as more and more financial service providers seek to expand into rural areas, agencies should anticipate the possibility of leveraging this to negotiate favourable agreements, both for themselves and for affected people.

Nepal also highlighted that compliance with KYC (Know Your Customer) requirements is likely to become a growing issue affecting cash transfer programming. These policies are designed to ensure that the cash is going to the right person, that the financial service provider is abiding by banking regulations and that the payment is not fraudulent (i.e. being used for illegal activities such as terrorism, money laundering or tax evasion). In line with this, Nepal's Central Bank requires anyone collecting a cash transfer to present an official government ID card, which is normally obtained through the local government administration. However, following the earthquake many people had either lost their ID cards or had

**Table 1 Financial service providers in Nepal**

Class	Classification	Institutional type
Class A Provider	Commercial banks	Formal banking sector
Class B Provider	Development banks	Non-formal banking sector
Class C Provider	Finance companies	Non-formal banking sector
Class D Provider	Microcredit development banks	Non-formal banking sector

**Table 2 Number of branches of banks and financial institutions**

Region	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D
Eastern	270	95	36	No data
Central	731	266	171	No data
Western	261	267	78	No data
Mid-western	124	62	11	No data
Far-western	86	23	2	No data
Total	1,472	713	298	No data

Source: *Understanding the Demand for Financial Services in Nepal*, November 2014.

not received one. Dalits, widows and other vulnerable groups were especially associated with problems obtaining ID cards. To overcome these obstacles, the government provided disaster-affected households with a temporary ID, while aid agencies worked with financial service providers to find ways of relaxing KYC requirements. In general, Nepal, like other emergencies, reinforced the need to better understand what being compliant means in humanitarian settings. Preparedness activities should take place with the government prior to a disaster, to develop plans that enable payments to be made quickly and at scale.

## Recommendations

- Payment IDs: 'Create specific humanitarian KYC standards, in collaboration with governments and international organisations (preferably before the emergency as part of the cash preparedness process).
- Know Your Customer: Ensure that aid agencies, rather than beneficiaries, are treated as customers by the service provider for KYC purposes.
- Tools: Develop simplified KYC forms for humanitarian purposes.
- Privacy and data protection: Limit the disclosure of information on refugees, IDPs and other beneficiaries with potential protection concerns.
- Mandate: Leverage the status of NGOs when negotiating contracts with service providers'.<sup>1</sup>

Delivering cash through existing financial channels in Nepal was constrained primarily by the geographical remoteness of affected communities and the lack of preparedness by humanitarian agencies, both in laying the groundwork with the Nepali government and in making agreements to address the details, requirements and coverage of financial service providers. While research indicates that the preference for formal providers has grown over the last ten years, more time and effort needs to be invested (particularly in the preparedness stage) to understand and mitigate issues associated with transferring cash after major sudden-onset emergencies.

The Nepali government's concerns around unconditional cash transfers by international NGOs led to delays in project approval at the district level, though to that extent cash transfers were not unlike other sectors, which also suffered from the effects of unclear government coordination under an unstable, temporary constitution and fragmented system of coordination and leadership at village and district levels.

## Recommendations

- Technology: 'Use technology-driven alternative delivery channels to improve the accessibility of financial services and to reach out to more people'.
- Products: 'Develop need-based, innovative financial products to attract more customers'.
- Awareness: 'Focus on improving financial literacy and awareness of financial products'.<sup>2</sup>
- Preparedness: Work closely with the government prior to a disaster to ensure that it understands unconditional cash transfer programming, and that any concerns it may have are addressed. Together with the government, identify focal points in each financial service provider, and work with them to develop national cash preparedness plans and policy enabling humanitarian agencies to deliver faster payments at scale (focusing on coverage, readiness and requirements).

1 Avner Levin, Anupa Varghuese and Michelle Chibba, *Humanitarian Cash Transfer Programs and Beneficiaries: Know Your Customer Standards and Privacy Recommendations*, Ryerson University Privacy and Big Data Institute.

2 *Understanding the Demand for Financial Services in Nepal*, November 2014.

## Hello Paisa

DCA used Hello Paisa ('Hello Money') mobile e-vouchers to deliver cash quickly to beneficiaries in remote locations. Given that the system is new in Nepal, there was a steep learning curve, for DCA, its implementing partners and Hello Paisa, in establishing the operating procedures for the payment system, informing people of their entitlements and ensuring that banks were ready to collaborate and understood their obligations. The e-voucher platform was used to transmit mass SMS messages via mobile phone, including the recipient's unique identifier code (to enable receipt of the cash transfer), the amount they would receive and contact numbers for complaints and inquiries. For people who owned a mobile phone, the SMS notifications worked quite well, though only three-quarters of the 10,780 targeted beneficiaries had a phone. For people who did not, efforts were made to ensure that they received the message through in-person contact with the implementing partner. Hello Paisa also provided beneficiaries who did not have mobile phones with 'peel away' paper vouchers with a hidden identifier code.

The lack of banking services and other financial institutions in rural Nepal made the delivery of cash a challenge. Hello Paisa, as an intermediary service provider, was able to circumvent some of the problems through its network of financial service contacts – including national market leaders Prabhu Bank and Civil Bank – which delivered the cash in communities. Accountability for the funds lay with Hello Paisa and its banking partners. This enabled DCA to focus on preparedness: planning with the Nepali organisations implementing the project, as well as familiarising communities with the project by explaining how it would help them. Once an effective plan was in place and beneficiaries were registered and verified, cash transfers moved quite efficiently. At its fastest, DCA assisted as many as 976 beneficiaries in one day's distribution with an average of one transfer every 28 seconds.

## Recommendations

- Preparedness. As with all aspects of cash transfer programming (and indeed emergency assistance more generally), it is important to get to know financial service providers, and potentially negotiate agreements with them, prior to a disaster. In contexts with recurring or chronic disasters, this could include small pilot projects to test delivery mechanisms.
- Groups of agencies should be able to negotiate better agreements with financial service providers by working together, especially prior to a disaster. Whilst some efforts were made to enhance the collective bargaining power of NGOs by sharing information on contracts and prices, parallel steps should have

been taken to establish relationships with financial service providers, such as developing multiagency cash preparedness plans linking recipients to stored savings accounts to promote financial inclusion, and facilitating further access to rural communities.

- There is a need for global coordination and documentation of learning on the use of financial service providers in humanitarian assistance. The Electronic Cash Transfer Learning Action Network and the Better than Cash Alliance are two leading fora for gathering and disseminating learning on e-cash. Agencies should engage with these networks and share lessons and evaluations.
- E-cash and e-vouchers are no longer 'nice to have': they need to be part of every agency's cash programming toolkit. While not applicable in every circumstance, e-cash and e-vouchers offer many potential advantages, both for agencies and for disaster- and conflict-affected people. Agencies doing cash transfer programming have a responsibility to learn how to use e-cash flexibly and adaptively.

## Conclusion

The increasing prominence of cash transfers, technology and the private sector is bringing about changes that were unanticipated even five years ago. A new hybrid model may be emerging whereby aid agencies are responsible for designing the response and ensuring local ownership and the fulfilment of cross-cutting commitments and links to other activities, financial service providers are responsible for getting the cash into people's hands (and where possible linking the payment to formal saving accounts) and governments are responsible for regulating, coordinating and linking short-term cash transfers to social welfare payments. Fully harnessing the power of information and communications technology will require greater investment during the preparedness phase so that coordinated payments can be delivered consistently at scale and on time. This isn't a straightforward task, particularly when the primary motive of financial service providers is to make a profit, and in post-conflict or unstable settings governments may have complicated relationships with their people. However, failing to invest in this discussion will mean failing to capture the potential to deliver faster, more efficient and more effective assistance to those who need it most.

**Erik Johnson** is Head of Humanitarian Response for DanChurchAid (DCA), and **Glenn Hughson** is DCA's Global Cash Transfer Adviser. **Alesh Brown** leads World Vision's Cash and Markets Learning Lab.

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# Using participatory tools to assess remittances in disasters

**Loic Le De, J. C. Gaillard and Wardlow Friesen**

In many low-income countries, remittances help to sustain people's livelihoods and reduce their vulnerability to disasters. However, most studies on this topic are short-term and rely on econometric methods and analysis. Research suggests that aid agencies are aware of the importance of remittances in disasters, but rarely consider them within their relief actions and recovery programmes since their understanding of such mechanisms is generally very limited. Drawing on fieldwork in Samoa, this article concludes that participatory methods, despite some limitations and challenges, contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of remittances and their importance in people's livelihoods following disaster.

## Why participatory methods?

Most studies exploring remittances during disasters use econometric methods based on national financial and migration data, which are often combined with questionnaire-based surveys. These methods of assessment give little insight for Disaster Risk Management (DRM), such as who has access to remittances and how important this resource is within people's livelihoods. Such methods may also be subject to large errors and provide limited information on remittance practices. The recorded data on remittance flows is often unreliable, as a large part is sent through unofficial channels. Survey-based research often consists of very long questionnaires that use predetermined categories that do not fit with people's own criteria and perceptions. These methods usually provide information at national level, and do not acknowledge smaller-scale patterns of remittances.

Participatory methods aim to be more cognisant of people's perceptions and priorities. Participatory tools also enable the collection of both qualitative and quantitative information that more conventional methods cannot capture. Participation is increasingly used in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR), which emphasises the need to build on people's own capacity to cope with natural hazards.

## A community-based research project in Samoa

The research took place in Samoa, where both remittances and vulnerability to natural hazards are very high. On 29 September 2009, Samoa was hit by a tsunami that killed 143 people and left 5,000 homeless. In December 2012, some of the same communities were hit by Cyclone Evan.

The overall aim of the research was to assess the importance of remittances in households' responses to hazard-related disasters by investigating:

- Who has access to remittances.
- The importance of remittances relative to other livelihood resources.
- How long after a disaster households received remittances and at what levels.
- What remittances are used for.
- The extent to which remittances help households to address their perceived priorities following a disaster.<sup>1</sup>

Participatory methods were used to address these objectives. The process of selecting and contacting communities for the study was facilitated by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), which supported the research project, and the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD). Fieldwork took place between 2012 and 2013. Eighty-two semi-structured interviews were carried out in five coastal villages affected by the 2009 tsunami. Some of these villages were also hit by Cyclone Evan in 2012. Participatory activities were later carried out in four of the villages. While less quantitative data on remittances was collected, having fewer study sites meant that more time was spent with the communities selected. A wide range of participatory techniques were used (see Table 1).

Interviews revealed disparities about the amount of remittances received and the degree of dependence on them. To assess the resources that constitute people's livelihoods, and the disparities among households regarding the importance of remittances, we developed a 'wheel' of livelihood resources. This technique first requires that participants, as a group, list all the livelihood resources and activities they employ, both normally and during disasters. In normal times, resources listed included farming, coconut harvesting, paid employment, remittances, handicrafts, mat weaving, raising cattle and fishing. During periods of disaster, people also listed livelihood resources, government support, external aid and loans and credit. Each resource was written on a card and then stuck on the pillars of the *fale* (a traditional open Samoan house), enabling participants to visualise the resources identified. When this process was completed, the cards were displayed on each cell of the wheel of livelihood resources, which comprises concentric circles and lines radiating from the centre. Each participant is allocated a row and each cell corresponds to a resource that the participants had previously identified. Participants were provided with 20 stones (shells or seeds can be used) that represented the

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the outcomes have been published in L. Le De, J. C. Gaillard, W. Friesen and F. M. Smith, 'Remittances in the Face of Disasters: A Case Study of Rural Samoa', *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 17(3), 2015; and L. Le De, J. C. Gaillard and W. Friesen 'Poverty and Disasters: Do Remittances Reproduce Vulnerability?', *Journal of Development Studies*, 51(5), 2015.



Wheel of livelihood resources in Poutasi village, Samoa.

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**Table 1 Participatory tools**

Method	Purpose
Semi-structured interviews	To understand the local context and gather different information obtained via participatory activities
Wheel of livelihood resources	To determine whether the different resources that people use to make a living and to face natural hazards and to assess the importance of remittances within that system
Proportional piling	To determine what people use remittances for, both before and during disasters
Listing via carousel exercise	To define poverty and wealth criteria to engender discussions on how the type of incomes, access to resources and level of wealth guide remittance practices
Timeline with scoring technique	To identify when and in which proportion remittances, government support and NGO assistance were received the year following the disaster
Matrix scoring	To compare the different resources people used to cope with and recover from the disaster, using community-determined impact indicators
Group discussions	To gather qualitative information on the various aspects linked to remittances in a disaster context

household's income, assets and resources. Each head of household then distributed the stones among the livelihood resources in accordance with the importance of each resource. The facilitators recorded the data directly on the wheel after double-checking its accuracy with participants. The exercise was repeated, but with participants reallocating the stones to reflect the relative importance of these

resources during disasters. The participants could indicate the trade-offs they made and the combinations of resources used, and how these become more or less significant in a crisis. Recording the information pre- and post-disaster on the wheel facilitates dialogue and helps participants to visualise both their resources and the decision-making process.

The wheel of livelihood resources was followed by proportional piling. The process started with an interactive discussion with all the participants listing what they used remittances for both before and after the disaster. The different uses of remittances were written on cards that were positioned on the floor in a circle. In the middle of the circle 40 stones were placed in order for the participants to indicate their use of remittances. At the beginning, the participants estimated how they spent remittances by allocating different piles of stones to different categories of spending. After visual observations and discussions (e.g. 'do we really spend that much on food?'), the stones were redistributed. The participants then explained their choices to the facilitators, delivering insightful information on the rationale behind their remittance-related livelihood strategies.

The third tool, the carousel exercise, encouraged participants to reflect on how wealth guides the need for and access to remittances. One of the objectives of the project was to determine who has access to, and makes use of, remittances. The first step was to understand what comprises wealth in Samoa. A carousel activity was conducted involving three different groups of participants. Each group was allocated a flipchart and participants were asked to define the components they thought defined wealth. After a few minutes, the flipcharts were rotated and each group had the opportunity to add more characteristics to the definition of wealth. People defined wealth in relation to the availability and scarcity of resources, including access to jobs, credit, land, wages and savings.

A timeline with scoring was carried out to define in what proportions remittances increased after the disasters, for how long and in comparison with the support received by the government and NGOs. This provided new as well as complementary information to that generated by the previous tools. The matrix-scoring tool was used at the end of the participatory process, as making best use of it required having extensively discussed different aspects of remittances and disasters beforehand. The resources that the participants had identified earlier with the wheel of livelihood resources were listed on the horizontal axis, while people's objectives, classified in seven predefined categories, were written on cards placed along the vertical axis. Each participant was given 30 stones to rank which resources, including remittances, were the most important in achieving particular outcomes.

Although remittances are important for households facing crisis, people see them as part of their everyday life and as an expression of love and affection from their relatives. It was only after reflection and discussion that participants started to think about this resource as a coping mechanism and/or a strength.

## Methodological strengths of participatory tools

Bringing together people who are directly concerned with issues of remittances and disasters generated rich qualitative and quantitative information. The main strengths of participatory tools and methods were:



An example of matrix scoring  
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- They were very efficient in measuring some aspects of remittances and households' livelihoods. This included quantifying remittances that are not part of official channels (e.g. as hand-carried cash, goods and in shipping containers), comparing remittances with external support (e.g. NGOs and government aid), and measuring activities that are part of people's livelihoods but do not necessarily generate income (e.g. subsistence fishing and farming).
- Participatory methods enabled researchers to quantify remittances in relation to households' incomes, how they fluctuated over time and how they were spent. This would have been impossible through more conventional methods that use predefined categories and are based on Western constructs (e.g. percentage or monetary value).
- The visual and interactive character of participatory techniques enabled a wide range of people to contribute their views and analysis, including those with limited knowledge of economic or scientific concepts and those with low levels of formal education or who were illiterate or innumerate. Many of these people would have had difficulty answering a questionnaire that involved numbers and percentages of income.
- Participatory tools potentially increased the accuracy of the quantitative information obtained as they encouraged participants to discuss, cross-verify and refine the data to reach consensus.
- Using a range of different participatory activities and debates involving the same participants helped both the participants and the researcher to identify more complex patterns, such as who has access to remittances and why.
- Group discussions provided insight on the social and cultural aspects of remittances.
- The participatory process allowed participants to discuss and learn more about their vulnerabilities and capacities, and how these are shaped by remittances and disasters.

## Methodological challenges and ethical considerations

Although participatory tools enabled a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding remittances, participation required building strong relationships with local communities, a very time-consuming process. Ethical issues, such as who owns the data and whether and how it can be shared, also had to be considered. For example, sharing some information with the other participants might be more delicate, such as the amount of remittances received. In this project, confidentiality was ensured by collecting this data using individual semi-structured interviews, so that participants would not feel that this was purely extractive research.

Adopting a participatory approach generally implies carrying out a small-scale analysis. While such studies may not produce statistically significant or generalisable results, they can potentially enable better monitoring of ethical issues, provide more detailed information, empower participants and be less costly. A larger sample size, which more conventional methods

pursued to provide statistically significant results, does not automatically mean better information, and may ultimately mean more bad information.

## Conclusion

Remittances are complex systems that involve socio-economic, political and cultural conditions, motivations and capacities, as well as local and global constraints and opportunities. Thus, conventional methods of assessment are limited in answering some of the central questions surrounding remittances and disasters, including who has access to remittances, why, and how they help people to deal with disasters. Working directly with concerned communities and using participatory methods is necessary if we are to gain a better understanding of remittances and the role they play in people's response to disasters.

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# Better not just bigger: reflections on the humanitarian response in South Sudan

**Viren Falcao and Hosanna Fox**

At an estimated \$1.6 billion, the UN-led response triggered by widespread violence in South Sudan was among the largest of 2014.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the capital Juba in December 2013, conflict quickly spread to other parts of the country. Long-standing political divisions and grievances within the ruling party underpinned the conflict, which divided communities largely along ethnic lines. Over a year and a half into the conflict, many people have been repeatedly displaced, moving from one location to another to escape ongoing hostilities. According to NGOs on the ground, some IDPs have reported being displaced up to ten times.

Another 200,000 people at least have sought refuge in 'Protection of Civilian' (POC) areas, distinct safe areas within UN peacekeeping bases.<sup>2</sup> Although these areas were intended to provide short-term refuge, ongoing protection threats outside the bases mean that many of the displaced have been sheltering in them since the current conflict began. Both the peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Mission in South

Sudan (UNMISS), and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) regard these POC areas as unsustainable and unsafe, both for the displaced and for UNMISS staff, and an obstacle to investment in protection activities elsewhere. Based on these concerns, UNMISS has pursued a durable solutions agenda that includes 'decongesting' the POC areas – or encouraging 'voluntary return' – a goal that potentially undermines humanitarian protection and assistance principles. Several solutions have been proposed, including returning the IDPs to their areas of origin or transferring responsibility for them to a non-military UN agency, but many home areas are still unsafe and passing responsibility to a civilian agency would negate the very reason why IDPs took refuge in POC areas in the first place.

Another challenge unique to South Sudan is the unprecedented degree of civil-military coordination required between humanitarians and UN peacekeeping forces. The cohabitation environment – where humanitarians are providing large-scale operations within UN bases – has resulted in a breakdown of distinction, the effects of which are exacerbated by operating within an integrated mission environment. In addition to the dilemmas that this poses for principled humanitarian action, the ethnic dimension of the conflict has created challenges in relation to securing negotiated humanitarian access and in deploying staff (particularly national staff) and assets.

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1 Prior to this most recent outbreak of violence, South Sudan had both a long history of large-scale humanitarian operations and a significant presence of active, well-established humanitarian actors, mechanisms and structures.

2 For an overview of issues related to POC sites, see Damian Lilly, 'Protection of Civilian Sites: A New Type of Displacement Settlement?', *Humanitarian Exchange*, 62, September 2014.



A boy fills wheelbarrows with dirt to build walls in the Protection of Civilians (POC) site near Bentiu, Unity State

© UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

The physical challenges of geography and poor infrastructure add to the complexity of managing humanitarian responses in South Sudan. For large parts of the year up to 60% of the country is accessible only by air, making it one of the most globally expensive and logistically complicated humanitarian operations to sustain. Even so, humanitarian agencies have been able to provide basic services and improve conditions both within and outside POC areas – in 2014, humanitarians were present in nearly 90 sites, up to ten of which also had an UNMISS presence. The timely provision of humanitarian assistance also helped to avert a large-scale deterioration in food security and malnutrition in 2014, and successfully contained cholera outbreaks in several parts of the country.<sup>3</sup>

The aid operation continues to face considerable logistical challenges within an increasingly complex political and security environment. Despite a peace agreement in August, displacement continues and needs are growing. The conflict has grown more fragmented and more complex, with regional interests increasingly a factor, and in some areas violence has become more brutal. Relations between the larger international humanitarian community and the South Sudan government and other parties to the conflict have deteriorated

considerably, becoming much more confrontational and less collaborative. NGOs now have to cope with a regulatory environment that increasingly hinders rather than facilitates operations, and face mounting bureaucratic impediments that often have a significant impact on the delivery of aid. More alarmingly, both UN and NGO agencies have faced a significant increase in intimidation, harassment and violence against humanitarian staff. Recent attacks against humanitarian aid workers – including abduction, rape and murder – have largely gone unaddressed, and a culture of appeasement risks turning into one of impunity.

The increasingly restrictive operating environment is hindering access and increasing costs for an aid sector confronted with an unprecedented scale and number of global crises. Within this context, it is important that humanitarians take a critical look, not only at the scale of need, but also the *effectiveness* and *appropriateness* of the response mechanisms and approaches used. Has the declaration of a system-wide/Level 3 crisis added value? How appropriate and sustainable are the approaches used so far, in terms of human and financial resources and assets deployed? How effectively were actors able to build on the significant and long-standing presence of humanitarian agencies in South Sudan, and draw lessons from the history of humanitarian responses in the country and region? What do 'durable solutions' mean in the current

<sup>3</sup> UN News Centre, 'UN Warns of Hunger Catastrophe for South Sudanese Children', 25 July 2014.

context of ongoing hostilities? What are the viable long-term solutions for people living in POC areas? What role does coordination play in an increasingly complex and fractured context? To what extent has coordination become an activity rather than a modality?

## Lessons from the response so far

Several key lessons can be drawn from past emergency responses in the country, and from the response thus far.

First, humanitarian activities need to better reflect the complexity of the situation, taking into account that the current conflict could last many years and that there are both chronic and acute needs that overlap and intersect, and which increasingly are not limited to areas directly impacted by the ongoing armed conflict and displacement. One response to displacement has been to increase mobile or rapid response teams focused on areas considered hard to reach. In principle, these sector-specific teams can be deployed at short notice across the country. They typically exit an area within a short period – at most a few months – after either addressing acute emergency needs or handing over to local actors or agencies able and willing to maintain a sustained presence. Funding mechanisms like the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) have also been adapted to support the scaling up of existing mobile response teams and the establishment of new ones, and coordination structures under the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have been adapted to support their operations.

While these teams have played a part in responding to acute needs in areas of displacement, the scale of need in many parts of South Sudan is immense, and the very modest pre-existing public services were already struggling from a severe lack of infrastructure, material and human resources even before the current conflict. This is equally true for areas into which displaced people have fled, where there are existing host communities with chronic needs, as well as across other parts of the country. The significant reduction in oil production – the principal source of government revenue – and the diversion of resources to military operations have undermined whatever limited services were available.

In this light the criteria for the prioritisation of needs and the effectiveness and sustainability of such responses in a situation of protracted conflict deserve re-examination. Humanitarian needs overviews, prepared in other countries facing protracted crises, should be adapted to the South Sudan context and used to guide the selection and prioritisation of locations for assistance. One good example is the Humanitarian Needs Overview in Afghanistan, which uses a range of indicators to guide analysis of the severity of needs across sectors and provinces.<sup>4</sup>

Second, cluster strategies need to account for the complexity of the situation in South Sudan. An enhanced analysis of needs and indicators of needs across the country – not just areas experiencing displacement and armed conflict – will allow a comparison across counties and states, resulting in more informed decisions on prioritisation. This will enable more efficient use of limited resources, and help ensure better-targeted responses.

Third, a complex operational environment doesn't necessarily need a complex coordination system. The efficacy of aid delivery is sometimes blunted by the coordination machine itself and the centralised, state-based coordination system has sometimes struggled to adapt itself to changing needs. The effectiveness and appropriateness of the response needs to be the main measure of success, rather than the number of locations reached or individuals who have received aid. The declaration of a Level 3 emergency is meant to mobilise resources, empower UN leadership and generally raise the profile of the crisis internationally. While these aims potentially increase the scale of the response to match the scale of the crisis, the L3 declaration in South Sudan has also had implications for the direction of the response. The outcome – and an inherent risk in such declarations – is a greater emphasis on attending to the scale of needs (for instance the number of people reached with services), and reduced attention to other key aims of the Transformative Agenda, such as improving quality, accountability and appropriateness. An Operational Peer Review was carried out in 2014, and the report of an Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation mission is forthcoming. While both measures were taken as part of the Transformative Agenda, and both have promoted collective accountability, much more needs to be done to improve programmatic accountability, particularly to affected people. Developing tools, indicators and mechanisms to monitor distributions and responses needs to be prioritised as a critical element of delivering appropriate and effective aid. Rather than measuring delivery, we should develop ways to measure impact and presence.

Despite its participation in the UN coordination system, as a self-regulating sector the NGO community also has an independent obligation to monitor, review and improve its practice. While NGOs monitor and evaluate their own activities internally, it would be worth considering an evaluation of the collective impact NGOs have had in the course of the ongoing response, and systems for periodic review of the direction, appropriateness and sustainability of their collective efforts as a distinct sector. This would provide a coherent overview of NGO practice in the aggregate, identifying where the NGO community as a whole can improve.

An additional area of improvement relates to the considerable challenge of collective knowledge management. Frequent staff turnover and staffing gaps have an acknowledged impact on institutional memory within individual agencies, and this is reflected within the community as a whole. While in a context as

4 OCHA, 'Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2015', November 2014.

operationally challenging as South Sudan perfect information will never be available, inefficient information management means that operational decisions are often based on incomplete or incorrect information. Information is used by the UN for both internal humanitarian needs analyses and for public funding appeals, two purposes that are often at odds. This potentially politicises data in a way that hinders the objective identification of needs. Additionally, competition over funding can lead to decreased information sharing between NGOs.

## Conclusion

Whether or not the war ends soon, humanitarians must prepare for the worst-case scenario. This should include preparing for the likelihood of a protracted, increasingly fragmented conflict that makes security management more challenging, a fragile economy that results in even higher operating costs and increased insecurity in Juba and beyond and a global funding environment where South Sudan is deprioritised and humanitarian needs continue to grow, both within and – increasingly – outside conflict-affected areas. Even if the peace deal holds – or at the very least reduces physical violence – humanitarian needs will remain and the cumulative impact of the conflict will take years to address. The violence of the last 18 months has exacerbated societal divisions, and many IDPs may decide that it is unsafe to return to their pre-conflict areas of residence after the conflict ends.

Responding to the complex crisis in South Sudan will require adaptability, making gains in innovation and efficiency and continued evaluation of our own collective actions. It will likely also require a more streamlined response by actors with low

risk-aversion and the ability to negotiate complex operational environments in order to reach affected communities. Adapting and expanding ‘good enough’ approaches that are cheaper and better suited to local conditions and logistical challenges should be considered as part of cluster and cross-cluster response strategies. A good example is the Integrated Community Case Management approach, already in use in parts of the country, where in the absence of qualified medical personnel community health workers are trained and provided with medical supplies to respond to the most common ailments. Better needs analysis and indicators will enable prioritisation based on clear criteria between locations, and also ensure better links between mobile response teams and actors with a more stable presence in an area. A more thorough analysis of needs and vulnerabilities across the country is a prerequisite for better prioritisation, more appropriate responses and the judicious use of limited resources in the face of such large-scale needs. Given the history and the wealth of experience that humanitarian actors in South Sudan possess, we need to be asking ourselves how we can make our responses better – not just bigger.

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## Robust peacekeeping in Africa: the challenge for humanitarians

**Simone Haysom and Jens Pedersen**

The origins of peacekeeping lie in an attempt to create a different kind of military operation, one that did not seek to give one side an advantage over the other. Central to this effort was only using troops from ‘states with no stake in the outcome’.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the last decade and a half many missions in Africa have rejected this approach and adopted partisan positions on the outcome of the conflict. Using high levels of force to change the balance of power between armed groups, these missions have drawn heavily on regional troops. Some have been undertaken under the direction of the UN, others by the African Union (AU) and some as ‘coalitions of the willing’, condoned by UN resolutions. The growing role of robust multilateral military interventions in peacekeeping in Africa means that the humanitarian sector will have to commit new resources to relationship-building on

the continent, and step up existing engagement on protecting a distinct humanitarian identity in conflict zones.

### The scope for robust action in Africa

The push for more aggressive peace operations can be traced to the early 1990s. While the number of UN missions increased markedly after the Cold War, it was the mass killings in Srebrenica and Rwanda that galvanised the development of more far-reaching concepts and norms on the use of violence to prevent atrocities. The soul-searching within the UN after these events fed into the landmark Brahimi Report of 2000, which argued that peacekeepers should be obligated to stop violence ‘in support of basic United Nations principles’, ideas reaffirmed in subsequent reports and doctrine. The concepts embodied in the Protection of Civilians (POC) agenda and ‘Responsibility to Protect’ were also developed during this

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<sup>1</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).



© UN Photo/Stuart Price

Soldiers from South Africa in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)

period. The first peacekeeping operation with a POC mandate was the UN mission in Sierra Leone in 1999. Since then, the majority of mandates issued to UN missions have authorised peacekeepers to use ‘all necessary means to protect civilians when under imminent threat of physical violence’. The size, number and aims of peacekeeping missions expanded, and interventionist tactics were increasingly institutionalised.

Despite mandates including explicit calls to ‘protect civilians’, many of these missions were seen as lethargic and ineffective.<sup>2</sup> Chapter VII missions, such as the UN-African Union (AU) hybrid mission UNAMID in Darfur and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), are known more for their inability to stand up to government forces than for their robustness. For those who wish to see the UN take a more interventionist stance in conflicts, the key challenge has been

securing the political will to condone troop deployments in aggressive operations.

Almost all of the mandates for robust peacekeeping operations have been written by the US, France and the UK. These countries, all Permanent Members of the Security Council, have political, security and economic interests on the continent, including a desire to contain conflicts that might give haven to terrorist groups for training and recruitment, fears that conflict will spark further migration to the West and a desire to maintain advantageous trade relationships and access to natural resources. Protecting these interests creates an incentive to reduce instability and shape the post-conflict environment in African countries. These interests are not necessarily opposed in Africa to the extent that they are in many other conflict hotspots, for example in Ukraine, where Western powers would face a credible military threat from Russia and a broader geopolitical backlash if they intervened. This lack of opposition increases the scope for robust regional peacekeeping as one way of addressing instability.

<sup>2</sup> See *Evaluation of the Implementation and Results of Protection of Civilians Mandates in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services*, 3 July 2014.

At the same time, Western troops will not deploy under UN command except in small specialist non-combat units, often under a bilateral or European Union (EU) mandate. South Asian countries contribute the bulk of troops to UN missions, but resist the trend towards robust peacekeeping. Major troop contributors India and Bangladesh have few direct political interests in the outcomes of conflicts in Africa, and as such they too are highly reluctant to engage in fighting and risk losing personnel and equipment. This makes African support crucial.

## Regional troop contributions and political frameworks

The AU is unique among regional organisations in facilitating external interventions in conflicts in its member states. The organisation has adopted the principle of Responsibility to Protect and established structures for implementing its security aims. Western powers, on which the AU is still highly financially dependent, have strongly encouraged this. The alignment of interests between African troop-contributing states and the West has supported the move towards robust multilateral peace operations.

Typically, the majority of African troop contributions come from countries in the same region. Within the large pool of African states contributing army or police troops, a sub-set including Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, Chad and South Africa stand out as important players. Their importance is derived from the consistency, size and military effectiveness of their contributions. Significant incentives to contribute include increased access to international forums and stronger bilateral relationships with powerful states that ask for contributions. It can also affirm the rule of the political parties which authorise deployments.<sup>3</sup> Crucial too are the interests of countries within the region in containing or suppressing the conflict itself.

While some may argue that this is all the better for promoting 'African solutions to African problems', this can have negative consequences for African citizens, including exposing them to poorly paid and resourced troops with low levels of training and little respect for civilians; further entrenching despotic regimes; or regionalising existing conflicts. Even so, troops originating from neighbouring countries remain a desirable component for 'peacekeeping' because of two main advantages over troops from further afield: they can be deployed faster and their governments have a greater political commitment to take risks. This is where robust operations and the use of regional troops come together. The ability to provide a force that is willing to act aggressively is often dependent on using troops from countries that have a direct stake in the outcome.

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3 See Charles Onyango-Obbo, 'Somalia Is Sweet and Sour Business for Burundi, Uganda', *East African*, 14 March 2011; Danielle Beswick, 'Peacekeeping, Regime Security and "African Solutions to African Problems"', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2010.

## Implications for humanitarian operations

We have already witnessed how robust mandates are playing out in practice. In the Central African Republic, for instance, Chadian 'peacekeepers' were widely reported as having backed the Séléka coalition, one of the main parties to the conflict, with financial and logistical support. In April 2014, Chad withdrew all its troops after accusations by the UN that they had fired on a civilian market without provocation, killing 30 people.<sup>4</sup> In the DRC, MONUSCO's concept of operations includes a 'shape, clear, hold and build' approach, similar to that used by NATO in Afghanistan. Integral to this approach are 'Islands of Peace' – areas which have been cleared of rebels through military action – and activities which support the extension of government control and services are prioritised, including humanitarian activities. In Somalia AMISOM has 're-hatted' two forces, from Ethiopia and Kenya, that initially entered the country through unilateral invasions. In the case of Ethiopia, the original intervention – driven by fears of events in Somalia destabilising its own territory – had disastrous consequences by inadvertently empowering the fundamentalist elements in the Islamic Courts Union, which reconstituted themselves as Al Shabaab.<sup>5</sup> In each case, robust peacekeeping is just one aspect of a complex conflict, but often one which compounds already acute challenges for humanitarian actors, including the tendency among donors and multilateral organisations to integrate and incorporate humanitarian operations into state-building efforts and the criminalisation of negotiations with non-state actors.

Ostensibly, the operational procedures used by humanitarian actors in robust peacekeeping operations should be the same as in other situations where humanitarians and military forces find themselves in the same space. However, there are two important differences. First, where the humanitarian parts of the UN system are integrated within UN peacekeeping operations (as in UN Integrated Missions), it is much harder for humanitarian organisations to distance themselves from the UN than from a NATO or AU military operation. Second, the label 'peacekeeping' and the involvement of multilateral organisations with a mandate for peace and development, such as the UN, AU and ECOWAS, confers an aura of legitimacy over and above that of a standard military intervention. This is central to the rationale for using multilateral forums for these interventions in the first place. This legitimacy will be undermined when multilateral forces use partisan military means and violence to achieve their aims, and reports of displacement and civilians harmed directly or indirectly filter into local and international media. In other conflicts – for instance in Iraq and Afghanistan following military invasions by Western coalitions, where human rights and democracy

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4 'Chad Withdraws All Troops from CAR', *Al Jazeera*, 17 April 2014.

5 'Ethiopia, Somalia and Some Gentle Diplomatic Blackmail', *Daily Maverick*, 25 April 2013.

were central to appeals for legitimacy – this has led to pressure on humanitarian actors to be seen to be ‘on-side’ with military actors, and the adoption of the language and activities of humanitarianism by military forces.

Regional ‘peacekeepers’ in Africa with robust mandates are here to stay. To ensure the best chance for assistance to reach civilians trapped in African conflict zones, humanitarian agencies need to protect their neutral identity and open lines of dialogue with all parties to the conflict. Currently,

however, most humanitarian organisations are primarily geared towards dialogue with the UN and Western militaries and diplomatic players. This is not adequate: humanitarian organisations need to urgently improve dialogue not just with the AU (and its subsidiary regional economic communities) but with key African troop-contributing states.

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## Disaster Risk Reduction

### Good Practice Review 9

Revised edition, October 2015

**John Twigg**

<http://www.goodpracticereview.org/9>

Disasters are a major problem worldwide and a serious threat to sustainable development. Global disaster data from 2013 shows that there were 330 reported disasters triggered by geophysical, meteorological and climatological hazards in that year, affecting 108 countries, resulting in more than 21,600 deaths, affecting 96.5 million people and causing damage and losses to the value of \$118.6 billion. As well as loss of life, injury and disease, the destruction of property and other assets, disasters can also cause social and economic disruption, loss of infrastructure and other services and damage to the environment. In an increasingly integrated world economy built on networks of global supply chains, disasters in one country can easily affect others, and a shock or disruption to one part of the supply chain, such as a production plant or distribution centre, can have a ripple effect throughout the whole chain. Disasters are generally seen as extreme events in their scale or impact, requiring some form of external assistance. However, small-scale, lower-intensity hazard events can also have significant impacts locally. Poor people in particular often face high levels of everyday risk, for example from lack of clean water and sanitation, poor healthcare, pollution, occupational injuries, road accidents, domestic fires, violence and crime.

This Good Practice Review identifies and discusses the principles and practice of disaster risk reduction (DRR), drawing on experiences from around the world. It gives guidance on the main issues that should be taken into consideration when carrying out projects and programmes, and ways of addressing these issues in practice. DRR is a wide-ranging field of activity, as the following pages show, and each of the 18 chapters addresses a specific theme.

The book is intended primarily for practitioners, principally project planners and managers already working in the DRR field or planning to undertake DRR initiatives, mainly at sub-national and local levels. Some of these practitioners will be based in specialist DRR organisations, but many will be engaged in other development or humanitarian work, and seeking to incorporate DRR into their activities more effectively. They may be working in NGOs, local government, community organisations or other types of organisation, for there are many different stakeholders in DRR.

The Good Practice Review is above all a practical document, but it is not a manual. Its emphasis is on the process of planning and implementing risk reduction initiatives, looking at key issues and decision points. The descriptions and discussions are supported by case studies, which aim to give a sense of the range and diversity of the practical approaches that can be used.

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