

Rising to the humanitarian challenge in Iraq

Armed violence is the greatest threat facing Iraqis, but the population is also experiencing another kind of crisis of an alarming scale and severity. Eight million people are in urgent need of emergency aid; that figure includes over two million who are displaced within the country, and more than two million refugees. Many more are living in poverty, without basic services, and increasingly threatened by disease and malnutrition. Despite the constraints imposed by violence, the government of Iraq, the United Nations, and international donors can do more to deliver humanitarian assistance to reduce unnecessary suffering. If people's basic needs are left unattended, this will only serve to further destabilise the country.



The NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) is a network of about 80 international NGOs and 200 Iraqi NGOs, set up in Baghdad immediately after the war in 2003 to help NGOs to assess and meet the needs of the Iraqi population. NCCI provides impartial information for NGOs operating in Iraq and facilitates coordination of activity between them. NCCI members all comply with the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

Oxfam supports partner organisations in Iraq from a base in Amman, Jordan. The programmes supported include the provision of emergency assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs) in central and southern Iraq, the delivery of emergency medical supplies to hospitals and clinics in conflict areas, and conflict resolution between the Palestinian refugees and the Iraqi community. In addition, Oxfam works in partnership with another international NGO to build the operational capacity of six Iraqi NGOs in project management, governance, peace building, and conflict resolution. Oxfam has not had a staff presence in Iraq since 2003 because of security risks.

Executive summary

While horrific violence dominates the lives of millions of ordinary people inside Iraq, another kind of crisis, also due to the impact of war, has been slowly unfolding. Up to eight million people are now in need of emergency assistance. This figure includes:

- four million people who are ‘food-insecure and in dire need of different types of humanitarian assistance’
- more than two million displaced people inside Iraq
- over two million Iraqis in neighbouring countries, mainly Syria and Jordan, making this the fastest-growing refugee crisis in the world.

This paper describes the humanitarian situation facing ordinary Iraqis and argues that, while violence and a failure to protect fundamental human rights pose the greatest problems, humanitarian needs such as food, shelter, water and sanitation must be given more attention. Although responding to those needs is extremely challenging, given the lack of security and of competent national institutions, Oxfam and the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) believe that more could be done. The government of Iraq could extend the distribution of food parcels, widen the coverage of emergency cash payments, decentralise decision-making and support civil society groups providing assistance. The international donors and UN agencies could intensify their efforts to coordinate, fund and deliver emergency aid. These measures will not transform the plight of Iraqis but they can help alleviate their suffering. The paper focuses on needs inside the country, which are less visible, and does not refer in detail to the refugees in neighbouring countries.

Iraqis are suffering from a growing lack of food, shelter, water and sanitation, health care, education, and employment. Of the four million Iraqis who are dependent on food assistance, only 60 per cent currently have access to rations through the government-run Public Distribution System (PDS), down from 96 per cent in 2004.

Forty-three per cent of Iraqis suffer from ‘absolute poverty’. According to some estimates, over half the population are now without work. Children are hit the hardest by the decline in living standards. Child malnutrition rates have risen from 19 per cent before the US-led invasion in 2003 to 28 per cent now.

The situation is particularly hard for families driven from their homes by violence. The two million internally displaced people (IDPs) have no incomes to rely on and are running out of coping mechanisms. In 2006, 32 per cent of IDPs had no access to PDS food rations, while 51 per cent reported receiving food rations only sometimes.

The number of Iraqis without access to adequate water supplies has risen from 50 per cent to 70 per cent since 2003, while 80 per cent lack effective sanitation. The ‘brain drain’ that Iraq is experiencing is further stretching already inadequate public services, as thousands of medical staff, teachers,

water engineers, and other professionals are forced to leave the country. At the end of 2006, perhaps 40 per cent had left already.

The people of Iraq have a right, enshrined in international law, to material assistance that meets their humanitarian needs, and to protection, but this right is being neglected. The government of Iraq, international donors, and the United Nations (UN) system have been focused on reconstruction, development, and building political institutions, and have overlooked the harsh daily struggle for survival now faced by many. All these actors have a moral, political, and in the case of the government, legal obligation to protect ordinary Iraqis caught up in the conflict. They also have a responsibility to find ways to secure the right conditions for the delivery of assistance, both where conflict is intense and in less insecure parts of the country to which many people have fled.

The primary duty-bearer for the provision of basic services remains the national government, which must work to overcome the extensive obstacles that hamper its operations at central and local level. Oxfam and the NCCI believe that political will must be found to improve the emergency support system for the poorest citizens, including the internally displaced. The government should start with the decentralisation of the delivery of assistance. This would include giving power to local authorities to quality-check and distribute emergency supplies within their own governorates, together with a more extensive system of warehouse storage for supplies throughout Iraq. Establishing a proper legal framework for civil-society organisations would greatly assist non-government relief efforts by giving them the legal authority to operate in Iraq.

The expansion of the PDS for foodstuffs, including the establishment of a temporary PDS identity-card system for IDPs, is also priority. As is the extension of the programme of emergency cash allowances to households headed by widows, which should be increased from \$100 per month so that it is closer to the average monthly wage of \$200, and expanded to include other vulnerable groups. A \$200 monthly payment to 1 million households, would cost \$2.4bn per year, which is within the country's financial capacity. Foreign governments with capacity and influence in Iraq, including the USA and the UK, must provide advice and technical assistance to Iraqi government ministries to implement these policies and supply basic services,

The main challenges both to the livelihoods of Iraqis and to the delivery of humanitarian assistance are the ongoing violence and insecurity. Political solutions to the conflict must be found as soon as possible, but in the meantime all armed groups, including the Iraqi security forces, the Multi-National Force in Iraq (MNF-I), local militia, and insurgents, should not harm civilian life, property, or infrastructure, and should respect the population's right to assistance, in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law.

Whilst indiscriminate, and often targeted, violence has greatly reduced the capacity of Iraqi civil-society organisations and NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and UN agencies to access the needy civilian population, this has not prevented many of these organisations from working with Iraqi communities to find creative ways to adapt to the constraints and continue to maintain a presence in Iraq.

An NGO (anonymous for security reasons) supported by Oxfam is providing emergency assistance to hospitals and clinics in conflict areas. It has carried out distributions of essential medical supplies to 40 health centres located in six governorates, to sustain the delivery of health services during conflicts. It also reinforces capacity in potential 'hot spots' through the pre-positioning of emergency supplies. Essential health care has been provided to over 100,000 patients.

There are 80 independent INGOs still engaged with Iraq, including NCCI members, and 45 of these have existing or potential emergency response programmes. Some have national staff running offices inside the country, with management based in a different country, commonly Jordan. Others fund and advise autonomous local Iraqi NGOs. These methods of working in highly insecure environments are often known as 'remote programming'. By adopting such approaches, NGOs are the main implementers of UN and other humanitarian programmes inside Iraq.

An NGO (anonymous for security reasons), supported by Oxfam, is supplying food and water to IDPs fleeing from Qa'im, Haditha, Rawa, Heet, Ramadi, and Fallujah. It also works in co-operation with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on IDP monitoring and the provision of emergency supplies. In addition, it implements an income-generation project for IDPs from Fallujah, carries out water drilling for IDPs and host communities in Ana and Heet, and has a school rehabilitation project in Fallujah. This NGO reports that lack of funding is a limitation that has prevented it from expanding its activities and reaching a wider range of beneficiaries.

Islamic and regional organisations are active in humanitarian response. Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid provide financial and technical support, focusing on humanitarian aid and orphan-care programmes, while the Qatari Red Crescent funds Iraqi NGOs and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS). The Khomeni Foundation has been providing basic hygiene kits, blankets, and food to IDPs in the south of the country. Islamic political parties and religious organisations, including mosques, also respond to the survival needs of their constituencies.

International donors have been slow to recognise the scale of humanitarian needs. Development aid from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors increased by 922 per cent between 2003 and 2005 to \$20,948m, whereas funding for humanitarian assistance fell by 47 per cent during the same period to \$453m. Results from a recent Oxfam survey of donors show that 2006 funding for humanitarian assistance fell alarmingly to \$95m despite the evident increase in need. The total is not complete as only 19 of the 22 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors were willing to provide data for the survey. However, eight of the top ten donors for humanitarian assistance to Iraq in 2005, including the US and the UK, did respond. Many humanitarian organisations will not accept money from governments that have troops in Iraq, as this could jeopardise their own security and independence. So it is particularly important that donors from countries which do not have troops there, such as Belgium, Canada, France,

Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland, agree to increase their budgets for humanitarian action in Iraq.

Donors and the UN have also not commonly appreciated the potential that exists to fund work inside Iraq, especially if there were greater willingness to support operations that do not involve all the conventional forms of delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and which may be costlier, yet which offer reasonable guarantees that money is well spent.

According to a survey of NGOs/INGOs conducted by Oxfam in April 2007, over 80 per cent could expand humanitarian work if they had increased access to funds. Both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the IRCS have recently launched appeals for their substantial programmes in Iraq, which are yet to be fully funded.

The UN, especially the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has a vital role to play in the provision of humanitarian assistance, through co-ordinating needs-assessment and delivery, advising the government, mobilising resources, and advocating for enhanced civilian protection. To date, the UN's performance has been limited, not least by the tight security it has imposed on its staff following the loss of 22 employees in the 2003 bombing of the Canal Hotel. Nevertheless, there are welcome signs that the UN may be becoming more active. The publication in April 2007 of a 'strategic framework' for a co-ordinated humanitarian response in Iraq is a step in the right direction, as is the decision of the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in July 2007 to ask donors to double its budget for work with Iraqi refugees and the internally displaced to \$123m.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

Bringing an end to war and civil strife in Iraq must be the overriding priority for the national government and the international community. However, the government, the countries of the MNF-I, the UN agencies, and international donors can do more to meet the other survival needs of the Iraqi population, despite the challenging environment.

The government of Iraq should take urgent action to address the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. Measures should include:

- Local authorities should assume greater responsibility for providing assistance, shelter, and essential services to displaced people, as well as to vulnerable local populations, and should be given the power and resources by central government to do so.
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should increase the \$100 per month payment to households headed by widows so that it is closer to the average monthly wage of \$200, and expand the range of recipients to include other vulnerable groups, such as the displaced population.
- The Ministry of Trade should improve the Public Distribution System (PDS). This should include the establishment of a temporary PDS identity card system so that displaced people can receive food rations.

- The government should create a cross-ministerial team to co-ordinate its humanitarian response and should release funds at its disposal for delivery of this response.
- Explicit orders should be given to the Iraqi security forces that they, like all armed groups, should not harm civilian life, property, or infrastructure, and should respect the population's right to assistance.
- The government of Iraq should support national NGOs through a legal framework, including registration procedures that recognise their rights and independence and secure their legal authority to operate in Iraq.

International governments with capacity and influence in Iraq should recognise their responsibilities towards the people of Iraq by:

- Supporting Iraqi ministries through advice and technical assistance in order to ensure their capacity to provide basic services, notably improved food distribution, shelter, and the extension of welfare payments.

The governments of the Multi-National Force in Iraq (MNF-I) should recognise their particular responsibilities towards the people of Iraq by:

- Ensuring that the armed forces respect their moral and legal obligation not to harm civilians or their property, or essential infrastructure.

Donors need to increase support to national and international NGOs, the ICRC, the IRCS, and UN agencies delivering the humanitarian response:

- Donors should provide increased emergency funding that is readily accessible and flexible. In particular, donors must build on discussions under way with NGOs to better understand 'remote programming' and mechanisms for monitoring and verification.
- Since many humanitarian organisations will not accept money from governments engaged in the conflict, it is important that donors from other countries, such as Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland, increase their funding for humanitarian action.

The UN, especially UNAMI and OCHA, needs to continue to strengthen its humanitarian role inside Iraq by:

- Working towards the achievement of a co-ordinated response with the government of Iraq and NGOs, and between UN agencies.
- Developing a more nuanced approach to the movement of UN staff that differentiates between constraints in different areas and which is more independent of the MNF-I, thereby allowing better needs assessment, co-ordination, and service delivery.
- Building on the emergency field co-ordination structure established by the NCCI to enable rapid response to identified needs.
- Administering a new pooled fund for rapid response that should be able to disburse monies to NGOs.

1 Right to assistance

Armed violence is the greatest threat facing Iraqis. The situation deteriorated rapidly in April 2004, with fighting in the cities of Fallujah and Najaf. It took a rapid and more visible turn for the worse in February 2006 following the bombing of the Al-Askari mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest sites for Shi'as, which sparked an escalation of sectarian violence across the country. The violence cannot be put down solely to sectarian conflict: it is also a result of the struggle for power at all levels of society.

However, the population is also experiencing another kind of humanitarian catastrophe of an alarming scale and severity. Iraq's civilians are suffering from a denial of fundamental human rights in the form of chronic poverty, malnutrition, illness, lack of access to basic services, and destruction of homes, vital facilities, and infrastructure, as well as injury and death. Basic indicators of humanitarian need in Iraq show that the slide into poverty and deprivation since the coalition forces entered the country in 2003 has been dramatic, and a deep trauma for the Iraqi people. The number of refugees and displaced persons is now massive by any modern standards.

The government of Iraq, the United Nations (UN), and international donor governments are not yet adequately addressing this deteriorating situation. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Peter Kessler, 'There has been an abject denial of the impact, the humanitarian impact, of the war...'.¹

Vulnerability and need

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimate that up to eight million Iraqis are in need of immediate assistance.² The situation is particularly severe for those in the central area of the country, while the south remains volatile, and even in the more stable and developed areas of the north violence is spreading and communities are struggling to meet both their own needs and those of the displaced population.

Access to food

A World Food Programme (WFP) report issued in May 2006 found that just over four million people in Iraq were 'food-insecure and in dire need of different kinds of humanitarian assistance'.³ This was an increase from the estimated 2.6 million who were found to be

'extremely poor' in WFP's 2004 Baseline Survey.⁴ This WFP estimate was based on data gathered before the fragmentation of Iraq, in times of far better access to basic services and the Public Distribution System (PDS).

According to UNHCR in April 2007, of the four million Iraqis who cannot regularly buy enough to eat, only 60 per cent currently have access to rations supplied by the government-run PDS. This is due largely to the difficulties of delivery and registration in the context of violence and insecurity.⁵ Although not a direct comparison, 96 per cent of all Iraqi families received PDS supplies in 2004, according to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) living-conditions survey.⁶ This shows a significant deterioration in the delivery of the PDS over the past four years. The PDS basket includes staples such as wheat, rice, dried milk, sugar, tea, and soap.

According to Refugees International, with around one million Iraqis internally displaced before the 2003 war and with the additional displacement of nearly one million due to factional violence, the PDS is now more important than ever. Both the effectiveness and efficiency of the PDS, however, have declined significantly.

Roads throughout Iraq have become treacherous as the result of the actions of criminal gangs and militias. PDS supply trucks are often unable to reach their destinations, leaving much of the country cut off. Administrative corruption has weakened the efficiency of the distribution system. Convoys that do reach their destination often carry only limited amounts of the PDS basket, with key items missing.

The violence that has caused so many Iraqis to flee prevents them from returning home to apply for the transfer of their rations to a new location. As a result, most of the displaced people in the north manage to obtain PDS rations only on rare occasions when relatives send them or when they pay others to collect them. Although some have tried to transfer their PDS registration cards, none have succeeded.⁷

Source: Refugees International⁸

The situation is worse for displaced communities. Of the displaced people interviewed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) between April and December 2006, 32 per cent reported that they had no access to PDS rations, 51 per cent reported receiving food rations only sometimes, while just 17 per cent reported that they always received them. In addition, many of those who received rations found that they were incomplete.⁹

As always, children pay a high price when livelihoods collapse. According to Caritas, child malnutrition rates in Iraq have risen from 19 per cent before the 2003 invasion to 28 per cent four years later.¹⁰ More than 11 per cent of newborn babies were born underweight in 2006, compared with 4 per cent in 2003.¹¹

'Sometimes we need to divide the only available bread with six members of my family because we don't have money to buy more. I had to leave my school because my father cannot afford notebooks and pencils.... You cannot imagine what it is like to see your six-year-old sister sick and at risk of dying because your family has no money to buy medicine for her.' – Hudhar Zein, aged 11

Source: IRIN¹²

Income

At the beginning of May 2007, the Central Office for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT), part of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, released a survey highlighting the fact that 43 per cent of Iraqis suffer from 'absolute poverty'.¹³ The poverty of many families is rooted in unemployment, which affects probably more than 50 per cent of the workforce. Many of those unemployed are young men, who are consequently vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.¹⁴

Bereavement is also a major cause of poverty. Most of the people killed in Iraq's violence – perhaps over 90 per cent – are men.¹⁵ Their deaths leave households headed by women who struggle to survive the loss of the main breadwinner. According to UNAMI's Human Rights Office, many projects created to provide jobs for women were abandoned after the number of INGOs began falling from October 2004 onwards.¹⁶ The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has started paying the equivalent of about \$100 a month to widows, but this payment cannot adequately support an entire family. In the short term, the solution is for the government to increase this payment so that it is nearer to the average monthly wage of \$200.

This emergency payment should also be extended to a wider population, including the four million Iraqis who are food-insecure and the two million or more who are displaced. The majority of these people have little or no access to livelihood opportunities, and are dependent on assistance from others.

An NGO (anonymous for security reasons) supported by Oxfam runs IDP monitoring and emergency assistance programmes in central and southern Iraq. These programmes are funded and supported by IOM and UNHCR. Mobile teams count and assess needs and monitor the displaced population in the 15 governorates of central and southern Iraq. The aim of the programmes is to ensure a prompt response to the urgent needs of recently displaced families.

Access to water and electricity

The number of Iraqis without an adequate water supply has risen from 50 per cent to 70 per cent since 2003. Eighty per cent of Iraqis lack effective sanitation.¹⁷ According to an April 2007 ICRC report, water is often contaminated owing to the poor repair of sewage and water supply networks and the discharge of untreated sewage into rivers, which are the main source of drinking water.¹⁸ There are reports of an increase in diarrhoeal diseases throughout the population.¹⁹ Both ICRC and UNICEF have water-trucking projects to try to combat the lack of safe supply.

There has also been a deterioration in electricity supplies in the past few months, with most homes in Baghdad and other cities receiving only two hours of electricity per day.²⁰

Access to health services

While several immunisation campaigns have been successfully undertaken by the Ministry of Health,²¹ health services are generally in a catastrophic situation in the capital, in the main towns, and across the governorates. IDPs are often not able to receive treatment outside their home area, where they are registered.

KEMADIA, the state-owned medical supply company, is unable to provide for the hospitals and primary health-care centres.²² Of the 180 hospitals countrywide, 90 per cent lack key resources including basic medical and surgical supplies.²³ Like many government institutions, KEMADIA has been crippled by bureaucratic, centralised management and a lack of distribution capacity, while accusations of corruption and sectarian influence have eroded people's confidence in its ability to deliver. The restricted supplies of electricity and water further disrupt medical services.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which funds the provision of surgical equipment, materials, and supplies to hospitals in Iraq, reports that former general hospitals, previously used to referring all but simple emergency cases, are now performing complex emergency surgery with only the most basic equipment and drugs. Doctors have had to

ask the relatives of injured patients to search local pharmacies for blood bags, sutures, and infusions before they can start surgery.²⁴

Health-care facilities are also overstretched by the increasing number of victims of the ongoing violence and of the related extreme deprivation. According to one estimate, there have been around 65,000 violent deaths since the 2003 invasion.²⁵ For every person killed, about three have been wounded, according to Iraq's Health Minister.²⁶ A 2006 study published in *The Lancet* said that violence may have led to 655,000 direct and indirect deaths since 2003.²⁷

Yarmouk hospital, which has been assisted since 1998 by an Oxfam-supported INGO (anonymous for security reasons), has serious security issues. Policemen, military personnel, and militiamen regularly storm the emergency rooms seeking treatment for their comrades, firing shots inside the hospital to intimidate patients, and threatening the medical staff. The Iraqi Medical Association states that 50 per cent of the 34,000 doctors registered in 2003 have left the country.

'The Geneva Conventions state that a hospital is and should remain neutral and accessible to everybody, particularly civilians. Yet, when it's occupied by armed groups or official forces, people will not have this free and humanitarian access.' – Cedric Turlan, information officer for NCCI

Source: IRIN²⁸

Access to education

Iraq's education system is also suffering because of the acute insecurity. One survey found that 92 per cent of children had learning impediments that are largely attributable to the current climate of fear.²⁹ Schools are regularly closed as teachers and pupils are too fearful to attend. Over 800,000 children may now be out of school, according to a recent estimate by Save the Children UK – up from 600,000 in 2004.³⁰ A recent report by the NCCI reveals that schools are also becoming shelters for IDPs in some communities, forcing the pupils either to remain at home or study in difficult conditions,³¹ while universities, from Basra in the south to Kirkuk and Mosul in the north, have been infiltrated by militia organisations, and female students are regularly intimidated for failing to wear the *hijab*.³²

Displacement

There are now over two million IDPs inside Iraq as a result of repression under the former regime, recent military operations, and sectarian violence and intimidation.³³ According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 70 per cent of IDPs are women and

children.³⁴ UNHCR reports that more than 820,000 people have been displaced due to sectarian violence since the February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari shrine.³⁵ Some central governorates have seen a ten-fold increase in the numbers of internally displaced people since the beginning of 2006.³⁶ According to the IOM, limited funding means that the needs of many displaced people will go unmet.³⁷

'I have been displaced since 23 March 2006, when insurgents came to my home in the Kadhimiya neighbourhood of Baghdad and gave me and my family 24 hours to vacate our home. I have a wife and four children to look after, but I have had no job since I was displaced... We are now living in this improvised camp for displaced families, as we have no money, because we used all our savings of \$1,000 to buy food for my family. Now we are totally dependent on local NGOs to give us assistance because Iraq's central government hasn't done anything to help us.

Local NGOs help us with clothes, food, and sometimes medicines, but in the past three months the aid has been drying up. There are about 2,000 living in this camp and we all depend on assistance. Actually, I had five children until three months ago, when the smallest one died from dehydration. Hassan, who was only two years old, got very sick from diarrhoea caused by drinking bad water, and because we couldn't afford to buy him nutritious food.' – Hussein Iyad, aged 38

Source: IRIN³⁸

According to UNHCR, the initial coping mechanisms of IDPs and of host communities have been depleted, as displacement has taken on a more permanent character.³⁹ Some provinces within Iraq are feeling overwhelmed and are attempting to close their boundaries to IDPs from other areas.⁴⁰ Thousands of displaced people without family links or money are living in public buildings and schools where they are at constant risk of eviction, or in hazardous, improvised shelters without water and electricity, or in camps administered by the IRCS.⁴¹

Some 50,000 Palestinian, Syrian, and Iranian refugees living in Iraq have been targeted by sectarian groups in deliberate attacks. In particular, the security of around 34,000 Palestinians has deteriorated drastically, forcing many thousands to move elsewhere inside the country or to flee to Jordan or Syria, often being stranded for long periods in 'no man's land' while potential host governments decide whether or when to let them enter.

An estimated 1,400 Palestinians are living in desperate conditions in refugee camps along the Iraq–Syria border, unable to cross the frontier into a country that is already straining to cope with hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees.

Source: UNHCR⁴²

As the ICRC points out, the most effective way of preventing displacement is to respect the rights of the civilian population in the event of armed conflict or other situations of violence. No person in need should go unassisted or unprotected.⁴³ This has not happened in Iraq to date. The government of Iraq, the MNF-I, the Iraqi security forces, and other non-state actors must all recognise that IDPs are protected by human-rights law and international humanitarian law, and that within the general population they often have the greatest need. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement⁴⁴ presented to the UN in 1998 describe the rights of the internally displaced at all stages of their displacement, right up to their safe return or resettlement, and also cover the prevention of displacement. Although not legally binding, the principles of the guidelines directly reference obligations in international law and provide valuable practical guidance for governments, authorities, intergovernmental organisations, and NGOs in their work with IDPs. All parties should adhere to these guidelines in their dealings with IDPs in Iraq.

Refugees

More than two million Iraqis are estimated to have fled to neighbouring countries. Syria has around 1.4 million Iraqi refugees, Jordan 750,000, the Gulf States 200,000, Egypt 80,000 and Lebanon 40,000.⁴⁵ Approximately 40,000–50,000 Iraqis are leaving their homes to seek safety inside or outside Iraq on a monthly basis.⁴⁶ According to Refugees International, Iraq now represents the fastest-growing refugee crisis in the world.⁴⁷

Minorities fleeing persecution are adding to the growing numbers of refugees and displaced people. Christians – who comprise between 8 and 12 per cent of the Iraqi population – are increasingly reported to be experiencing discrimination in accessing the labour market or basic social services, and are particularly fearful of attacks by militia.⁴⁸ Of the

1.5 million Assyrians living in Iraq before 2003, half have left the country and the remaining 750,000 are trying to move to safer areas.⁴⁹ Iraqi Yazidis, numbering some 550,000, are also facing violent assaults and threats, as are Iraq's Turkmens and Kurds, as these groups are seen by some as being affiliated to foreign powers.⁵⁰

Iraq is also losing its educated public-service workers in massive numbers. Reports indicate that some universities and hospitals in Baghdad have lost up to 80 per cent of their professional staff.⁵¹ At least 40 per cent of Iraq's professional class, including doctors, teachers, and water engineers, have left since 2003.⁵²

Many women have tried to flee to neighbouring countries to find work, in order to secure an income for their families back in Iraq. UNHCR has found numerous cases where young women have been promised jobs in Syria, only to arrive and find themselves being exploited by sex traffickers.⁵³

Providing shelter for Iraqi refugees is an international obligation that is legally binding for signatories of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees.⁵⁴ The burden should not fall solely on regional governments such as those of Jordan and Syria. It is imperative that the international community, particularly the USA and the UK, meet their responsibilities to provide refuge for those fleeing insecurity and violence in Iraq, and to provide assistance to refugees who remain in the region.

2 Addressing the challenges to providing humanitarian assistance

The government of Iraq, donors, coalition governments, and the UN system have been focused on reconstruction, development, and building political institutions, and have been overlooking the harsh daily struggle for survival now faced by many. All these actors have a moral, political and, in the case of the governments, legal obligation to act in defence of ordinary Iraqis caught up in the conflict. In the view of Oxfam and the NCCI, all players can do more than they are doing at present, both where violence is intense and in the relatively quieter parts of the country to which many people have fled.

The resilience of humanitarian actors in Iraq illustrates that, while there are huge challenges, where there is determination and creative thinking there are also ways to assist better those in need. By understanding the obstacles that exist, and the ways in which these can be tackled, it is possible to improve the humanitarian response in Iraq, and to prepare for the future.

Violence and lack of humanitarian access

Car bombs, roadside bombs, suicide bombs, assassinations, sniper attacks, kidnappings, drive-by shootings, torture, and sectarian killings have become daily occurrences in many of Iraq's cities. Increasingly, militias and criminal gangs have been reported as acting in collusion with, or have infiltrated, the security forces.⁵⁵ Some militia purport to grant local communities protection that cannot be guaranteed by state law-enforcement agencies,⁵⁶ and some offer welfare support, including basic supplies.⁵⁷

The ability of humanitarian organisations to respond effectively to emergency needs is severely affected by the violence and by the denial of civilians' rights to assistance. Areas where needs are greatest are invariably the most insecure and the least accessible. At least 88 aid workers have been killed in Iraq since March 2003,⁵⁸ with local NGO staff being by far the most frequent victims. Others have been kidnapped and released only after harrowing experiences.⁵⁹

During some military operations, MNF-I and the Iraqi security forces surround an area and do not allow anybody to enter or leave. A heavy military presence in areas where NGOs hope to provide assistance can increase the level of danger that distribution teams face. Checkpoints, curfews, road closures, and sudden changes in access to towns and cities for security reasons all pose major constraints on NGOs' ability to deliver a humanitarian response.

Armed groups, including the MNF-I, Iraqi security forces, local militia, and insurgents, have a legal obligation not to harm civilian life, property, or infrastructure.⁶⁰ Together with the UN, foreign governments, and the government of Iraq, they all have a responsibility to find ways to secure the right conditions for the delivery of assistance. In practical terms, the creation of humanitarian space could be facilitated by ceasefire agreements between the parties in conflict to allow for the delivery of humanitarian relief, particularly PDS convoys and deliveries of medical supplies.

The MNF-I operates under a UN mandate, which commits it to act in accordance with international law, to participate in the provision of material assistance to the population, and to facilitate humanitarian assistance.⁶¹ However, the MNF-I is widely resented by Iraqis and is not seen as an impartial actor in the conflict. MNF-I contributions to the humanitarian effort must only occur as a last resort when no civilian means are available for meeting urgent needs, in accordance with international guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets in complex emergencies. If and when such efforts occur, they must avoid blurring the lines between military actors, who may be engaged in providing material assistance, and aid workers, who

provide humanitarian assistance based on principles of impartiality and independence. International and national NGOs have already reported that some local communities do not make this distinction, which puts humanitarian actors at greater risk.⁶²

NGOs and the UN also face increasing problems of access, which can be dependent on the ethnicity, religion, or nationality of those bringing humanitarian assistance. Sometimes only those from the local area are trusted.

Iraqi government response

Taking responsibility

Iraq's leaders have yet to create national unity and, to date, the national government has been unable to demonstrate that it has an effective ministerial structure, or the ability to govern in many areas.⁶³ The Iraqi government operates in a restrictive security environment where mobility is severely constrained and governorates and government offices have been cut off from one another. Security concerns understandably dominate all other priorities. Government officials are justifiably increasingly preoccupied with the safety of their own families, given the rising number of assassinations and kidnappings.

A combination of a high turnover of officials including the loss of staff who are fleeing Iraq and divisions throughout government is making it hard to achieve consistency on any issue, including humanitarian response. This is not helped by the fact that the Iraqi authorities have only recently recognised that there is indeed a humanitarian crisis.⁶⁴ In addition, Iraq is in the grip of economic downturn, stumbling reconstruction, and massive corruption.⁶⁵ In 2006, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Iraq in 160th place in the world, making it worse than the DRC or Sudan.⁶⁶

Despite these problems, severe as they are, the government of Iraq remains the principal duty-bearer in providing its citizens with food and essential services, including housing, health care, water and sanitation, electricity, and education. It should, therefore, be taking a leadership role in the impartial provision of basic services to the population.

With four million Iraqis now food-insecure, the government must make a renewed effort to improve and expand the PDS for staple products, on which many Iraqis have depended since the early 1990s and which serves as a basic safety net for poor and vulnerable people. As recommended by Refugees International, the government should establish a temporary PDS identity-card system so that displaced

people can receive their basket of goods, without politically sensitive implications for their permanent residence or voting status.

Another priority, as noted earlier, is for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to significantly increase the \$100 per month payment to households headed by widows so that it is closer to the average monthly wage of \$200, and to expand the range of recipients to include other vulnerable sections of the population, such as the food-insecure and displaced populations. Using the figures in this report, that means a \$200 monthly payment to approximately one million households, covering six million people (based on the average family size of six people⁶⁷), which would cost \$200m per month or \$2.4bn per year.

A means of improving the provision of basic services could be through decentralisation. The government should decentralise some of the responsibilities for delivering services to its people, including the distribution of PDS rations and medical supplies. With Baghdad at the centre of the violence and insecurity, requirements for approval and documentation from the capital mean that aid takes much longer to reach people in need. At present all aid supplies coming into Iraq must first be sent to Baghdad where they are kept in seven vast warehouses for quality-control checking before being distributed to the rest of the country. This has created a huge backlog of food and medical supplies that are not getting out to vulnerable communities. It also means that if one of the warehouses suffers damage during the ongoing violence, as with the reported recent burning down of the warehouse storing medical supplies, there are no back-up supplies elsewhere in the country.

Power to local authorities to quality check and distribute emergency supplies within their own governorates, together with a more extensive system of warehouse storage for supplies throughout Iraq would help to address this problem. Local governors taking on board these responsibilities must be given the necessary funds to carry them out.

The ministries with a particularly key role to play include the Ministry of Trade, which is responsible for the PDS, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which is responsible for social security payments, the Ministry of Displacement, and the Ministry of Health. These ministries must be allocated the necessary funds to enable them to deliver. Co-ordination would be assisted by the creation of a cross-ministerial group to deal with humanitarian needs, which must include the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior.

The Iraqi government cannot do this without support from international governments with capacity and influence in Iraq. These governments, including the USA and the UK, must support Iraqi

government ministries through the provision of technical assistance in order to ensure the government has the capacity to provide basic services for its people. This could start with assistance to the Iraqi Ministry of Trade to reform the PDS system.⁶⁸

Available funds

The government of Iraq has money available that it could use to help the delivery of the humanitarian response. It has access to funds from oil revenues, in addition to those committed by donors that were never spent on what they were planned for, mainly because some projects have been cancelled for security reasons. In 2006, it was estimated that there was an underspend of \$26bn, due to the inability to implement planned projects.⁶⁹ While reconstruction projects are of vital importance to the development of Iraq, given the immediacy of the humanitarian crisis, some of this underspend should be reallocated to meet emergency needs, including reform of the PDS and the expansion of social security payments for vulnerable groups.

There are already two funding mechanisms geared towards the reconstruction of Iraq: the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) and the International Compact for Iraq, launched in early May 2007, which should one day replace the IRFFI. There is no such facility for financing the humanitarian response. At a recent UNHCR conference on the Iraqi refugee situation, the government of Iraq promised a \$25m programme of support for those of its citizens who have fled abroad. While this is a welcome start, provided those funds go to the neediest people, similar commitments are required to meet the needs of the Iraqi people who remain inside the country.

Legal framework for civil society

All NGOs, but specifically Iraqi NGOs, face a further challenge to their ability to deliver a humanitarian response because of problems with legislation. Attempts by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the government of Iraq to establish a law governing civil-society organisations were considered too restrictive and were rejected by NGOs and the Iraqi Parliament. UNAMI and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPs) have been working on a series of drafts with the Civil Society Committee in the Iraqi Parliament. The latest draft, which is broadly accepted by NGOs, has been submitted but not yet considered by Parliament. Without this legal framework, the NCCI reports that the ability of NGOs to operate is restricted in the following ways:

- Most donors and grant-making organisations require that NGOs are registered before they will agree to enter into a funding agreement. There are temporary registration rules that exist for

NGOs operating in Iraq but these have no legal framework to support them and are subject to frequent changes, making it difficult to meet donor requirements.

- Working within a legal framework is extremely important for the way in which NGOs are perceived by others. In the Iraqi context of violence and insecurity, it is vital that NGOs have a clear legal status that is recognised by others and which separates them from private contractors or organisations affiliated to coalition governments. In order to be entirely legitimate, NGOs need to have their rights enshrined in law.

While it is necessary to provide a mechanism for identifying legitimate NGOs, it is vital to do so in a way that builds trust between them and the government, and that respects their independence. Such trust is currently lacking; as the number of murdered aid workers rises, all NGOs are becoming increasingly worried that NGO databases compiled by the government could be misused.⁷⁰ An inclusive legislation process, such as that currently under way with the UN and the Iraqi Parliament, should go some way to establishing this trust.

Non-government response

NGO presence in Iraq

There were few national NGOs in Iraq before 2003, except in the autonomous Kurdish areas in the north. By July 2006, there were over 11,000 civil-society organisations,⁷¹ according to Ministry of Civil Society estimates. By November 2006, the Ministry had determined that 2,775 of these were registered and legitimate.⁷² While perhaps only a fraction of them have emergency-response potential or programmes, they are continuing to strive to meet the needs of the people of Iraq, have critical knowledge of local areas and needs, and possess some degree of access.

In the aftermath of the US-led invasion in 2003, Iraqi pharmacist Dr. Rashad Zaydan founded the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society (K4IWS), in response to the needs of women working to hold their families and communities together. She is determined to 'relieve the suffering of Iraqi women by providing financial, occupational, medical, and educational resources'. K4IWS offers basic health services, financial loans, schools for children, and courses for women to develop literacy and marketable skills. The organisation currently employs 70 people and has 300 volunteers across Iraq.

*Source: CodePink Women for Peace*⁷³

The number of independent INGOs engaged in Iraq has declined to less than a third of its original number in July 2003.⁷⁴ However, there are still 80 either working in-country or supporting local partners, including many NCCI members, and 45 of these have emergency-response programmes or potential.⁷⁵ While INGOs are heavily dependent on national staff to undertake work in central and southern Iraq, there are a number of expatriate staff based throughout the country, primarily in NGOs in the Iraqi Kurdish area of the north, who have experience from 2003 or earlier.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) movement has nearly 400 staff in Iraq and Jordan.⁷⁶ Although it no longer has a permanent expatriate presence in Baghdad, teams continue to visit Baghdad on a regular basis. ICRC has offices in Dohuk, Suleymaniah, and Najaf with two further offices to open in Rabea and Trebil. It also runs sub-delegations in Erbil and Basrah. ICRC continues to run and expand operations to improve the water and sanitation infrastructure of medical facilities, and to supply them with medical and surgical supplies, through national staff and volunteers. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) has over 1,500 staff and 9,000 active volunteers working inside Iraq, and covers the whole country.

Together the ICRC and the IRCS are providing monthly emergency aid for 60,000 people, including displaced families and their hosts. Some 83,000 people, including members of displaced families, have had their water supply ensured through emergency ICRC water and sanitation projects and, in all, over four million people have benefited from water and sanitation projects.⁷⁷ The ICRC has said that it is able to expand its operations to meet the growing needs of the Iraqi population, and in May 2007 asked donors for an additional \$29m to make this possible.

International Islamic charities based in the West have also been instrumental in providing ongoing support to Iraq through the years of sanctions and following the 2003 war. Financial and technical support is provided by well-known organisations such as Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid, with a focus on humanitarian aid and orphan-care programmes. Other regional organisations are playing an important role in responding to the humanitarian crisis. The Qatari Red Crescent continues to support Iraqi national NGOs and the IRCS. The Iraqi Refugee Aid Council, based in Tehran, provides assistance to refugees. The Khomeni Foundation, an Islamic charity, provides basic hygiene kits, blankets, and food to IDPs in the south of the country.

Large political parties such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the Islamic Dawa Party, the Sadr Alliance, the Alliance of Independent Democrats, and the Iraqi Islamic Party all have strong social networks that are striving to fulfil basic needs such as food and health care. Smaller parties including the Constitutional

Monarchy Movement and the Iraqi Hashemite Alliance contribute funds to provide basic services for their constituencies. This aid is often distributed via religious institutions including mosques that are being supported by the political parties. A survey released in January 2005 by Women for Women International revealed a growing trend of citizens becoming reliant on religious charity.⁷⁸

Adapting to insecurity

In Iraq, some international and national NGOs have adapted their ways of working to the insecure environment. These strategies include: using networks of local contacts to map the security situation; identifying constraints to access and changing plans accordingly; making sure that staff working in particularly sensitive areas are from an appropriate religious, cultural, or geographic background and have the experience to cope with working in an insecure environment; and keeping a low profile (e.g. operating in unmarked vehicles, varying routines, not using permanent offices where possible, and restricting the accumulation of assets). By adopting such approaches, NGOs are the main implementers of UN and other humanitarian programmes inside Iraq.

Some INGOs that have remained in Iraq with international staff have relocated their bases away from the areas with the highest levels of conflict, and only enter such areas for rapid assessments and delivery of aid. Some have relocated to the relatively stable north of the country, and undertake operations to deliver services into other parts of Iraq when emergency needs arise – though it is unclear for how much longer they will be able to do this, given that violence is now spreading into previously more secure parts of the country.

Most INGOs, however, either have Iraqi national staff running their programmes inside the country, with management and decision-making support based in a different country – commonly next-door in Jordan – or they fund and advise independent Iraqi NGOs. In the former case, staff inside Iraq may have considerable autonomy or may be quite tightly managed. These methods of working in highly insecure environments are often known as ‘remote programming’. In the words of UNHCR, ‘Remote management is not ideal, but what is the alternative? It is the best possible solution – as long as we still have sufficient indicators and we can see the impact of what we are doing.’⁷⁹

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) left Iraq in October 2004 because of targeted attacks on international aid organisations. The agency's programme now works out of Amman (Jordan), providing essential supplies to medical facilities. In just one of the hospitals it supports, 2,882 surgical interventions were performed in the period October–December 2006, of which two-thirds were emergencies and over half were violence-related.

*Source: Médecins Sans Frontières*⁸⁰

Oxfam opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq on humanitarian grounds, but during and after the invasion it continued to work in Baghdad, in southern Iraq, and on the borders of the country, providing humanitarian relief and rehabilitating water supplies and sanitation systems damaged in the war and the subsequent unrest. In late 2003, Oxfam removed its staff because of security concerns, but has continued to fund and advise Iraqi NGOs and INGOs that have staff in-country, working from a base in Amman. As with many other agencies, Oxfam's Jordan office plays an information-gathering and networking role in Amman, where so many NGOs, donors, and UN agencies are based.

An NGO partner (not named for security reasons) supported by Oxfam was able to continue running a water, sanitation, and health-care assistance project in Fallujah in 2004, despite the intense fighting in the city during that period. The NGO distributed drugs and medical equipment to 21 public health-care centres (PHCCs) in and around Fallujah City, and installed water tanks and pumps in four of these centres.

After the fighting in April 2004, it provided additional water and sanitation capacity at the health facilities, and spare parts in case of future need. Flexibility in the project design allowed Habbanyia PHCC to be added to the original list of 20 centres. This was judged to be essential in view of the impending conflict in Fallujah in November 2004 and the expected demands on the centre's services.

Figures provided by IOM's monitoring partner in Anbar Governorate, the Italian Consortium of Solidarity, show that the number of IDPs that arrived in Habbanyia during the crisis was in the order of 24,000. This took the total number of people to benefit from the PHCCs served by this programme to over half a million.

International donor response

International aid

The coalition of governments that sent forces into Iraq,⁸¹ led by the US and the UK, and those that formed the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, did not adequately take into account emergency needs that would arise from deteriorating security over time. The current downward spiral of violence and insecurity was not predicted by the coalition of governments who had hoped for a peaceful transition to democracy and stability in Iraq. As a consequence, their emergency preparedness plan was insufficient to cope with increasing basic needs. Western donor governments, most of whom were part of the coalition, generally tied their contributions to the reconstruction effort and development activities (see Table 1 below).

Funding for development and reconstruction in Iraq from the 22 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors increased by 922 per cent between 2003 and 2005 to \$20,948m, whereas funding for humanitarian assistance declined by 47 per cent during the same period to \$453.43m.⁸² The results of an Oxfam survey of DAC donors in May/June 2007 show that funding for humanitarian assistance declined alarmingly to just \$95m in 2006, despite the evident increase in need. The total is not complete as only 19 of the 22 DAC donors were willing to provide data.⁸³ However, eight of the top ten donors for humanitarian assistance to Iraq in 2005 are included in the 19 who responded. Those countries that gave the most were the UK (\$9.5m for humanitarian assistance and \$162.9m for development assistance) and the USA (\$43.1m and \$17,826m for humanitarian and development purposes respectively).⁸⁴ A full list of DAC donors and their funding commitments for emergency humanitarian assistance in Iraq from 2003–2006 can be found in Table 2 below. The figures in bold represent the top ten donations in each year.

Table 1: Emergency humanitarian assistance and official development assistance to Iraq from DAC donors 2003–2006 (\$million)⁸⁵

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Emergency humanitarian assistance from DAC donors	862.48	875.09	453.43	95
Assistance for development only (Official Development Assistance minus humanitarian)	1,232.50	3,518.73	20,948.64	18,010.1

Table 2: Emergency humanitarian assistance to Iraq from DAC donors, by country, 2003–2006 (\$million)⁸⁶

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Australia ⁸⁷	28.56	4.39	0.01	1.68
Austria	3.47	1.97	0.9	0.1
Belgium	4.21	2.02	0	0
Canada ⁸⁸	28.78	0	0	0
Denmark	0	0.49	4.11	2.69
Finland	4.21	2.63	0.53	0
France	9.41	0.93	2.99	0
Germany	27.53	1.65	1.45	0
Greece	3.4	2.67	1.99	Not provided
Ireland	5.09	1.24	0.1	1.8
Italy	2.94	9.06	0.28	16.5
Japan	0	624.91	251.76	Not provided
Luxembourg	4.18	0	0	0.13
Netherlands	70.87	27.34	21.81	2.3
New Zealand	5.97	1.39	2.26	0
Norway	51.19	9.66	12.31	11.01
Portugal	0.04	14.53	2.83	Not provided
Spain ⁸⁹	12.15	9.5	3.06	4.00
Sweden	11.8	5.56	2.95	1.58
Switzerland	5.18	1.45	1.11	0.57
UK	166.13	46.84	19.87	9.5
USA	417.37	107.46	123.08	43.1

Following such a large decline in humanitarian assistance in 2006, there are signs from 2007 funding allocations recorded on the UN Financial Tracking Service that donors may now be refocusing their attention on humanitarian needs. The figure including committed and pledged funds is currently at \$140.6m.⁹⁰ Pledges must be quickly turned into committed donations, and must be combined with more flexible approaches to funding.

More, and more flexible funding

According to an Oxfam survey of national and international NGOs conducted in April 2007, over 80 per cent of them would be able to expand their humanitarian work if they had increased access to funds. One Oxfam partner, for example, reported in March 2007 that it had

assessed needs for medical supplies in a number of governorates but, due to limited funds, it was not in a position to expand its distributions. As security constraints impose a number of safety rules, the costs of such distributions are high. Both the ICRC and the IRCS have recently extended appeals for their substantial programmes in Iraq, which are yet to be fully funded.

Donors and organs of the UN have not commonly appreciated the potential that exists to fund humanitarian work inside Iraq, especially if there were greater willingness to support operations that do not have all the conventional forms of delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and which may be costlier, yet which offer reasonable guarantees that money is well spent and which meet minimum requirements. Non-conventional forms of delivery are described in the section on NGO response above. Monitoring and evaluation methods in Iraq include NGO staff or locally employed consultants gathering information on needs directly from local leaders, from informal surveys of local people and community groups, and from ministry representatives if they are present in the area. Rapid appraisal methods are also used whereby a set of indicators is defined by NGOs based on qualitative judgement.⁹¹

Some donors are reluctant to fund programmes that are 'remotely' managed, for example, or are not sufficiently flexible about changes in implementation that may be required by security considerations. This lack of understanding is surprising, since 'remote programming' has been established practice for humanitarian organisations for many years, in places such as Angola, South Sudan, Uganda, Chechnya, Darfur, and Gaza, to name just a few.

According to recent research undertaken by the Feinstein International Center, staff members from the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, UN agencies, the NCCI, and international and national NGOs have consistently raised the lack of flexible and accessible donor funding as a threat to current and planned humanitarian programmes. Operational NGOs with proven track records inside Iraq are feeling the shortfalls most acutely, causing some to close down, even as needs escalate.⁹²

Despite the concerns of some donors, NGOs and the IRCS have found ways of undertaking rapid assessments and monitoring of vulnerable populations, largely through informal survey methods with local leaders and communities with whom they have established a relationship in order to maintain a presence in the first place. There are also successful means of verifying project implementation. One NCCI member and Oxfam partner organisation has relied on personal contacts in different project locations (who are hired on three-month contracts) to monitor, evaluate, and assess the impact of the projects. This has included surveys of people benefiting from the projects and an examination of a set of agreed indicators before and after project implementation.

Another issue restricting the availability of funding to many Iraqi and international NGOs is their policy of not accepting money from sources that might compromise their independence and security. In situations of conflict, humanitarian agencies have to be particularly careful to be seen both by communities and by armed groups as impartial and neutral, in order not to become targets themselves or to lose access to people in need. In the case of Iraq, Oxfam does not accept funding from countries that have troops in the country. If a government has made a significant change to its policies towards the war that demonstrates their impartiality, Oxfam will consider accepting funds. The April 2007 Oxfam survey of NCCI members with programmes in Iraq found that over half of them would be able to expand their humanitarian work if they had increased access to funds from non-coalition country sources specifically.

Of the funds committed for humanitarian assistance by DAC donors in 2005, 94 per cent were from coalition governments. This puts a particular onus on DAC countries that were not part of the coalition or withdrew troops (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), along with multinational donors such as the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) and 'non-traditional' donors such as the Gulf states, to help provide more neutral funding.

The ECHO decision not to commit new humanitarian funds to Iraq in 2005 caused some INGOs either to scale down or close down their operations, or to switch to a development focus.⁹³ From the start of the conflict until the end of May 2005, ECHO had committed €100m to humanitarian-assistance projects in Iraq through UN agencies, the ICRC, and many INGOs, and was one of the few sources of neutral funding.

In February 2007, ECHO announced that it was re-engaging in Iraq and committed approximately €4m to assisting IDPs through the ICRC

inside the country, and €6.2m to assisting Iraqi refugees in the region. While this is welcome, all international donors must recognise that the humanitarian needs of people inside Iraq are as important as those of people fleeing the country – and their funding allocations should reflect this. ECHO remains open-minded about beginning to fund NGOs once more, saying that this depends on the development of the humanitarian situation in Iraq and on the input it receives from NGOs.⁹⁴ There are indications that other donors may also increase donations for humanitarian needs, which would be a welcome development, provided that the terms and conditions are suited to the operating environment on the ground.

Finally, international donors must also co-ordinate better amongst themselves regarding the allocation and distribution of funds for Iraq. Effective co-ordination will avoid a concentration of funding in one area or organisation at the expense of another.

UN response

UN presence

The response of UN agencies has been severely hampered by security restrictions put in place after the bombing of the UN's Baghdad headquarters in 2003. Access to the country for international staff is still very limited, and while some duties are ably carried out by the organisation's Iraqi staff, it still suffers from the perception that it is not a neutral player, a view that dates back to the UN sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s.

Until late 2006, the UN system was geared largely towards development thinking in Iraq, rather than towards addressing emergency humanitarian needs. Fortunately, this is now changing: OCHA has re-engaged with Iraq, is establishing a liaison office in Jordan, and is promising to achieve an inclusive, co-ordinated humanitarian approach. This is already under way with the publication in April 2007 of a Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq, prepared by OCHA together with UNAMI, and based on a consultative process involving the government of Iraq, UN agencies, NGOs (including NCCI and five member organisations), and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement.

Delivering the strategy

The publication of a strategic framework, although welcome, must be followed up with a considerable effort to turn it into an effective system. This will include establishing effective co-ordination between all agencies involved in the provision of a humanitarian response, and making sure that the agencies that head up the development and

reconstruction cluster groups in Iraq are also aware of what is planned.⁹⁵ On the ground in Iraq the NCCI and its members have established an emergency field co-ordination structure, in the absence of a UN system, to enable rapid response to identified needs. This system can be built on, and the new humanitarian co-ordination centre that OCHA is setting up for Iraq, based initially in Jordan, should prioritise this.

As NGOs are the main implementers of UN and other humanitarian programmes inside Iraq, delivering a co-ordinated humanitarian response will also require action to increase information, education, and awareness about humanitarian principles and the role of humanitarian agencies with local Iraqi NGOs, if they are to expand their work with any degree of security. Advocacy with the Iraqi government on this issue should be stepped up by the UN and by INGOs on behalf of their national and local partners.

Specific areas where assistance to NGOs can be improved include:

- Financial: ensuring rapid availability of appropriate funding. The new OCHA co-ordination office should administer a new pooled fund for rapid response that disburses monies to NGOs;⁹⁶
- Political: interfacing between NGOs and the government of Iraq, MNF-I, and other political stakeholders;
- Capacity-building: provision of technical advice and training (including project management, monitoring, and evaluation);
- Information: collation, analysis and dissemination, mapping;
- Logistics;
- Security: advice, training, real-time information.

Within the strategic framework, the UN has made several important observations, by which it must be guided in its own operations. These include the realisation that the security situation is not uniform across Iraq and that some areas of the country are more accessible for humanitarian activities than others. In addition, in some areas, local communities still have significant capacities and resources that could be better utilised. The UN should build on this information in order to develop a more nuanced approach to security and the movement of UN staff that differentiates between constraints in different areas and which is more independent of the MNF-I, thereby allowing needs-assessment, co-ordination, and service delivery.

In Iraq, UNHCR works through 11 partners; it used to be 20, but this was reduced due to funding constraints. There are fewer than 29 national members of staff, and 70–80 per cent of their work through partners is done through NGOs. Through strategic mapping on the ground, UNHCR national staff are now able to move around more to verify projects. Implementation is monitored by national staff, and the partners themselves have to report. Sometimes they undergo independent evaluations by consultants, who demand documentation from local authorities. UNHCR equips its partners with the necessary tools to undertake documentation, and is currently thinking of establishing a peer monitoring programme to further improve monitoring and evaluation.⁹⁷ The organisation recently appealed to donors to double its budget for Iraqi refugees and internally displaced to \$123m.⁹⁸

Until international donors and the UN Security Council fully recognise the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and make the provision of humanitarian assistance a priority for the UN, the UN agencies on the ground and the NGOs that deliver their projects will struggle to deliver a co-ordinated and effective response.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

Bringing an end to war and civil strife in Iraq must be the overriding priority for the national government and the international community. However, the government, the countries of the MNF-I, the UN agencies, and international donors can do more to meet the other survival needs of the Iraqi population.

The government of Iraq should take urgent action to address the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. Measures should include:

- Local authorities should assume greater responsibility for providing material assistance, shelter, and essential services to displaced people arriving in their jurisdiction, as well as to vulnerable local populations, and should be given the power and resources by central government to do so.
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should significantly increase the \$100 per month payment to households headed by widows so that it is closer to the average monthly wage of \$200, and expand the range of recipients to include other vulnerable sections of the population, such as food-insecure people and the displaced population.
- The Ministry of Trade should improve the Public Distribution System. This should include the establishment of a temporary PDS identity-card system so that displaced people can receive food rations.
- The government should create a cross-ministerial team to coordinate its humanitarian response and should release funds at its disposal for the delivery of this response.
- Explicit orders should be given to the Iraqi security forces that they, like all armed groups, should not harm civilian life, property, or infrastructure, and should respect the population's right to assistance.
- Finally, the government of Iraq should support national NGOs through a legal framework including registration procedures that recognise their rights and independence and secure their legal authority to operate in Iraq.

International governments with capacity and influence in Iraq should recognise their responsibilities towards the people of Iraq by:

- Supporting Iraqi government ministries through advice and technical assistance in order to ensure the government has the capacity to provide basic services for its people, notably improved food distribution, shelter, and the extension of emergency welfare payments.

The governments of the Multi-National Force in Iraq (MNF-I) should recognise their particular responsibilities towards the people of Iraq by:

- Ensuring that the armed forces respect their moral and legal obligation not to harm civilians or their property, or essential infrastructure.

Donors need to increase support to national and international NGOs, the ICRC, the IRCS, and UN agencies delivering the humanitarian response:

- Donors should provide increased emergency funding that is readily accessible and flexible. In particular, donors must build on discussions under way with NGOs to better understand 'remote programming' and mechanisms for monitoring and verification.
- Since many humanitarian organisations will not accept money from governments engaged in the conflict, it is important that donors from countries that have not sent troops to Iraq, such as Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland, increase their funding for humanitarian action.

The UN, especially UNAMI and OCHA, needs to continue to strengthen its humanitarian role inside Iraq by:

- Working towards the achievement of a co-ordinated response with the government of Iraq and NGOs, and between UN agencies.
- Developing a more nuanced approach to security and the movement of UN staff that differentiates between constraints in different areas and which is more independent of the MNF-I, thereby allowing better needs assessment, co-ordination, and service delivery.
- Building on the emergency field co-ordination structure established by the NCCI to enable rapid response to identified needs.
- Administering a new pooled fund for rapid response that should be able to disburse monies to NGOs.

Notes

¹ BBC News, 'World "ignoring Iraqi refugees". The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) says there has been an "abject denial" around the world of the humanitarian impact of invading Iraq', 20 March 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/6470425.stm.

² Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq, prepared by UN OCHA, April 2007. This includes food, shelter, and health care.

³ WFP, 'Food Security and Vulnerability in Iraq', 12 May 2006, www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf_Food_Security_and_Vulnerabi.pdf; This figure is accepted as representing the current level of need and was used by UNHCR in its Briefing Notes for a Geneva conference on Iraqi refugees in April 2007.

⁴ United Nations World Food Programme Baseline Food Security Analysis in Iraq, 29 September 2004. www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2004/wfp-irq-29sep.pdf.

⁵ UNHCR Briefing Notes, press briefing, 20 March 2007, Palais des Nations, Geneva. www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/45ffb87b1f.html.

⁶ UNDP Iraq Living Conditions Survey, 2004. www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/income.htm

⁷ Refugees International is concerned that there are also political reasons preventing the transfer of PDS cards to new locations. Iraqi authorities are in denial about the extent of the violence and displacement, maintaining that it is a small-scale and temporary problem. As such, they are reluctant to initiate a process that could enshrine displacement, potentially encouraging IDPs to view their new locations as permanent. Because the PDS cards are also the basis for voter registration, and Iraqis vote according to the location in which they are registered, any transfer of the PDS card could conceivably allow Iraqis to vote in their new locations.

⁸ Refugees International, 'Iraq: fix the Public Distribution System to meet needs of the displaced', 10 May 2007 (data from April 2007). www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/9971/.

⁹ IOM Iraq Displacement 2006, Year in Review, www.iom-iraq.net/library/2006%20Iraq%20Displacement%20Review.pdf

¹⁰ UNHCR Briefing Notes, press briefing, *op. cit.*

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⁸⁶ Analysis based on OECD statistics online, <http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/default.aspx?DatasetCode=TABLE%202A> and 2006 information from an Oxfam survey of all 22 DAC donors in May/June 2007. Whilst OECD statistics are a reliable data source, they do not include all funding that donor countries give to UN agencies and NGOs directly to carry out humanitarian response work.

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This paper was based on the research of Jane Chana'a and was written by Mary Kirkbride with Michael Bailey. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Kasra Mofarah, Laila Noureldin, Manal Omar, Simon Springett, Cedric Turlan, Alex Renton and Nick Martlew in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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<p>Oxfam GB Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK Tel: +44 1865 473727 E-mail: enquiries@oxfam.org.uk www.oxfam.org.uk</p>	

Oxfam International Secretariat: Suite 20, 266 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7DL, UK
Tel: +44 1865 339100 Email: information@oxfaminternational.org Web site: www.oxfam.org

Oxfam International advocacy offices:

E-mail: advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

Washington: 1100 15th St., NW, Ste. 600, Washington, DC 20005-1759, USA

Tel: +1 202 496 1170.

Brussels: Rue Philippe le Bon 15, 1000 Brussels, Belgium, Tel: +322 502 0391.

Geneva: 15 rue des Savoises, 1205 Geneva, Switzerland, Tel: +41 22 321 2371.

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